



AGRINATURA 2026 CONFERENCE REPORT

Anticipating Change and the Role of Research in Shaping Future Food Systems

26–27 May 2026

Hosted by the University of Reading, United Kingdom

Executive Summary

Agrinatura 2026 marked a shift from asking what research should study to asking how research itself must change in order to remain relevant in a rapidly changing world.

The conference showed that food systems are being reshaped simultaneously by climate change, geopolitical tensions, changing markets and financing, technological developments, biodiversity pressures and changing societal expectations. These forces are interacting in ways that create uncertainty, but also new opportunities for innovation, collaboration and transformation.

Against this backdrop, research can no longer operate primarily as a producer of knowledge that is subsequently transferred to policy or practice. It needs to become more anticipatory, collaborative, demand-driven and interdisciplinary, and more closely connected to policy, investment, innovation and implementation.

The discussions also pointed to a changing model of partnership. Larger and more diverse coalitions will be needed, bringing together researchers, governments, farmers, civil society, development organisations, businesses and financial actors. At the same time, partnerships need to remain grounded in principles of equity, local ownership, co-creation and shared benefit.

A recurring message was that the principal challenge is not necessarily a lack of agricultural innovations, but the conditions required for useful innovations to be adopted, adapted and scaled. Scaling depends on finance, markets, institutional capacity, incentives, policy frameworks and partnerships extending beyond the research community.

The conference also highlighted the changing geopolitical and financing environment for international research and development cooperation. Agricultural research will increasingly need to demonstrate its contribution not only to food security and agricultural productivity, but also to climate resilience, biodiversity, employment, economic development, nutrition and health, social inclusion and broader societal resilience.

For Agrinatura, these discussions raise a strategic question: how can the network use its distinctive position connecting European universities and research organisations with partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America to help shape future research, policy and investment agendas, rather than simply responding to them?

Key messages from Agrinatura 2026

1. Anticipation must become part of research practice.

Research organisations need to look beyond current problems and develop the capacity to anticipate alternative futures, emerging risks and new opportunities.

2. Research needs to be more connected to action.

Evidence needs to inform policy, investment, innovation and implementation rather than remain primarily within academic boundaries.

3. From innovation to impact, scale matters.

Promising innovations need pathways to adoption and scale, including stronger links with finance, investors, policymakers and the private sector.

4. Partnerships need to evolve.

Equitable, demand-driven, co-created and longer-term partnerships will be increasingly important, particularly between Europe and partners across Africa, Asia and Latin America.

5. Local knowledge matters.

Different knowledge systems need to be brought together to develop solutions that are locally relevant, context-appropriate and capable of wider application where appropriate.

6. Food-system challenges are interconnected.

Climate adaptation, livelihoods, nutrition, markets, biodiversity, finance and social relations cannot always be addressed in isolation.

7. Science–policy interfaces need strengthening.

Researchers need to engage more actively with policy processes and help connect evidence with policy and investment decisions.

8. Geopolitical change is reshaping research and development cooperation.

Agricultural research needs to understand and respond to changing geopolitical priorities, financing patterns and international cooperation frameworks.

9. New skills are required.

Future researchers will need stronger capacities in interdisciplinary collaboration, communication, entrepreneurship, digital technologies, foresight and engagement with non-academic actors.

10. Networks have an important strategic role.

Networks such as Agrinatura can create connections, coalitions and collective capabilities that individual institutions cannot achieve alone.

Conference at a Glance

Theme: Anticipating Change and the Role of Research in Shaping Future Food Systems

Dates: 26–27 May 2026

Host: University of Reading, United Kingdom

Participants: More than 100 researchers, academics, policymakers, development practitioners and representatives of international organisations and research networks

Geographical perspectives: Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America

Core structure: Keynote and opening panel, three thematic tracks, plenary synthesis and final strategic panel

Thematic tracks:

- Multi-actor innovation and private-sector engagement
- Climate change, resilience and adaptation
- Research–policy interfaces and Africa–Europe collaboration

The conference was complemented by the CEA-FIRST session “**Navigating the Food Systems**

Polycrisis: Anticipating Future Research Priorities through Africa–Europe Partnerships.”

