

2021 Innovation Award for Sustainable Food Systems winners announced

The winners of the 2021 edition of the annual International Innovation Award for Sustainable Food Systems have been announced. The awards, a joint initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Federal Government of Switzerland, were announced in a virtual ceremony with the participation of FAO director-general QU Dongyu and Christian Hofer, director-general of the Federal Office for Agriculture of Switzerland.



Source: FAO

The main Digitalisation and Innovation for Sustainable Food Systems award is given for innovations that impact more than one level of the supply chain and strengthen the link between farmers and consumers. A second prize is also awarded for Innovations that Empower Youth in Agriculture and Food Systems. The prize for each award is \$30,000, allowing winners to take their business to the next level.

This year's award for Digitalisation and Innovation for Sustainable Food Systems went to Ifarm360, a startup enabling investors to crowdfund smallholder farmers in Kenya. In addition to access to finance, Ifarm360 offers smallholder farmers crop advice and supervision, as well as farming inputs and equipment, such as solar irrigation kits. Ifarm360 connects smallholder farmers, the crowd investors and off-takers, creating a win-win-win business model.

Special mention was given to Enveritas for using digital technology and innovation to conduct sustainability verification of unorganised and underserved smallholder coffee farmers globally.



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Innovations that Empower Youth in Agriculture and Food Systems award

The Innovations that Empower Youth in Agriculture and Food Systems award was split this year between two projects, both of which received equally high rankings from the Screening Committee.

Access Agriculture AISBL was recognised for enabling young people individually or as a team, to use solar-powered technology to show farmer-to-farmer training videos in local languages in remote villages with no electricity, no internet access and poor mobile signal. Access Agriculture is working with local communities across the Global South, while also improving the environment using agroecological principles.

Access Agriculture shared the prize with Bountifield International, which offers young people in rural areas new opportunities as postharvest technology entrepreneurs providing a fee-for-service to farmers to process, preserve and sell their crops. Bountifield's 'business in a box' model equips them with needed technology, access to financing and information they need to drive agribusiness value addition, to reduce food loss, and to increase growth across rural Africa.



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Innovation, youth key to transformative change

QU Dongyu congratulated the winners, adding that the award “highlights the importance of innovation and youth as key drivers to transform agri-food systems. FAO is working to engaging and empowering youth to transform our agri-food systems”.

“I wish to convey my appreciation to the Government of Switzerland for the effective partnership which has led to this successful outcome. It also affirms the value of our shared goal - to encourage game-changing solutions by innovative approaches and people,” he said.

Christian Hofer, director-general of the Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture, said, “The Swiss-FAO International Innovation Award aims at honouring already existing projects that proved to be successful and have a potential to scale up or spill over to other parts of the food systems. This kind of support is important because there is a need for a larger number of well-functioning innovative projects to achieve food systems transformation.”

“I’m convinced that transformative change is only possible if it engages young people and if it exploits the potential of digitalisation in the agriculture and food sector,” he said.

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