

QAFCO Research & Development Grant: **An Example of Industry/ Academia Partnership to Promote Research Excellence**

Prof. Abdelali Agouni

Manager of Post-Award, Research Support for Grants and Contracts Department-Qatar
University



In its constant pursuit of excellence in scientific research and innovation, Qatar University is keen to implement its research projects in cooperation with partners and stakeholders from various scientific and industrial bodies, both at the national and international levels. In light of this strategy, Qatar University signed at the end of 2019, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Qatar Fertiliser Company (QAFCO) aimed at supporting research initiatives in the field of agriculture to further strengthen and support the agricultural sector in the State of Qatar. The initiative was taken for achieving its goal of sustainable and reliable production of the required quantity and quality of agricultural products for the country. In addition, the MoU advocated for sharing, maintaining, and expanding the knowledge of best global farming practices amongst Qatari stakeholders. The MoU also set the foundations for the establishment of a new research grant targeted at Qatar University faculty and students to develop and implement research ideas on topics of national importance. The purpose of this new competitive grant scheme is to support QAFCO's strategy to disseminate knowledge that enables the State of Qatar to achieve self-sufficiency in food products in line with the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030. Furthermore, this new program supports Qatar University's strategy of sustainable research and development, promoting a culture of research, innovation, and research environment in the University community in addition to fostering academia and industry collaboration.

The QAFCO R&D Grant Scheme was designed in two phases and launched in 2020. In the first phase (pre-prototype stage), Qatar University faculty and students were invited to submit their research proposals that were then reviewed by a joint technical and scientific committee formed between QAFCO and Qatar University. Following the first phase, eight projects were funded for a duration of six months. The funded projects covered a variety of topics of national importance and involved multiple undergraduate and graduate students. At the end of the first phase, the winning teams submitted technical progress reports about their achievements in this phase and research plans proposed for the second phase (prototype stage). Furthermore, lead investigators also presented their findings from the first phase and research plans for the second phase before the joint QU/QAFCO technical committee. After the review of reports and proposals by experts, two projects from the first phase were selected to receive additional funding to complete their research plans in the second phase for one year.



Announcement of the QAFCO grant winners.

The partnership between Qatar University and QAFCO has been a great success due to close cooperation and contribution in all the stages of the grant scheme development and implementation. The industrial partner (QAFCO) has actively participated with the Research Support Office at Qatar University in designing of the funding grant program, the drafting of its main objectives, technical evaluation of the first phase project progress reports, and the selection of winning projects for the second phase of funding. The comments received from the researchers participating in the first phase unanimously shed light on the positive impact of this cooperation between the academia and industry in promoting a culture of innovation and benefiting from funded research to make an economic and societal impact in the State of Qatar. This cooperation between Qatar University and QAFCO will be strengthened in the near future through new initiatives that will expand the participation of QU students in research and development and address key national challenges in line with Qatar University's research priorities and strategic plan.

Qatar University focuses on research cooperation with the industrial sector due to its importance in enhancing research funding opportunities and developing prototypes, systems, and related programs, in addition to strengthening the role of the University in meeting the research needs of the state in areas of national priority and exploring ways to transfer knowledge and commercialize research. Cooperation with industrial bodies also ensures the employment of research capabilities and competencies incubated by the University to find innovative solutions to issues of interest to the industrial sector in the country, in an effort to support the transition to a knowledge-based economy in the State of Qatar.