Introduction

The Agrinatura 2026 Conference, *Anticipating Change and the Role of Research in Shaping Future Food Systems*, was hosted by the University of Reading on 26–27 May 2026. It brought together more than 100 researchers, academics, policymakers, development practitioners and representatives of international organisations and research networks from Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America, including Agrinatura members and partners.

The conference provided an opportunity to reflect on the transformations underway in global food systems and their implications for research, innovation, partnerships and action.

The conference was organised around three interconnected questions:

- **What changes are already reshaping food systems?**
- **What futures are emerging and which transformation pathways are plausible?**
- **What does this mean for research, partnerships and action?**

This structure was intended to move the discussion beyond the identification of current challenges towards a more forward-looking reflection on how research and research partnerships themselves need to evolve.

The conference was particularly timely. Food systems are being reshaped by climate change, biodiversity loss, geopolitical tensions, changing trade patterns and global markets, demographic and social change, technological developments and shifts in development finance. At the same time, research and innovation systems are themselves under pressure to adapt institutionally, methodologically and strategically.

A particularly strong feature of the discussion was its geopolitical dimension. Developments beyond the agricultural sector—including changes in international investment, trade, security and development cooperation—are increasingly influencing food systems and the environment in which agricultural research operates.

The event therefore provided an opportunity not only to discuss the future of food systems, but also to consider the future role of research networks such as Agrinatura.

1. From Signals of Change to Strategic Choices

The conference was deliberately structured as a progression from understanding change, to exploring possible futures, and ultimately to considering the strategic choices required to shape them.

The first day focused on signals, trends and disruptions already reshaping global food systems, as well as the uncertainties that may influence future trajectories. The second day moved from these signals towards possible transformation pathways, examining how research, innovation, partnerships and institutions can respond under different conditions. The final discussions then considered what these developments imply for the future role of research networks such as Agrinatura.

This progression underlined a central message of the conference: the challenge is no longer simply to understand change, but to anticipate it and organise research, partnerships and action around multiple possible futures. In her opening remarks, **Professor Parveen Yaqoob OBE, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation at the University of Reading**, highlighted the importance of research and education in supporting innovation and emphasised the value of multi-actor collaboration and international networks in addressing increasingly complex food-system challenges.

The discussions also highlighted that food-system transformation cannot be addressed through technological innovation alone. Innovation needs to be embedded in enabling institutional, financial, policy and market environments, while taking account of social norms, local knowledge, power relations and the interests of different actors along food-system value chains.

Multi-actor approaches are therefore becoming increasingly important. Researchers, farmers, businesses, policymakers, investors, civil society and consumers may all have roles to play in shaping innovation and transformation pathways. This raises questions not only about what innovations are technically possible, but also about who benefits, who bears risks, who has influence over decisions and how value is distributed.

For Agrinatura, this provided an important reflection on the potential value of its network. Its ability to connect universities and research organisations across disciplines and countries, and to build bridges

with international partners and other actors, can be an important asset in a context where fragmentation increasingly constrains impact.

2. Reading the Signals: Emerging Transformations in Global Food Systems

The opening keynote by **Leonard Mizzi, Adviser on Food Systems, European Commission, DG INTPA**, followed by a panel moderated by **Ioannis Dimitriou, President of Agrinatura**, brought together perspectives from research, policy and agricultural development.

The panel included **Patrick Caron, President of Agropolis and member of the CGIAR Integrated Partnership Board; Patrick Okori, Executive Secretary of RUFORUM; Petronella Chaminuka, Executive Manager for Research Support and Coordination at the Agricultural Research Council of South Africa; and Katja Vuori, Chief Executive Officer of AgriCord.**

The keynote and panel provided a broad assessment of the forces currently reshaping food systems and of what these changes mean for research, innovation and international cooperation.

The speed and interconnectedness of change

A key theme was the speed and interconnectedness of change. Climate change, biodiversity loss, geopolitical tensions and conflict, food insecurity and migration are interacting with economic uncertainty, changing trade and investment patterns, technological developments and shifting consumer expectations.

These dynamics are creating a food-system environment in which established assumptions and approaches can become obsolete rapidly.

