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International Collaboration Tackles Climate Change in Vineyards

Experts Gather to Combat Wine Industry's Water Crisis

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From July 1st to 6th, Zaragoza, Spain, became a hub of expertise and innovation in viticulture, hosting an advanced course on "Sustainable Water and Soil Management for Resilient Viticulture." Organized by the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) and the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM), the event brought together 45 students from 22 countries. This convergence of diverse perspectives underscored the global significance of sustainable practices in

viticulture.

The course was inaugurated by Raúl Compés López, Director of CIHEAM Zaragoza, who emphasized the pivotal role of collaboration between the two intergovernmental organizations. He highlighted how scientific discourse serves as a universal language fostering harmonization and cooperation across borders. John Barker, Director-General of the OIV, also contributed via a video message, stressing the growing importance of advanced training in the face of limited water resources and the necessity of soil preservation. Both leaders acknowledged the long-standing cooperation between CIHEAM and the OIV, a partnership that began with the "Cours Supérieur International de Viticulture" in 1973 and was further solidified with a Memorandum of Understanding in 2023. This agreement highlighted the imperative to intensify collaborative efforts to address emerging challenges in the agri-food system, further reinforced by a joint scientific session at COP 27 in 2006 and subsequent advanced courses on viticulture resilience.

The event's timing is particularly pertinent as wine regions worldwide grapple with the consequences of climate change. The traditional viticultural practices are being re-evaluated in light of new environmental realities, including water scarcity and shifting soil dynamics. As global temperatures rise, vineyards face the dual challenge of ensuring adequate water supply and maintaining soil health, while also adapting to new regions with varying water and soil conditions.

This advanced course aimed to equip participants with the knowledge and tools necessary for sustainable vineyard management, focusing on balancing soil health with water conservation. Attendees gained a comprehensive understanding of the challenges posed by water scarcity, especially as they pertain to viticulture in an era of climate uncertainty. The curriculum covered soil-water interactions, emphasizing the critical relationships between soil, plants, and the atmosphere, essential for vine health. Key topics included the eco-physiological responses to various water and soil conditions, carbon exchange processes, and their implications for grape quality and yield. Participants also explored sustainable strategies (environmental, social, and economic) for water and soil management in viticulture, as well as the potential and limitations of alternative water sources, such as recycled or treated water, and the

management of salinity in vineyard irrigation. Advanced carbon sequestration technologies were also discussed.

The course featured prominent instructors from international organizations, universities, and research centers across the globe, including Enrico Battiston of the OIV, Ignacio Belda from the Complutense University of Madrid, Marcella Biddoccu of the National Research Council of Italy, Marco Contin from the University of Udine, Alain Deloire formerly of Institut Agro Montpellier, Aaron Fait from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Matteo Gatti from the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Piacenza, Joan Girona from IRTA Lleida, Naftali Lazarovitch also from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Luís Marcos from ADVID in Vila Real, Andrea Pitacco from the Università Degli Studi Di Padova, Gonzaga Santesteban from the Public University of Navarra, and Hans Reiner Schultz from Geisenheim University.

The program not only provided theoretical insights but also practical applications, as students engaged in discussions, case studies, and shared experiences related to water and soil management from their respective countries. The course concluded with the awarding of certificates of attendance, followed by field visits in the Aragón wine region, where participants observed vineyards employing innovative water and soil management strategies.

This course exemplifies a critical step towards fostering resilience in viticulture. As the wine industry faces increasingly complex environmental challenges, such initiatives are vital for developing sustainable practices that ensure the longevity and health of vineyards worldwide. The collaboration between CIHEAM and the OIV, along with the diverse international participation, highlights the global commitment to sustainable viticulture and the proactive steps being taken to address the pressing issues of our time.