

Final Report Inspiration and Knowledge- sharing Tour Egypt Sept 12-14, 2021.

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By: NABC and Land, Water & Food Consult.



Introduction

The 'Inspiration & Knowledge-sharing Tour' to Egypt took place from September 12 - 14, 2021. Fourteen Dutch companies had agreed to participate in this visit - two companies withdrew participation at the last minute due to unforeseen circumstances. One company (Plant Health Cure) had to return to the Netherlands after being refused at the immigration office in Cairo due to a health/vaccine certificate that did not comply with the Egyptian health regulations. From the eleven Dutch companies that took part in the visit to Egypt, ten companies travelled from the Netherlands, while one company (Koppert) was represented by the local representative of Koppert in Egypt.

The 'Inspiration & Knowledge-sharing Tour' was a unique visit, because it took place at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic was still ongoing. The visit to Egypt can be seen as the first Dutch activity related to private sector development in Africa and trade and investment promotion for Dutch companies that was organized since March 2020 for both the RVO and NABC. The visit, which was financed by RVO, but had been initiated by the Agricultural Counselor of the Netherlands embassy in Cairo, was considered opportune due to the fact that the Sahara Expo - the largest agricultural expo in Egypt - was held in Cairo from 12-15 September, 2021. This event offered an opportunity for a post-covid start to re-energize Dutch and Egyptian cooperation, to stimulate Dutch participation at the expo and to facilitate knowledge sharing between Dutch and Egyptian agribusinesses contributing to sustainable and inclusive agribusiness in Egypt.

The 'Inspiration & Knowledge-sharing Tour' was mainly aimed at Dutch companies that already participate in various Dutch strategic programs in Egypt, to combine their current project activities with the visit, but was also open to other Dutch companies active in climate-smart agriculture interested in Egypt and with a focus on horticulture (the poultry and dairy sector were excluded from this visit). If it wasn't for the pandemic, the number of participants could have been higher. A number of companies indicated that by policy, they do not travel at all, or only in case of highly urgent visits. Considering Covid-restrictions and the short preparation time for the program during the summer month of August, NABC was pleased with the final number of eleven Dutch companies that joined the 'Inspiration & Knowledge-sharing Tour'.



Goals

The Inspiration and Knowledge-sharing Tour had numerous objectives. An important goal was to support the embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Cairo in contributing to a more sustainable and inclusive food system in Egypt. In doing so, the embassy strives to **make impact on SDG2** and associated SDGs related to sustainable and inclusive food systems.

To show Dutch companies the potential of Egypt and to inspire them to contribute in partnership with Egyptian agribusinesses to the transformation of the Egyptian agricultural production to a sustainable and efficient integrated model, with benefits for farmers, the environment and the full value chain, was another goal of the 'Inspiration and Knowledge-sharing Tour'. To offer the Dutch companies a complete overview of the Egyptian agribusiness landscape, field visits to large Egyptian commercial farms in the 'new lands' (desert), as well as field visits to the other side of the spectrum, the small-holder farmers in the 'old lands' (the Nile delta), were organized.

Learning from each other was another important goal. There is a great deal the Netherlands and Egypt can learn from each other about sustainable and inclusive agribusiness, relevant to the Egyptian content. The embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands saw this visit as an opportunity to jointly raise attention for the expertise of the Dutch private sector in the field of climate-smart agriculture. The Dutch participants were all high-value agriculture companies that have innovative and sustainable solutions to offer to the challenges Egypt is currently facing: limited availability of water and nutrients, saline soils, effects of climate change like unexpected storms, strong radiation and strongly fluctuating temperatures. The hybrid seminar on Dutch climate-smart agriculture solutions like soil testing, irrigation systems, integrated pest management, hydroponics, fertilizers, salinity, biological crop protection, seeds and green house technologies, organized during the visit to the Sahara Expo offered an excellent platform for Egyptian and Dutch agribusinesses to learn from each other.

