



Lomonosov Moscow State University

## Eurasian Center for Food Security

### Contents

- **Food Policy Research and Capacity Development in Eurasia: Outcomes of the IFPRI – WORLD BANK – ECSF Joint Webinar .....1**
- **World Soil Day 2020 in Russia and in the World: Awareness Raising and Capacity Building..... 2**
- **Event Calendar 2021 ..... 3**



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We will remember this December first of all for two important webinars: the Food Policy Research and Capacity Development in Eurasia virtual event co-organized by ECFS, the World Bank Group, and IFPRI and the Fifth Scientific and Practical Conference on Food Security and Soil Science, dedicated to World Soil Day. We summarize the results of these webinars in our newsletter.

We also want to express our best wishes for the Holidays from the ECFS team, and for health and happiness throughout the coming year. Thank you, everyone, for being with us this year, and for taking part in our projects, events and surveys. We value our work with you and look forward to continuing working and to participating in important undertakings in the year to come.

## Food Policy Research and Capacity Development in Eurasia: Outcomes of the IFPRI – WORLD BANK – ECSF Joint Webinar

*By Roman Romashkin*

[A virtual event](#) took place on December 2, 2020, as part of a webinar on food policy and research capacity building in Eurasia. The event was co-organized by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the World Bank Group, and the Eurasian Center for Food Security (ECFS) of Lomonosov Moscow State University. Results of the joint World Bank and ECFS

program on developing and using food policy case study methodology for providing evidence-based and data-driven policy support to the region, effectively engaging with policy makers and supporting the next generation of policy analysts through educational and capacity development programs, were presented, together with interim results of the joint work of IFPRI

and ECFS on assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food systems.

**Sergei Shoba**, ECFS Director, noted in his opening remarks that case studies are one of the main activities of ECFS. Since 2016, scientists from the countries of the Eurasian region have carried out 29 studies, and their results have provided the basis for educational and methodological materials that correspond to world best practices. This work contributes significantly to regional knowledge, increases research collaboration, and informs policy responses on current food security and nutrition issues.

The ECFS Director highlighted the need to continue collaborative projects with the World Bank and IFPRI, and he stressed the importance of applied research to develop empirically based policies to address food security challenges in the region. Among the promising areas of applied research identified were:

- ✓ Assessing the impact of national agricultural policies on the population's food security;
- ✓ Determining the potential impact of innovative technologies on productivity in the agricultural sector, and
- ✓ Looking for opportunities to expand regional trade and increase agri-food exports to low-income countries.

**Roman Romashkin**, Deputy Director of ECFS, made a presentation about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on national economies, trade, and remittances of labor migrants. According to the data presented by the rapporteur, the economy of the Kyrgyz Republic is the most vulnerable Eurasian country to a

pandemic. At the same time, agricultural production in the countries of the Eurasian region has demonstrated a certain stability. For the first half of the year, production in the agriculture sector of Tajikistan increased by 8.2 percent, of Russia by 3 percent, of Uzbekistan by 2.8 percent, and of the Kyrgyz Republic by 1.6 percent. Moreover, despite the decrease in imports from low-income countries, an increase in regional trade helped to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on food security and nutrition in the Eurasian countries.

The speaker also pointed out that the current crisis has led to a significant reduction in remittances from Russia to Tajikistan and the Kyrgyz Republic as a result of the imposed restrictions on labor migration, job losses, and the lower incomes of migrants. Thus, the current crisis has a more serious impact on remittances and trade than the previous crisis did in 2015. Reduced remittances and energy exports could lead to increased poverty, deteriorating current account balances, and further depreciation of national currencies. To mitigate the negative impact of the crisis on food security, it is necessary to build a system of social protection for vulnerable groups of the population and ensure the competitiveness of agricultural products in conditions of high dependence on imports of resources.

The event attracted over 100 participants from around the world. Of particular interest to the audience was the discussion of the possibility of using the accumulated experience in conducting case studies in other regions of the world, the impact of regional trade restrictions on food security in Central Asia, the impact of the pandemic on households in Tajikistan, and the identification of the main factors for ensuring food security in the Eurasian region when the pandemic ends.

