

WFF Startup Innovation Awards 2026

Terms and Conditions

1. Background and objectives

World Food Forum (WFF), the Global Youth Action Initiative (Youth Initiative) harnesses the passion and power of youth and incites positive action for agrifood systems through youth empowerment. It acts as a catalytic movement and driver of youth engagement in agrifood governance, and serves as a knowledge center and innovation lab, fostering and inspiring youth-led solutions. It thus actively contributes to the implementation of the United Nations Youth 2030 Strategy and enhances youth engagement in the follow-up to the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit.

The WFF Youth Initiative is hosted within the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Office of Youth and Women (OYW), which aims to strengthen FAO's capacity to better serve its Members through advocating for youth and women. The Youth Initiative is a core component of OYW's work to engage and empower young people worldwide to drive positive transformation of agrifood systems.

The activities of the Youth Initiative are implemented through a set of thematic programmes that leverage intergenerational and cross-sectoral collaboration, innovation and investment. These include a Youth Assembly, a Youth Entrepreneurship and Innovation Lab, a Youth Education programme, a Youth Culture programme and a Local Youth Action programme.

Within this context, the WFF Startup Innovation Awards (SIA) powered by [MassChallenge Switzerland](#), a major startup accelerator based in Switzerland, and part of the [global MassChallenge network](#), aim to identify, elevate and support youth-led startups that are developing innovative, scalable and impact-driven solutions to accelerate agrifood systems transformation. Through this platform, the WFF Youth Initiative seeks to harness the power of youth entrepreneurship, science, technology and inclusive business models to address critical challenges related to food security, sustainability, resilience and equity.

The Awards align with FAO's mandate to eradicate hunger, improve nutrition, enhance sustainable agricultural productivity and promote resilient agrifood systems. They also contribute to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to zero hunger, climate action, decent work and reduced inequalities.

The specific objectives of SIA are to:

- Identify high-potential youth-led startups delivering innovative solutions for agrifood systems transformation;
- Provide visibility, recognition and catalytic support to promising entrepreneurs;
- Facilitate access to mentorship, partnerships and acceleration opportunities; and

- Foster a global network of youth innovators committed to building sustainable, inclusive and resilient agrifood systems.

In 2026 SIA seeks to identify youth-led startups who show the greatest potential for a positive impact to transform agrifood systems across the four categories:

- Digital Innovation in Food Processing
- Empowering Women in Agrifood Systems
- Enhancing Climate Resilience and Water Security
- Fighting Malnutrition and Enhancing Food Security

2. Scope of the award

The Awards are open to eligible youth-led startups developing innovative solutions across agrifood systems, including but not limited to production, processing, distribution, consumption, circularity, climate resilience, digital innovation, nutrition and inclusive value chains.

Award categories are defined each year in line with FAO priorities, reflecting key thematic areas of focus for that edition of the Awards.

Solutions should demonstrate a clear value proposition, measurable or potential impact and the ability to scale across contexts, particularly in underserved or vulnerable communities.

3. Eligibility criteria

To be eligible for the SIA, applicants must meet the following criteria:

3.1. Youth leadership

Startups must be youth-led, with at least one founder or C-level executive aged between 18 and 35 years old at the time of application.

3.2. Programme participation eligibility

Startup representatives who participate in online demo days, pitching sessions, the MassChallenge Switzerland early accelerator programme and/or pitch at the WFF flagship event in Rome must be 35 years old or younger at the time of participation, in line with the UN Youth 2030 Strategy definition of youth.

3.3. Proof of concept

Applicants must demonstrate validated evidence of their solution. This may include pilot implementation, early customer adoption, strategic partnerships or measurable results.

3.4. Funds raised and sales

Startups must have raised less than USD 2 million in total capital.

Startups must have generated less than USD 2 million in total sales (revenue).

3.5. Scalability and inclusion

Priority will be given to scalable and context-adaptable innovations that address the needs of smallholder farmers, young women, rural communities, Indigenous Peoples and other underserved or vulnerable populations within agrifood systems.

3.6. Impact and Sustainability

Solutions must clearly articulate their expected or demonstrated contribution to agrifood systems transformation, including social, environmental and/or economic impact.

Applicants must demonstrate the potential for long-term financial, operational and environmental sustainability.

4. Selection process

The Awards are implemented through a multi-phase selection and acceleration process:

- **Phase 1: Application and online selection**

The process begins with an open call for applications, followed by an initial eligibility screening and technical assessment conducted by an independent panel of expert judges from diverse backgrounds including UN and FAO, private sector, government, VCs, academia and NGOs among others.

Shortlisted startups will advance to a second round of evaluation, which may include a virtual assessment webinar and online pitching sessions.

Following these rounds, startups will be selected to proceed to the acceleration phase.

