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By Martyn Fisher

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## Omani growers net Brazilian boost

Project involving universities in both countries aims to reverse impact caused by mango disease and boost local production



Oman's Port of Salalah could see more fruit exports in future if the fight against Mango Wilt succeeds

**T**wo agricultural scientists from Brazil's leading agricultural educational university visited Omani farmers to share the latest research and technology for citrus and mango cultivation, reports the Times of Oman.

Supported by mining firm Vale and in co-ordination with the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the project was established in 2012 with the aim of restoring Oman's two most traditional crops through investigating control measures against Mango Wilt and Witch's Broom; both of which have been affecting yields.

A research into the decline of both crops has been funded by Vale, and has previously allowed researchers from Oman to visit Brazil to understand how growers in the South American nation cultivate citrus and mango to obtain higher yields.

Acid lime was Oman's second most valuable export product in the 1970s, but since then more than 90 per cent of trees have shown symptoms of Witch's Broom disease caused by a phytoplasma, and have died within five to eight years, reducing the local production by half.

Mango trees, on the other hand, have been affected by the *Ceratocystis fimbriata* fungus, with 60-70 per cent of trees dying over the last 17 years.

Through Vale's work with researchers at the SQU and Brazil's Federal University of Viçosa (UFV), the pathogens causing these two diseases have been studied to develop sustainable control strategies, while focusing on the regeneration of agricultural areas in Oman, and the replenishment of fruit supplies by adopting new cultivation techniques.

Sergio Espeschit, CEO of Vale in Oman,

told the Times of Oman: "Our partnerships in Brazil and Oman have created the opportunity to engage educational institutions in the transfer of knowledge, and the sharing of research and expertise to benefit the local community in North Al Batinah.

"Currently, the Sultanate imports 66 per cent of its mangoes. This project will contribute in changing the scenario while raising the in-country value by providing the means to farmers, to transform farms into sustainable commercial agri-businesses."

Speaking at a workshop conducted for local farmers at the SQU, Dalmo Lopes de Siqueira, professor of crop sciences at the UFV, said: "Together with Vale and the SQU, our main objective is to share the Brazilian agricultural knowledge gained through our research conducted in Brazil, and provide Omani farmers with the techniques necessary to

increase yield of both crops, and prevent

"One of the objectives of our research is to

However, due to Mango Wilt decreasing

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further erosion of such important crops."

"We will also monitor fruit production in Oman and share the findings of our projects in Brazil, focusing on plant pathology, while aiming to maximise our contribution to the sustainable growth of North Al Batinah's agriculture industry.

obtain Brazilian mango cultivars that are resistant to Mango Wilt, to be introduced in Oman. Omani farmers can propagate them in the Sultanate's climate and specific soil conditions."

Brazil is the seventh largest producer of mangoes in the world, but has achieved the world's highest yield ranging from 16 to 25 tonnes of mango per hectare.

yields, growers in Brazil have adopted enhanced cultivation techniques that Vale, the SQU, and the UFV aim to replicate in Oman.

Mango Wilt was first detected in Brazil in 1940, and appeared in Oman in 1998. Outbreaks have also been reported in India, the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan.