



Институт за примену
науке у пољопривреди

01 - 03 DECEMBER 2021

12 GFRAS ANNUAL MEETING

OVERCOMING COVID-19: HOW AGROECOLOGY AND RURAL ADVISORY SERVICES CAN SUPPORT RECOVERY AND STRONGER VALUE CHAINS

12th GFRAS Annual Meeting

Overcoming COVID-19: How Agroecology and Rural Advisory Services can Support Recovery and Stronger Value Chains

01 - 03 December 2021, Belgrade, Serbia

Concept Note

Date, Venue and Topic

The 12th GFRAS Annual Meeting, whose topic is "**Overcoming COVID-19: How Agroecology and Rural Advisory Services can Support Recovery and Stronger Value Chains**" will take place in Belgrade, Serbia between 1 and 3 December, 2021. Side Events are planned to take place on November 30th. The Annual meeting is co-organized by the Institute for Science Application in Agriculture, Serbia (IPN/ ISAA) and the South Eastern Europe Advisory Service Network (SEASN).

Background

The GFRAS Annual Meeting is a key mechanism for GFRAS to foster a shift towards new and more sustainable practices, and to discuss and strengthen the functioning of GFRAS, regional networks and national fora.

The Annual Meeting contributes to addressing the four strategic fields identified in the GFRAS Strategic Framework, namely:

1. Advocacy and support for an enabling policy environment and appropriate investment in RAS
2. Professionalization
3. Knowledge management and exchange
4. Network strengthening

Thematic Focus

The COVID-19 pandemic generated a series of negative effects on world economies and communities around the world, creating many threats to the sustainability of the agricultural sector, particularly sensitive to food supply and food security needs. The agriculture sector is widely interconnected. All sea ports and airports that were shut down during the pandemic massively diminished capacity of freight for agricultural goods and generated significant disruptions in global supply chains. Shut down of local markets and movement of agricultural commodities adversely affected both input and output markets farmers depend on and led to lower income from agriculture.

The consequences of the pandemic on the agricultural sector require immediate and long-term actions. First of all, it is necessary to analyze and comprehend the immediate consequences of current pandemic on food systems in order to develop necessary actions, mitigate risks and vulnerability, increase resilience and promote systemic shifts of agricultural systems to adapt to the current situation.

As the need for new approaches to sustainable agriculture increases, agro ecological practices have gained prominence in scientific, agricultural and political discourse. Agroecology is fundamentally different from other approaches to sustainable development in that it focuses on localized and bottom-up solutions, ensuring that farmers, their communities and their local knowledge are fully integrated in improving agricultural sustainability. This adaptable and flexible approach suggests ways to not only promote efficient and resilient agricultural systems, but also to ensure food security and healthy diets, while supporting the conservation and restoration of biodiversity – thereby fulfilling the three pillars for integrated land use and food systems.

The COVID-19 crisis has created a moment where existing calls for agroecology acquire new relevance. Agroecology provides a path to reconstruct a post-COVID-19 agriculture, one that is able to avoid widespread disruptions of food supplies in the future by territorializing food production and consumption. There are few main areas in which agroecology can point the way to a new post-COVID-19 agriculture, including: overcoming the pesticide treadmill, enriching nature's matrix, revitalizing small farms, creating alternative animal production systems and enhancing urban agriculture. One way to encourage the adoption of agroecology and accelerate the recovery and strengthening of food systems is via Rural Advisory Services (RAS¹). In here, all the different activities that provide farmers and other people living and working in rural settings with the information and services they need to increase agricultural productivity are encompassed (GFRAS). RAS could potentially support adoption and upscaling of agroecology through its pluralistic service providers and using digital tools.

Meeting Objectives

Building on the experience of previous GFRAS meetings, the capacity assessments of GFRAS regional networks, and on the expertise, knowledge, and experiences of participants, the objectives of the 2021 Annual Meeting are to:

¹ Rural advisory services, also called extension services, are all the different activities that provide the information and services needed and demanded by farmers and other actors in rural settings to assist them in developing their own technical, organizational and management skills and practices so as to improve their livelihoods and well-being. (GFRAS Strategic Framework)

1. Give an overview and share experiences on RAS actions due to overcoming restrictions and limitations in advisory work, during COVID – 19 and post-COVID 19,
2. Provide better understanding on RAS role in promoting agroecology, share experiences among regional specific programs and implemented measures in rural areas.
3. Analyzing strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for advisory work under new circumstances and bold the overall role of advisory services within AKIS.
4. Initiate strategic thinking and visioning of RAS support on Recovery and Stronger Value Chains.