The 'Inspiration and Knowledge-sharing Tour' also aimed for **matchmaking** between Egyptian and Dutch agribusinesses as it is the embassy's ambition to boost the local small and medium sized agribusinesses in Egypt and to move from trade to investment in Egypt. Egyptian agribusinesses face increasing demands related to the standards of imported produce, not only in relation to quality and food safety, but also in relation to social and environmental compliance at European markets and are looking for access to new technologies and advisory services in these fields. During the matchmaking at the Sahara Expo and the network reception at the embassy, Egyptian companies and agribusiness professionals met the Dutch company representatives which led to several opportunities for assignments as agents or representatives which will lead to employment opportunities as well as positioning of Dutch agribusinesses in Egypt. For the Dutch agribusinesses that already serve the Egyptian market, the matchmaking allowed them to meet new clients and explore opportunities for market expansion and perhaps for moving from trade to investment. For the Dutch agribusinesses new to the Egyptian market, it provided access to contacts for possible clients, agents or representatives, as well as inspiration for their market access strategy.

Finally, the visit was seen by the embassy as an important stepping stone to **re-energise the Dutch-Egyptian cooperation** in the post-Covid era. For the embassy, RVO and NABC, the visit provided insights in the opportunities for Dutch companies in doing business in sustainable and inclusive agriculture in Egypt. It provided inspiration for follow-up activities under the cooperation, trade and investment agenda. Ultimately, the visit should lead to more Dutch investments in sustainable and inclusive agribusiness, generating meaningful jobs for Egyptian men and women, and business-to-business relations between the Netherlands and a stable, prosperous, inclusive and sustainable Egypt.

Participants and program

Eleven Dutch companies took part in the 'Inspiration & Knowledge-sharing Tour' to Egypt, ten companies travelled from the Netherlands, while one company (Koppert) was represented by the local representative of Koppert in Egypt.

Overview of the participants:

Company name:	Sector:
Bosman van Zaal	Integrated greenhouses
RMA	Sensor technology
Go and Grow farm solutions	Hardware supply
Eurofins Agro	Laboratory (for soil tests, among others)
The Salt Doctors	Desalinisation of soil
Bioclear Earth	Soil Health
Koppert (local representative)	Biological crop protection
East-West Seed	Seeds, focusing at smallholders
Legro	Substrates and soil
Broere Irrigatie BV	Irrigation
Tijms VOF	Irrigation and (secondhand) machinery

Scoping Mission

The 'Inspiration and Knowledge-sharing Tour' was preceded by a scoping mission executed by NABC and Land, Water & Food Consult from Aug 7-11, 2021. The scoping mission was prepared by local consultant Ahmed Arini with the aim to create a comprehensive overview of the Egyptian agricultural companies and key persons. The scoping mission allowed us to pre-select the Egyptian agribusinesses - the established (family) companies, but also the smaller innovative start-ups, as well as the small-holder farmers programs - that were the best match for Dutch knowledge and expertise in climate-smart and circular agriculture.

From the 17 agribusinesses and organization visited during the scoping mission, 2 commercial farms were selected for the field visits on the first day of the 'Inspiration and Knowledge-sharing Tour' and 2 programs aimed at small-holder farmers were selected for the field visits on the third day of the visit in September. Most of the agribusinesses visited during the scoping mission were also invited to attend the seminar and matchmaking session at the Sahara Expo.

The 'Inspiration and Knowledge-sharing Tour'

The 'Inspiration and Knowledge-sharing Tour' from Sept. 12-14, 2021 was an intensive three-day program. The first day (Sept. 12) of the program consisted of company/field visits. The delegation traveled by bus and was joined by employees of the Dutch embassy. The first stop was at Belco, one of the larger agriculture companies in Egypt, that had expressed interest in cooperating with Dutch companies. The second company that was visited was called Dakahlia, based in Wadi El Natroun. Both companies expressed interest in Dutch expertise and technologies in climate-smart agriculture and are open to working with Dutch companies. Belco showed clear interest in working together with several Dutch companies in a pilot on substrates, irrigation, soil testing and sensor technologies.

