



Caravan vehicles at a date palm extension site.

Promoting Agricultural Production with Agricultural Caravans

By Mohamed A. Zain

The caravan has a long and vivid history in West Asia and North Africa. Historically used as a more reliable method of establishing trade, their original routes successfully bridged difficult terrain and aided early economic development throughout the region.

Today, the concept of these original trade caravans is being applied as an effective agricultural extension tool. The goal is to provide a forum filled with agronomic specialists, and to provide farmers direct access to the expert advice they need to be successful.

As a touring event, the caravan can adapt to the specific issues that may be present at the site, and respond to the full range of challenges that farmers experience. Mobile workshops are held to educate farmers on the latest land preparation, planting, and crop care methods. The concept of 4R Nutrient Stewardship is interwoven into discussions on fertilizer product awareness, new technologies for soil analysis, fertilizer and water (irrigation) applications, and high productivity agriculture.

The date palm-farming community in Saudi Arabia recently benefited from an agricultural awareness caravan tour conducted late this past year with the collaboration of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture, and the Arab Fertilizer Association. The caravan provided



Caravan extension specialists discussing date palm agronomics with farmers in Saudi Arabia.

advisory services to date palm farmers with the aim of seeking solutions to the problems being experienced in the field, and raising overall farm productivity.

Comprised of five specially equipped vehicles, the caravan



The mobile showcase exhibit on devices needed to detect and eradicate the red palm weevil.

toured through the Al-Riyadh, Al-Ahsa, Qassim, and Madinah regions. Caravan vehicles were equipped with internet-enabled devices, audio-visual systems, and a mobile lab to analyze soil and water samples.

As part of the caravan's program, agricultural specialists and agricultural ministry officials visited many farms in each region and advised farmers on correct palm cultivation methods. For many of the farmers, this was their first introduction to the concept of 4R nutrient management. In addition to this recent caravan in Saudi Arabia, similar caravans have been successfully held in Morocco and Egypt to bring agronomic advice directly to farmers.

In addition to agriculture, these caravans offer medical and educational programs. This range of activities is designed to support the development goals of local communities, improve the daily life on the farm, and enhance the relationship between farmers and the agricultural industry that supports them. **BC**

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