In short we should try to help RAS understand better their role in promoting agroecology and using digital tools to help overcome the adverse impact of COVID-19. Our participants will be keen to learn more about these.

Meeting Structure

Thematic Part:

The 2021 GFRAS Annual Meeting will provide a broad view discussion on the foundations of agroecology and how it can help build stronger and more resilient communities, support food systems, and aid in the recovery of value chains. The meeting will also deepen discussions on the post-COVID-19 urge for RAS digitalization, due to knowledge transfer, distant advisory work, overcoming restrictions and limitations in advisory work.

Sessions will then allow participants to discuss further the role of RAS providers in these domains.

Session 1: The covid-19 pandemic influence on agriculture sector: Implications for Rural Advisory Services

- *Agricultural sector: the risks, vulnerability, resilience and systemic shifts of agricultural systems to adapt to the current situation*
- *RAS practices applied to respond to limitations imposed by COVID-19 restrictions*
- *Agriculture supply chain risks and COVID-19: mitigation strategies and implications for RAS*

Session 2: Agroecology - acquiring new relevance and a path to reconstruct a post-COVID-19 agriculture

- *Main areas in which agroecology can point the way to a new post-COVID-19 agriculture, include: overcoming the pesticide treadmill, enriching nature's matrix / biodiversity, revitalizing small farms, creating alternative animal production systems and enhancing urban agriculture*
- *How Rural advisory services can support upscaling agro-ecology?*
- *Sustainable Intensification and Agroecology*
- *EU Policy/Global Policy and Agroecology*

Session 3: Need for Speed: Accelerated processes in Agriculture due to Covid-19

- *Overview of tools and enhancements, accelerated due to Covid-19.*

- *Raising needs for Knowledge and Innovation Exchange*
- *e-Extension to reach farmers with more efficient and effective services*

Virtual Field Trips

Participants will be introduced to local rural areas, landscapes and local agroecological practices. IPN / SEASN will provide Virtual trip to one digital farm in Serbia, as an example. Videos about Serbia and its agriculture and extension/advisory service will also be played.

FUNCTIONAL COMPONENT

Strengthening the Capacities of RAS Networks

Regional and sub-regional networks and country fora are the main constituents of GFRAS in implementing its work and in strengthening and advocating for RAS within their regions. They ensure that the work and focus of GFRAS remains grounded, relevant and demand-driven. The GFRAS 2016–2025 Strategic Framework and corresponding five-year operational plan place a strong emphasis on strengthening the capacities of the regional and sub-regional networks and country fora to fulfil these roles. Capacity assessments undertaken in 2016 show that, while the different networks have specific needs and demands depending on their context, they face some common challenges. These include mobilizing sufficient funding and skilled human resources and building capacities to advocate effectively for policies and investments that strengthen RAS.

Dealing with the analysis and overview of RAS response to restrictions and challenges will provide some kind of a list (inventory) of digital tools and practices worldwide and give continuity and follow up on 2020 / 2021.

Evaluations of past meetings have shown that peer exchange between networks is perceived as critical for networks to strengthen their own capacities, and the 2021 Annual Meeting will continue to provide space – virtually – for extensive peer exchange and learning between networks.

Policy Dialogue

Building on the results of the exchanges on the first two days, in the afternoon of the third day participants will take part in a policy dialogue which will discuss key elements of agroecology issues in RAS, explore the roles that the enabling environment plays and identifies structural and policy changes needed in order to foster change and implement the recommendations identified in the first days of the meeting. The policy dialogue will take the form of a moderated roundtable discussion among selected key resource persons and a Q&A session with Annual Meeting participants.

Draft agenda and preparation of inputs by participants

The 12th GFRAS Annual Meeting will be a participatory learning event with a range of different types of sessions, including keynotes, panels, presentations in plenary, group work, parallel workshops, short presentations, a market place and field trips. 2021 GAM will be held as a hybrid or on-line event. Participants will be given a wide range of opportunities to provide

inputs that will include lessons from practical experience and reviews of evidence. Inputs may take the following forms:

- presentation in one of the sessions;
- blogs beforehand and short presentations during the meeting on experience, case studies, stories or evidence related to the role of agroecology in strengthening value chains, and how RAS can contribute to that;
- side events or trainings on November 30, 2021;

A draft agenda as well as requirements, application process and deadlines, and selection criteria for all inputs and preparatory activities will be made available on the GFRAS website.

