

CIHEAM,

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BEANS Network: Cultivating Resilience Across the Mediterranean and Beyond

The **BEANS Network** represents a premier example of how scientific collaboration can address the severe threats of climate change and food insecurity in one of the world's most vulnerable regions. Operating as a specialized research and innovation cluster, supported by Organizations like CIHEAM, ICARDA, Biodiversity International & CIAT Alliance, ENEA, and several others, the network focuses on grain legumes, such as chickpeas, lentils, faba beans, and common beans, which are essential in the Mediterranean Diet and to sustainable agricultural ecosystems.

The Mediterranean basin is warming 20% faster than the global average, leading to severe water scarcity and soil degradation. The BEANS Network faces these challenges by utilizing the "universal language" of science to identify and develop legume varieties capable of thriving in these harsh conditions: i) aiming for genetic diversity (local landraces), showing natural traits of drought and heat tolerance that have been lost in industrial farming; ii) applying climate-smart breeding by utilizing phenotyping and genomic tools targeting the development of crops that require less water and fewer chemical inputs; and iii) promoting soil health through the unique capacity of legume crops to fix atmospheric nitrogen in the soil and to reduce the carbon footprint of regional agriculture.

The BEANS Network has the ambition to stand as a vital platform and a natural ground for technical diplomacy through the connection of research institutes, experts and private companies in the Mediterranean region and beyond. Institutions, scientists and private businesses from various sides of the region may establish positive relations working side-by-side, sharing germplasm and overall data; in other words, a collaboration which ensures that critical agricultural knowledge remains a shared regional asset, transcending political borders to prevent a total collapse of local food systems during climate shocks.

The BEANS Network prioritizes the involvement of women and young entrepreneurs in rural areas, providing them with high-quality seeds and technical training. By making legume cultivation economically viable and climate-resilient, the network may stimulate a reduction of rural migration and empower a new generation of Mediterranean farmers. By securing the future of the "humble bean," the network is effectively planting the seeds of a more resilient, cooperative, and food-secure Mediterranean.

From Establishment to Concrete Action

In 2026, key priority will be to reinforce coordination among partners through an active Executive Committee, thematic working groups, and a strengthened coordination mechanism hosted by CIHEAM.

Several practical initiatives will guide our efforts. We will encourage multi-country research activities to test improved cultivars, assess soil health, and analyse value chains across diverse agro-ecological contexts. Joint participation in EU and regional calls, such as PRIMA, Horizon Europe, and COST, will broaden opportunities to finance innovative initiatives. BEANS will also promote Research-to-Business initiatives to engage private companies and start-ups in developing new legume-based products and services. In parallel, the membership framework should be clarified and formally established for both institutions and experts participating in the General Assembly.

Regional training activities, mobility schemes, and curriculum development, implemented through the programmes of international and national partners, will strengthen skills and capacities. Policy dialogue and communication efforts will be supported through policy briefs, newsletters, high-level fora, regular Executive Committee meetings, consultations with General Assembly members, and the use of the BEANS digital platform (<https://beans.ciheam.org/home>).

Together, we can elevate Mediterranean legumes as a true regional public good and a driver of sustainability, resilience, and prosperity.