

Title: Contributing to sustainable food production and food safety through responsible research applied to public policy areas and society

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Abstract:

Agriculture and food production are crucial in providing food security and sustenance to the growing global population. Responsible applied research in these areas is key to accomplishing sustainable food production and supporting governance mechanisms that promote sustainable agriculture for socio-economic development and food value chains in the Mediterranean area.

The Mediterranean Institute for Agriculture, Environment and Development - MED is a large research unit in Portugal focused on the nexus of agriculture, environment and development. It seeks to respond to issues that arise in practice, following emerging trends, producing useful research and gathering expertise in areas such as animal production, agro-ecology organic farming, conservation agriculture, precision agriculture, agro-forestry, among others.

MED research is done using responsible research practices, i.e. improving the scientific processes that lead to knowledge and understanding that can contribute to society. These include the development and promotion of solutions for ensuring the sustainability of farm and forestry production, working with producers to identify problems and design solutions, targeting both producers and consumers. This is implemented through: a) specific research lines, such as novel management practices and alternative pharmacological compounds for animal health and product quality improvement, traceability and safety assuring long-term food security; b) participation in several projects, e.g., the “FoSaMed” (new joint Master’s programme on food safety); and c) promotion of concepts like the ones retrieved from applied research on Mediterranean Diet topics, such as factors that can positively influence the acceptance of basic food Mediterranean products, and the understanding of the contribution of these systems, in terms of small-scale agriculture and short-circuits, characteristic of the Mediterranean Diet.

MED is also part of the Associated Laboratory CHANGE (Global Change and Sustainability Institute) along with two other research centres, cE3c (Center for Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Changes) and CENSE (Center for Environmental and Sustainability Research). CHANGE's mission is to identify scientifically supported solutions for public policy and governance targeting an environmentally friendly, resource-efficient, and competitive economy, in the context of ongoing global changes. One of its five thematic lines, "Ensure sustainable food and biomass systems", tackles key public policy areas such as: a) Promoting Resilient Production Systems (EU policies like Farm to Fork and Common Agricultural Policy, Global Policies like climate change adaptation); b) Food safety and quality (One Health; promotion of Mediterranean products by innovative post-harvest, processing technologies and traceability methods to increase consumers' trust in food chains, including locally based ones); c) Ensuring sustainability of high-nature-value farmlands, such as cork and holm-oak-forest "Montado", and on mechanisms that can prevent the disappearance of these systems under climate and land-use change. These challenges are global but most relevant in the Mediterranean context.

Supported by existent collaborations and initiatives, such as the "Food and Water" UNIMED sub-network, aimed to promote side cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation and local sustainable development related to water and food, and the FoSaMed project, MED and CHANGE are actively seeking and promoting partnerships with authorities, researchers, producers and consumers from both sides of the Mediterranean to help ensure food safety and stronger food systems in the Mediterranean region.

Keywords: (maximum 5 keywords)

Food systems, Mediterranean, Sustainability, Responsible Research, Public Policy

Theme: food safety and sustainability

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