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Iran and Japan get additional GIAHS sites

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Three new sites in Asia are the latest to have been formally recognised as Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS), underlining the importance of the continentâ??s centuries-old agricultural practices in feeding the worldâ??s growing population and combating climate change and biodiversity loss.

The sites - a unique rain-fed fig growing region in Iran, an area famous for using fallen leaves as compost for agriculture in suburban Tokyo and a system breeding beef cattle with unique genetic preservation practices in western Japan - were designated during a meeting of the GIAHS Scientific Advisory Group taking place in Valencia, Spain this week (4-7July).

Under the flagship programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the selection criteria stipulate that sites must be of global importance, have value as a public good, support food and livelihood security, agro-biodiversity, sustainable knowledge systems and practices, social values and culture as well as outstanding landscapes. Recognising these sites also spurs communities to continue sustainably managing these jewels of biodiversity and tradition.

With the latest additions to the global agricultural heritage systems list, FAO's worldwide agricultural heritage network now consists of 77 systems in 24 countries around the globe. The programme recently held a major event to award certificates to the most recently designated sites and use immersive experiences to celebrate the diversity of GIAHS systems worldwide

Iranâ??s unique rainfed fig growing area

The Estahban Rainfed Fig Orchards Heritage System, located in southwestern Iranâ??s Fars province, is one of the worldâ??s most important areas for rainfed fig production. The communities living in this mountainous part of the country have been cultivating unique fig gardens for at least 250 years, using precious and ancient varieties of fruit. They use a distinctive and historic system of stone and clay constructions to channel the water to the roots of the trees, making an important contribution to combating erosion and desertification in this region of extreme temperatures.

Traditional system in suburban Tokyo

The Fallen Leaves Compost Agroforestry System in Musashino Upland in the peri-urban area of Tokyo combines traditional agriculture, forestry and fishing industry. To address the low nutritional content of the soil and scarcity of water, the local communities have developed a practice of using fallen leaves from the forest as compost to plough into the fields, creating highly productive conditions for the cultivation of agricultural products including sweet potatoes, spinach and taro.

Rice and cattle thrive together in western Japan

The Integrated Farming System for Harmonizing People and Cattle is located in the mountainous, thickly forested Mikata district of western Japanâ??s Hyogo prefecture. Rice is the main crop here, with many of the paddy fields set amid hillside terraces. These are fringed by soft grass, which together with rice straw, provides ideal feed for the areaâ??s 2,000 head of Tajima breeding cattle.