

The Marseille Call

Agriculture as a strategic partner for water security

Preamble

We, participants in the 26th ICID World Congress, representing Ministries of Agriculture, Water and Environment, international organisations, universities and research centres from over fifty countries, gathered in Marseille, France, from 12 to 17 October 2026, issue this *Marseille Call* to advance water security, food security and climate resilience. The Marseille Call is a non-binding political declaration and a voluntary framework for cooperation. It does not create legal obligations for its participants but reflects their shared vision and respective determination to strengthen international cooperation and collective effort in support of these common objectives.

We recognize that water and agriculture are inseparable. There can be no food security without sustainable water management. Agriculture, as the foundation of food security, accounts for the largest share of global freshwater withdrawals. Its footprint varies widely across regions and farming systems, yet it shapes watersheds, soils, ecosystems and the water cycle worldwide. It therefore has both a responsibility and an opportunity to contribute to water security.

This role must be fulfilled amid growing and interconnected pressures on water resources and food systems. Climate change is intensifying drought risks, heat stress and hydrological variability, while broader environmental pressures, including land degradation and pollution, are reducing the quality and availability of usable water. At the same time, population growth, urbanization and changing consumption patterns are increasing demand for water, food and land. Together, these dynamics are heightening competition over the resources and deepening inequalities in access to water, land and irrigation, particularly in the most vulnerable areas. Rising temperatures are also raising crop water requirements and essential water needs for livestock watering and protection, especially during periods of extreme heat and drought.

Farmers are on the front line of these considerable challenges, but their exposure and capacity to adapt vary significantly according to the climatic, agricultural and environmental context of their territories. We recognize that sustainable investment in agricultural water management can strengthen the climate resilience of rural communities. Agriculture must therefore no longer be regarded solely as a water user, but as a strategic partner for water security, sustainable land management and drought resilience. The agricultural water transition must be guided by a long-term perspective, ensuring that today's investments and policies do not create tomorrow's vulnerabilities, while respecting national circumstances, priorities and applicable national laws.

We welcome the growing recognition of water as a global political priority. We build upon the momentum created by the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture to better integrate agriculture into global water governance. The 26th ICID World Congress provides an opportunity to consolidate a limited set of shared, science-based and action-oriented messages on agriculture and water. Participants may voluntarily draw on these messages in relevant political and

technical discussions, in accordance with their respective mandates and national circumstances, including in the context of the 2026 United Nations Water Conference, the Conferences of the Parties on desertification and climate change, and the 11th World Water Forum in 2027.

Against this background, the Marseille Call sets out five shared priorities as areas for voluntary cooperation, to be pursued through cross-sectoral cooperation and coordinated efforts at all relevant levels. These five priorities are not presented in hierarchical order. They are intended to reinforce one another and to guide voluntary action across policy, investment, knowledge and field implementation.

1. Aligning agricultural systems with water, soil and climate realities

We underscore the need to build agricultural systems that are more resilient to drought, water scarcity and excess water.

This requires better water management at farm level by combining rainfed and irrigated agriculture where appropriate, advancing water conservation, demand management and smart irrigation practices that improve water-use efficiency.

Integrated water–soil–crop management is equally essential. Farmers should be supported in tailoring crop selection, diversification strategies and agroecological practices to local resource constraints. We recognize healthy soils as productive assets that enhance water retention, sustain crop productivity and strengthen the resilience of farming systems.

These transformations will only endure if they are economically viable and beneficial to farmers. Agricultural water management should improve livelihoods and increase the economic, social and nutritional value generated from available water resources. Where appropriate, stronger links between agricultural production, markets and value chains can help secure viable farmer incomes, reduce food losses and strengthen resilient agri-food value chains.

2. Making agriculture a steward of water and land resources

We recognize farmers as key stewards of land and water, and agricultural systems as providers of essential ecosystem services. Farming practices directly influence the health of watersheds, aquifers and aquatic ecosystems, while contributing to the resilience of rural communities.

These contributions should be recognized and supported. Integrated land management at landscape and watershed levels can reduce soil erosion and land degradation, enhance water infiltration and groundwater recharge, mitigate flood risks, protect and restore natural water buffers, and reduce pressure on freshwater resources. To achieve genuine water conservation, farm-level efficiency gains

should translate into reduced overall pressure on water resources at watershed and aquifer levels.

We encourage efforts to protect water quality by preventing diffuse pollution and reducing agricultural runoff. This includes limiting nutrient and pesticide losses through agroecological practices, complemented, where appropriate, by precision approaches.

