What are Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems?

Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) are outstanding landscapes that combine agricultural biodiversity, resilient ecosystems and valuable cultural heritage. They have withstood climate variability for centuries, showing a remarkable ability to reduce the impacts of climate change by building resilient ecosystems that preserve agricultural biodiversity with the help of traditional farming practices.

Why is good to being a GIAHS site?

A GIAHS site is one with the present and future capacity to provide food and livelihood security and to generate other local, economic and environmental goods and services.

The knowledge and practices of these agricultural systems can be adapted to global or national policies and can support sustainable development through climate adaptation, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity conservation. Becoming a GIAHS site assists traditional and family farming communities in addressing the challenges of globalization while maintaining agro-ecosystem goods and services.

At the national level, GIAHS can contribute to the adoption of policies that integrate agricultural heritage into agricultural development programmes. In this way, GIAHS can be influential in promoting the sustainable use of biodiversity and genetic resources for food and agriculture while maintaining rural communities.

KEY MESSAGES

Peoples’ know-how and the richness of biodiversity unite in GIAHS to achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources and ecosystems. Sites bring together the economic, social and environmental dimensions at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Traditional agricultural systems such as those that have become GIAHS sites are extremely important for:

- sustaining livelihoods,
- maintaining rural communities,
- preserving traditional and local knowledge,
- protecting unique landscapes and agrobiodiversity, and
- showing examples for building resilience to the changing climate.
Regional Examples:

Soave Traditional Vineyards
Italy

Barroso Agro-sylvo-pastoral System
Portugal

Ancient Olive Trees Territorio Sénia
Spain

What is needed to become a GIAHS site?

• Agricultural systems that contribute to food and livelihood security
• Rich and unique agrobiodiversity
• Traditional knowledge and technologies
• Strong cultural values and collective forms of social organization and value systems for resource management and knowledge transmission
• Remarkable landscapes and/or seascapes stemming from ingenious systems and technologies of land and water management

What is the role of the FAO?

FAO’s GIAHS initiative aims to identify, support and safeguard traditional agricultural systems that sustain and conserve biodiversity and genetic resources for food and agriculture, respect and promote rural livelihoods and knowledge systems. Through these, FAO intends to contribute to the vision of integrating social and environmental sustainability, according to the Sustainable Development Goals.

In the region, as the numbers show, there are just a few sites designated. FAO can provide support to countries to understand the possibilities and benefits of having GIAHS site(s) for the dynamic conservation of traditional agricultural systems and for using traditional knowledge to enhance adaptation to the changing climate.

The FAO Regional Office supports the Europe and Central Asia region by enhancing awareness of the values and associated benefits of such agricultural systems and promoting all necessary actions to achieve dynamic conservation.

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