

Doc. 1

BEANS GA Report

CIHEAM Bari, June 5-6, 2025

By Teodoro Miano & Mouin Hamze

Official Launch of the BEANS Meta Network: A Collective Commitment to Transform Mediterranean Food Systems

The MEDIET Project, launched by CIHEAM Bari in 2022, identified that despite their benefits, legumes are underutilized due to weak market visibility, fragmented research, scattered policymaking, and limited consumer awareness. This vision evolved on seed funding secured by CIHEAM-Bari for 2025 through Italian MAECI and the CIHEAM to support governance, functionality, and continuity through 2026 and 2027. To address this, the BEANS (Boosting Euro-Mediterranean Agri-food through Networked Systems) Meta Network was launched on June 5, 2025, at the CIHEAM Bari's Innovation Hub with the specific aim of unifying knowledge, policy, and practice across the Mediterranean in areas like cultivar selection, nutritional promotion, and climate-smart agriculture.

Key ambitions of BEANS include revaluing legumes (faba beans, lentils, chickpeas, and dry beans) as a regional public good for the Mediterranean, fostering rural prosperity, sowing sustainability and resilience, feeding nutrition and health security, driving economic growth, and preserving Mediterranean heritage.

The action plan for 2025 prioritizes the establishment of an institutional and operational foundation for the network. This includes putting in place a comprehensive **governance framework** that ensures transparent decision-making, accountability, and coordination across stakeholders and regions. In parallel, efforts will focus on **designing and deploying a strategic communication plan** to raise awareness of the network's objectives, reach key audiences, and build a shared identity. A critical component of this early phase is the **anchoring of regional hubs**, which will serve as decentralized nodes for knowledge exchange, innovation dissemination, and territorial engagement across the Mediterranean.

Operationally, 2025 will also witness the **launch of communication and knowledge-sharing platforms**, the **publication of an official manifesto** outlining the vision, principles, and strategic priorities of the network, and the **development of a long-term strategic roadmap**. These efforts will be supported by proactive measures to **mobilize resources and funding**,

leveraging national, regional, and international mechanisms to ensure financial sustainability and programmatic continuity.

To foster dialogue and visibility, the network will organize an **annual Mediterranean Legume Summit**, providing a platform for sharing experiences, aligning regional strategies, and mobilizing political commitment.

Through this phased and interlinked approach, the network will evolve from structural set-up in 2025 to full operationalization and influence across the Mediterranean agri-food landscape by 2027.

The launch event highlighted the crucial role of pulses in transforming Mediterranean agri-food systems due to their ecological, nutritional, economic, and cultural benefits. The BEANS Meta Network, supported by numerous international and regional organizations, government representatives, research institutions, universities, private sector, civil society, and local authorities, seeks to integrate pulses into agricultural and food policies.

Adoption of the Network's Operating Framework

The General Assembly marked a milestone with the unanimous adoption of the BEANS Network's operational framework. Members pledged to actively contribute to its activities, shape its strategic directions, and support its knowledge dissemination, joint programme development, international partnership building, and regional advocacy efforts. This collective momentum places legumes and pulses at the heart of a **structuring Mediterranean initiative that connects nutrition, agroecology, economic inclusion, and the preservation of agricultural heritage**.

Members also approved a structured action plan for 2025–2027. By the end of 2025, the network will launch **communication platforms** (website, social media, newsletter), publish and circulate its **official manifesto**, develop a **strategic roadmap with measurable two-year goals, and mobilise funding** from ministries, EU programmes, and regional agencies.

In the medium term, work will focus on establishing **national and thematic chapters** tailored to local specificities, publishing a series of **Policy Briefs** targeting policymakers, creating a network of pilot sites showcasing the tangible benefits of legumes, organising an **annual Mediterranean Legume Summit**, and developing a **regional label** to promote sustainable practices and high-quality legume products.

Finally, the meeting concluded with an endorsement statement from the BEANS Meta Network General Assembly members, committing to active participation, supporting objectives, recognizing network functions, and upholding organizational structure and responsibilities, aligning with the CIHEAM Strategic Plan 2030.

General Assembly Declaration

We, the members of the BEANS Meta Network General Assembly, hereby endorse the establishment and operational framework of **BEANS** as outlined in the project document dated March 27, 2025.

We commit to actively participating in the Network's activities, contributing to its strategic direction, and supporting its objectives to promote legumes within Mediterranean food systems.

We recognize the key functions of the Network, including knowledge dissemination, collaborative program creation, international partnership development, and awareness raising.

Furthermore, we acknowledge and support the organizational structure consisting of the **General Assembly** and **Executive Committee**, and we agree to uphold roles and responsibilities assigned to each stakeholder group.

We hereby declare our commitment to the **BEANS Meta Network's** mission and its alignment with the CIHEAM Strategic Plan 2030.

Attendance

CIHEAM and National Delegates

Representatives from CIHEAM's General Secretariat, CIHEAM Bari, Chania, Montpellier, and Zaragoza took part, alongside the President of the CIHEAM Governing Board and Delegates from Albania, Egypt, Lebanon, Italy, Malta, Morocco, Spain, Tunisia, and Türkiye.

International and Regional Organizations

FAO, IFAD, ICARDA, PRIMA Foundation, CGIAR, Bioversity-CIAT, AOAD, ACSAD, and the European Commission's DG AGRI were actively involved.

Government and Institutional Representatives

Ministries of Agriculture from Algeria, Lebanon, Libya, Syria and Spain participated in the discussions, together with representatives from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Research Institutions and Universities

Participants included the University of Jordan, University of Bari, University of Florence, Polytechnic University delle Marche, American University of Beirut, University of Catania, University of Seville, and University of Pisa. Other institutions represented included CREA (Italy), ENEA (Italy), INRA (Morocco), INRAT (Tunisia), LARI (Lebanon), IRCCS De Bellis (Italy), INTIA (Spain), and ESIAT (Tunisia).

Private Sector and Civil Society

Several companies and consortia, including Andriani SpA, la Valle nel Parco, the Protectium Lentil Consortium, as well as civil society organisations such as Slow Food (Italy) and ILS, also took part.

Local and Regional Authorities

The Puglia Region (Italy) was also represented, underscoring the importance of territorial engagement in this Mediterranean initiative.

Concluding Remarks

CIHEAM welcomes the strong commitment demonstrated by all participants and their readiness to actively contribute to the success of the BEANS Meta network. Building on this momentum, the Executive Committee of BEANS will convene a coordination meeting in November 2025 to formally confirm roles and responsibilities and to launch the implementation of the priority actions outlined for the current year. In parallel, the Committee will initiate efforts to secure financial support for the network's operations, including the submission of joint proposals to relevant European funding calls. These steps aim to ensure the availability of seed funding necessary for the effective rollout of the 2025 action plan and to lay a solid foundation for sustained activities in the following years.