

Launching of the FAO book "Crop ecology, cultivation and uses of cactus pear"

The book "Crop ecology, cultivation and uses of cactus pear" was launched on November 24th, at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in Rome. The book is the updated version of the first edition published by FAO in 1995, and includes chapters that address from the management of the plant, to its use and commercialization. The authors that participated in this edition are expert researchers from different countries. The Seminar in which the book was presented, was entitled "Cactus: a miracle crop to combat climate change" and was chaired by the Director of the Plant Production and Protection Division of FAO, Dr. Hans Dreyer. In this Seminar, as well as Dr. Dreyer, participated Professor Carmen Sáenz, who reviewed the history and activity of FAO-ICARDA CactusNet; Dr. Mounir Louhaichi, Deputy General Coordinator of FAO-ICARDA CactusNet and representative in said network of the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA); the editor in chief of the publication Professor Paolo Inglese, of the University of Palermo (Italy); Dr. José Dubeux (USA), expert in the use of the nopal as fodder; and Dr. Firew Tegegne (Ethiopia) who referred to the potential of this plant in his country.

During the Seminar a special tribute was paid to Dr. Nicolás Franck (R.I.P.) who was, along with Dr. Loreto Prat, one of the authors in charge of updating the chapter that Professor Fusa Sudzuki (R.I.P.) wrote in the first edition. Dr. Franck was also part of FAO-ICARDA CactusNet, as Chairperson of the ISHS Workgroup Cactus Pear and Cochineal, representing the International Society for Horticultural Science (ISHS). The early departure of Dr. Franck has been highlighted as a great loss to the world of agricultural science in dry areas.

Given that the book is aimed mainly at the poor inhabitants of the rural areas of the world, as a contribution to improve their quality of life in a hostile agricultural environment, such as arid and semi-arid zones and that has united scientists of many nationalities and religions, the editor in chief, Dr. Inglese, suggested its delivery to Pope Francis, who is concerned about the problems of poverty in the world and the unity and effort of people of good will to combat it. So, thanks to the efforts of the Apostolic Nuncio in Chile, H.S. Mons. Ivo Scapolo and H.S. the Ambassador of Chile in the Vatican, Mariano Fernández, Dr. Carmen Sáenz (Chile) and Dr. Mounir Louhaichi (Tunisia), were able to deliver a copy of the book to Pope Francis, who was pleasantly pleased by the purpose of the publication and the variety of its authors.

The text has been in great demand in countries such as Algeria, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, South Africa and Zimbabwe in Africa, and India and Pakistan in Asia. Also in the Mediterranean and South American countries that are increasing their production areas. Several species of the genus *Opuntia* can be found in many countries, where they are sometimes considered invasive species, and are not used, wasting their great potential. Madagascar is another country where the plant is widely disseminated, and where they are just beginning to explore use as fodder.

The book, available in English on the FAO website (www.fao.org/3/a-i7012e.pdf), is being translated into Spanish, French and Arabic to facilitate access to a larger number of people.