

- ✓ In Central America, BGU researchers encountered white sapote, another desert fruit tree. Twenty varieties are now growing at the Negev test facility.
- ✓ In South America, a BGU research team learned of a variety of cactus that produces a thornless cactus apple. In the Negev and other desert regions around the world, this rugged, easy-to-harvest plant promises to become an important new crop.

And there's more -- much, much more.

As I mentioned earlier in this letter, beneath the surface of the Negev -- and extending under Egypt and all across North Africa -- there is a vast aquifer, filled with briny water. It has been there since the last ice age.

What good is it?

Until recently, not much.

But now, Ben-Gurion University scientists have developed crop varieties that actually thrive on brine. If you buy a tomato in Western Europe this winter, there's a good chance it will have been grown in the Negev with "unusable" water.

Impressive?

I think so.

Thanks to the pioneering researchers at Ben-Gurion University, we're at last beginning to learn what we most need to know -- and that, of course, is how to do more with less.

But it's not just us -- people who live in scientifically sophisticated countries -- who stand to gain from the work of Ben-Gurion University.

In recent years, experts from BGU's Institute for Agriculture and Applied Biology have worked closely with colleagues from Egypt and Morocco on saline water irrigation, fodder and industrial crops for arid zones and the use in the desert environment of greenhouses and other types of "protected agriculture."

And that's just for starters.

Of the twenty poorest countries in the world, thirteen are dominated by arid and semi-arid zones. Over 800 million people inhabit these nations. And, often, they walk the line between subsistence and hunger.