



Innovation
award for
WOMEN
farmers
2023

Organised by:

copa*cogeca
european farmers european agri-cooperatives

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European Economic
and Social Committee

INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of the Women's Innovation Award, the political and practical landscape of European agriculture continues to evolve. EU strategies such as the Farm to Fork, Biodiversity and Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas are shaping measures with direct impact on our sector. Whilst factors such as climate change and the war in Ukraine is adding increasing pressures on Farmers and their Families.

The agricultural and forestry sector needs now more than ever, innovative, and entrepreneurial people in order to continue the transition to a more sustainable rural economy. Women farmers are key players in achieving this goal. According to Eurostat data from 2016, women represent 42% of the European Union's agricultural workforce, but only 30% assume managerial positions.

Over the years, the initiatives and businesses models presented by these women demonstrate their capacity in finding new solutions to the challenges faced by farmers and agri-cooperatives and by rural areas. The recognition, support and dissemination of these impactful initiatives is essential for the sector to be able to meet increasing societal expectations and continue to bring innovative solutions to , climate and political challenges.

The seventh edition of Copa-Cogeca's Innovation Award for Women Farmers will be entitled **“Women at the forefront of Sustainable Rural Areas”**.

Whilst we talk about the need for a transition towards more sustainable food systems, it's not possible to reach sustainability objectives without looking at the three dimensions: economic, environmental, and social as well as the needs for financial and technological tools.

For that reason, for the 2023 edition Copa-Cogeca wishes to showcase the innovative and novel solutions implemented by women that are contributing to all the three pillars of sustainability and are a concrete of example of the diversity of our EU agriculture sector. Whether that be on the farm, in their business decisions or to the benefit of the wider local community.

CHECK LIST

The 5 finalists were chosen based on the fulfilment of the following criteria. This can be used as a guide in enabling you to choose the winner and runner up.

ARTICLE 4 THE USE OF INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS IN ADAPTING TO AND/OR MITIGATING CLIMATE CHANGE

Innovation may include working methods, organisational approaches and new forms of technology that contribute to adaptation and/or mitigation of climate change.

Adaptation solutions may refer to the use of new strategies and adaptation tools in geographical areas where they were not previously used, aiming at making the sector more resilient to the impacts of climate change. This may involve the development of risk management tools, new forms of active land management and irrigation systems allowing for more efficient water management. Other examples may include the creation of new plant varieties able to withstand more extreme weather conditions and more resistant to pests and diseases.

Approaches focusing on mitigation should focus on reducing carbon emissions. This may include carbon sequestration and different ways in dealing with emissions from arable land, livestock management and the substitution of traditional fossil fuels by biofuels or renewable energy. Additionally, increasing efficiency in food production through circular economy should also be considered, creating added value with by-products allowing for the creation of more sustainable business models and new value-chains.

ARTICLE 5 INNOVATION TRANSFER

Innovation must not be limited to one single farm but should have a potential impact or effect on all holdings in the same production sector or region, or on the area's relations with the outside world.

In this context, innovation not only refers to those aspects which affect the farm itself, but also to the whole value chain, including machinery, the packaging of products, channels of distribution and export methods for agricultural or forestry products.

ARTICLE 6 SUSTAINABILITY OF THE INNOVATION

The innovation must be socially viable and promote green growth by tackling climate change, mitigating pollution and optimising resource efficiency.

It must also have a certain longevity and should stand the test of time in order to have an impact, instead of appearing and disappearing in a short space of time.

The innovation should also promote the maintenance and creation of jobs in rural areas, entrepreneurship and new business models.

ARTICLE 7 NEW COMMUNICATION METHODS AND TOOLS

New communication methods and tools are used to improve farm or forestry education for children and adults and/or improve consumers' knowledge of farm or forestry production methods, or of the nutritional value of agricultural products. Conveying how farmers are at the forefront of innovation regarding solutions to tackle climate change.

