Empowering youth through digital innovation and entrepreneurship

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and Zhejiang University (ZJU) recognise the important role youth, startups, innovation and digital technologies play in modernising agriculture and creating employment in the agriculture and rural development sector. As a result, FAO and ZJU are collaborating to foster an innovation and entrepreneurship environment for increased use of technologies and adoption of innovation. The collaboration aims at strengthening the capacity of policy makers, practitioners and smallholders, particularly youth and women, startups to harness digital tools and technologies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of agrifood systems.

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PARTNERSHIP MILESTONES

2019 Memorandum of Understanding signed.
2019 First annual Digital Agriculture Forum (DAF) held.
2020 First annual Global Agrinnovation Challenge (GAC) held.
2020 Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alumni Network established.
2022 Agreement to renew the partnership

CONTRIBUTING TO
Key Results

01 | High-Level Dialogue on Digital Agriculture – FAO and ZJU co-organised the event at the 2019 China Rural Revitalization and International Rural Development Forum. More than 300 national and international participants took part in the Forum.

02 | Global AgriInno Challenge (GAC) - FAO and ZJU co-organised the annual Challenge from 2020 to 2023. The Challenge aimed to identify, accelerate and scale-up youth-led innovative solutions and business models in agrifood systems through crowd sourcing and co-creation. In 2020, the theme addressed the challenges of agricultural product distribution and sales. In 2021, the Challenge focused on ‘transforming rural villages into Digital Villages-Solutions for the Four Betters’, and in 2022, on the theme “addressing challenges related to the transformation of the agrifood systems in line with FAO’s four betters”. From the launch of the Challenge in 2020, GAC has received a total of 417 youth innovation and entrepreneurship applications from 65 countries around the world.

03 | Digital Agriculture Forum (DAF) - DAF is an annual event co-organized by FAO and ZJU to host policy and technical discussions and to share knowledge and good practices in the area of digital agriculture and digital innovation. It aims to enhance experience exchange in digital agriculture among different stakeholders worldwide. Since 2019, the DAF has attracted over 800 participants from more than 80 countries.

04 | Digital Agriculture Bootcamp - composed of one-week classroom training and a one-week study tour, aims to develop digital capacity and innovation skills for practitioners in agrifood systems. Participants at the first Bootcamp for youth and women in 2022 comprised of the top winning teams from the Global AgriInno Challenge 2020 and 2021.

05 | Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alumni Network – established since 2020 with youth innovators from the Global AgriInno Challenge 2020, 2021 and 2022.

06 | Digital Agriculture publications – aims to enhance knowledge and good practices sharing in the digital transformation of agrifood systems. So far, the publications include: Digital Agriculture Report: Rural E-commerce Development Experience from China, Digital Agriculture Forum Highlights, and Innovation Challenge Handbook (to be published).

Looking Forward

FAO and ZJU will continue to collaborate to foster an innovation and entrepreneurship environment, and to enhance knowledge exchange in digital agriculture among multi-stakeholders, to contribute to achieving the SDGs. The two parties intend to consolidate collaboration in the following areas:

- Leveraging digital agricultural solutions to contribute to an efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agrifood systems.
- Empowering individuals (agri-entrepreneurs)/organizations in digitalization, entrepreneurship, and innovation in the areas of digital agriculture solutions.
- Capacity development programmes on digital skills enhancement for FAO staff.
- Promoting digital agricultural solutions to developing countries through South-South and Triangular Cooperation mechanism.

Areas of Collaboration

- Empowering youth through innovation and entrepreneurship mentorship and training.
- Fostering technological and entrepreneurial innovation through mentorship and educational boot camps for young entrepreneurs and innovators in food and agriculture through technical, academic, and entrepreneurial training.
- Facilitating an Innovation and Entrepreneurship Alumni Network for youth agribusiness entrepreneurs.
- Enhancing access to open data and improving knowledge management in agricultural sciences.
- Co-organising events on digital agriculture.

In Partnership with ZJU

Zhejiang University is a long-established, research-oriented and innovative university located in Hangzhou in the People’s Republic of China. Its origin date back to 1897 with the founding of the Qishti Academy. The modern-day ZJU, was re-established in 1998 through the merger with Hangzhou University, Zhejiang Agricultural University, and Zhejiang Medical University, and is composed of 37 colleges and schools. The university has about 4,100 full-time academic members of staff and an enrolment of over 60,000 students, of which about 56% are graduate students. ZJU has a strong impact on research, education, and development trends in China and abroad, and is ranked among the top 5 universities in the country.