



DAWN

Zinc-rich wheat variety to be cultivated this year

By Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The country's first zinc-rich wheat variety would be available for cultivation during the 2015-16 Rabi crop season later this year, Minister for National Food Security and Research, Sikandar Hayat Khan Bosan announced on Monday.

"Zincol 2015" has been recommended for approval by the Variety Evaluation Committee of Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) and submitted to the provincial seed councils, Bosan said, speaking at a roundtable on 'HarvestPlus Biofortification Programme in Pakistan'.

After promoting iron fortification of wheat and salt with iodine, the wheat bio-fortification programme

Continued on Page 12

Zinc-rich wheat variety...

Continued from Page 10

has been launched in the country. Under the programme, wheat, the main staple food crop has been targeted to develop a zinc-rich wheat variety.

The programme is coordinated by the International Food Policy Research Institute, International Center for Tropical Agriculture, International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre, PARC and National Agricultural Research System under the umbrella of the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

Bosan maintained that biofortification can play a major role in tackling Pakistan's 'hidden hunger'.

Biofortification is sustainable, cost-effective and targeted as more nutritious staple food can reach rural communities often missed by other nutrition interventions such as dietary supplementation and food fortification.

The ministry is actively engaged in providing support to provinces for development in this area as per the 'Vision 2025' of the prime minister, Bosan added.

Secretary National Food Security and Research, Seerat Asghar in his remarks said that availability of highly nutritious food is the most important dimension of food security as 43 per cent of children under-5 does not get enough zinc in their diet. "Mineral and vitamin deficiencies cost Pakistan nearly \$3 billion in GDP losses annually.

The upcoming high zinc wheat variety would provide 50pc of daily zinc requirement and is expected to be a high yield and disease resistant variety," he said.

He said the new bio-fortified wheat variety developed with the efforts of HarvestPlus and PARC would ensure nutritious food for all, particularly for nutrition-deficient rural population to help them overcome health deficiencies.

There is also a need for launching soil-fertility campaign that would help bio-fortification of food crops, he emphasised.

HarvestPlus is part of the CGIAR Research Programme on Agriculture for nutrition and health.

Secretary Planning, Development and Reforms, Hassan Nawaz Tarar said the Planning Commission would continue to support all nutrition programmes to help Pakistan become food and nutrition secure.

PARC Chairman Dr Iftikhar Ahmad stressed the need for using diversified nutrients to ensure a healthy society. "Pakistan is the first country that has introduced zinc-efficient wheat variety," he added.