Participation and registration

Online registration and the call for inputs will open at the beginning of October 2021 and close in late XXX. Participants from all regions of the world working or interested in RAS or in related fields are welcome to attend the meeting. Stakeholders from different sectors – public, private and civil society – are encouraged to register for the meeting, including representatives of farmers' organizations, private companies, research and education institutions, development agencies, media and others.

In order to guarantee a participatory meeting with a focus on networking and exchange, the number of participants will be limited to approximately 300. If more people register, participants will be selected in a way that secures the best possible balance of regions, subregions, gender, sectors and age.

There will be no fee for participation in the meeting.

Budget and funding

While the main funding for this year's event is provided through the GFRAS, Institute for Science Application in Agriculture, Serbia (IPN/ ISAA) and the South Eastern Europe Advisory Service Network (SEASN), other organisations and institutions can co-fund the event or side events. For more information, please contact Ingrid Oliveira at the GFRAS Secretariat (ingrid.oliveira@g-fras.org).

Monitoring and evaluation of the annual meeting

The meeting will be evaluated on the final day, with possible extension due to on-line evaluation for participants. The results of the meeting will be also monitored and assessed by the participants, working groups, regional networks and country fora via regular progress reports and annual reports.

Annual meeting organizing committee

The organization of the 2021 Annual Meeting is strategically guided by an organising committee that comprises representatives of the hosts as well as all larger GFRAS regional networks.

Further reading

Emma Stephens, Guillaume Martin, Mark Van Wijk, Jagadish Timsina, Val Snow 2020 **Impacts of COVID-19 on Agricultural and Food Systems Worldwide and on Progress to the Sustainable Development Goals**, (Editorial) *Agricultural Systems*, Volume 183, August 2020 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308521X20306910>

FAO. 2020. **Extension and advisory services: at the frontline of the response to COVID-19 to ensure food security**. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca8710en>

Francesco Montanari, Inês Ferreira, Filippa Lofstrom, Cesare Varallo, Simone Volpe, Elta Smith, Maria Kirova, Axel Wion, Una Kubota, José Diogo Albuquerque 2021.

Preliminary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on European agriculture: a sector-based analysis of food systems and market resilience, European Parliament, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/690864/IPOL_STU\(2021\)690864\(SUM01\)_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/690864/IPOL_STU(2021)690864(SUM01)_EN.pdf)

Leslie Arathoon, Rishi Raithatha, and Daniele Tricarico 2021 **COVID-19: Accelerating the use of digital agriculture**, GSMA https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/COVID_19_Accelerating_the_use_of_digital_agriculture_updated.pdf

Sulaiman, R V 2021. **Transforming Extension and Advisory Services to promote agroecology** <https://wle.cgiar.org/cosai/news/transforming-extension-and-advisory-services-promote-agroecology>

Swinnen, Johan, ed.; and McDermott, John, ed. 2020. **COVID-19 and global food security**. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). <https://doi.org/10.2499/p15738coll2.133762>

Miguel A. Altieri & Clara I. Nicholls (2020) Agroecology and the reconstruction of a post-COVID-19 agriculture, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47:5, 881-898, DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2020.1782891

Dalia Štreimikienė, Tomas Baležentis, Artiom Volkov, Erika Ribašauskienė, Mangirdas Morkūnas & Agnė Žičkienė (2021) Negative effects of covid-19 pandemic on agriculture: systematic literature review in the frameworks of vulnerability, resilience and risks involved, *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, DOI: 10.1080/1331677X.2021.1919542

Jan Douwe van der Ploeg (2021) The political economy of agroecology, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 48:2, 274-297, DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2020.1725489

Jan Douwe van der Ploeg (2020) From biomedical to politico-economic crisis: the food system in times of Covid-19, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47:5, 944-972, DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2020.1794843

<https://www.eufiras.eu/index.php/activities/archive/145-position-on-the-european-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic>

https://www.eufiras.eu/images/activities/Position_paper_EUFRAS_IALB_SEASN.pdf

or