



## FOOD CHALLENGES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Foment del Treball Nacional, Barcelona

18th March 2015

It is necessary  
to promote  
agriculture as  
a smart sector,  
strengthening  
business  
intelligence and  
innovation

In the occasion of the Signature of the Memorandum of Understanding between CIHEAM and IEMed the Conference '**Food Challenges in the Mediterranean**' took place in Barcelona on the 18th of March 2015. Its aim was to debate the current challenges that the region is facing regarding food security. This event brought together experts and representatives of institutions and governments in order to tackle policies and proposals that could contribute to the improvement of food security in the Mediterranean region.

In the current context, **Cosimo Lacirignola**, Secretary General of CIHEAM, recommended that all the actors work together to respond to the problems and demands of the Mediterranean region. He suggested that farming is losing



Signature of the MoU between Cosimo Lacirignola, Secretary General of CIHEAM, (left) and Senén Florensa, Executive President of IEMed (right)

its attractiveness for the young generations and in order to change this trend it is necessary to promote agriculture as a smart sector. Additionally, business intelligence and innovation are required as well as a positive attitude to cooperate with farmers in order to promote human development.

Population growth that is leading the Mediterranean region towards a fragile situation

Business intelligence is also relevant for trade, which plays a major role in the region as Mediterranean countries are highly dependent on food imports. **Senén Florensa**, Executive President of the IEMed, highlighted this fact along with a progressive population growth that is leading the Mediterranean region towards a fragile situation. Despite the important challenges that the region needs to overcome, it provides a unique and culturally rich and diverse environment. Cooperation in agriculture is a must in order to foster development and the efficient optimisation of the resources available.

According to the representative of the FAO in Lebanon, **Maurice Saade**, the development of the region is being affected by a rapid population growth that is rising the demand for food. However, the limited supplies of natural resources cannot meet this increasing demand. In addition, the reliance on food imports exposes the region to high vulnerability of supply and price



Elena de Felipe, Vice President of Foment, Cosimo Lacirignola, Secretary General of CIHEAM and Senén Florensa, Executive President of IEMed.

shocks in global markets. These two factors are increasing the number of undernourished in the region, which has doubled in the last two decades. Moreover, the high levels of unemployment, poverty, conflicts and civil insecurity are also important driving factors behind the current food insecurity trends in the region, which need to be better tackled in order to enhance the nutrition of the most vulnerable groups.

The reliance on food imports exposes the region to high vulnerability of supply and price shocks in global markets

**Leith Ben Becher**, the President of the Tunisian Syndicate for Agriculture (SYNAGRI), stated that the current model of agricultural development needs to be redesigned in a way that reconciles the economy, the environment, preserves the natural resources (such as water and soil), and takes into account the social factor, i.e. improving the conditions of the farmers and giving them a voice when defining the new agricultural policy.

On the other hand, **Luis Miguel Albisu**, Consultant at the Centre for Agro-Food Research and Technology of Aragon (CITA), referred to the logistical challenges for agro-food trade in the region in order to improve food security and economic development. He also noted the need to strengthen technical cooperation together with research and innovation among the Mediterranean countries. He demanded to increase investment and deepen institutional reforms so that the region can ensure food security and combat scarcity.

The current model of agricultural development needs to be redesigned in a way that reconciles the economy, the environment and the social factor

**Javier Albarracín**, Director of the Socioeconomic Department of the IEMed, suggested that demographic growth, as well as the tens of millions of tourists that visit the Mediterranean countries, constitute a growing, logistically easily accessible and untapped business opportunity for Spanish food companies. This opportunity multiplies if we consider the growing market of halal food products. The food and beverage halal market worldwide was estimated in 2012 at more than 1 billion dollars, and expected to reach 1.63 billion dollars by 2018. Among the top four halal consuming markets in the world, Turkey runs second and Egypt fourth. Moreover, there is a very significant growth of the food industry sector in countries such as Turkey, Egypt and Morocco,

offering a wide range of cooperation opportunities from trade to transfer of know-how.

Demographic growth and tourism constitute a growing, logistically accessible and untapped business opportunity

According to **Valentín Almansa** from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment of the Government of Spain, it is necessary to lead the Mediterranean region towards a more sustainable agriculture. There are also factors such as preventing a rise in food prices, which may increase up to 70% over the next decades, and climate change that should be considered in this context.

Investments in infrastructure and education are essential, and innovation was highlighted as a key element to development. In addition, the Mediterranean region has an intense trade activity that allows for an interesting base for strengthening economic ties and cooperation. It is important to reinforce food production and trade within the agriculture sector. The promotion and availability of health resources in rural areas is also relevant. There are two policies that the Spanish Ministry for Agriculture is currently developing. One related to the prevention and treatment of food waste and another to the promotion of sustainability and resilience.



From left to right, Valentín Almansa de Lara, Director General, Agricultural Production Health, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment, Government of Spain; Michael Schara, President, Catalan Meat Industry Federation (FECIC), Board of Directors of Foment; Josep Maria Pelegrí, Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, Food and Natural Environment, Government of Catalonia; Senén Florensa, Executive President, IEMed; and Sebastien Abis, Administrator, CIHEAM.



Catalonia takes advantage of innovation and creativity to adjust to a continuous changing world and to foster growth and development

The Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, Food and Natural Environment of the Government of Catalonia, **Josep M<sup>a</sup> Pelegrí**, mentioned that in Catalonia, gastronomy is an important cultural heritage and is currently one of the worldwide leading actors in the sector. In this regard, he presented the Mediterranean Diet Foundation that aims at promoting regional products of quality as part of the Mediterranean Diet. In this line, **Fearghus Roche** from ASCAME, explained that the MedDiet project aims to increase awareness of the importance of the Mediterranean Diet, as an integral part of the Mediterranean lifestyle, and as a vehicle for development, stability and solidarity in the Mediterranean basin.

Josep M<sup>a</sup> Pelegrí also mentioned that the agricultural sector in Catalonia takes advantage of innovation and creativity to adjust to a continuous changing world and also to foster growth and development. Besides the traditional Mediterranean products such as wheat, oil and wine, Catalonia has included products from all over the world, which has resulted in a rich and unique cuisine. Its simplicity and variety are a balanced combination based on fresh and local products.

For Morocco, agriculture, food and rural environment are priority areas of development and regional cooperation.

In addition, about 80 Catalan companies from the olive oil and wine sectors are currently participating in the Common Mediterranean Development Programme (CoMeDPro) launched by the European Commission. In Catalonia, this project aims at increasing the competitiveness and internationalisation of SMEs from the olive oil and wine sectors and promoting the landscape and territory that define these products.

In the promotion of Mediterranean food cultures the strategy should be based on promoting local products as a key to sustainable development. Moreover, dialogue and cooperation among the countries of the region should be further encouraged to create more opportunities.

The developments in agriculture, food security and sustainable growth of the rural territories are the common challenges for the Mediterranean countries,

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according to **Mohammed Sadiki**, Secretary General of the Ministry of Agriculture and Maritime Affairs of the Government of Morocco. In the case of Morocco, agriculture, food and rural environment are priority areas of development and regional cooperation. The agricultural sector in Morocco concentrates 40% of total national employment and 80% of rural employment. The future of cooperation between Europe and the countries from the Mediterranean depends on the capacity to better address these issues from a collective perspective.