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Transboundary Plant Pests and Diseases

 **News** Publications

FAO inspires young scientists from University of Florence during study visit



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Rome – The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) welcomed a group of 29 MSc students of Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture from the University of Florence for an immersive learning visit aimed at deepening their understanding of global food and agriculture.

The students engaged directly with FAO experts, explored the Organization’s technical work, partnerships with academic institutions, countries and other partners to tackle

pressing issues such as hunger, biodiversity loss, and the impacts of climate change. The visit also provided students with insights into the skills and knowledge needed to transform agrifood systems for a sustainable future.

Shoki Al-Dobai, Senior Agricultural Officer and Team Leader of the Transboundary Plant Pests and Diseases team, presenting FAO's scope of work said the visit offers students a wider understanding of both the successes and the ongoing challenges in agriculture and global food production systems, as well as the strategies being implemented to transform agrifood systems to be more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable systems.

"Having young scientists learn about the state of global food security and nutrition, as well as the need to transform production systems to become more sustainable by applying principles of optimization and minimization to produce more with less, increases their interest and engagement. It also gives these future agricultural leaders insights into innovative ideas needed to address the global challenges facing the sector," said Al-Dobai.

These contributions enhance FAO's ability and global community to support countries in tackling hunger and malnutrition, ultimately helping to transform agrifood systems.

Particularly, presentations were delivered by the different teams of the Plant Production and Protection Division, covering topics such as pests and pesticides, the Rotterdam Convention, the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), and the management of locusts and transboundary plant pests and diseases. FAO's innovative tools and solutions were presented, including the [eLocust apps](#), [SusaHamra](#), [FAMEWS](#), the use of drones in locust management, and various plant health solutions that support member countries.

This visit marks the second cohort from the University of Florence to participate in the programme, following a [similar visit last year](#) by the 2024 class from the same department. The initiative is part of a growing partnership between FAO and the University.



The students asked questions during the visit, and also played the "Next Exit: Chemical Safety", an educational escape game project developed by the joint Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions, with support from

FAO and other partners, to teach about the dangers of hazardous chemicals.

Professor Laura Mugnai, Professor of Plant Pathology at the Department of Agricultural, Food, Environmental and Forestry Science and Technology (DAGRI), highlighted the importance of exposing students to global food and agriculture issues.

“There is so much to learn from FAO’s work. As a lecturer, I also benefit from seeing the practical field activities carried out by FAO. Another important outcome is that the visit helps students identify informed and focused career paths in this field,” she noted. She added, “We look forward to continuing this partnership.”

FAO recognizes academia and research institutions as natural partners in its efforts to transforming agrifood systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life – leaving no one behind.

The University of Florence is an Italian public research university comprising 12 schools.



Other FAO teams presented as well, including IPPC, Pesticide Management, and the Rotterdam Convention.

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