An overview of the goals and functions of the Israeli gene bank for agricultural crops

Rivka Hadas, The Israeli Gene Bank for Agricultural Crops, VolcaniCenter, Beit Dagan, Israel

The area of Israel is rich in valuable wild-growing relatives of crop plants that can be used as breeding resources. However, with growing urbanization and land use, the populations of these relatives and of other species with an untapped economic potential are becoming impoverished or are in danger of extinction. A cardinal goal of the Israeli Gene Bank for Agricultural Crops (IGB), founded in 1979, is to conserve representative gene pools of these species. For now, this is mainly realized by *ex-situ* collections. At present, the central seed bank at the headquarters of the IGB, which is in the process of being renovated, holds some 8,000 accessions of wild crop relatives. Landraces that used to be grown in our area are being preserved in the seed bank and in vegetatively maintained clonal repositories. The IGB maintains a network of collaboration with academic institutions and other bodies that are engaged in work related to plant genetic resources, in Israel and abroad. For the future, strategies of *in-situ* conservation of entire populations of wild crop relatives are being explored. It is planned to enlarge the seed collections to include country-wide representatives of all native species with an economic potential, as well as rare plants. The IGB hopes to become part of a regional network with related germplasm collections in neighboring countries.

Information on the various activities occurring under the scope of the Gene Bank and information regarding our collection can be found at our web site http://igb.agri.gov.il , through which there is an option of searching for information on various species in the gene bank inventory.