This changing context reinforces the need for research and innovation to remain closely connected to societal needs. An important question raised during the discussion was how research can better anticipate and respond to changing demands from societies and consumers, rather than responding primarily to established policy priorities.

From innovation to impact

The discussion explored the conditions required for innovation to generate impact at scale. Examples included green fertilisers and alternatives to mineral fertilisers, agroecological approaches, better use of underutilised crops, responses to animal diseases and innovations capable of generating employment at scale, particularly in Africa.

The challenge is not simply to generate technically viable solutions, but to create the conditions under which they can be adopted, adapted and scaled.

Scaling innovation was highlighted as an important European interest, given the contribution that research and innovation can make to resilience, food security, climate adaptation, economic development and employment. However, scaling requires much more than research itself. It depends on appropriate investment, enabling policies, institutional capacity, markets and partnerships.

This led to a strong emphasis on connecting research with finance and investment. Research organisations need to engage more effectively with financial institutions and investors and to understand different investment models, risk profiles and requirements. Developing mechanisms to de-risk investment in innovation was identified as an important part of enabling scale.

The discussion also pointed to the potential of more strategic regional approaches, including investment around strategic economic and agricultural corridors.

Partnerships, power and equity

At the same time, scaling raises important questions of equity and value distribution. The discussion around carbon credits, for example, highlighted the need to understand how new mechanisms are entering agricultural value chains and who ultimately benefits from them.

More broadly, engagement with the private sector needs to consider not only what businesses can contribute to transformation, but also what types of partnerships are appropriate, how risks and benefits are shared, and how power asymmetries along value chains can be addressed.

The distinction between transactional and extractive forms of cooperation was also discussed. Transactional partnerships can provide value when they are based on clear and mutually beneficial objectives; concerns arise where partnerships reproduce power asymmetries or lead to an unequal distribution of risks and benefits.

Equitable partnerships therefore emerged as an important principle. Effective collaboration needs to bring together different stakeholders and knowledge systems while ensuring that solutions remain locally relevant and have potential to scale where appropriate. This requires moving towards partnerships based on shared objectives, trust, transparency and appropriate benefit-sharing.

Research in a rapidly changing and increasingly uncertain world

The panel discussion also explored the broader role of research.

Patrick Caron highlighted the extent to which the world is moving from uncertainty towards the unknown, with profound changes in the ways food is produced and consumed and with new forms of innovation emerging alongside significant geopolitical and social tensions.

A recurring challenge was the difficulty of connecting local innovation with wider systems. Many promising innovations emerge locally, sometimes unexpectedly, but their ability to influence wider systems can be constrained by fragmented institutions, power asymmetries, limited resources and the difficulty of reproducing or scaling solutions across different contexts.

The discussion challenged the assumption that technology alone can resolve food-system challenges. Technological innovation needs to be accompanied by social, institutional and political transformation. The importance of science–policy interfaces, appropriate institutional frameworks and public–private partnerships was therefore emphasised.

The panel also highlighted the diversity of food systems and the coexistence of different models of production and consumption. The distinction between “local” and “global” should not necessarily be understood as a choice between opposing systems. Rather, the challenge is to understand how different systems can coexist and interact, and under what conditions they contribute to sustainable and equitable outcomes.

Questions of power, values and interests were particularly prominent. Research priorities, the questions considered important, the evidence that gains attention and the solutions that are prioritised are shaped by values, interests and institutional contexts. This reinforces the importance of transparency, dialogue and engagement across different perspectives, particularly in an increasingly polarised environment.

The discussion also drew attention to the opportunities associated with Africa’s young and growing population and the substantial research and innovation capacities already present across the Global South. This challenges traditional assumptions about where knowledge and innovation originate and reinforces the need for more balanced and reciprocal international partnerships.

Four complementary functions of research

Against this backdrop, the discussion pointed to four complementary functions for research in supporting food-system transformation:

1. **Producing evidence** – generating robust evidence on the drivers and impacts of food-system transformation, including progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the consequences of different pathways.
2. **Engaging in dialogue** – creating spaces in which researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders can move beyond polarisation, understand different perspectives and identify obstacles preventing change.
3. **Designing and assessing solutions** – contributing to the development, testing and assessment of technological, institutional, policy and social innovations, while recognising that solutions need to be adapted to different contexts.
4. **Looking ahead** – using foresight, horizon scanning and scenario approaches to explore possible futures, challenge assumptions and help societies prepare for emerging risks and opportunities.

