

Webinar series

SEEDS of the MEDITERRANEAN



Seeds of the Mediterranean II– Water Sustainability within the Circular Economy

The webinar “Seeds of the Mediterranean II: Water Sustainability within the Circular Economy” took place on June 30th.

The webinar [“Seeds of the Mediterranean II - Water Sustainability within the Circular Economy”](#) is the second event of the new webinar series launched within the framework of the Mediterranean Cluster, a cooperation group that brings together the National CAP Networks of Mediterranean EU Member States (Italy, France, Romania, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, Malta and Croatia). The cluster is coordinated and facilitated by the [EU CAP Network](#).

The “Seeds of the Mediterranean II - Water Sustainability within the Circular Economy” webinar provided a platform to share innovative solutions and good practices that aims to provide a collaborative space to showcase practical solutions, innovative projects and transferable experiences related to water sustainability within the circular economy framework, highlighting initiatives that are already generating positive impacts in Mediterranean regions.

Background

The idea for this series emerged during a previous in-person Mediterranean Cluster meeting, where participating networks identified the need to create a regular space for **sharing experiences, addressing common challenges and showcasing innovative solutions relevant to Mediterranean rural areas.**

WEBINAR TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

- ♦ Water Sustainability within the Circular Economy”
- ♦ June 30th, 2026, from 11:00 to 12:30.
- ♦ Online format.
- ♦ **Attendees:** Researchers, farmers, local action groups, foundations, NGOs, associations, business entities, state and regional public administration, etc.
- ♦ **190 participants.**
- ♦ Webinar organized by the Portuguese, Greek, Cypriot and Spanish CAP Networks and coordinated by the EU CAP Network.

The **Seeds of the Mediterranean** series aims to organise **one webinar every four months**, each one focusing on a topic of strategic importance for Mediterranean agriculture and rural territories. These events are designed to promote knowledge exchange, highlight innovative practices and strengthen cooperation between countries facing similar environmental and agricultural challenges.

The [first webinar of the series](#), held on **16 March 2026**, focused on **Water Management** and received very positive feedback, with strong participation and interest from stakeholders across different Mediterranean countries.

Building on the success of the first edition, the Mediterranean Cluster organized the second webinar of the series.

Specific Objectives

Based on the above, this second event was organized with the following objectives:

- Present four good practices and innovative projects focused on water management in Mediterranean contexts.
- Give visibility to real solutions addressing water-related challenges through technology, advisory services, innovation, and collaborative approaches.
- Promote knowledge exchange and support the transferability of solutions to other Mediterranean territories.
- Raise awareness of the importance of efficient water management across Mediterranean regions.
- Strengthen cooperation among national networks, universities, researchers, farmers, administrations, and private stakeholders.
- Inspire future projects contributing to climate and water resilience in the Mediterranean area.

Opening session

During the welcome and opening of the webinar, **Maria Custódia Correia**, the National Coordinator of the Portuguese CAP Network, highlighted several key points:

She welcomed participants to the second webinar and noted that the **Mediterranean cluster is one of the most dynamic, promoting strong collaboration between various countries in the region**. She explained that the aim of the event was to **share practical solutions** and inspiring examples to help Mediterranean territories use water more sustainably, **make better use of resources**, and **increase resilience to climate**

change.

Additionally, she thanked the project representatives for sharing their work, stating that their participation is vital for bringing new ideas and **strengthening cooperation across the Mediterranean** and expressed gratitude to the **National CAP networks** and the **EU CAP network** for their commitment to making the event possible.



Picture 1: **Maria Custódia Correia**, coordinator of the Portuguese National CAP Network, opening the session

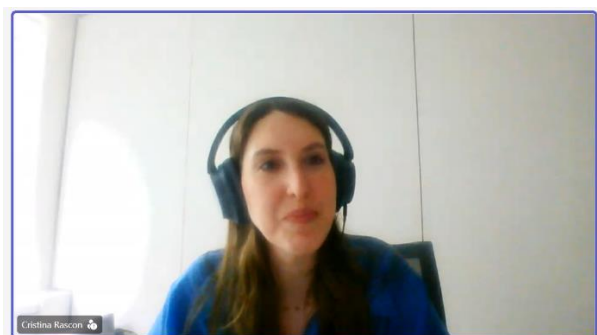
Interaction tools

Following the introduction, **Cristina Rascón**, from the **EU CAP Network** explained how participants could interact during the webinar through the [Padlet platform](#), which was used to collect questions from the audience and facilitate discussion with the speakers.

Participants were encouraged to submit their questions throughout the session, allowing the organisers to gather feedback and promote interaction between speakers and attendees.

Additionally, a real-time Mentimeter poll conducted during the session by Cristina provided an evidence-based assessment of the current "Water Stress Reality." Stakeholders reported that the 2025-2026 period was characterized by **extreme climatic volatility**.