- **Phase 2: Acceleration Programme – Lausanne, Switzerland**

Successful startups will participate in the MassChallenge Switzerland early accelerator programme in Lausanne, Switzerland starting from the end of June.

This phase includes an in-person bootcamp and collaboration activities designed to strengthen business models, refine impact strategies and prepare startups for high-level pitching opportunities.

- **Phase 3: Demo Day and pre-final judging**

Selected startups will participate in an online Demo Day in September, during which eight finalists will be chosen for the live pitch at the WFF flagship event in Rome, Italy, from 11-16 October 2026.

In parallel, startups will undergo additional pre-final judging for the MassChallenge Switzerland Award.

- **Phase 4: Final Pitch and Award Ceremonies**

Finalists will pitch live at the WFF flagship event at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy, where award recipients will be announced.

The MassChallenge Switzerland Award Ceremony will take place separately in Lausanne, Switzerland, on the October 29, 2026.

5. Prizes and benefits

- During the SIA finals at WFF, October 12-16, winners will receive at least USD 7 500 per category with USD 2 500 awarded to runners-up. The overall SIA winner will receive an additional USD 10 000. All semi-finalists will also be eligible to compete for MassChallenge Switzerland's CHF 500 000 prize pool wholly administered and coordinated by MassChallenge Switzerland and which will be awarded on October 29 in Lausanne, Switzerland;
- Access to benefits from the [MassChallenge Switzerland programme](#), including tailored startup support, mentorship, global network access and growth opportunities;
- Travel support for two finalists per award category to attend the WFF flagship event in Rome; and
- Extensive visibility and promotional opportunities via WFF Youth Initiative social media platforms and website.

6. Data protection and privacy

FAO respects your concerns about data protection and privacy, and it is committed to processing your personal data fairly, with integrity, responsibility, security and transparency, in accordance with its data protection rules, policies and procedures. FAO will process your personal data you provide for the purposes of:

- Conducting surveys, collecting and analyzing feedback for the aforementioned purpose;
- Informing future outreach and programming; and
- Programme implementation, coordination and analysis.

To that effect, the data FAO will process is your name, email, year of birth and organizational data. Your data will be securely handled and accessible only to authorized personnel. Your data will not be shared with any person or organization outside FAO without your specific consent, except with select third parties (i.e. MassChallenge Switzerland, Seeding the Future Foundation, and Smart Sensors for Agrifood innovation hub) collaborating with FAO, in full respect of international transfer safeguards and in line with adequate data processing agreements. FAO makes every effort to ensure that the selected third parties afford a level of personal data protection and safeguards that are the same as or comparable to FAO. Your data may be shared with and processed by the WFF Youth Initiative for purposes consistent with this notice. Your data will be retained only as long as necessary to fulfil the purposes stated above. It will be securely deleted once it is no longer needed for these purposes.

You may request access, correction or deletion of the personal data FAO holds of you. Any such requests, questions or concerns you may have regarding how FAO processes your personal data, should be communicated through FAO's ServiceNow [<https://fao.service-now.com/csp>]. Once you have registered an account, select the "Data Privacy" catalog to submit your query. For further information on how FAO processes your personal data, please consult FAO's Data Protection and Privacy Notice [<https://www.fao.org/contact-us/data-protection-and-privacy/en/>].

7. Award category allocation

Applicants are required to select the Award category that best aligns with their innovation at the time of submission. However, the SIA organizers reserve the right to recommend the reassignment of an application to a different Award category if it is determined that the solution more closely aligns with the objectives, scope or evaluation criteria of another category.

In such cases, applicants will be informed of the proposed reallocation and will have the right to accept or decline the reassignment. If an applicant declines the proposed reallocation, the application will remain in the originally selected category.

8. Ownership and rights of the applicant

The WFF respects your rights and does not claim ownership or copyright for works you submit to this Competition.

8.1. You will retain full ownership and copyright to each entry. In addition, your moral rights are respected. Whenever your work is published by the WFF and its partners, you will be credited. Failure to publish a credit due to error or oversight shall not be deemed a breach of this condition.

8.2. By submitting works to the WFF SIA, the applicant confirms that for each work submitted:

- a. The applicant is the author of the application and that it constitutes original work. To the best of the applicant's knowledge, no third party holds or may claim rights to the submitted work.
- b. The applicant is the sole copyright holder.
- c. The applicant has not licensed any rights in the work that conflict with the usage rights required by the WFF Youth Initiative.
- d. That it does not include trademarks, contract rights, or any other intellectual property rights of any other third person or entity.
- e. The applicant shall be responsible for any claim made by any third party in respect of the submitted entry and shall fully indemnify the WFF, its sponsors and its partners in respect of all royalties, fees and any other monies owed to any person or entity as a result of a breach of any of the foregoing representations.