Participants and program



The second day (Sept. 13) was mainly taken up by a visit to the Sahara Expo. The 'Sahara' is one of the largest agricultural trade fairs in the Maghreb region. It was the first time it took place in two years, after the 2020 edition was cancelled. The Dutch participants started their day early by visiting the exhibitors and making new connections. The seminar, largely seen as the paramount of the tour, took place in the morning. The seminar was moderated by Mr. Peter Prins, the owner of Land, Water & Food Consult. Mr. Prins gave an overview of all the different solutions that the participating Dutch companies have to offer when it comes to engaging in agriculture in a rapidly changing climate.

After this introduction, a number of the Dutch companies gave in-depth presentations regarding their own expertise. There were consecutive sessions about soil health, soil fertility and irrigation. The session, which was attended by some 50 participants and 80 people who joined online, was concluded by four breakout sessions that zoomed in on specific topics. The plenary part of this session can be played back via the NABC Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnkdNVIGuAY>



The afternoon was reserved for matchmaking. In the weeks prior to the visit both the Dutch and the Egyptian companies submitted company profiles to the NABC. According to a meticulous matchmaking schedule, companies were given one-on-one appointments with each other. In just 15 minutes, they could get acquainted with the other companies. Although the start of the matchmaking was slow due to the late arrival of some of the Egyptian agribusinesses, the overall success rate was high; the average number of meetings per Dutch company was 8, with a high outlier of 20 meetings and a low outlier of 4 meetings.

The second day of the program ended with a networking reception at the premises of the Dutch embassy. Hosted by Marjolein Jongman -Head of Economic Affairs and Development Cooperation at the embassy - a few dozen Egyptian companies, businessmen and representatives of the Egyptian government mingled and established new business contacts. During this event Rosmarijn Fens, the Managing Director of NABC, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Egyptian African Businessmen's Association, represented by Dr. Yousrey El-Sharkawi. This MoU is meant to further increase sustainable business links between the Netherlands and Egypt.

On Sept. 14th, the third and final day of the tour, participants had the possibility to further follow-up on the contacts made earlier in the program, return to the Sahara Expo, or join the field visits to the small-holder farmers. Most Dutch companies decided to join the visits to a smallholder program run by NGO Care, and a visit to the company Mozare3, a platform for small-holder farmers. Especially Mozare3 showed interest in irrigation, soil testing, seeds and secondhand agriculture equipment.

Results and feedback

For an article about this visit, the NABC interviewed participant Coen Everts, who represented East-West Seed. Here are his comments.

“The mission was above expectation. We had the opportunity to get an extensive impression of the Egyptian market, in just three days. It was a very efficient and pleasant program. Our eyes have been opened. We realised that there are many more smallholders active in the Nile delta than we previously thought. These contacts will almost certainly lead to business for us.”

NABC has sent a survey a week after return to the Netherlands to the 11 participants. Through the 7 responses we received, we received the following feedback.

Overall impression

Participants were asked to rate the tour on a scale between 1 to 10. The average was a score of 8.5. The lowest mark given was a 7.5 (twice), while two others rewarded the programme with a 9, which was the highest that was received.

Number of meetings per company:

We asked companies about the number of meeting they had and the responses ranged from 4 to 20, with the majority indicating that they met roughly between 5 and 10 Egyptian companies.