Participants consistently identified a dual-threat environment: prolonged, extreme drought cycles interrupted by erratic sessions of excess water. This "too dry or too wet" paradigm validates the urgent need for the Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) and non-conventional water resource (NCWR) strategies presented by the cluster.



Picture 2: Cristina Rascón, Networking coordinator, EU CAP Network, introducing the interaction tools.

Presentations

The main body of the webinar featured four presentations highlighting practical circular economy solutions and innovative management practices designed to enhance water sustainability and climate resilience across Mediterranean agricultural systems.

- SPONGEWORKS - Creating and Upscaling Sponge Landscapes by Working with Natural Water Retention and Sustainable Management, Greece.

The first presentation introduced the SpongeWorks project, which focuses on creating and upscaling "sponge landscapes" to move from drainage-oriented water management toward natural water retention to mitigate floods and droughts.

Speaker: Dr Andreas Panagopoulos, Research Director, [Soil & Water Resources Institute](#).

The SPONGEWORKS project, implemented in the Pinios River basin in Greece, aims to shift traditional water management from drainage-focused systems toward the creation of **sponge landscapes** that prioritize **natural water retention**.

By utilizing tools like **irrigation scheduling**, the project has achieved **water savings of at least 22%**, while **mechanical mulching** techniques have increased **soil organic matter to 1.2%**, significantly enhancing the soil's storage capacity.

The initiative integrates scientific monitoring of **biodiversity and socioeconomic factors**, relying

on the active **engagement of local stakeholders** to ensure long-term viability and **climate resilience** for agricultural holdings against extreme flood and drought events.



Picture 3: Dr Andreas Panagopoulos, Research Director, Soil & Water Resources Institute, explaining the project SPONGEWORKS.

- Development and modernization of vegetable waste briquetting activities, Romania.

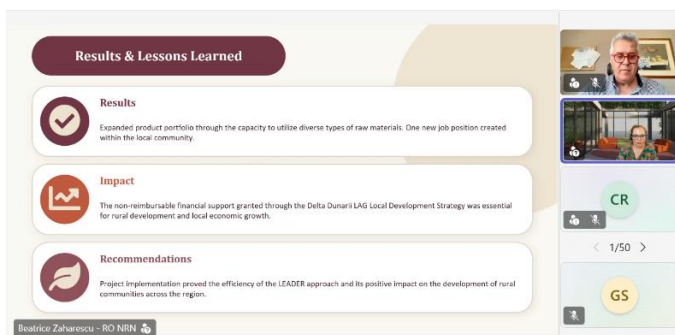
The second presentation detailed a Romanian success story where agricultural waste is transformed into heating briquettes, highlighting how EU-funded modernization supports rural entrepreneurship and the bioeconomy.

Speakers: Beatrice Zaharescu, EU CAP NETWORK Communication & LEADER, [Romanian National Rural Network](#) and Dima Ancuta, Romanian beneficiary promoter.

In Romania, a **rural entrepreneurship** initiative in the **Danube Delta** demonstrates how the **circular economy** can transform **vegetable waste** from crops like wheat and sunflower into **heating briquettes**.

Supported by **EAFRD** funds through the **LEADER approach**, the project modernized its facility with high-performance machinery, allowing it to **double production capacity** and drastically reduce operational costs.

This **bioeconomy** model not only diversifies agricultural activities by repurposing byproducts that were previously discarded but also generates **local employment** and provides a sustainable source of **renewable energy** for the rural community.



Picture 4: Beatrice Zaharescu, EU CAP NETWORK Communication & LEADER, Romanian National Rural Network



Picture 5: Dima Ancuta, Romanian beneficiary

- [WoolMulch: Building Crop Resilience in the Climate Emergency](#), Spain.

The third presentation explored the WoolMulch initiative, demonstrating how raw sheep wool can be repurposed as a biodegradable soil cover to drastically reduce irrigation needs and increase crop vigor during extreme heat.

Speaker: Raoul Ferrer, Agricultural Engineer with a Master's Degree in Organic Agriculture and Agricultural Technologies.

The **WoolMulch** project, based in Spain, offers an innovative solution by using **raw sheep wool** as a biodegradable **organic mulch** to combat the **climate emergency** in agriculture.

Wool is distinguished by its **thermal regulation** properties and high **hygroscopy**—absorbing up to 30% of its weight in water—while providing nutrients like nitrogen as it decomposes.

Scientific results show that in lettuce crops, this technique allows for **25 days without irrigation**, saving **1.5 liters of water** per gram of product; meanwhile, in almond and olive trees, it improves

vigor and regrowth during extreme heat, serving as a sustainable alternative to **agricultural plastics**.



Picture 6: Raoul Ferrer, Agricultural Engineer with a Master's Degree in Organic Agriculture and Agricultural Technologies.

