

Yuan Longping's saltwater rice to become UAE national gift

By Jing Yue from People's Daily



File Photo: Yuan Longping inspects on saltwater rice planting in Shandong Province, China (Photo: VCG)

Researchers with Qingdao's saltwater rice team led by “the father of hybrid rice” Yuan Longping, were recently successful in harvesting rice in Dubai's desert.

H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), recognized the significance of the breakthrough. To commemorate the moment, the Al Marmoom rice brand was created and will be presented as a souvenir to distinguished guests to help promote the Yuanmi brand.

The Chinese government has made it clear it would like to take on more responsibilities and obligations to make greater contributions in agricultural development and economic growth.

The Qingdao Saltwater Rice R&D center, led by Yuan, made the saltwater breakthrough in September 2017.

HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum values food safety and health in Dubai, the UAE, the Middle East and North Africa. It is hoped that his efforts will help countries overcome long-standing agriculture problems and to help them be more self-sufficient, eliminate hunger, and bring peace and prosperity to nations in need of food.

When Maktoum first heard about Yuan and the agriculture breakthrough, he invited the 87-year-old scientist and his research team to Dubai.

Yuan's research team always adhered to the spirit of the Belt and Road initiative which helped

both sides to reach an agreement, establishing a strategic long-term partnership.

The project officially began on January 8, from May through July over 80 varieties of rice, including the saltwater rice was created.

Experts from the International Rice Research Institute, India, Egypt, the UAE and China conducted the first yield determination tests in May.

Ye Guoyou, group leader with the International Rice Research Institute, announced that the tested production yields of five varieties numbered YCLJ59, YCYJ48, YCRN4H, YCSTU9712 and YCLJ58 were respectively: 7.8041 tons/ha, 7.4106 tons/ha, 7.3076 tons/ha, 5.952 tons/ha and 4.8266 tons/ha. All these varieties exceed the world's average rice yield of 4.539 tons/ha (From the 2014 FAO statistics).

Growing rice in the desert has always been a challenge. Extreme temperatures, high saline water, low humidity, lack of fresh water, sand storms, lack of proper soil and planting resources have always been obstacles.

To overcome difficulties, the team used an advanced intelligent agriculture system to help develop Dubai's digital agriculture.

Under the guidelines of the "Green Dubai" cooperation framework agreement, the Chinese research team will conduct four stages of experimental and industrial tests.

The first stage involved a variety of rice planting methods in different temperatures to help decide genetic resources and growth techniques.

Experiments for the rest of 2018 are underway. Confirming optimal soil parameters and fertilizer circulation aimed at reducing production expenses is a primary focus.

Both sides will begin the third stage in 2019 which will include the development of a saltwater rice farm. They will also explore green ecological land usage, and introduce commercial investment through the Belt and Road industrial capital.

The fourth and final stage involves comprehensive promotion.

Maktoum's vision wants to expand the area of the saltwater rice rapidly beginning in 2020, and sees the crop covering 10 percent of Dubai's total land area.

In working with the Qingdao research team, together they will establish the Yuan Longping Middle East and North Africa Saltwater Hybrid Rice Research and Promotion Center, and continue testing, optimizing technology conditions, training and industrial promotion.

Both sides are committed to serving the entire Arab world with saltwater rice agriculture

methods to solve hunger issues caused by poor nature conditions throughout the region.