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Zaragoza, 3 March 2022

CAMA project organised an international course to review the latest trends in conservation agriculture

The international course "[Current Trends in Conservation Agriculture in Mediterranean Environments](#), held on-line from 14 to 23 February 2022, was co-organized by CIHEAM Zaragoza and the [CAMA](#) project (Research-based participatory approaches for adopting Conservation Agriculture in the Mediterranean Area, financed by the EU [PRIMA](#) programme), with the collaboration of [ICARDA](#) (International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas).

Conservation agriculture is a cropping system that originated in the USA based on three fundamental principles: minimum soil disturbance (minimum tillage or non-tillage), maintaining plant cover on the soil, and crop rotation. This form of agriculture offers many advantages for the environment as it protects the soil, saves water and fixes carbon. In economic terms, CA maintains and improves yield and reduces labour costs. It has become a widespread practice in regions such as North America, the Southern Cone and Australia but it still has not taken off in the Mediterranean countries despite empirical evidence that conservation agriculture can adapt successfully to the agroecological conditions of this region. However we expect to see wider adoption of this practice in some European countries in forthcoming years thanks to support from the Common Agriculture Policy.

The course was designed for specialists, consultants and researchers engaged in the practice, promotion and research of conservation agriculture. It addressed all the agronomic, environmental, economic and social aspects involved in the transition from conventional tillage agriculture and to this cropping system in Mediterranean agriculture and how it affects the soil and water resources. It dealt with technical aspects such as crop rotation, cover crops, genetic selection of varieties suitable for this type of crop system (especially legume crops), crop residue management, control of pests, diseases and weeds, and machinery. The course offered a holistic vision of conservation agriculture and looked into the environmental, productive and economic benefits, without forgetting the obstacles preventing wider adoption by farmers, and explored possible ways of breaking down these barriers through support, training, farmers' organizations and public policies. The course concluded with a series of case studies on conservation agriculture experiences in Mediterranean countries, a virtual visit to farms and research plots in Aragon, and an interview with the Director of Agriculture Production of the Government of Aragon.

There were 35 participants (professionals selected from over 150 applicants) from 10 countries (eight countries from the Mediterranean region –Algeria, Greece, Italy, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey- as well as Georgia and Iran), who followed and discussed the lectures delivered by 17 experts, most of whom are scientists in the CAMA project, as well as consultants and researchers from other institutions such as the prestigious International Center for Research in the Dry Areas, ICARDA.

[CAMA](#) is an international research project (coordinated by Consiglio per la ricerca in agricoltura e l'analisi dell'economia agraria, Italy) that explores the reasons that prevent the adoption of conservation agriculture in



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Mediterranean countries and encourages participatory research to support farmers in their transition from conventional tillage to profitable, environmentally sustainable conservation agriculture. In spring 2023 the project will organize a second training course on conservation agriculture in Italy.

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CIHEAM Zaragoza is one of the four Institutes of the International Centre for Advanced Agronomic Mediterranean Studies (CIHEAM), together with Bari in Italy, Montpellier in France and Chania in Greece. CIHEAM Zaragoza was founded in 1969, offering quality and excellence in training and promoting international cooperation through research project management based on CIHEAM Zaragoza's five fields of expertise: 'Environment and Natural Resources', 'Fisheries and Aquaculture', 'Animal Production and Welfare', 'Plant Production, Health and Breeding' and 'Marketing and Agrifood Systems'. CIHEAM Zaragoza has become consolidated as a point of reference for specialized international training in the agro-food sector. It is located on the Campus of Aula Dei, one of the largest and prestigious agricultural science complexes in Spain, strengthening synergies between the scientific community, firms and students. CIHEAM Zaragoza se ha consolidado como uno de los referentes en materia de formación internacional especializada en el sector agroalimentario.

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