8.3 The WFF Youth Initiative reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to disqualify any entry that is incomplete, not relevant to the theme, or does not comply with any of the Terms and Conditions and the WFF's values and guiding principles, even after the entry is submitted.

9. Unacceptable content

The WFF reserves the right, in its sole discretion and upon written notice, to disqualify any applicant for content or behavior:

- a. That is disrespectful of the impartiality and independence of the United Nations, reflects adversely on the WFF Youth Initiative, is incompatible with the aims and objectives of the WFF Youth Initiative and is derogatory to any persons;
- b. That is or could be construed as threatening, false, misleading, abusive, harassing, libelous, defamatory, vulgar, obscene, scandalous, inflammatory or profane;
- c. That could constitute or encourage conduct which would be considered a criminal offence, give rise to civil liability or otherwise violate any law.

10. Use of Works

10.1. By participating in this Competition, the applicant agrees that any work submitted may be used free of charge by the WFF Youth Initiative and its partners for non-commercial marketing and promotional purposes. These uses may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. Displaying application content on the WFF website (and possibly websites of partners) and social media networks and for the shortlisted teams and winner(s), featuring team profiles using the information of applicants submitted and associated materials including any recordings of presentations and pitches provided or recorded during online events, throughout the MassChallenge Accelerator, the SIA finals at WFF and any other events.
- b. Displaying the entries in any media for non-commercial use to promote the work of the WFF Youth Initiative.
- c. Extracting, reproducing any component of the work as necessary to promote the work of the WFF Youth Initiative and its partners.
- d. Sub-licensing the entries to the press and partners for reproduction in connection with the Competition and the WFF Youth Initiative and any related media releases issued by the WFF Youth Initiative and its partners with a non-commercial, promotional purpose.

10.2. The applicant grants the WFF Youth Initiative and its partners a non-exclusive, irrevocable and free license throughout the world for as long as reasonably necessary for the non-commercial, promotional uses described in 10.1 above, for each entry submitted.

10.3. The applicant acknowledges responsibility for protecting the submitted entry against misuse by third parties. The WFF Youth Initiative and its partners assume no responsibility and shall not be liable for any misuse of submitted works.

11. Miscellaneous

11.1. The WFF Youth Initiative reserves the right to cancel, modify, suspend or delay the Competition in the event of unforeseen circumstances beyond their reasonable control. It also reserves the right to change, amend, delete or add to these Terms and Conditions at any time.

11.2. WFF Youth Initiative and its staff shall not be responsible or liable for any claims, demands, losses and liabilities of any kind or nature arising out of or in connection with the applicant's participation in this Competition or the acceptance or use of the prizes awarded.

11.2.1. WFF Youth Initiative shall not be responsible or liable for:

- a. Any problem, loss or damage, misdirected or illegible entries, delay and/or failure in receiving and sending the entry as a result of any network, communication or system interruption or error; or
- b. Any error, interruption, deletion, defect, delay in operation or transmission, site failure or unauthorized access to entries.

11.3. WFF Youth Initiative does not represent or endorse the accuracy or reliability of any data, information or other material provided by any applicant. It explicitly disclaims any responsibility for the content of any data, information and materials provided by the applicants in the context of the Competition.

11.4. By submitting an application to the Competition, the applicant agrees to indemnify, defend, and hold and save harmless, the WFF Youth Initiative, FAO and its partners against all suits, proceedings, claims, demands, losses and liabilities of any kind or nature brought by any third party against the WFF Youth Initiative, including, but not limited to, all litigation costs and expenses, attorney's fees, settlement payments and damages, based on, arising from, or relating to the WFF Youth Initiative's use of the applications strictly in accordance with the Competition's terms and solely for non-commercial purposes, without any transfer or assumption of intellectual property rights from the applicant. The obligations under this section do not lapse upon closure of the Competition.

11.5. Nothing in these Terms and Conditions or in any rules related to the Competition, nor any acts performed or statements made in relation to the Competition, shall be deemed a waiver, express or implied, of any of the privileges and immunities of WFF Youth Initiative and FAO. Any dispute arising out of or relating to the interpretation or implementation of the Competition or these Terms and Conditions shall be settled amicably through consultations and negotiations. If the dispute is not resolved through negotiation, it shall be submitted to conciliation in accordance with the UNCITRAL Conciliation Rules, as in force. Any dispute not resolved through conciliation shall be finally settled by arbitration in accordance with the UNCITRAL Arbitration Rules, as in force. The arbitration proceedings shall be conducted in English and the place of arbitration shall be Rome, Italy. The decision of the arbitral tribunal shall be final and binding, and the arbitral tribunal shall have no authority to award punitive damages.

12. Acceptance

By submitting entries, the applicant confirms that the Terms and Conditions for this Competition, as set out above, have been read, understood and agreed to by the applicant.