- Sustainable wastewater reuse for agriculture, Cyprus.

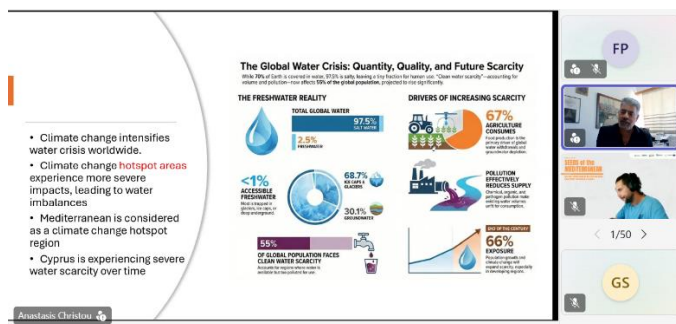
The fourth presentation addressed the strategic implementation of reclaimed wastewater reuse in Cyprus, emphasizing scientific research into the safety of using treated water for irrigation as a key component of the circular economy.

Speaker: Dr Anastasis Christou, Agricultural Research Officer in the Agricultural Research Institute of the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment of the Republic of Cyprus.

In Cyprus, facing a critical **water exploitation index** of 92%, the **reuse of reclaimed wastewater** treated at a tertiary level has become a **strategic national policy**, currently supplying **20% of the irrigated land**.

Rigorous scientific research confirms that soil acts as an effective **physical barrier**, minimizing the transfer of **contaminants of emerging concern**, such as microplastics or pharmaceuticals, to crops.

By providing essential nutrients like **nitrogen and phosphorus**, this practice reduces chemical fertilizer use and enhances **drought resilience**; furthermore, studies show no unacceptable health risks, particularly in **fruit trees**, bolstering public confidence in the **circular water economy**.



Picture 7: Dr Anastasis Christou, Agricultural Research Officer in the Agricultural Research Institute of the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment of the Republic of Cyprus.

Conclusions

The webinar "**Seeds of the Mediterranean: Water Sustainability within the Circular Economy**" provided several key conclusions regarding climate resilience and resource management in the region. Below is a summary of the main takeaways:

Strategic and Regional Conclusions

- A fundamental conclusion was the need to move from traditional water management focused on drainage to a mindset of **water retention** within the landscape, creating what are known as "**sponge landscapes**".
- The Mediterranean region is already a climate change hotspot, facing increased temperatures, forest fires, and severe water stress. This necessitates **transformative changes** that are implemented quickly and at a large scale.
- Scientific solutions are only successful if they are **realistic, accepted by local actors**, and developed through collaboration. Finding "inspired champions" within the community is essential for moving from pilot projects to broad adoption.

Practical Project Findings

- Sponge Landscapes (Greece):** Implementing nature-based solutions like **irrigation scheduling** can save at least **22% of water**. Furthermore, mechanical mulching (instead of herbicides) can increase soil organic

matter to **1.2%**, significantly improving the soil's ability to retain water during droughts and manage floods.

- Bioeconomy and Energy (Romania):** The modernization of facilities to turn **agricultural waste** (wheat, barley, sunflower) into **heating briquettes** proves that circular economy principles can diversify rural income. This initiative, supported by **EU funds (EAFRD)** and the **LEADER approach**, doubled production capacity and created new local jobs.
- Regenerative Materials (Spain):** **Raw sheep wool** is an extraordinary organic mulch that serves as a **thermal regulator** and moisture sensor. In lettuce crops, it allowed for **25 days without irrigation** during summer, saving **1.5 litres of water** per gram of product. It also improved the **vigor and regrowth** of trees in extreme temperatures (up to 50°C).
- Safe Wastewater Reuse (Cyprus):** Reclaimed water is a **strategic and reliable resource** that already irrigates **20% of agricultural land** in Cyprus. Research concluded that **soil acts as a physical barrier** against micropollutants (like pharmaceuticals), and there are **no unacceptable health risks** for consumers, particularly with fruit trees.

Final Takeaways for Success

- Monitoring pillars such as **biodiversity, water retention, and socioeconomics** provides the hard evidence needed to gain the trust of farmers and stakeholders.
- Utilizing the **CAP (Common Agricultural Policy)** and its **eco-schemes** is vital to provide the economic and social incentives required for farmers to adopt these sustainable practices.
- The exchange of ideas between different Mediterranean territories is a powerful tool for finding handheld solutions to shared climate challenges.

The organizers concluded that the webinar fulfilled its objective of inspiring new ideas and collaborations among Mediterranean territories.

It was emphasized that, although the time for questions was limited, the exchange of knowledge should continue through digital tools such as [Padlet](#) and future sessions in the series, to further strengthen sustainable water management in the region.

The **Seeds of the Mediterranean** webinar series will continue with future editions addressing other key topics relevant to Mediterranean rural development.