



1st CIHEAM Lebanese Alumni International Seminar, 24 September 2025, Beirut, Lebanon

Opening Speech,

Frida Krifca, President of the CIHEAM Governing Board

Dear Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Alumni, dear colleagues:

It is my distinct pleasure, on behalf of the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies—CIHEAM—to open this first International Seminar of CIHEAM's Lebanese Alumni here in Beirut.

We gather at a demanding yet dynamic moment, with a simple and steady conviction: youth, skills, and innovation must be placed at the very heart of Lebanon's agrifood transformation. This vision is not abstract; it is the cornerstone of the recovery of rural territories, of the revitalization of value chains, and of the renewal of trust in public institutions.

This seminar brings together public authorities, academics, practitioners, entrepreneurs and—above all—many generations of Alumni who have transformed knowledge into service to their country. Your presence testifies to the importance of building bridges between education, research, public policy and business, so that together we may generate lasting impact.

Allow me to begin with words of appreciation.

I warmly thank our hosts and, in particular, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Minister himself for his openness and spirit of partnership. His support is a sign of confidence in the value of collaboration.

I also thank the Minister of Technological Innovation and Artificial Intelligence, from whom we will later hear about national plans to advance innovation and technology in Lebanon. Your engagement is crucial: agriculture cannot succeed in isolation, but only when linked to digitalization, entrepreneurship, and cross-sector innovation.

Finally, to each and every one of you here today—thank you for your presence and your trust.

This gathering carries a special meaning for our institution. It coincides with CIHEAM's sixty-third anniversary, and it extends a partnership with Lebanon that spans more than four decades.

During this time, hundreds of Lebanese students and professionals have trained in our Institutes of Bari, Montpellier, Zaragoza, and Chania. They returned enriched, and many are today leaders in public administration, research, and agrifood enterprises.

This proud community of Lebanese Alumni is proof of the relevance of Mediterranean cooperation. It demonstrates how investment in human capital yields results that endure through crises and transitions. To all of you, I wish to express CIHEAM's gratitude and admiration.

We are fully aware of the difficult context. In recent years, Lebanese agriculture has endured interlocking crises: financial, economic, political, environmental. These have tested the resilience of farms, markets, and public services.

Yet, even in this adversity, solutions are emerging on the ground:

- More prudent and efficient use of inputs;
- Investments in solar energy for irrigation;
- New forms of local cooperation;
- Research findings translated into practice through partnerships with producers and cooperatives.

These encouraging signals show that innovation is not a distant ideal—it is already present, often in modest but powerful initiatives.

Our responsibility, collectively, is to consolidate and scale up these signals: by embedding them in coherent public policies, ensuring access to adequate financing, and relying on well-trained human resources.

Speaking for CIHEAM, I wish to emphasize what we know how to do with Lebanon—and what we shall continue to do.

- We transmit knowledge, ensuring that it remains relevant to the needs of today.
- We bring research closer to public action, making science a tool for decision-making.
- We connect professional communities that do not always communicate with each other—farmers with researchers, policymakers with entrepreneurs, youth with mentors.
- We give visibility to proven pathways, so that successful experiences inspire replication and support.

Our added value lies in six decades of patient experience across the Mediterranean, where countries face similar challenges: scarcity of water, the imperative of food safety, the urgency of agroecological transition, the vitality of rural areas, and the empowerment of youth and women.

This reservoir of comparative knowledge—from the Maghreb to the Mashreq, from the southern to the northern shores—equips us to bring not only solid references and best practices, but also methods of evaluation that are rigorous, modest, and credible.

We do not promise quick fixes. We promise seriousness, attentive listening, and continuity.

The cooperation we value is not only bilateral. By vocation it is Mediterranean—rooted in the circulation of ideas, the mobility of people, and peer-to-peer learning.

It is within this Mediterranean framework that we wish to place today's exchanges:

- aligned with Lebanon's national priorities,

- respectful of the choices of Lebanese institutions,
- while letting solutions tested elsewhere inspire and resonate here.

CIHEAM will remain at your side as a trusted third party and facilitator:

- a place where skills are strengthened;
- where data are carefully reviewed before decisions are taken;
- and where teams that benefit from working together are brought together.

If this day allows us to re-order our efforts, to launch or relaunch promising initiatives, and to reaffirm trust among partners—then it will have achieved its full purpose.

Allow me to be clear: the future of Lebanon's agriculture will depend on the capacity to connect education to professions, to link research to markets, and to empower youth with the tools of innovation.

This is not the responsibility of one institution alone. It is a shared responsibility—between government and private sector, between universities and farmers' organizations, between local communities and international partners.

CIHEAM's role will be to accompany, to support, and to sustain this collective effort—always with the conviction that agriculture is not only about food, but also about jobs, dignity, environment, and the future of rural territories.

In conclusion, I wish to express heartfelt thanks:

- to the teams of the Ministry of Agriculture and of CIHEAM who prepared this meeting with care;
- to the moderators, rapporteurs, and speakers who will share their expertise;
- and above all, to you—the Alumni—who give this community its meaning, its energy, and its strength.

On behalf of CIHEAM, I wish you a fruitful day of work. May it produce sound ideas, useful alliances, and commitments that are kept.

- Together, let us turn intention into action:
- connect education to professions,
- nurture innovation,
- and give Lebanese youth the means to act.

I thank you.