THE 5 FINALISTS

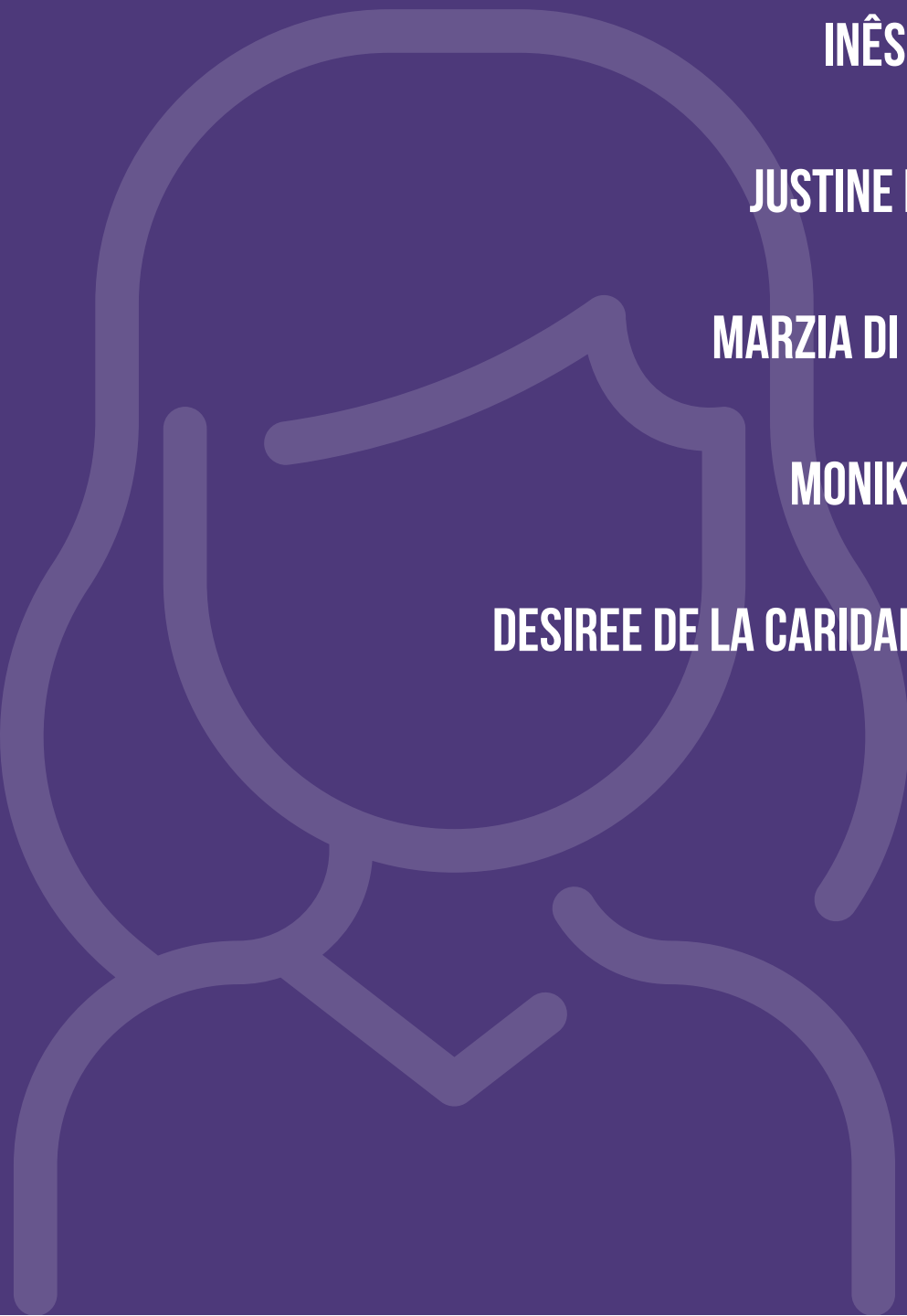
INÊS DRAGAO

JUSTINE DEWITTE

MARZIA DI PASTINA

MONIKA LASON

DESIREE DE LA CARIDAD NIEVES





INÊS DRAGÃO

PORTUGAL – CAP PORTUGAL

Herdade da Sancha is a sustainable and ecological family farm led by Inês Dragão and her three daughters. The farm, located on 300 hectares of land, focuses on breeding German Merino and White Merino sheep. The transformation of the farm began in 2015, when Ines inherited the farm and decided to shift away from conventional cattle and cereal production to a more sustainable and women-led agricultural approach.

To ensure the well-being of their animals, the farm provides careful daily care to the ewes, offering them a tailored diet based on their nutritional needs at each stage of their life. The farm grows a variety of crops, including peas, oats, barley, corn, beans, to produce the animal feed. They also produce their own hay and silage, ensuring a year-round supply of high-quality feed.

Animal welfare is a top priority at Herdade da Sancha. The farm ensures that the animals have access to clean water, shelter, and a comfortable environment. They implement natural methods for pest and disease control.

The farm follows sustainable practices, including the conservation of soil, use of renewable energy, and waste reduction. They have transformed their cereal areas into biodiverse pastures and implemented a triennial rotation system to avoid using chemicals. They aim to improve biodiversity and protect water resources.

In terms of neonatal management, the farm employs the Healthy Lamb Technique, which involves careful handling of newborn lambs, disinfection of the umbilical cord, and ensuring sufficient colostrum intake. They also practice early weaning at 45 days old to increase the economic profitability of the farm.

