Breakthrough in developing drought-resistant crops

Canberra (IANS): A team of Australian researchers believes that they have made a breakthrough in developing drought-resistant crops after being able to “close the pores” on leaves.

The breakthrough was made by the team from the Australian National University (ANU), reports Xinhua news agency.

In a statement on Monday, Barry Pogson from the ANU said the team was able to identify a molecular pathway which controls a plant’s ability to close its pores, a process which naturally conserves water.

“This basic scientific research has the potential to be able to improve farming productivity not just in Australia, but potentially in other countries that suffer from drought stress,” Pogson said.

“If we can even alleviate drought stress a little, it would have a significant impact on our farmers and the economy.” The team was able to use a chloroplast signal to stimulate a plant’s cells and close the pores, in a finding described as “completely unexpected”, Co-researcher Kait Chan said the team tested the theory on barley, and found that enhancing the chloroplast signal on the cells, the barley survived in drought conditions 50 per cent longer.

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