

Call for Working Groups

Addressing current and future challenges of work in agriculture: research, policy and practice

International Symposium on Work in Agriculture, 7-10 July 2026
Berne, Switzerland

Work in the agri-food sector is an increasingly complex topic. There are many intersecting challenges, such as ageing of the workforce, digitalisation, migration, impacts from a changing climate and integration of supply chains. The people working in the agri-food sector play a critical role in adapting and transforming work in the face of these challenges. Advancing the research agenda in this context is essential for informing responsible policy and practice relating to work in the agri-food sector.

The International Symposium on Work in Agriculture ([ISWA](#)) is the only global forum that brings together researchers, policymakers and practitioners to address questions of work in the agri-food sector. Together with the Committee of Labour Science in Agriculture of the Max Eyth-Society for Agricultural Engineering (Arbeitskreis für Arbeitswissenschaften im Landbau der Max-Eyth-Gesellschaft für Agrartechnik im Verein Deutscher Ingenieure – AKAL) and the annual event of the Hugo P. Cecchini Institute at Berne University of Applied Sciences, ISWA 2026 will provide a forum to present and discuss research on challenges of work in the agri-food sector from diverse disciplinary perspectives. It aims to facilitate exchange and collaboration between the different stakeholders to tackle challenges related to work that the agri-food sector is facing currently and in the future.

The symposium is primarily organised around Working Groups. We invite researchers to propose Working Groups centred around one or several of the following themes:

- I) Attractiveness of work in the agri-food sector**
To retain and improve the workforce of the agri-food sector, agricultural work needs to be attractive and rural labour markets need to ensure sufficient supply of workers. This requires research to explore the attractiveness of work in the agri-food sector and to identify ways of enhancing its attractiveness both in the global North and South for local workers, migrant workers, the youth, women, etc.
- II) Decent work in the agri-food sector**
An important ethical question is the quality and quantity of work people are subject to in the agri-food sector. A core topic is the definition and measurement of decent work as well as formulating and evaluating interventions to support decent work. It raises further questions such as inclusive work opportunities, consideration of work in sustainability assessments and certifications or making invisible work(ers) visible to policy, consumers and society.
- III) Knowledge, skills and education**
Workers and farmers embody knowledge and skills in agriculture and food production. At the same time work itself has meanings to them. Insight into these meanings and embodiments of knowledge and skills is useful for understanding workers and farmers as well as for education and management. Moreover, transfer of these meanings, knowledge and skills by workers and farmers across settings could promote mutual understanding and innovation in the agri-food sector.

IV) Dynamics of work

Work in the agri-food sector is subject to change in many dimensions, including short-term events, such as droughts or border closures and long-term historical dynamics such as digitalisation or urbanisation. Also work organisation and the co-existence of on-farm and off-farm work can imply changes of work and of production systems. Structural change in the agri-food sector, climate change, technological transitions and digitalisation can change content, requirements and effects of work on workers and influence labour migration.

V) Health and safety

Health and safety of agricultural work are well known challenges that research and policy tend to neglect. Besides physical health, psychological issues come increasingly in focus, such as burn-out or feelings of loneliness with impacts on the well-being of workers and farmers. Research not only identifies determinants of health and safety but also evaluates interventions to improve work conditions to make them less hazardous and to promote more fulfilling work in the agri-food sector.

VI) Agricultural workforce development systems

Addressing workforce challenges requires collaborations, policies and projects or other interventions that often occur at a local or territorial level. It is important to examine case studies and evaluations of such approaches to examine systemic workforce interventions, success factors or intractable challenges to be overcome.

Format of Working Group proposals

Proposals for Working Groups (WGs) should not exceed one A4 page and be structured as follows:

Title: Short title

Convenors: Name(s), affiliation(s), email address(es). Please identify the contact person.

Topic: Brief introduction to the topic of your WG, including a short list of sub-themes if there are any. Short description of how your proposed WG engages with the themes of the conference.

Aims: Describe what content you aim to cover in your WG and what you aim achieve from your WG, for example sharing new knowledge, discussion, joint publications, networking, future collaborations.

Format: Describe how your WG will be organised. One session will last 1.5 hours and each WG can have several sessions.

The main **language** of the conference is English, but WGs in another language can be proposed (note that there will be no translations during the symposium).

Both traditional academic paper sessions and non-traditional formats are welcome, such as panel debates, roundtables, pecha kucha, world cafe, audio/video materials, documentary films, live performances, photo or art exhibits.

Important dates and contact

- 29 August 2025: **Deadline** for submissions for Working Groups. The Working Groups will be selected by the Scientific Committee.

--> Please send your proposals by email to: ISWA2026.hafl@bfh.ch
- 15 September 2025: Communication on **accepted WG proposals** and possible revisions of proposals.
- 1 October 2025: Launch **call for contributions** to the accepted WGs. Convenors of each WG will be responsible for selecting the contributions for their WG, under the guidance of the Scientific Committee.

Please note, that we will ask convenors of all WGs after the symposium to provide a summary with key messages that have been discussed in their WG. These summaries will be published on the conference website.

If you have any **questions**, please contact Melf-Hinrich Ehlers: melf-hinrich.ehlers@agroscope.admin.ch

The [ISWA](#) is the Symposium of the International Association on Work in Agriculture ([IAWA](#)). In 2026 it is organised together with the [Hugo P. Cecchini Institute](#) of BFH-HAFL and the Labour Science Colloquium (Arbeitswissenschaftliches Kolloquium) of [AKAL](#).

Scientific Committee

- Melf-Hinrich Ehlers, Agroscope, Socioeconomics Group, Switzerland (Co-Head of Scientific Committee)
- Katja Heitkämper, Agroscope, Socioeconomics Group, Switzerland (Co-Head of Scientific Committee)
- Sandra Contzen, Bern University of Applied Sciences, School of Agricultural, Forest & Food Sciences (BFH-HAFL), Switzerland (Head of Local Organisation Committee)
- Bruno Dorin, French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development CIRAD/CIRED, France
- Nathalie Hostiou, INRAE, UMR Territoires, France
- Priscilla Malanski, INRAE, France
- Ruth Nettle, University of Melbourne, Australia
- Mohamed Taher Sraïri, Hassan II Agronomy and Veterinary Medicine Institute, Morocco
- Zenebe Uruguchi, Bern University of Applied Sciences, School of Agricultural, Forest & Food Sciences (BFH-HAFL), Switzerland