Herdade da Sancha is committed to gender equality and providing job opportunities for women in agriculture. Besides Ines and her daughters, the only other employee is also a woman. They plan to add another job position in the future to further support women in the agricultural industry.

Future objectives of the farm include building a new sheepfold to enhance animal welfare and continuing to invest in improving sustainable practices. The farm aims to contribute to the production of high-quality and sustainable food by providing a healthy and natural environment for their animals.



JUSTINE DEWITTE

BELGIUM– BOERENBOND

Justine Dewitte is the successor to her grandparents' farm, which she has transformed into an organic mixed farm focused on short supply chains. With extensive experience working as a researcher and advisor in organic crops and herbs at a Flemish research centre, Justine aims to expand the farm and provide customers with an enjoyable experience. Additionally, she serves as a lecturer in organic agriculture.

't Goed Ter Heule is a short-chain organic mixed farm with 4 hectares of cultivable land and pasture. The farm cultivates a diverse range of vegetables, fruits, and animals and sells its products through self-picking gardens, a farm shop, and local retailers. This includes 80 different kinds of vegetables, small fruits, herbs, flowers, as well as 70 varieties of pumpkins and potatoes. Moreover, the farm breeds sheep, broilers, pigs, laying hens, guinea fowls, and ducks.

Recently, Justine renovated the farmhouse, which now includes an eatery and a hall for seasonal dishes. She also engages in various awareness-raising activities.

In terms of sustainability, the farm strives for a closed cycle, minimal waste, and limited food miles. The farm has organic certification and adheres to strict standards, often going beyond legal requirements while promoting biodiversity both above and below ground. Animal manure is used as fertiliser, surplus produce is processed in their kitchen, and food leftovers are returned to the animals, effectively closing the circle. Direct customers are the primary focus, reducing food miles.

Socially, 't Goed Ter Heule aims to be inclusive and reclaim the traditional role of a farm as a place for everyone. Visitors are encouraged to explore the fields and stalls, promoting transparency in cultivation practices. The farm welcomes guided visits from various groups, including kindergartens, universities, special education institutions, and foreign schools. Justine also offers customised care and shares knowledge with high school and adult education trainees. Additionally, the farm employs people on permanent contracts and fosters a sense of togetherness by cooking and enjoying meals together.

Economically, the farm operates as a private initiative without additional subsidies from the municipality or province. Each branch of the farm is expected to be profitable, with a primary focus on farming. By diversifying the crops and animals, Justine mitigates risks and reduces dependence on larger market players. Striving for efficiency, Justine aims to provide fair wages to her employees and ensure a sustainable income.



MARZIA DI PASTINA

ITALY - ALLEANZA DELLE COOPERATIVE ITALIANE AGROALIMENTARE

Marzia Di Pastina took on the challenge of revolutionizing her family's agricultural business and making it more sustainable. She then embarked on her journey by establishing her own farm, putting her innovative ideas into practice and engaging in post-farm activities as well as becoming a member of the Cooperative San Lidano.

The farm, known as LID.MAR., spans over 20 hectares, with 7 hectares covered by multi-tunnel greenhouses. It specialises in cultivating a variety of produce, including leafy vegetables, baby leaf, endive, cabbages, savoy cabbage, leafy cabbage, turnip tops, watermelons, and pumpkins. To ensure the safety and healthiness of its products, the farm adheres to strict food safety standards and implements continuous monitoring of both products and processes. Marzia has introduced a novel approach to vegetable production for fresh-cut products, incorporating feedback from retailers and consumers. Despite the challenges posed by climate change, Marzia is pioneering sustainable growing systems, employing modern equipment, implementing drip irrigation, reducing chemical usage and fertilizers, and actively promoting biodiversity.

In terms of sustainability, LID.MAR. is registered in the National "Rete del Lavoro Agricolo di Qualità" (Quality Agricultural Work Network) and has obtained Global G.A.P. certification, in addition to the G.R.A.S.P. Social Responsibility add-on module. By integrating Integrated Pest Management (IPM) systems and biotechnics like Bacillus and Trichoderma spp., as well as practicing minimum tillage, the farm has successfully reduced its synthetic inputs by 40%. Environmental monitoring conducted over the first three years of operation has revealed significant achievements, including over 60% energy savings, a 30% reduction in CO2 emissions, a 57% decrease in water consumption thanks to micro-irrigation systems, and a 60% reduction in waste through the reuse of vegetal waste as feed for local buffalo farms. These accomplishments have earned LID.MAR. certification as a Biodiversity Friend by the World Biodiversity Association.