Taken together, these functions suggest a broader conception of the role of research. Research is not only about producing knowledge, but also about helping societies understand change, navigate competing choices, design solutions and prepare for futures that cannot yet be fully known.

3. Futures in Motion: Exploring Transformation Pathways

The second day of the conference moved beyond the identification of emerging signals towards the exploration of plausible futures for food systems between 2035 and 2050.

This shift—from analysing what is changing to considering what could emerge—was central to the conference design. Through three thematic tracks, participants examined how innovation, resilience and policy engagement might evolve under different conditions, and what these developments imply for research networks such as Agrinatura.

The three tracks provided different but complementary perspectives:

1. **Multi-actor innovation and private-sector engagement**
2. **Climate change, resilience and adaptation**

3. Research–policy interfaces and Africa–Europe collaboration

Although the presentations addressed different geographical contexts and research questions, several common themes emerged.

3.1 Multi-Actor Innovation and Private-Sector Engagement

The first thematic track explored how innovation is increasingly generated through ecosystems of actors rather than isolated research institutions.

Presentations ranged from seed systems in protracted crises to rural entrepreneurship, innovation hubs, livestock production, farming systems and agricultural energy. Despite this diversity, a common narrative emerged: innovation is becoming more distributed, collaborative and dependent on interactions between farmers, entrepreneurs, extension systems, businesses, financial institutions and policymakers.

Speakers emphasised that the traditional model—where research produces a technology and later seeks to transfer it—no longer fully reflects how innovation unfolds. Instead, co-creation, experimentation and iterative learning are becoming central to the emergence and spread of new practices.

The track highlighted that scaling cannot be reduced to increasing the number of users of a technology or practice. It requires enabling environments: institutional capacity, appropriate incentives, financing, markets, policies and partnerships.

The discussion resonated strongly with the conference's broader reflections on the need to connect research with investment. Research organisations need to engage more effectively with financial institutions and investors, understand different investment models and risk profiles, and explore mechanisms to de-risk innovation.

Without these connections, even promising innovations may struggle to move beyond pilots and contribute to wider systemic transformation.

3.2 Climate Change, Resilience and Adaptation

The second thematic track examined the future of climate resilience, drawing on presentations from Malawi, Zambia, India and other regions.

The discussions made clear that resilience is not a technical challenge alone, but a systemic one shaped by livelihoods, gender relations, nutrition, markets, local institutions, knowledge systems and farmer decision-making.

A particularly compelling contribution came from **Professor Henny Osbahr**, whose research on Andhra Pradesh Community Managed Natural Farming illustrated how climate-sensitive agricultural transformation intersects with livelihood precarity, food insecurity and gendered social change.

Her work demonstrated that resilience cannot be achieved through isolated interventions. It requires approaches that integrate social, economic and environmental dimensions and recognise diverse knowledge systems, including farmer and local knowledge.

Speakers also reflected on the uncertainties that will shape future resilience pathways. Can food systems balance climate adaptation with economic pressures, demographic change and shifting market demands? How will local institutions and governance structures evolve under increasing climate stress? These questions underscored the need for interdisciplinary research and partnerships that support locally led solutions.

3.3 Research–Policy Interfaces and Africa–Europe Collaboration

The third thematic track focused on the evolving relationship between research, policy and implementation, with a particular emphasis on Africa–Europe collaboration.

Presentations covered the International Research Consortium on Food and Nutrition Security, the African Livestock Observatory, TSARA, DeSIRA LIFT+, and efforts to institutionalise foresight through Foresight4Food.

Speakers emphasised that evidence does not automatically translate into policy influence. Effective science–policy engagement requires institutional mechanisms, trusted relationships, communication capacities and sustained interaction between researchers and decision-makers.

The track highlighted examples where longer-term collaboration, rather than short project cycles, enabled more meaningful policy engagement.

