

China kiwifruit laboratory seeks deeper cooperation with Iran

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

FEATURE REPORT

A Chinese kiwifruit research laboratory has expressed interest in expanding cooperation with Iran, inviting Iranian scientists and businesses to collaborate on research, cultivation and the development of new kiwifruit varieties.

The China-New Zealand Belt and Road Joint Laboratory on Kiwifruit also hopes to work with Iranian partners to introduce red- and yellow-fleshed varieties to the Iranian market, subject to the agricultural conditions, regulations and standards of both countries.

Kiwifruit is a common autumn fruit in Iran, where an increasing number of farmers have turned to its cultivation in recent years as a profitable crop. Native to China, the fruit was introduced to New Zealand in 1904 by teacher Isabel Fraser. New Zealand growers spent years developing the first commercially viable varieties, and in the 1950s, as merchants began promoting the fruit overseas, it was given the name “kiwifruit” after New Zealand’s national bird, the kiwi.

Today, only a limited number of countries cultivate the fruit, with China by far the world’s largest producer. The country produces about 2.3 to 2.4 million tons of kiwifruit annually, accounting for roughly half of global production.

Iran also holds a significant

position in the global kiwifruit market, producing between 250,000 and 300,000 tons a year, or around 5% to 7% of global output.

Yet for many Iranians, kiwifruit is associated almost exclusively with the familiar hairy, green-fleshed variety, with relatively little awareness of the diversity of species and varieties found around the world.

A visit by Iran Daily to the China-New Zealand Belt and Road Joint Laboratory on Kiwifruit in Sichuan offered a glimpse into that diversity. Researchers at the laboratory said there are 54 wild kiwifruit species worldwide, including varieties with red and yellow flesh.

The joint laboratory is a collaboration between the Sichuan Provincial Academy of Natural Resource Sciences and New Zealand’s Institute for Plant and Food Research. It was inaugurated by the two countries’ top leaders in 2014 and became operational in the Sichuan Tianfu New Area in 2018.

The laboratory collects and preserves wild kiwifruit germplasm resources, while also conducting research into kiwifruit diseases and methods of treating them.

As part of its efforts to promote international scientific and technological exchange, the laboratory organizes science and technology exchange conferences as well as international symposiums on kiwifruit innovation and development.

It also holds international training workshops that have brought together scientists and technicians from countries including Egypt, Pakistan, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Nepal and Iran.

Seeking a bridge to Iran

Zhuang Qiguo, the Chinese director of the China-New Zealand Belt and Road Joint Laboratory on Kiwifruit, told Iran Daily that the institute has been seeking deeper cooperation with Iran in recent years.

“We know that Iran has abundant scientific and research resources. Through several bilateral exchange programs, some Iranian scientists have already visited our institute, but we are still at an early stage,” he said. The two sides have introduced their respective industries to one another, but have yet to establish concrete joint projects, Zhuang said.

He described the visit by an Iranian media organization as an opportunity to broaden those exchanges and build connections with a wider network of Iranian scientists and businesses.



Zhuang Qiguo, Chinese director of the China-New Zealand Belt and Road Joint Laboratory on Kiwifruit, briefs journalists on the laboratory's work.

“We hope you can serve as a bridge connecting us with more scientists in Iran and help us establish broader cooperation,” he said.

“It may seem like just a small step — simply introducing our institute — but it could mean a great deal for our future cooperation.”

Zhuang said the proposed cooperation could follow a path similar to the laboratory’s experience with New Zealand.

“In the beginning, a New Zealand scientist came to visit our country and our institute. That visit helped us connect with more resources and networks in New Zealand, and eventually we built the large platform we have today,” he said.

Given Iran’s position as a major kiwifruit-producing country, Zhuang said the laboratory could potentially introduce its red- and yellow-fleshed varieties to Iran through future cooperation.

From research to commercialization

During the visit, journalists were given the opportunity to taste several kiwifruit varieties, including sour, sweet and astringent types, as well as red- and yellow-fleshed varieties.



Zhuang said such first-hand experience could help introduce the potential of the different varieties to Iranian researchers and businesses.

“Perhaps through your introduction, we can gradually begin our cooperation — first within the scientific research community and then by bringing the research into industry and commercialization,” he added. However, Zhuang stressed that introducing new varieties is not simply a matter of transferring them from one country to another, as different varieties can perform differently depending on local agricultural

conditions.

“For example, a particular variety may grow very well in China but may not perform as well in Iran. That is why we need to conduct experiments and tests first,” he said.

He noted that establishing a successful partnership would require work on several fronts, including regulatory issues and assessments of soil and climatic conditions.

“We believe there is still a lot of work to be done to establish a partnership, including surveys and studies of land, soil and weather conditions,” Zhuang said.

