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# PARC and HarvestPlus chiefs discuss biofortification of staple food crops to alleviate malnutrition

*Staff Reporter*

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Iftikhar Ahmad, Chairman, Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) had a meeting along with his research team with Dr. Howarth-Bouis, Director, HarvestPlus (partner of Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, CGIAR System). They discussed the strategic measures to alleviate the persisting perils of malnutrition, especially zinc nutrient in the daily diets.

Currently, the population of Pakistan is affected by 31.5% (underweight), 43.7% (stunted) and 15.1% (wasted). The lactating mothers & children under 5 years are highly prone to deficiency of zinc syndrome. There are estimates that 32%, 44% and 15% children are facing underweight, stunting and wasting, respectively these phenomena. Apart from other interventions

to mitigate malnutrition, the biofortification of staple food crops, bred through conventional breeding techniques have proved their evidence to mitigate malnutrition at global level.

On an average, the currently grown wheat varieties contain about 25 microgram zinc per gram. This quantity is insufficient to meet the daily needs, who persist on the cereal based diets. The HarvestPlus has targeted to raise the level of zinc from 25 to 37 microgram zinc per gram in the wheat grain through conventional plant breeding techniques.

The R&D efforts of Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) and National Agricultural Research System (NARS) under the patronage of Ministry of National Food Security & Research (MNFSR) and provincial agriculture departments have borne fruits

to roll-out its first biofortified high zinc wheat variety, "Zincol 2015". This forthcoming variety has productivity equal to other mega varieties, containing more than 37 microgram zinc per gram (+12 over base line) and resistant to diseases including stem rust (Ug99) and also highly productive under irrigated & rain-fed areas of the country.

Dr. Iftikhar remarked that the consumption of biofortified high zinc wheat would enable the rural and sub-urban malnourished communities to raise their zinc nutrition level. He applauded the efforts of the international organizations for technical & financial support for this challenging task. He added that PARC has also chalked out comprehensive plan to fortify the food crops in association with academic institutions.

Dr. Azeem Khan, Director General, National Agriculture Centre briefed about the Research Activities of the Centre for contribution in the development of Agriculture Sector of Pakistan. He also presented a Shield of the Centre to the Director, HarvestPlus. Dr. Shahid Masood, Member, Plant Sciences Division also briefed about the research and development activities of PARC and the centre.

Dr. Bouis thanked the Government of Pakistan, Ministry of National Food Security & Research and particularly PARC for extending their cooperation and making this task fruitful. He also added that with the passage of time, other staple food crops, pulses and vegetables would also be included under biofortification program to make them more nutritious compared to the current level.