

HOW DIVERSE ARE DATE PALM VARIETIES IN GCC COUNTRIES?

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A database on 6 fruit qualitative traits scored on 203 date palm varieties grown in the 6 GCC countries, along with scores on the overall quality and economic value of these varieties, was statistically analyzed. Varieties from UAE were highest in diversity (1.122), followed by varieties from Kuwait (0.989), Oman (0.962), Saudi Arabia (0.886), Bahrain (0.866) and Qatar (0.772). Kuwaiti varieties were separated from the rest with an average standardized distance of 0.9 unit, suggesting a totally different origin of these varieties, followed by varieties from Saudi Arabia (0.61), Bahrain and Qatar (0.55) and finally Oman and UAE (0.46). Most varieties have good-medium fruit quality (80%), while the remaining 20% were rated as excellent. Non-commercial varieties were highest (92%) in Bahrain and in each of Kuwait and Qatar (72%), however, 75% of the Saudi varieties were classified as having high commercial value. Very few varieties (7%) were identified as having the best combination of desirable fruit shape, fruit size, fruit color, and maturity date. A regional project in the center of origin and center of diversity of date palm should identify, select and propagate the best varieties and distribute them for maximum economic return.