A recurring theme was the importance of African leadership and ownership in shaping future research agendas. Participants stressed that partnerships need to move beyond project-based cooperation towards institutionalised collaboration that supports co-creation, joint agenda-setting and capacity strengthening.

In a geopolitical environment where priorities are shifting, Africa–Europe partnerships will need to become more strategic, balanced and resilient.

A Shared Future Across Tracks

Although the three tracks addressed different questions, they converged on several overarching insights.

Participants agreed that fragmentation remains a major constraint on impact and that coordination—across institutions, sectors and regions—is becoming as important as innovation itself.

They emphasised that anticipation needs to become an institutional capability, with foresight embedded in research planning and partnership development.

They highlighted the importance of local ownership and diverse knowledge systems, and the need to design solutions grounded in local realities.

Finally, they underscored that scaling requires far more than research: finance, markets, institutions, incentives and policy frameworks shape whether innovations can be adopted, adapted and expanded. Together, these insights pointed towards a future in which food-system transformation will depend not only on scientific excellence, but also on the ability of networks such as Agrinatura to connect actors, align priorities and support pathways to scale.

4. Plenary Synthesis: From Evidence to Strategic Insight

The thematic tracks were brought together in a plenary session facilitated by **Jim Woodhill of the University of Reading**.

Each thematic track shared one key insight or emerging trend, one critical uncertainty and one implication for research, partnerships or action. The plenary provided an opportunity to step back from the individual themes and consider the broader architecture of change shaping agricultural research, innovation and policy.

Woodhill emphasised that food systems are evolving within a landscape of overlapping fragilities—climate pressures, geopolitical tensions, market volatility, demographic shifts and rapid technological change. These dynamics are not isolated trends but interconnected forces that require research organisations to think systemically and anticipate multiple possible futures rather than rely on linear models of change.

Two discussants added important global perspectives.

Ravi Khetarpal, Executive Director of APAARI, highlighted developments in the Asia-Pacific region and the growing importance of multi-actor innovation and private-sector engagement. The discussion pointed to opportunities for strengthening Europe–Asia-Pacific cooperation through shared platforms for foresight, capacity development and policy dialogue.

Romano De Vivo, Vice-Chair of GFAIR, brought the discussion back to Europe's evolving geopolitical context. He observed that agrifood is no longer as central to Europe's external investment agenda as it once was, with initiatives such as Global Gateway and Team Europe increasingly shaped by strategic concerns around critical raw materials, energy, migration, security and economic resilience. In this context, agricultural research actors need to build larger coalitions and new forms of partnership if they are to remain influential.

Several common messages emerged.

- **Fragmentation is a major constraint.** Innovation and research activity are abundant, but impact is often constrained by fragmentation between institutions, sectors, countries and funding programmes.
- **Coordination is becoming as important as innovation.** The capacity to connect research with policy, finance, markets and implementation increasingly determines whether promising ideas can reach scale.
- **Anticipation needs to become an institutional capability.** Foresight should not be treated as a one-off exercise. Research organisations and networks need mechanisms for continuously monitoring emerging trends, testing assumptions and adjusting priorities.
- **Local ownership matters.** Solutions need to be grounded in local realities and knowledge systems, while partnerships should support genuine participation and shared ownership.
- **Scaling requires more than research.** Finance, markets, institutions, incentives and policy frameworks all shape whether innovations can be adopted, adapted and expanded.

Taken together, the plenary synthesis highlighted a central challenge for Agrinatura: in a world where food systems are shaped by complex and interconnected forces, the network has an opportunity to

strengthen its role not only as a producer and connector of knowledge, but also as a strategic convener capable of connecting actors and helping shape agendas.

5. Choices That Shape Tomorrow

The final panel, moderated by **Isolina Boto, Secretary General of Agrinatura**, brought together perspectives from Latin America's agricultural research and innovation community, China's global food policy leadership, the European private sector and Africa's continental research architecture.