Trade ties with Eurasian bloc gain momentum

Economy Desk

Trade between Iran and members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is on an upward trajectory despite ongoing challenges, the head of Iran’s Trade Promotion Organization said, as Tehran seeks to deepen commercial ties and strengthen private-sector cooperation with the bloc. Mohammad Ali Dehghan Dehnavi made the remarks during a meeting with Andrey Slepnev, Minister in charge of Trade of the Eurasian Economic Commission, expressing hope that the second meeting of the

Iran-EAEU Joint Committee would be held in Tehran soon, IRNA reported.

He said holding the joint committee meeting in Tehran could provide an opportunity to strengthen links between private-sector businesses on both sides and pave the way for new economic and trade partnerships.

Dehnavi was in Minsk to attend the 19th meeting of the Iran-Belarus Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation.

During his visit, an Iranian pavilion was held at an international trade and economic cooperation exhibi-

tion in Minsk from September 30 to October 2, where Iranian companies showcased their export capabilities and products.

A parallel trade and economic cooperation exhibition was also held in Iran, bringing together businesses to explore trade, investment and commercial opportunities with EAEU member states.

The events coincided with a meeting of EAEU prime ministers and an industrial exhibition in Belarus, providing a platform for business representatives to discuss potential areas of cooperation and investment.

Iran ready to offer investment projects to Turkmen, CIS partners

Economy Desk

Iran is ready to offer feasibility-tested investment projects in energy, transit, agriculture, industry and special economic zones to partners in Turkmenistan and other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, a senior Iranian official said Thursday, according to IRNA. Speaking at the Ashgabat Investment Forum, Mehdi Heydari, deputy economy minister and head of Iran’s Organization for Investment and Economic and Technical Assistance, said Tehran viewed the forum as an opportunity to open a new chapter in economic cooperation with Turkmen-

istan.

He highlighted joint investment, infrastructure development, technological cooperation and greater private-sector participation as key areas for expanding bilateral economic ties.

Heydari said stronger connections between regional markets would be central to future investment, pointing to the International North-South Transport Corridor, the Middle Corridor and closer links among Central Asia, the Caspian region, the Persian Gulf and global markets.

“Iran can provide Turkmenistan and other Central Asian countries with access to the Persian Gulf, open waters and Middle Eastern

markets, while Turkmenistan and Central Asia can help expand Iran’s access to the Eurasian economic space,” he said.

He identified energy, transit and logistics, agriculture and food processing, and industrial investment in free and special economic zones as priorities for future cooperation.

In the energy sector, Heydari highlighted gas swaps, energy transmission and storage, refining and petrochemicals. In transport, he cited investment in rail and road fleets, border terminals, logistics hubs and Caspian maritime connections. He also pointed to the potential to link Central Asian agricultural production

with Iran’s processing, packaging and distribution capacity, creating opportunities for joint access to regional and international markets.

Heydari cited existing cross-border projects, including the Korpeje-Kurt Kuy gas pipeline, Friendship Dam, Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway and Incheh Borun-Bereket rail link, as examples of successful bilateral cooperation.

He called for investment opportunities to be backed by clear institutional mechanisms, predictability and viable projects, and invited regional partners to turn economic dialogue into concrete joint investments.

Tehran, Baghdad push for resumption of flights

Economy Desk

Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh and Iraqi Ambassador to Tehran Yasser Abdul Zahra Al-Hajjaj discussed bilateral issues, including the resumption of flights between the two countries, during a meeting in Tehran. Al-Hajjaj referred to US pressure on air transportation between

Iran and Iraq, saying the two sides were working to identify mechanisms that could help address the issue under the current circumstances.

“Flights between the two countries will resume soon,” he was quoted as saying by IRNA.

“Millions of pilgrims travel to the holy sites, while thousands of students and schoolchildren, as well as large Iranian and Iraqi

communities, travel between the two countries. There are also extensive trade ties between the two sides.”

He added that large numbers of Iranian and Iraqi nationals live in each other’s countries and that economic and people-to-people ties between the two sides were deep-rooted and strong.

“I believe such a decision [by the US] cannot diminish the depth of

relations between the two countries,” the Iraqi envoy said.

Sadegh, for her part, said ties between Iran and Iraq were deep and interconnected, adding that countries with little in common with Iran and Iraq in terms of culture, civilization, ethics and shared history and religion could not create division or separation between the two nations.

“Given the efforts currently

being made by both countries, we hope the issue of flights will be resolved as soon as possible and air connectivity between Iran and Iraq will improve,” she said.

The United States has recently imposed sanctions targeting Iran’s aviation industry as part of its broader pressure campaign. The measures also include secondary sanctions against foreign

companies and intermediaries that provide Iranian airlines with fuel, airport services, spare parts or other support.

The measures have led to restrictions affecting some Iranian flights to other countries, including Iraq.

However, officials from both countries are pursuing efforts to bring back air links between Iran and Iraq.