Date Palm

- Only half of the dates produced is used for human consumption.
- Other half being primarily utilized for animal feed or considered surplus and wasted.
- Dates are consumed mainly as fresh Rutab,
- Date syrup, date sugar and other by-products.
- Main pests in Oman are Dubas bug and red palm weevil.
- Problems: Traditional methods of cultivation, small farm size, labor availability and poor postharvest handling and marketing.
- New offshoots produced from tissue culture with the primary focus on superior cultivars that are kept, among other cultivars, in the date palm ex situ gene bank.
- Processing still lagging behind for dates and by-products.
Consumption

- Fresh whole dates sold in 3 forms namely Dates, Rutab and Bussor in few countries with fresh dates representing more than 60% of total production.
- Local annual p/c date from less than 2Kg to 38Kg.
- Reaches peak during Ramadan.
- Date Demand income elasticity is hypothetically low.
- Demand price elasticity is also very low indicating low impact of price variations on quantity demanded (-0.3).
- Local consumption comes from citizens. Expats are not big consumers (in Oman they consume around 5% of average local consumption).
Dates Supply Chain

- This sector (Worldwide, regional, and domestic) witnessed developments and modernization in many functions performed in SC (harvesting, packing, processing and marketing).

- Local consumption 60 to 70% in most countries (with the exception of North African Countries)

- Farmers/ producers play significant role in dates marketing together with small traders

- Date export has not developed with same pace in all countries of the region.
Most active channels handling large proportion of production are traditional.

Trading procedures and industrial organization do not guaranty basic GSO quality standard 1916/2009 on loose dates.

Few companies have started production of quality dates with diversified packing as a response to local demand from high revenue consumers and export demand.

Packaging by local companies remains in low and medium segments; it does not carry any image of the country.
Dates identified by ITHRAA as one of a total of 50 thrust products with most potential.

Competitiveness of Omani dates in Indian market was rated as particularly high.

Unlike other countries, no particular quality label or Geographical Indications (GI) nor Protected Geographical Indicators established in palm date sector in Oman.
Marketing constraints

- Heavy involvement of farmers
- Narrow range of varieties for processing / packing.
- No outstanding variety
- Limited range of processed products
- Packaging substandard relatively to competitors
- Dispersed operators, with small own resources for promotion and development
No processors / exporters organization

GSO specific Technical Regulation(s) for dates exist, but neither applied nor enforced

Lack of promotion of Omani dates by tourism industry or air carriers

Lost opportunities for by-products valorization
Tangible opportunities/encouragements for rewarding marketing

- National plans for tourism development
- Active and demanding regional market both for fresh and processed products
- Potential of differentiation through new varieties in EU/US markets because of two dominant varieties “Deglet Nour” and “Medjool”
- Appropriate legislation (intellectual property) has been drafted.
SWOT
Strength

- Recognition from government on importance of Date sector
- Availability of infrastructure and agencies that help promote export (ITHRAA, Handcraft Authority, OmanAir, MoT, ..)
- Potential to grow many high value variety
- High nutritional value of Omani dates
- Traditional attachment to date palm
- High number of date palms that could improve production and productivity if managed
- Capability of Omani to work with dates (traditionally and heritage inherited)
Weakness

- Lack of innovation in farming and cultivation of date palm.
- Farm cultivation practices that have not coped with technological advances and innovations.
- Sanitation and diseases threats that affected quality and increased losses at harvest level.
- Lack of industrial coordination between production and post-harvest functions of storage, packaging, processing and transportation.
- Dominance of traditional local markets and marketing procedures
- Distorted date-business industry with insufficient storage facilities and logistics.
- Non-competitive market organization to the advantage of local or international intermediaries.
- High losses of dates and palm date by-products and lost opportunities for unused dates.
- Low product diversification.
- Low returns to date palm cultivation at the national level and consequently low returns to water and land resources and low contribution of the sector to agricultural GDP.
Opportunities

- Recognized as thrust product within a coherent, Government-led export strategy, to be elaborated further.
- Active and demanding regional market both for fresh and processed products.
- Potential of differentiation through new varieties in EU/US markets because of two dominant varieties “Deglet Nour” and “Medjool.”
Dates selected as one of thrust products by ITHRAA, consequently significant budgets are likely to be devoted to enhancing its exports in its programming process.

Upgrading value added of date products and palm date by-product

Enhancing export revenues

Creating new employment opportunities through new investments in the industry

Tourism export by utilizing date sector to promote
Threats

- International competition worldwide
- Competition of imported dates
- Leaving farms managed by expat labor and mismanagement
- Uncontrolled pesticide use
- Discussion was focusing on dates only
- What is generated from dates / dates palms
- Where dates are found
Date & Tourism: Linkages
Tourist attraction linked with Dates

- Oasis
- Traditional industries (date syrup, handcrafts)
- Traditional markets
- Museums
- Furniture
- Handcraft centers
- Wadi
- Festivals
- Forts
Recommendations

- Promote date palm related handcraft
- Initiate date palm society
- Optimizing fruit size
- Optimize nutritional content and rapid cultivar selectivity
- Employing modern orchard layouts and mechanization of labor dependent cultural practices
- Optimize and promote byproducts
- Utilize date sector and link with other sectors such as tourism
- Create a brand name for Omani Dates
Thank you