The panel included **Shenggen Fan, Chair Professor at the Academy of Global Food Economics and Policy, China; Eugenia Saini, Executive Secretary of FONTAGRO, Latin America; Paul Lindley OBE, Chancellor of the University of Reading, founder of Ella's Kitchen and long-standing advocate for children's welfare; and Aggrey Agumya, Executive Director of FARA.**

The discussion addressed the central question: **How must research evolve to remain relevant, credible and impactful across multiple possible futures?**

A key message was that the future of food systems will not be shaped by trends alone. It will also be shaped by choices made by governments, research organisations, businesses, civil society and international networks—about what to prioritise, whom to partner with, how to invest and how power and agency are distributed.

- **Research must become more connected to decisions and behaviour**

Participants emphasised that the relevance of research ultimately depends on its ability to inform decisions, influence behaviour and contribute to change. This requires greater attention to the motivations and needs of users, consumers, entrepreneurs and policymakers, rather than relying primarily on supply-driven approaches to research and innovation.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of stronger knowledge exchange between research, academia, government and the private sector.

- **Investment needs to become part of the innovation pathway**

The panel reinforced the message that research organisations need to engage more effectively with finance and investment.

Private-sector perspectives highlighted the importance of developing convincing business cases, understanding consumer expectations and presenting innovations in ways that can attract investment.

Examples discussed in relation to circular economy approaches illustrated how business models can potentially combine commercial opportunities with environmental and societal benefits.

- **Partnerships need to become more equitable and longer term**

The panel reinforced the importance of partnerships that are globally equitable and oriented towards longer-term impact.

This includes moving beyond short-term, project-based relationships towards forms of cooperation that support joint agenda-setting, institutional strengthening and shared ownership.

- **Research remains under-recognised and underfunded**

Participants also noted that research is not always sufficiently valued by policymakers and decision-makers, and that too many innovations remain supply-driven rather than being adapted sufficiently to users' needs. Underfunding remains an important constraint.

- **New capabilities will be required**

Across the discussion, the future research agenda was associated with stronger capacities in:

- foresight and anticipation;
- interdisciplinary research;
- science–policy engagement;
- communication and knowledge brokering;
- entrepreneurship and innovation;
- digital technologies and artificial intelligence;
- partnership development;

- investment and financing;
- monitoring and learning; and
- inclusive and locally led approaches.

The discussion reinforced the importance of strategic networks. In an increasingly fragmented environment, networks can create connections and collective capabilities that individual universities or research organisations cannot generate alone.

For Agrinatura, this highlights the potential value of its ability to connect European research capacity with regional and global networks.

6. Implications and Strategic Orientations for Agrinatura

The conference discussions provide a strong basis for reflecting on Agrinatura's future strategic positioning. They suggest that the network's value should extend beyond facilitating exchanges among members and participating in research projects. In an increasingly fragmented and rapidly changing environment, Agrinatura can add value by connecting knowledge, actors and opportunities across Europe and its international partnerships.

Six strategic orientations emerge from the conference.

1. Strengthen Agrinatura as a strategic network and connector

Agrinatura's distinctive strength lies in its ability to bring together European universities and research organisations and connect them with partners and networks in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The conference suggests an opportunity to strengthen this role by using the network to build broader coalitions around emerging food-system challenges, connect complementary expertise and identify areas where collective action can achieve more than individual institutions acting alone.

This could involve identifying a limited number of strategic themes around which Agrinatura members and partners could develop joint initiatives and contribute to European and international research and policy agendas.

2. Make anticipation and foresight part of Agrinatura's strategic work

The conference emphasised that anticipation can no longer be treated as a one-off exercise. Rapid technological, geopolitical, environmental and economic changes require research organisations and networks to continuously monitor emerging trends, question established assumptions and consider alternative futures.

Agrinatura could therefore develop a more systematic capacity for horizon scanning and foresight, helping its members anticipate changes in food systems, research priorities, financing and international cooperation.

3. Strengthen the research-policy-investment interface

A recurring message was that producing robust evidence is not sufficient to generate impact. Research needs to connect more effectively with policy processes, investment decisions and implementation.

Agrinatura could strengthen its role as an intermediary between research and these wider decision-making processes, including through policy dialogue, accessible evidence and stronger engagement with financial institutions, investors and other actors involved in scaling innovation.

This would require maintaining research integrity while developing new forms of engagement with non-academic actors.