## World Soil Day 2020 in Russia and in the World: Awareness Raising and Capacity Building

*By Anna Kontoboytseva and Yulia Timofeeva*

In 2020, the health issues of the world's population became priority number 1 in the global agenda. However, few people are aware that soil micro- and macroorganisms support life on Earth, ensuring soil fertility and soil health—and therefore food and environmental security. For example, almost all antibiotics created to fight infections have been developed using soil microorganisms.

The [Global Soil Partnership](#) (GSP) has been organizing a [World Soil Day \(WSD\) campaign](#) since 2014 to raise awareness of the importance of soil conservation and preserving soil health through sustainable soil management worldwide. The theme of the WSD 2020 campaign is "Keep soil alive, Protect soil biodiversity."

In the Russian Federation, the Food and Agriculture

Organization of the United Nations ([FAO Liaison Office with the Russian Federation](#)), ECFS, the World Bank, and the [Russian State Agrarian University – Moscow Timiryazev Agricultural Academy \(RSAU-MTAA\)](#) organized the **Fifth Scientific and Practical Conference on Food Security and Soil Science, dedicated to WSD**, on December 4, 2020. Previous conferences have been held jointly with leading Russian science, research, and educational institutions with the aims of exchanging experience and knowledge and of strengthening cooperation among scientists, researchers, government officials, agribusiness, and nonprofit organizations to address practical and applied problems. Information about WSD 2019 in Sochi is available [here](#).

This year, the conference—which was held on the Zoom platform—was attended by 180 specialists from Russia, Europe, and Central Asia, as well as from South Africa and the United State.

The meeting was moderated by **Sergei Shoba**, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS), President of the Faculty of Soil Science of Moscow State University, and President of the V.V. Dokuchaev Soil Science Society. In his welcoming speech, Sergei Shoba emphasized the crucial role of the soil cover in the processes of global biosphere functions regulation and in ensuring food security.

Then **Igor Konstantinov**, Vice-Rector for Science and Innovative Development of the RSAU-MTAA; **Oleg Kobayakov**, Director of the FAO Liaison Office with the Russian Federation; and **Artavazd Hakobyan**, Senior Agriculture Economist of the World Bank, addressed the participants with welcoming words.

Oleg Kobayakov announced the [global ceremony of the WSD celebration](#), organized at FAO headquarters in Rome, also on December 4, and stressed that for FAO, WSD is one of the main UN holidays, since soils are the basis of agricultural production.

Then **Ronald Vargas**, Executive Secretary of the GSP, briefly presented the [State of Knowledge of Soil Biodiversity](#) report. Over 300 scientists from around the world contributed to the preparation of this report, which highlights the threats and the solutions that soil biodiversity can provide to current global challenges. The report is the result of a coordinated effort of the

GSP and its Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Global Soil Biodiversity Initiative, and the European Commission. The main report of over 600 pages is supplemented by a 40-page handy summary for policy makers.

The special guest of the event was **Edoardo Costantini**, Secretary of the [European Society for Soil Conservation and](#) President-Elect of [the International Union of Soil Sciences](#). In his speech, Edoardo Costantini emphasized that soil provides us with ecosystem services that are essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Usually, people talk about the functions of the soil in the context of the first 30 centimeters, this surface layer that is used in agriculture, but they forget about subsoil layers that lie below these 30 centimeters and provide soil self-organization.

**Konstantin Gongalsky**, Doctor of Biological Sciences, head of the Laboratory of the Ecological Functions of Soils at the A.N. Severtsov Institute of Ecology and Evolution of RAS, and co-author of the *State of Knowledge of Soil Biodiversity*, made a presentation on the protection of soil fauna in Russia. In his opinion, it is necessary to make an inventory of many groups of soil fauna; to create identifiers, including molecular genetic characteristics; and to include soil fauna in the *Red Data book of the Russian Federation*. There is also great potential for assessing the role of soil fauna in ecosystem processes.

