



PORTUGAL

Nuno CANADA

President of the National Institute for Agricultural and Veterinary Research (INIAV)

*Dear Minister of Agriculture of the Kingdom of Morocco,
Dear President of the CIHEAM's Governing Board,
Dear Ministers and Heads of Delegations,
Dear representants of International Organizations,*

I begin by highlighting the importance of this meeting, recognizing its relevance, given the increasing challenges we face, and the obligation to guarantee a high level of cooperation between our member countries.

We have common challenges in the area of food systems in the Mediterranean region and research, knowledge transfer and advanced education are crucial to develop and adopt the best solutions for each country.

The objective of ensuring food and nutritional security, with the supply of food in quantity and quality, in a sustainable manner, is a challenge that requires articulated and multidisciplinary responses. The implementation of CHIEAM strategic plan 2030 will be very important to achieve this objectives.

As Mediterranean countries, we are naturally more susceptible to the effects of climate change and agriculture is one of the sectors most affected by this reality, with recurring situations of severe and extreme drought. I highlight the role of structuring investment, new technologies and innovation, with regard to the creation of infrastructures essential to the development of productive activities, crucial to respond to these challenges, contributing to minimize risk, ensure income stability and reinforce attractiveness of regions and the fight against desertification.

It is also very important the alignment of innovation and knowledge transfer agendas in promoting sustainable practices in the production and management of natural resources,

with digitalization and the adoption of appropriate technologies, constituting crucial factors for the success of Mediterranean agri-food systems and their value chains.

In this regard, I would like to emphasize the range of partnerships in innovation and knowledge transfer projects on topics related to food security, conservation agriculture, irrigation, and the enhancement of genetic resources, among others, involving broad Mediterranean country consortia (represented here) with ambitious goals to promote sustainable agriculture in the Mediterranean basin and in identified vulnerable areas.

The pressing needs, for environmental reasons and for mitigating the effects of climate change, in terms of extensification and diversification of agricultural and livestock production systems, as well as focusing on genetic improvement adapted to dryland environments or those subject to modest supplementary irrigation, are benchmarks for cross-border cooperation and research that should be replicated in the future with greater intensity.

I highlight, for example, the importance of finding cultivars with greater drought tolerance. Portugal has been working on this area and has achieved notable results. Another example is the cultural diversification and extensification, often justified by the need to address the high nutritional deficits of foods.

I also reinforce the importance given to training and exchange programs that strengthen the knowledge and skills of technicians and producers, enabling them to implement the best practices and technologies available.

The adoption of new climate-adapted and environmentally beneficial practices depends on the availability of appropriate policies (and policy instruments) that not only cover the additional costs but also act as incentives.

The incentives should also aim to increase the inclusion and entrepreneurship of both women and youth, through innovative economic diplomacy initiatives, ensuring access to productive resources. This is another challenge that needs to be developed in the joint mission and the construction of a common agenda for the coming years, to sustainably increase productivity and competitiveness in the agri-food sector, safeguarding farmers' livelihoods, particularly women and youth.

It is worth highlighting the new European Commissioner for Mediterranean issues, Croatian Commissioner Dubravka Šuica, who places the Mediterranean at the center of the European Commission's agenda for 2024-2029. This portfolio addresses the key points identified in the recent Mediterranean Pact, namely, sustainable development and deeper cooperation between the European Union and Southern Mediterranean countries.

Portugal, aligned with legislation on water, air, and climate, within the framework of European policies and objectives, will also continue to contribute in an integrated manner

to addressing a significant number of challenges facing Mediterranean agri-food systems, particularly within the scope of this new Mediterranean Pact, proposed by the European Commission with the contributions of all regional partners.

Therefore, it is important to continue promoting the partnerships necessary for this strategic alignment and strengthening connections between our countries. CIHEAM, enabling dialogue and facilitating contacts, plays a crucial role in developing regular platforms to discuss regional issues and share knowledge and research and innovation projects.

These are some of the current challenges for the Mediterranean countries' agendas. Alignment of agendas reflects the solidarity of Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries, representing the spirit of CIHEAM. Portugal, together with partner countries, some of them European Union Member States, has been an active participant.

In this regard, we must continue to work to counter what we anticipate as future challenges, in a coordinated and constant manner, to improve and pursue the goals of efficiency and sustainability we set for ourselves.

It is therefore imperative to continue supporting partnerships and cooperation actions, in the short and long term, aimed at mitigating the effects of food crises and climate change, focusing on capacity-building and knowledge transfer platforms, with emphasis on environmental, economic, and social dimensions.

I conclude by expressing the hope that the results of this ministerial dialogue will reinforce strategies in order to implement solutions that contributes to have more sustainable and resilient food systems in the Mediterranean region.

Thank you for your attention.