4. Develop more equitable and strategic international partnerships

The conference highlighted the importance of moving beyond short-term, project-based cooperation towards partnerships that are more equitable, demand-driven, co-created and longer term.

For Agrinatura, this means continuing to strengthen relationships with research organisations and networks in Africa, Asia and Latin America, with greater emphasis on local leadership, joint agenda-setting and shared ownership.

The objective should be not simply to expand the number of partnerships, but to develop strategic relationships capable of generating sustained value for all partners.

5. Connect research more effectively with innovation, scaling and private-sector engagement

The conference repeatedly highlighted the gap between generating innovations and achieving impact at scale.

Agrinatura could contribute by encouraging research programmes and partnerships to consider from the outset how innovations might be adopted, adapted, financed, institutionalised and scaled. This requires engagement with actors beyond research, including businesses, entrepreneurs, financial institutions, policymakers and implementation organisations.

Appropriate private-sector engagement could therefore become an increasingly important component of Agrinatura's partnership approach, while safeguarding research independence and public-interest objectives.

6. Build the capabilities required for a changing research environment

The conference highlighted that scientific expertise alone will not be sufficient for researchers and research networks to navigate the emerging environment.

Future-oriented capabilities will increasingly include:

- foresight and anticipation;
- interdisciplinary collaboration;
- science–policy engagement;
- communication and knowledge brokering;
- entrepreneurship and innovation;
- digital technologies and artificial intelligence;
- partnership development;
- investment readiness and financing;
- monitoring, learning and adaptation; and
- inclusive and locally led approaches.

Agrinatura could play a facilitating role by creating opportunities for members and partners to exchange experience, develop skills and build collective capabilities in these areas.

Taken together, these orientations point towards a possible evolution of Agrinatura from a network primarily connecting research organisations towards a **more strategic platform for anticipating change, building partnerships, connecting knowledge with action and shaping future research and innovation agendas**.

7. Possible Follow-up Actions

The conference was primarily a space for reflection and strategic exchange rather than a decision-making process. The following actions are therefore proposed as possible areas for further consideration, rather than commitments arising from the conference.

1. Identify strategic areas for collective action

Identify two or three emerging food-system challenges where Agrinatura members have complementary expertise and where a collective initiative could provide added value.

2. Explore an Agrinatura foresight initiative

Organise a horizon-scanning or foresight exercise involving Agrinatura members and selected international partners to identify emerging trends, risks and opportunities affecting food systems and research.

3. Develop a research–policy dialogue mechanism

Explore the development of an Agrinatura research–policy dialogue series, bringing together researchers, policymakers and other relevant stakeholders around selected emerging issues.

4. Explore stronger links with investment and private-sector actors

Assess opportunities for Agrinatura and its members to engage with businesses, investors and development finance institutions around innovation scaling, investment readiness and the development of appropriate public–private partnerships.

5. Strengthen strategic international partnerships

Build on the relationships developed through the conference and other Agrinatura activities to identify potential longer-term strategic partnerships with research networks and organisations in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

6. Identify opportunities for joint initiatives and funding

Monitor emerging European and international research, innovation and investment priorities and identify opportunities where Agrinatura members could develop collective initiatives rather than responding separately to funding opportunities.

7. Consider how the conference messages can inform Agrinatura's strategic planning

Use the conference findings as an input to the development of Agrinatura's future work programme and longer-term strategic positioning, including consideration of the network's distinctive added value and the areas where collective action should be prioritised.

8. Conclusion

The Agrinatura 2026 Conference demonstrated the value of bringing together diverse perspectives to think collectively about the future of food systems and the future of research.

The discussions showed that food systems are entering a period of profound transformation in which climate change, geopolitics, technology, markets, finance, biodiversity and social change are increasingly interconnected.

In this environment, research must evolve. It needs to be more anticipatory, interdisciplinary, collaborative and connected to policy and practice. It must engage with a broader range of actors and pay greater attention to how innovations are financed, adopted and scaled.

The conference also highlighted that partnerships themselves need to evolve. Stronger coordination, local ownership, equitable relationships and longer-term collaboration will be essential if research is to contribute meaningfully to food-system transformation.

