Press Release
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Agroforestry Week in Montpellier, France

A World Congress + Public Events

19-23 May, Le Corum Conference Center

The global community faces unprecedented challenges due to climate change and unsustainable farming and land use practices. Land degradation, social disruption, inequality, depletion of natural capital . . . these are just some of the issues that need to be addressed, now. Agroforestry, the practice of trees on farms, offers one of the most effective methods for addressing these interrelated challenges. But to make it effective, there needs to be a strong connection between the science of agroforestry and how it is incorporated into public policy to effect positive social and environmental gains.

The 4th World Agroforestry Congress will bring together more than 1,200 agroforesters, researchers, decision-makers, students, business leaders, NGOs and farmers from more than 100 countries to discuss, debate, and share best practices in an effort to bridge the science-policy gap. The Congress, placed under the High Patronage of Mr Emmanuel MACRON, President of the French Republic, will be held from 20 to 22 May 2019. And for the first time, it will be hosted in Europe, in Montpellier, one of France’s oldest cities and home to the country’s first formal research into agroforestry. The event is organized by CIRAD and INRA, in partnership with World Agroforestry (ICRAF), Agropolis International and Montpellier University of Excellence.

Launching the Congress will be Sustainable Agriculture, a Food Issue: Trees on our Plates, an exploration of the ways agroforestry practices can, and do, positively influence agricultural practices and as a result the food we eat. The day-long event, to be held Sunday 19 May, is open to the public and will feature discussions, exhibitions, entertainment, a products corner and more. It is made possible by the Fondation de France and the French Association of Agroforestry.

"We wanted, through this public day ahead of the Congress, to raise awareness of agroforestry with civil society", said Emmanuel Torquebiau, Agroforestry Correspondent at CIRAD and Chair of the Organizing Committee of the Congress.

Grounding the Congress’ goals is the need for a substantial societal debate around agriculture and its role in land and climate decay. By strengthening links between science, society and policy, the Congress offers a timely opportunity to evaluate agroforestry’s vital contribution to the agroecological transition of world agriculture.

"It is time for technical solutions to be discussed within civil society and that they become part of public policy", said Christian Dupraz, INRA Research Director and Chair of the Congress Scientific Committee.

Monday, 20 May will serve as the official launch of the International Union of Agroforestry (IUAF), the first global association devoted to furthering the work of agroforestry.

On May 23, participants will be able to visit the oldest European experimental agroforestry site at Domaine de Restinclières in Prades-le-Lez (11 km north of Montpellier). Here, cereals (such as durum wheat and barley rotated with protein peas) are grown, with many species of trees, especially walnuts. In more stony soils, vineyards are grown with pines and cormiers. This agricultural domain of 50 ha belongs to the departmental council of Hérault and is scientifically piloted by the INRA center of Montpellier.

Conceptualised in the 1970s by international think-tanks seeking solutions to the problem of tropical deforestation, agroforestry is now recognized as a vital practice for protecting soil, responding to climate change issues and
contributing to global food security. Its applications are quite diverse and include: hedges and alignment of trees or shrubs in and around plots; multilayer agriculture; production of timber or fruit in cropland; fodder trees; trees for honey; shade trees for perennial crops (coffee, cocoa, vine) or livestock; multistoried agroforests; and agroforestry gardens. Today, agroforestry has become a subject of international research and is part of the agronomic education curriculum of higher education institutions around the world.

In keeping with its green mission, the Congress has enacted several initiatives including voluntary climate compensation for participant’s trips the funds from which will be devoted to agroforestry research and development projects related to soil protection, and a concerted effort to limit the ecological footprint.

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