

# Middle East meets western wheatbelt

**D**eclining global biodiversity, which threatens plant genetic diversity and therefore the raw materials humans rely on for food, fibre, fuel, medicine and industrial products, has led to a far ranging collaborative research project between The University of Western Australia (UWA) and Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in the Sultanate of Oman.

A 2004 visit by UWA's Professor Alistar Robertson, then Dean of the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences (FNAS) and Professor Kadambot Siddique, Chair in Agriculture and Director of the Institute of Agriculture, established links with SQU.

Subsequent collaboration has involved staff exchanges, joint scientific projects and two recent internships for Omani students.

The six week internships for two outstanding undergraduates majoring in crop sciences at SQU, were organised by Dr Michael Walsh, Senior Research Fellow at UWA's Western Australian Herbicide Resistance Initiative (WAHRI), while he was on sabbatical in Oman.

Based on their academic excellence,

Ruqaiya Al-Mas'oudi and Safa Al-Hinaai were accepted for training at UWA with FNAS researchers.

Ms Al-Mas'oudi, supervised by Michael Walsh, conducted whole plant screening to establish the true extent of bromoxynil



**Dr Heather Clarke, Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Legumes in Mediterranean Agriculture, The University of Western Australia, with visiting Omani student Safa Al-Hinaai and research assistant Sabrina Tschirren.**

herbicide resistance in a wild radish population collected from WA's grainbelt.

She was also exposed to molecular based research on ryegrass herbicide resistance and visited the grainbelt to learn about WA broadacre cropping.

Ms Al-Hinaai, supervised by Dr Heather Clarke, Senior Research Fellow at the UWA based Centre for Legumes in Mediterranean Agriculture (CLIMA), made wide crosses between cultivated chickpea and some of its wild annual relatives from the Middle East.

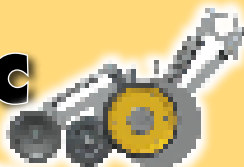
Tissue culture technology was used to rescue hybrid embryos in the laboratory at UWA.

Ms Al-Hinaai investigated how different components of the artificial medium could be adjusted to manipulate hybrid growth and development and used DNA-based techniques to test 'hybridity'.

Heather Clarke said FNAS staff had enjoyed working with the Omani students and learning about life in Oman.

"We hope they will return to UWA as postgraduate students in the near future," she said.

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