Marzia actively participates in the San Lidano Cooperative Chain, which is ISO 22005 certified. This cooperative initiative prioritizes local production in its sourcing criteria, aiming to enhance the economic value of its members' products and the surrounding territory. Within the cooperative, Marzia has initiated several projects, including "ORTI LAZIALI," a label that combines tradition and quality in horticulture, and "Cuore Rosso il Cocomero," a premium brand for high-quality watermelons. Additionally, the cooperative has achieved BRC-ETRS (Ethical trade and responsible sourcing) certification, making it the world's first fresh-cut company and food chain to attain this prestigious recognition.



MONIKA LASON

POLAND – KRIR

Monika Lason graduated from Warsaw Life Science University and gained valuable experience working in cheese dairies across Europe before embarking on her own entrepreneurial journey in the world of goat farming. In 2011, she began producing goat's milk and, through trial and error, has successfully developed a unique range of cheeses sourced from her Alpine and Saanen goat breeds.

Monika employs state-of-the-art machinery and maintains a short milk supply chain, processing fresh raw materials with minimal additives. She blends bacterial cultures to craft innovative flavours and cheeses, drawing inspiration from both Dutch and Swiss cheese-making traditions. Her artisanal cheeses have garnered acclaim from customers and restaurateurs alike. Monika's commitment to promoting wholesome, preservative-free foods was particularly evident during the pandemic when she increased her online cheese sales, reducing her food supply chain and a commitment to healthy eating.

The cheeses are naturally cared for and packaged in biodegradable materials to reduce the carbon footprint. Monika takes pride in her ability to shape the unique flavours of her cheeses and share them with her consumers. In Poland, goat and sheep cheeses are not yet widely popular, making Monika's artisanal offerings a novelty. Her sustainable farming model revolves around responsible animal feeding practices, ensuring high-quality milk production while minimizing environmental impact. Operating within a short food supply chain further underscores her commitment to sustainability and customer satisfaction.

Monika actively participates in fairs, collaborates with restaurants, and supplies slow-food shops, valuing direct interactions with customers to exchange knowledge and understand their preferences. She invites cheese enthusiasts to visit her farm, providing a behind-the-scenes glimpse into her cheese-making process, complete with tastings paired with carefully selected wines, oils, and preserves. Monika enjoys the creative aspects, independence, and challenges of her work, continuously innovating, even crafting delightful goat's milk ice cream. Despite the demanding nature of agricultural work, she finds great satisfaction in creating and selling her own products, with customer happiness serving as her motivation for future growth.



DESIREE DE LA CARIDAD NIEVES

ITALY – CONFAGRICOLTURA

Desiree Nieves is the head of her family business located near Lake Bolsena in the Viterbo province. Since taking over in 2015, Desiree has transformed the farm into an entirely organic operation, prioritising sustainability and eco-friendliness. Her commitment to quality, coupled with ongoing training, has led Desiree to attain certification as an oil sommelier and a professional taster. Beyond her role as a businesswoman, she actively champions female entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector, advocating for representation and collaborative growth.

The farm encompasses 22 hectares, with 7 dedicated to hazelnut groves, 2 to olive groves, and the remainder used for cereal production. The cultivation follows strict organic practices, certified and carried out with a deep respect for the environment. An underground irrigation system with driplines helps conserve water and is connected to a weather station to optimise irrigation. The packaging used for the organic extra virgin olive oil is fully recyclable, emphasising their commitment to environmentally friendly practices.

The farm operates self-sufficiently, reinvesting earnings to continuously improve the quality of their products and environmental practices. Desiree uses social media to communicate their commitment to conscious agriculture, serving as an example for other businesses and future generations. She actively supports female businesses, fostering connections among women in agriculture and emphasising their value to society. Currently, Desiree is also organising a conference on agriculture, culture, and territory, with a focus on women's perspectives. Additionally, she tackles important social issues such as violence against women by collaborating with public institutions to implement educational projects in schools.

Desiree takes pride in the farm's connection to the land and its rich history. The region has been cultivating olive oil since ancient Etruscan times, and she feels honoured to continue this tradition. As an immigrant from Cuba who has become an Italian citizen, Desiree appreciates the diverse cultural heritage of the land. She aims to promote the region's historical treasures, particularly the ancient Etruscan necropolis of Bisenzio, by organising historical treks in collaboration with local authorities. These treks will showcase the evolution of the area and its agricultural practices, highlighting the enduring bond between humans and nature.



The Women's Committee of COPA-COGECA represents at European and EU level Women in agriculture, whether they be farmers, rural entrepreneurs, farming families, agricultural cooperatives or associated with agricultural and other rural activities.

The Committee provides a platform to highlight the challenges faced by women in agriculture and rural areas, as well as ensuring a gender perspective to agricultural and rural policies.

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