3. Planning and managing resilient, diversified agricultural water systems

We encourage integrated planning at the appropriate level and stronger cross-sectoral coordination, in accordance with national circumstances, to strengthen the resilience of agricultural water systems to climate variability and shocks. Land-use, water and agricultural policies should jointly consider local resource constraints and anticipate long-term hydro-climatic trends, seasonal variability, droughts and floods. Such planning should be supported by transparent, participatory governance and context-appropriate water allocation frameworks, consistent with national priorities and laws. These approaches can help protect rural communities and maintain reliable access to water for agriculture.

Delivering this reliability requires climate-resilient infrastructure and service-oriented irrigation management. We emphasize the maintenance, modernization and, where appropriate, redesign of existing irrigation, drainage, water-harvesting and storage systems, as well as the development of new infrastructure where justified by the context. Their planning and design should anticipate future hydrological conditions and support agroecological transitions. Context-appropriate green and grey solutions can make these systems more multifunctional, multi-use, flexible and responsive to droughts and floods.

We also recognize that the resilience of agricultural water systems can be further strengthened by optimizing existing resources and responsibly developing non-conventional sources, where appropriate. Treated wastewater reuse should be recognized as a strategic option for agriculture and supported by risk-based planning, fit-for-purpose standards, balanced consideration of costs and benefits, adequate monitoring and farmer support throughout the reuse chain.

4. Mobilizing finance for sustainable agricultural water management

In many parts of the world, agricultural water systems remain structurally underfunded. We encourage, in accordance with national circumstances, investment in water for agriculture and sustainable land management as a strategic contribution to food security, climate resilience and sustainable development. Agricultural, water and climate investments should be aligned around shared objectives, with a stronger focus on long-term preparedness, while maintaining and

improving the capacities required for effective emergency response, recovery and post-disaster reconstruction.

Financing must extend beyond initial capital expenditure. Adequate resources are needed for the maintenance, rehabilitation, modernization and development of infrastructure and services. Funding models for agricultural water services should support long-term sustainability, service quality and water conservation, while remaining consistent with public policy goals, social equity and users' capacity to pay. Where appropriate, cost-recovery approaches, targeted economic incentives and water-pricing mechanisms may contribute to these objectives. Value-chain actors should also be engaged to help farmers in adopting sustainable and climate-resilient practices.

We encourage better mobilization and alignment of public, private and international finance, including climate and blended finance. Technical and financial assistance should be strengthened for countries with limited capacities and high climate vulnerability. Instruments should remain accessible to smallholders, water user organizations and local water managers without creating unsustainable financial burdens.

5. Empowering people through knowledge, data and innovation

We emphasize that innovation delivers results only when it responds to local realities and can be used at scale. We call for farmers, local communities and water managers to be involved in the co-design of technological, social and institutional innovations. Affordable and context-appropriate solutions, backed by strong advisory services, are essential to turn investment into lasting changes in water and farming practices.

We encourage, where appropriate and in accordance with national circumstances, the use of water and land data to support integrated, evidence-based decision-making at the appropriate level. Interoperable information systems combining in-situ observations, remote sensing, spatial soil assessment, climate information and digital technologies can improve water management, transparency and preparedness. Their value lies not only in collecting more data, but also in translating it into practical knowledge for farmers, water managers and decision makers.

Delivering this change requires sustained investment in education, agricultural extension and lifelong learning. Women and young people should be recognized not only as beneficiaries, but as leaders, entrepreneurs and co-creators of agricultural water innovation.

The Marseille Call reaffirms that agriculture is not only a water user, but a strategic partner for sustainable water management, land management, food security and climate resilience. The five priorities set out in this Call provide a practical basis for advancing sustainable agricultural water and land management across diverse national and local contexts.

We encourage governments, international organizations, financial and research institutions, farmers' and water user organizations, civil society and the private sector, in accordance with their respective mandates, to draw on these priorities in support of voluntary and context-appropriate action.

Within its mandate, ICID will continue to foster international cooperation, knowledge exchange and dialogue, and will share the messages of the Marseille Call in relevant international forums on water, agriculture, land and climate.

Contributing countries

Chad
China
France
Iraq
Jamaica
Japan
Kenya
Kosovo
Lebanon

Malaysia
Mauritania
Pakistan
Palestine
Saudi Arabia
South Africa
Spain
Uzbekistan
Zimbabwe