Number of relevant meetings:

With regards to the relevance of meetings, we received a variety of responses: *‘10 out of 10’*, one participant responded. *‘That remains to be seen’*, someone else commented. Other responses indicated 3 out of 10, 5 out of 12. The lowest figure mentioned here was 2 relevant meetings. Asked whether business had already been done, most companies replied *‘not yet.’* But asked if they still expect this to happen, the majority said *‘yes, still working on it’* or simply: *‘yes, I expect business will be done.’* There was quite some optimism here, with one company indicating a change of *‘50 to 70%’* that business will come out of this, and another one *‘expecting to gain two clients.’*



Possible follow-ups

In the survey, the participants were asked what they would like to see as follow-up and if they would rather see a group follow-up or an individual follow-up.

One company indicated willingness to set up a local branch in Egypt. Others wrote:

- I would like to organize a local demonstration project in Egypt with several complementary companies to show our business offering.
- I will travel to Egypt again in November for the follow-up.
- I hope that when there is someone who expresses their interest in crop cultivation under saline conditions, Peter and Rosmarijn will forward those contacts to us.
- Keep connecting via local representative – and thus follow up accordingly. Follow-up trip October/November is what we anticipate today.
- I think it would be good if NABC also stays in touch with the visited companies and keeps the members of the trade mission on the radar of these Egyptian companies. It would be good to see whether there are possible combinations between the Dutch companies that can do a trial at one of the Egyptian companies.
- It was the first time we did a tour like this. We are looking for partners and funding to do research for developing insights for climate resilient soils. It would be nice if a meeting can be organized in the Netherland how to get EU funding to collaborate for better agriculture in Africa.
- A follow-up meeting among the Dutch participants to see who is interested in a pilot/Dutch showcase project of several Dutch technologies and start a proposal
- A good follow-up would be to invite the Egyptian companies that are interested in a pilot project with several Dutch companies for a visit to the Netherlands.



Conclusion

Based on the feedback we have received from the participating companies, they all have appreciated the programme and the overview that was offered of the agricultural landscape of Egypt. All companies were satisfied about the business connections they have made during the trip. For some companies it may result directly in an order from one of the large farms that were visited on the first day. Other companies might need some follow-up visits, while other are considering setting up a local branch or laboratory. Almost all participants have indicated that they would be interested in a follow-up activity.

A potential follow-up could be the setting up of a demonstration farm, showcasing Dutch expertise, technologies and products. There is potential for 2 different pilots: one within a large commercial farm and one pilot within the Mozare3 or Cares Programs, targeting small-holder farmers.

The pilot in the large commercial farm in the “new land” could focus on:

- Improving the (natural) resilience of salt affected soils
- Pilots on implementation of various CSA techniques to design resilient soft fruit value chains (such as blue berries, strawberries, raspberries)
- Introduction of innovative soil tests and systems of certified quality control

The pilot with Mozare3 /Care Program could focus on small-holders in the Nile delta on:

- Irrigation techniques
- Different seeds
- Second hand machinery
- Soil improvement and testing, and improvement of fertilisation strategies

The next step should be a follow-up meeting with the participants to identify which company wants to participate in a follow-up and to identify which RVO subsidy or program could be a fit for a demonstration farm/pilot/Dutch showcase in Egypt. The newly established entity [Invest International](#) could also be an interesting option to consider as they offer project development services to provide co-financing solutions with the objective to make these types of projects financeable and/or to develop scalable innovative business models.

NABC would like to thank the RVO, especially Ms. Gertrude Wagemans and the Agricultural Counselor of the Netherlands embassy In Cairo, Mr. Melle Leenstra for the assignment to organize the 'Inspiration and Knowledge-sharing Tour' and for the trust in NABC.

NABC would like to thank Mr. Peter Prins of Land, Water & Food Consult for the excellent cooperation between our organizations; together we can make great things happen!

Furthermore, NABC would like to thank local consultant Mr. Ahmed Arini for all his work. NABC knows from our years of experience in organizing trade missions and visits to African countries, that local consultants with a good network make the difference between a visit with Dutch companies to an African country and a *successful* visit with Dutch companies to an African country that sparks *sustainable cooperation between the Netherlands and Africa*.

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