**Pavel Krasilnikov**, Corresponding Member of RAS and Acting Dean of the Faculty of Soil Science at Moscow State University, spoke about the activities of the [Eurasian Soil Partnership](#) in 2019–20. In 2020 the [Eurasian Soil Portal](#) website was updated; its purpose is to provide soil scientists and all interested parties with a selection of information about soils and their sustainable management in accordance with the goals of the GSP. If you want to post information on the portal, please write to [info@ecfs.msu.ru](mailto:info@ecfs.msu.ru).

A more detailed overview of the event is [available](#) on the FAO website (only in Russian). A video recording of the event is available [here](#). Speakers' presentations are [posted](#) on the ECFS website.

The Fifth Scientific and Practical Conference on Food Security and Soil Science was not the only event dedicated to the WSD celebration in Russia

On December 4, an online tour of three soil museums of the world took place. The tour was organized by the [V.V. Dokuchaev Central Museum of Soil Science](#) (St. Petersburg, Russia), the [Emirates Soil Museum](#), (Dubai, United Arab Emirates) and the [Museum of the Institute of Cartography and Geology](#) (Catalonia, Spain). Virtual tour participants learned about expositions and the history of the museums' creation. The broadcast took place on Zoom and YouTube platforms. More than 220 people from all over the world watched the museum tours.

The event's moderator and organizer, the head of the [World Soil Information \(ISRIC\) World Soil Museum](#), **Stefan Mantel**, noted that "the global network of soil museums is a growing group of museums around the world that emphasize the importance of soil and the need to collaborate with each other." A video of the virtual tour is available [here](#).

Also, on December 5, the online symposium Grounding Art & Science was held. The speakers of the event were artists and curators of art centers, as well as a representative from the scientific side: **Elena Sukhacheva**, director of the V.V. Dokuchaev Central Museum of Soil Science.

During the symposium, speakers presented a vision of cooperation between scientists and artists on the

popularization of soils and environmental issues through modern exhibitions and expositions in classical natural science museums.

The online symposium was held within the framework of the cultural and educational project Grounding, organized by the Center for Art and Science of [ITMO University](#), St. Petersburg). An online symposium recording is available on the website <http://groundingwith.space/en/>.

In total, more than 700 events took place across the world, marked in 112 countries on the [official map of World Soil Day](#). GSP reminds us that extraordinary events can apply for the [WSD 2021 award!](#)

The most ambitious event was the [global WSD ceremony](#), attended by **Qu Dongyu**, FAO Director-General, and other high-level speakers. Between Zoom and webcast events, the official celebration was followed by over 2,500 participants. During the event, the [State of Knowledge of Soil Biodiversity](#) report was officially presented worldwide; the [laureate of the fifth Glinka World Soil Prize](#), **Luca Montanarella** from the ITPS and EC, was named; the [King Bhumibol World Soil Day Award was presented](#); and the [children's book contest on soil biodiversity](#) winners were announced. Agenda and presentations are available [here](#).

Join the WSD campaign next year!

## Event Calendar 2021

Date	City, Country	Event
January 12	ONLINE	Chicago Council on Global Affairs <a href="#">WEBINAR: The World in 2021 - New Year, New Normal?</a>
January 22	ONLINE	CGIAR <a href="#">WEBINAR: Climate Adaptation in Food Systems: Lessons from youth led science-based social movements</a>

Date	City, Country	Event
February 2–5	ONLINE	<a href="#">FAO Global Symposium on Soil Biodiversity (GSOBI20)</a>
March 1–5	St. Petersburg, Russia	<a href="#">XXIV Dokuchaev's readings 2020: Soil Science in a Digital Society</a>
July 19–24	Syktyvkar, Russia	<a href="#">VIII Dokuchaev Congress of the Society of Soil Scientists. and the School of Young Scientists on Soil Morphology and Classification</a> (in Russian only).
August 23–27	Geneva, Switzerland	<a href="#">EUROSOIL 2021</a>
September 13–16	Tashkent, Uzbekistan	<a href="#">FAO Global Symposium on Salt-Affected Soils</a>
December	Tokyo, Japan	<a href="#">Nutrition for Growth Summit</a>