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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**The 8th World Congress for Conservation Agriculture starts today in Bern**

***Shaping the future of the most fundamental revolution in farming methods since the invention of the mouldboard plough in the 17th century***.

Conservation Agriculture(or CA for short) has its origins in the No-Till movement that began in the 1960s in the USA and Europe, when, in the face of ridicule from other farmers, a few brave pioneers set aside their ploughs and demonstrated that it was possible to grow crops without inverting the topsoil through ploughing or digging. They showed that frequent tillage destroyed the structure of soils and made them susceptible to erosion by wind and rain: cultivation was also diminishing soil organic matter content, reducing fertility by damaging natural biological activity. Though not realised at the time, we now know that, with repeated ploughing, soils lose much of their carbon content, speeding up the pace of climate change.

CA goes beyond No-Till because it has spawned the growth of a wide array of improved farming systems, adapted to different ecologies and farm sizes, that make the best use of the untilled land. The area under CA has grown from less than 1 million hectares in 8 countries in 1970 to over 200 million hectares in 102 countries last year. It is now applied on 15% of the world’s crop lands by farmers, large and small, in the poorest and the richest countries.

The World Congress that opens in Bern today was postponed from 2020 because of COVID 19. There will be 3 days of virtual events, attended by over 700 CA enthusiasts scattered over 80 countries. This will be followed by two field days to showcase emerging technologies on Swiss CA farms.

The event is organised by the European Conservation Agriculture Federation (ECAF) and Swiss No-Till in coordination with the Moderator of the Global CA Community of Practice (CA-CoP).

Qu Dongyu, Director General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) will open the proceedings and welcome farmers as well as high-level officials from institutions that have supported the CA movement - including the European Commission and the Swiss Government; development partners such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank; international research institutions, universities and private sector participants.

The tone for the meeting will be set in an Inaugural Speech by Amir Kassam, the CA-CoP Moderator. He will call on participants to celebrate their “*joint engagement and contribution to transforming farming from being* *the main source of land degradation globally, to becoming a driving force for conserving and rebuilding the quality of soils and agroecosystems so that they can sustainably meet the world’s future needs for food and other farm products while helping to slow the pace of climate change and ecological breakdown*.*“*.

Much of the success is due to the fact that “*farmers are the initiators and drivers of the CA movement, its main innovators, and its main promoters…. We do this because we believe in it. Nobody has had to order us to stop ploughing and digging and nobody has had to pay us to change our ways!*”

“*The main motivation for farmers’ engagement has been CA’s potential for net gains in productivity and incomes. By eliminating tillage, larger farmers have cut spending on farm machinery, inputs and fuel, while small-scale farmers have not only made big savings in time and human energy from excluding deep hand-digging, but they have also found that they can move into CA with few purchased inputs and rely on their own seeds.”*

The main message emerging from the event is expected to be that CA must be the mainstay of the shift that the world must make urgently towards sustainable farming and food systems because healthy soil management is fundamental. The CA Community cannot go it alone but must engage with the champions of other essential elements of sustainable farming, especially those engaged in organic farming, integrated pest management, agroecology and regenerative farming systems. In return, the CA Community can help these farming systems to harness CA principles and practices.

The Congress organizers will call on participants to signal their support for a notional goal of having enhanced CA-based systems fully applied on at least 50% of the world’s annual cropland area (or 700 million ha) by 2050.

Given the successful precedents, this should be an attainable goal, but it will call for the engagement of a growing team of volunteers, drawn from within the Community, to give their expertise, time and energy to innovation and to spreading the best of CA systems with help from a range of committed development partners.

For more information:

Amir Kassam, Moderator of the Global Conservation Agriculture Community of Practice (CA-CoP): [amirkassam786@googlemail.com](mailto:amirkassam786@googlemail.com)

Emilio Gonzalez, Secretary General of ECAF: [egonzalez@ecaf.org](mailto:egonzalez@ecaf.org)