

Sustainable soil management to unleash soil biodiversity potential and increase environmental, economic and social well-being

25



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INNOVATION TAKES CENTER STAGE: ANNUAL HORIZON 2020 PROJECT CONSORTIUM MEETING IN ATHENS TO HIGHLIGHT MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS



Athens, Greece - The SOILGUARD project completed its Annual Consortium Meeting in Athens, Greece. The event, held in collaboration with the National Observatory of Athens (NOA) and the WINGS ICT Solutions (WINGS) consortium, marked a significant milestone for the SOILGUARD project.

During the meeting, researchers, stakeholders, and experts gathered to discuss progress and plans. Representatives from 25 European and international organisations came together for a meeting that provided an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the substantial progress made thus far and allowed for the identification and resolution of any challenges encountered, setting the stage for another year of prosperity.

The event began with welcoming remarks from NOA and WINGS, followed by updates from the coordinating organisation, LEITAT. SOILGUARD also partnered with the IUCN for an online EU Green Week event highlighting the importance of soil biodiversity conservation. During the panel discussion, Mirco Barbero from the Directorate-General for Environment of the European Commission aptly stated, "Soils are a business partner," underscoring soils' vital role in our economic and societal well-being. This insightful remark resonated with the overall theme of the discussion, highlighting the immense potential of soil biodiversity to drive positive impacts on the environment, economy, and society.

Critical updates were shared on various work packages. Work Package (WP) 1, focusing on the SOILGUARD Network of Knowledge (SNoK), updated and approved the Soil Biodiversity and Well-being Framework and Strategic Plan. WP2 discussed the successful establishment and soil sampling of the SOILGUARD cross-biome network of sites, 234 soils across 7 EU NUTS-2 regions and 3 International regions, challenges related to the Nagoya Protocol for non-EU soil samples and the first soil multifunctionality results. WP3 covered the successful implementation and soil sampling of drought simulations across the EU, the challenges found and the preparation of new drought and heatwave simulations for this 2023. This data will be combined with machine learning tools to increase the predictive power of soil management impacts on soil biodiversity and ecosystem service delivery under future climatic conditions and is crucial to demonstrate the potential of soil biodiversity as a nature-based solution.

Dr Charalampos Kontoes from NOA/BEYOND delivered a welcoming speech on day two. WP4 presented progress in quantifying the economic and socio-cultural value of Nature's Contributions to People. WP5 provided updates on evidence chains and the development of the SOILGUARD app. Moreover, WP5 conducted two workshops on the value chain and the SOILGUARDIANS app. These workshops generated valuable ideas and inputs, shaping our project significantly. WP6 shared insights on pan-European policies and international frameworks for soil biodiversity.

Overall, SOILGUARD's third year holds great promise as the project strives to unleash soil biodiversity and generate positive impacts on the environment, economy, and society. The project aims to enhance biodiversity, bolster agricultural productivity, and safeguard valuable land by prioritising soil health. This holistic approach will yield environmental benefits like climate change mitigation and water filtration and foster economic efficiency by reducing input costs and ensuring long-term soil fertility.

Through its comprehensive efforts, SOILGUARD is paving the way towards a more resilient and sustainable future by emphasising the significance of sustainable soil management.



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