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Vatican Launches Sustainable Farming Project at Castel Gandolfo Emphasizing Agroecology and Social Integration

Borgo Laudato si’ aims to blend traditional and modern agricultural practices while providing training and opportunities for migrants and displaced people.

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In early September, the Vatican inaugurated a new agricultural project in the gardens of Castel Gandolfo, about 20 kilometers from Rome. The initiative, called Borgo Laudato si’, was launched by Pope Leo XIV, who succeeded Pope Francis earlier this year. The

project fulfills a wish of Pope Francis to create a “living laboratory” for ecological farming practices that put people at the center of agricultural reflection.

Borgo Laudato si’ covers around 50 hectares on the grounds of the papal summer residence. The site is designed to showcase the main crops of the Mediterranean region. According to Professor Laurent Torregrosa, director of the Vine and Wine Center at Institut Agro Montpellier and a member of the Fructu Vinae expert commission, the project will offer a broad representation of Mediterranean agriculture. Eight international experts in viticulture and oenology are supporting the implementation of this initiative, which draws inspiration from Pope Francis’s 2015 encyclical Laudato si’.

The Vatican has been engaged for years in discussions about social stability, integration, and training for migrants and displaced people, many of whom lack formal agricultural education. Professor Torregrosa explained that the encyclical repositioned agriculture as central to sustainability and life balance. Pope Francis believed that modern agriculture’s intensification, reduced labor force, and growing distance between producers and consumers had led to neglecting its essential role. He advocated for returning agriculture to the heart of human concerns.

Pope Leo XIV has continued this vision. Of the land set aside for experimentation at Castel Gandolfo, about four hectares will be dedicated to vineyards. The vine holds symbolic importance for the Vatican and many European countries. In September 2024, eight experts from different backgrounds were brought together by Pope Francis to study the feasibility of establishing an agroecological vineyard at Castel Gandolfo. After his death in April, his successor confirmed the project.

The experimental vineyard will combine modern techniques with traditional methods to develop a new approach to viticulture based on agroecology, resource sharing, and human-centered practices. The vineyard will include both ancient grape varieties and disease-resistant types. Different soil management and vine training systems will be tested. Some Italian varieties have already been planted under the guidance of the University of Udine. Disease-tolerant vines will help reduce reliance on chemical treatments.

Training is also a key part of Borgo Laudato si’. Many current agroecological initiatives focus mainly on technical aspects. The Vatican’s approach aims to explore how manual labor can be increased and how people can be trained in new methods. Changing soil management or introducing new grape varieties is not easy, so hands-on education is essential.

The project is intended as a demonstration site for what can be achieved in agriculture by moving toward polyculture and integrating new agroecological approaches. It will provide work opportunities and serve as a training center for people learning these methods.

The Fructu Vinae commission has been given a five-year mandate until 2029. During this period, wines will be produced from the experimental vineyard at Castel Gandolfo. The team includes professors from universities in Udine, Naples, Madrid, Geisenheim, Montpellier, as well as representatives from philanthropy and wine journalism.

The Vatican’s new agricultural initiative reflects an ongoing commitment to sustainability and social integration through practical experimentation with Mediterranean crops and innovative viticulture.