THE GROWING NUMBER OF GLOBALLY IMPORTANT AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE SYSTEMS IN CHINA

With a new site added last November 2022, China ranks first in the world in the number of Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) designated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

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.

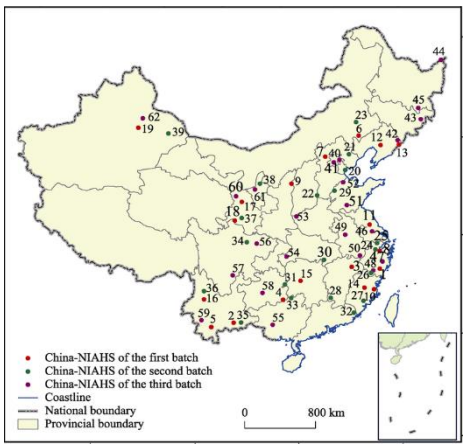
The GIAHS Initiative, which in 2022 is celebrating 20 years, has designated 72 systems in 23 countries as agricultural heritage sites, and currently 15 new proposals from 7 different countries were received by FAO.

Since 2004, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of China have actively participated in the GIAHS Initiative involving local people managing traditional practices, local governments, universities and experts in the activities. Already in 2005, with the support of all the actors involved, the first proposal of the *Rice Fish Culture* to be recognized as Agricultural Heritage System had been presented by the Ministry of Agriculture of China to FAO. The Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) continues to collaborate actively in this strategy since its inception, recognizing the importance of the GIAHS inspiring principles for the country.

Throughout the years, 19 Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems have been identified in China and recognized by the FAO GIAHS Initiative and today operate with the support of local and national institutions. Each GIAHS practice can be known through the relevant documentation published on the website:

- Rice Fish Culture (2005)
- Wannian Traditional Rice Culture (2010)
- Hani Rice Terraces (2010)
- Dong's Rice Fish Duck System (2011)
- Pu'er Traditional Tea Agrosystem (2012)
- Aohan Dryland Farming System (2012)
- Kuaijishan Ancient Chinese Torreya (2013)
- Urban Agricultural Heritage – Xuanhua Grape Garden (2013)

- Jiaxian Traditional Chinese Date Gardens (2014)
- Xinghua Duotian Agrosystem (2014)
- Jasmine and Tea Culture System of Fuzhou City (2014)
- Huzhou Mulberry-dyke and Fish Pond System (2017)
- Diebu Zhagana Agriculture-Forestry-Animal Husbandry Composite System (2017)
- Xiajin Yellow River Old Course Ancient Mulberry Grove System (2018)
- Rice Terraces in Southern Mountainous and Hilly areas (2018)
- Shexian Dryland Stone Terraced System (2022)
- Anxi Tieguanyin Tea Culture System (2022)
- Ar Horqin Grassland Nomadic System in Inner Mongolia (2022)
- Qingyuan Forest-Mushroom Co-culture System in Zhejiang Province (2022).



In an article published in November 2022 to announce the designation by FAO of the Qingyuan Forest–Mushroom Co-culture System of Zhejiang Province as GIAHS, the China's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs highlights how a traditional system contributes to build new paths of sustainable development, responding to the great challenges of today. "Located in the southwest of Zhejiang Province, the Qingyuan Forest -Mushroom Co-culture System dates back to the 13th century. For hundreds of years, local residents have developed an edible fungi industry through the rational use of forest resources. They created and developed an agroforestry system for mountainous regions with the support of *forest–mushroom co-culture technology*, which organically integrates forest conservation with mushroom cultivation and agricultural production. With such a system, lands can be rationally utilized in Qingyuan, as forests, terraces, villages and rivers are perfectly arranged to support and reinforce each other, thus forming a unique ecological landscape. In Qingyuan, one can learn the whole course of the evolution of edible fungi cultivation techniques, given that all these techniques, from making a slit in a tree bark and carving a hole in a log to using a substrate, have been well preserved".

In the Research Report published in 2021 in collaboration with the Center of International Cooperation Service, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs highlights how the safeguarding of knowledge and technologies adopted by rural populations in traditional agricultural practices can play an important role in Poverty Reduction strategies. Based on the results of the 15 operational GIAHS in 2020, all identified in impoverished areas, the Report underlines that "GIAHS sites have served as good examples of turning the lucid waters and lush mountains into invaluable assets that help the local residents to fight against poverty and increase their income on the basis of effective conservation and full exploitation of biotic resources, cultural connotation, and landscape advantages of those sites". In the conclusions of the Report are also presented the priorities identified for increasing the public support needed to consolidate the outcomes and innovative approaches of GIAHS, helping farmers shake off poverty and increase their income.

Over the years, the Ministry of Agriculture's efforts investing in heritage agricultural systems in China have produced significant social, ecological, economic, cultural benefits and an effective platform is ongoing for their conservation and development, involving a great variety of national and local actors. An increasing number of universities participate in research and documentation of the various aspects of these agricultural systems, improving technologies and designing training courses at local level to benefit relevant government officials, communities and farmers. The results of the GIAHS practices are exhibited in fairs and cultural events held throughout the country, encouraging other local communities to participate. Even at the international level, with the country's achievements in the number and

significance of ongoing GIAHS practices, China plays an important role in encouraging other countries to adopt the strategy of enhancement of traditional agricultural systems.

In all countries of the world, with the rapid expansion of industrialization and urbanization, a great number of agricultural heritage systems are at risk of disappearing. Conserving and developing such agricultural practices today allows not only to face the great challenges for increasing agricultural productivity and farmer's income, but also to sustainably manage essential natural resources such as water, to conserve biodiversity and maintain essential ecosystem services adapted to cope with climatic change.

To know more

GIAHS sites in China

FAO-GIAHS Initiative

Article - Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs in moa.gov.cn

Article - Two New FAO GIAHS Pilot Sites by Chinese Academy of Sciences (cas.cn)

Article in moa.gov.cn

Article in moa.gov.cn

Article in moa.gov.cn

Article in moa.gov.cn

Article in moa.gov.cn

Research Report on Poverty Reduction 2021 in agri.cn

China's experience and contributions to poverty alleviation in CGTN

Spatial Distributions of Agricultural Heritage Systems (AHS) in China 2020 (mdpi.com)

Article in People's Daily Online

Twenty years of Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems - 2022 FAO publication