

Press release, 2 December 2019

Presentation of the SFIAR Research Awards 2019

Optimised Cropping Systems in the Tropics

The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) investigates the contribution of organic agriculture to sustainable development. To this end, it has been comparing organic and conventional cropping systems in India, Kenya and Bolivia. FiBL will be presented with this year's research award of the Swiss Forum for International Agricultural Research (SFIAR) for this work on 4 December. The SFIAR will also honour Janine Steinmann for her master's thesis submitted to ETH Zürich on the improvement of soil quality in yam cultivation in West Africa.

Organic agriculture is often presented as an alternative to conventional agricultural production. Its positive effects on both the environment and the health and well-being of farming families are frequently mentioned. However, there are many doubts as to whether this farming system can produce enough and profitably. While organic farming has proven to be economically competitive in temperate areas, solid data for tropical areas are lacking.

With the aim of closing this data gap, FiBL launched the "Long-term farming systems comparisons in the tropics" (SysCom) programme¹ in 2007. Together with partner institutions, FiBL has conducted long-term experiments in India, Kenya and Bolivia comparing different agricultural production systems. SysCom monitors agronomic, economic and environmental parameters over a long period of time. At the same time, SysCom is researching locally adapted, sustainable technologies together with the farmers.

The results of the project so far show that ecological agriculture in the tropics has great potential and can be profitable. In order to fully exploit this potential, support is required in the development of tropical farming methods, the education of farmers and the institutional framework.

Growing yam root sustainably

Yam is an important staple food in West Africa. For the population, the tuber represents an important supplier of carbohydrates and vital nutrients. But yam cultivation is under pressure: the plants themselves have a high nutrient requirement, which is increasingly lacking in African soils. Population growth is forcing producers to cultivate their fields at ever-shorter intervals, and they are often unable to afford mineral fertilizers.

The YAMSYS project addresses these challenges with the aim of developing methods for improving soil fertility and sustainable yam cultivation. As part of the project, Janine Steinmann's master's thesis examined the influence of different types of fallow on the soil quality and production of yam. The research has shown that without fallow, the harvest is significantly lower. Traditional natural fallows appear to have a more positive impact on the soil than man-made legume fallows, with the climate and soil type of a region also playing an important role.

Awards ceremony

Both projects provide valuable scientific foundations upon which food production in developing countries can be made more sustainable. Therefore, the SFIAR honours FiBL with its Team Award of CHF 10,000 and Janine Steinmann with its Master Thesis Award of CHF 1,000. SFIAR President Angela Deppeler will present the awards on Wednesday 4 December 2019 (4.15-6.40pm) at ETH Zürich as part of a public event entitled "*Farming systems for the future* -

¹ SysCom is financially supported by Liechtenstein Development Service (LED), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Coop Sustainability Fund and Biovision

The contribution of agricultural research for development ". The keynote speech will be given by Christian Frutiger, the new Assistant Director-General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

SFIAR Research Awards

Since 2008 the Swiss Forum for International Agricultural Research (SFIAR) has been honouring innovative Swiss projects with annual awards. With this engagement, SFIAR seeks to support the efforts of numerous Swiss institutions in the area of agricultural research for development. The award is sponsored by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture.

Further information about the awards ceremony and the projects together with photos can be found at www.sfiar.ch/award.

Contacts for members of the media

SFIAR Secretariat
Felix Hintermann
Tel: +41 31 910 21 91
E-mail: felix.hintermann@bfh.ch

Beate Huber (FiBL)
Tel: +41 62 865 04 25
E-mail: beate.huber@fibl.ch
<https://systems-comparison.fibl.org>

Janine Steinmann
Tel: +41 77 425 43 49
E-mail: janinest@student.ethz.ch