

Conservation Agriculture is an excellent opportunity to address present and future challenges in agriculture

FAO Director General, EU Commissioners for Agriculture and Environment, Chair of the Comagri of the EU Parliament, the Swiss government, and international organizations and development partners have opened the most important Congress about Conservation Agriculture of the last 20 years.

At the Opening session of the 8WCCA, Gottlieb Basch, president of European Conservation Agriculture Federation (ECAF) expressed the "overwhelming interest and participation from international institutions in the 8WCCA", which returns to Europe after 20 year when the 1WCCA was held in Spain. ECAF comprises nineteen national farmer associations which has been promoting since 1999 soil management "best practices" with Conservation Agriculture.

DG from FAO, Qu Dongyu, expressed that "to produce more with less requires us to be truly innovative and environmentally thoughtful". In fact, FAO is supporting its Members in achieving this delicate balance based on local conditions and priorities and "this includes Conservation Agriculture (CA), integrated with other good agronomic practices, to prevent soil erosion, and promote biodiversity, biological interactions and efficient natural resource management". Mr Qu encouraged the audience by saying that "I was a CA promoter in China".

"Using Conservation Agriculture methods will bring us closer to our sustainability goals" said Mr Wojciechowski, EU Commissioner for Agriculture. Climate neutrality is at heart of EU policies. Mr Sinkevičius, EU Commissioner for Agriculture Environment, highlighted the need for a strategy for soils in the EU. Both Commissioners linked principles of CA to soil health within the ambitious Green Deal and the key elements of the new Common Agricultural Policy, the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies. The chair of Agriculture and Rural Development Committee of the European Parliament, Mr. Norbert Lins, emphasized that "there is a need for more robust sustainable farming, and we need to support our farmers". CA has important contribution to offer, above all in mitigating climate change and adapting to it. "We need to support farmers as constituting the base for food security", Lins stressed. The host country of the 8WCCA is Switzerland, and it is not by chance that Swiss authorities are paying more and more attention to the application of the principles of CA, as elaborated

by Mr. Christoph Ammann and Mr. Christian Hofer. Measures supporting CA have been promoted in the country since 1990s.

Development partners have a major role in the adoption and spread of CA worldwide. Successful CA examples and key messages were shared by the representatives of IFAD, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, IPCC, CIMMYT and the Global Farmer Network.

CA has highest climate smartness, common sense agriculture, economic benefits. Investment in CA is essential to meet the food and environmental challenges in developing countries, as it is key to ensure sustainability and productivity. It was highlighted that the adaptation of CA to the needs of the smallholders and to the role of women are crucial issues for the widespread adoption of CA. Entry points and main constraints need to be targeted with incentives which have been found to be effective for the transition period.

Climate change was addressed at the 8WCCA. Abdalah Mokssit, Secretary of IPCC, stated that “actual policies are not enough to control global warming which could lead to an increase of 3 degrees”. Population growth and changes in demand are growing, whilst extreme climatic events have increased over the last years, drylands are more vulnerable, land degradation is reducing productivity and releasing more carbon into the atmosphere. A real threat is that climate change will increase hunger even further.

Martin Kropff, from CIMMYT stated that “Agriculture cannot have a toll at environment”. Conversely to tillage-based agriculture, CA makes cropping systems more resistant to climate stress, reducing negative yield effects.

The performance of CA in difficult conditions is outstanding. Experiences in drought conditions have shown that CA yields can be twice as much as conventional agriculture, peaking up to 4-fold higher yields in wheat.

And we should never forget that CA reduces erosion, increases soil organic matter, reduces cost of production and in the end it raises farmers’ income. A win-win for the environment, farmers, and for us all.

For more information:

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