

CONTEMPORARY ROLE OF GLOBALLY IMPORTANT AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE SYSTEMS – GIAHS

An article published in 2021 by the [GIAHS Initiative](#), implemented by FAO, highlights the contribution of the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems to the agri-food systems transformation around the world.



In particular this article highlights how the GIAHS initiative has transformed, ten years since its launch, agri-food systems in five countries: Philippines, Japan, China, Peru and Algeria.

The [Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems \(GIAHS\) initiative](#) recognizes agroecosystems where communities live in relationship with their territories. These evolving agricultural systems are resilient and built on traditional knowledge and invaluable cultural values. Agrobiodiversity and landscapes at these sites are sustainably managed by farmers, herders, fisherfolk and forest people in ways that also contribute to their livelihoods and food security.

Since 2005, [the GIAHS initiative has designated 62 systems in 22 countries as agricultural heritage sites](#), and currently 15 new proposals from 8 different countries were received.

The idea of transforming food systems for a modern world increasingly challenged by climate change and with an ever-growing population, is a main topic of the GIAHS initiative. At the center of this transformation, there is a systemic change from largely unsustainable agri-food production systems which overexploit natural resources to a system that protects the environment, increases food security and nutrition and raises incomes for farmers and others in the value chain.

The article resumes how the farming methods used by farmers and their communities in the framework of the GIAHS sites in the mentioned countries contribute to this system transformation.

Philippines. [The Ifugao old system of irrigated rice terraces](#) in the Cordillera mountains has been improved balancing conservation with sustainable use of the area's agrobiodiversity. Today farmers cultivate high-value crops such as taro, yam, sweet potato, eggplant and ginger. With machineries and equipment provided by the GIAHS project, farmers are now producing cookies, bars, wine, taro chips, ginger candy and herbal teas that are labelled with information about the GIAHS site.

Japan. [The Noto peninsula is characterized by a mosaic of terrestrial-aquatic and marine-coastal ecosystems](#). Traditional methods of farming, fishing and managing forests and water have sustainably maintained the area's landscapes for centuries. An executive committee involving local cities and prefectures, commerce, industry, tourism organizations and cooperatives work together to promote and preserve the area's agricultural heritage. In cooperation with financial institutions, they invested in creating a



certification system to assure the origin of local products and promoting agricultural products from the Noto region, increasing incomes for farmers.

China. [The Aohan Dryland Farming System](#) combines farming, forestry and animal husbandry and some of the region's wide variety of crops date back to over 8 000 years ago. Customs, skills and experience in unique, dryland farming have been passed down over the years. Traditionally, different crops are interplanted, rotating between arable crops and soil-improving crops. Since the Aohan system was recognized as a GIAHS, it has built a brand for the area's most popular crop, millet, through TV announcements, advertisements and promotion from large companies, increasing sales significantly.

Peru. [The Cusco - Puno corridor in Peru's Andean mountains](#) is home to indigenous Quechua and Aymara farmers, who manage the land using traditional agricultural practices and knowledge. The families in the area have established and maintained terraces, local irrigation systems and agricultural systems adapted to different altitudes. Since this corridor's GIAHS designation, the Peruvian Ministry of Agriculture has approved a decree that established *agrobiodiversity zones* around the country to increase the value of agro-biodiversity and recognize the farming and indigenous communities who preserve native species and wild relatives of maize, potatoes, quinoa and beans, amongst others.

Algeria. [The Ghout oasis system](#) in the Souf region of southeast Algeria was originally designed in the 15th century. In a desert environment it involves the planting of date palms in craters or basins, called *ghout*, where can thrive and also be protected from climatic hazards thanks to the high walls of the *ghout*. There is no need for irrigation because roots go in search of water deep under the earth. Over the past ten years the actors involved by GIAHS worked to create income-generating activities for communities in this area and safeguard local biodiversity: for example, replanting in the area date palm cultivars that were close to dying and introducing a local breed of pigeons to ensure they do not go extinct.

The overall goal of the GIAHS initiative is to identify and safeguard Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems and their associated landscapes, agricultural biodiversity and knowledge, through establishing a long-term programme to enhance global, national and local benefits derived through their dynamic conservation, sustainable management and enhanced viability. The GIAHS sites represent not only stunning natural landscapes but also agricultural practices that create livelihoods in rural areas while combining biodiversity, resilient ecosystems and tradition and innovation in a unique way.

The [GIAHS Initiative invites FAO member countries and other stakeholders](#) to submit proposals to nominate new GIAHS sites through effective participation of the communities.

Proposal shall explain the unique nature and specific features of agricultural practices that exhibit remarkable characteristics in the proposed site, including: Food and livelihood security; Agrobiodiversity; Local and Traditional Knowledge systems; Cultures, Value systems and Social Organizations; Landscapes and Seascapes features.



The GIAHS Initiative website indicates the procedure to be followed. The actors engaged in fostering territorial development processes can find in this initiative a way to enhance the traditional economic activities of small producers, safeguarding landscapes and promoting the local culture for a sustainable development.

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