For Agrinatura, the conference provides a strong basis for reflecting on a strengthened strategic role. The network's strength lies in its collective knowledge, its European research base and its ability to connect institutions and people across regions and disciplines.

Its future contribution can therefore extend beyond facilitating collaboration among members. Agrinatura can help anticipate change, connect knowledge with action, build strategic partnerships and contribute to shaping the research and innovation agendas that will influence future food systems.

The central message emerging from the conference can be summarised as follows:

The future of food systems will depend not only on the innovations we generate, but on our capacity to connect science, policy, investment, institutions and society around shared pathways for change.

This is both a challenge and an opportunity for Agrinatura.

Annex: Conference Programme



Agrinatura 2026 Conference

Anticipating Change and the Role of Research in Shaping Future Food Systems

Hosted by the University of Reading, United Kingdom

26-27 May 2026

[Agriculture Building](#), Whiteknights Road, Earley, Reading 6BU, England

Venue: Nike Lecture Theatre in the Agriculture building

PROGRAMME

About the Conference

The conference will explore sequentially:

- What changes are already reshaping food systems;
- What futures are emerging and which transformation pathways are plausible;
- What this means for research, partnerships and action.

In a context marked by climate change, geopolitical tensions, biodiversity loss and shifting global markets, food systems are undergoing profound and uncertain transformations. These dynamics call for renewed approaches to research, collaboration and knowledge production.

At the centre of the discussions will be the evolving and strategic role of Research & Innovation (R&I) and Education in shaping equitable and resilient food systems. Particular attention will be given to the role of Agrinatura in strengthening European and North–South partnerships, while fostering broader international collaboration across science, policy and practice.

The conference will bring together researchers, academics, students, policymakers and development practitioners to foster dialogue across disciplines and sectors. It will combine plenary sessions, panel discussions, thematic tracks and interactive formats such as poster sessions to encourage inclusive and participatory exchanges.

A key feature of the conference is its forward-looking approach, combining foresight and participatory discussions to better understand emerging trends, anticipate future challenges and inform strategic choices for food systems transformation. Participants will collectively reflect on possible futures and translate these into strategic orientations for research and partnerships.

Beyond technical and economic dimensions, the conference will also address the social, cultural and behavioural aspects of food systems transformation, including the role of local knowledge, consumption patterns and societal values, including gender equity.

The conference aims to generate strategic insights and practical orientations to inform future research agendas, strengthen international partnerships and enhance the global impact of research and innovation. Exchanges will also contribute to shaping Agrinatura's strategic direction and to defining priorities for future research and partnerships.

Organizing Committee:

For the University of Reading: Andrew Ainslie, Chair of the Conference Organising Collective.

For Agrinatura: Ioannis Dimitriou, President; Susanna Rokka, Vice-President; Isolina Boto, Secretary-General..

Tuesday 26 th May 2026		
Time	Session	Speaker
13:30 – 14:00	Registration	
14:00 – 14:15	Opening session	Andrew Ainslie, Chair of the Conference Organising Collective Parveen Yaqoob OBE, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation, University of Reading Ioannis Dimitriou, President, Agrinatura
14:15 – 14:45	Session 1 - Signals of change Reading the signals: emerging transformations in global food systems This session will examine weak signals, trends and disruptions already reshaping food systems and research agendas. The objective is to identify key uncertainties and drivers that will frame the rest of the conference.	Leonard Mizzi , Adviser Food Systems, European Commission, DG INTPA
14:45 – 16:30	Roundtable/panel discussion Moderated discussion with 4–5 lightning interventions bringing different perspectives and interaction with the audience. Short synthesis of emerging signals and uncertainties to guide Day 2 discussions. <i>Moderator: Ioannis Dimitriou, Agrinatura</i>	Patrick Caron, President of Agropolis, CGIAR Integrated Partnership Board Patrick Okori, Executive Secretary, RUFORUM Petronella Chaminuka, Executive Manager Research Support & Coordination Agricultural Research Council, South Africa Katja Vuori, Chief Executive Officer Agricord
16:30 – 17:30	Coffee break and poster session /interactive sessions	Poster session in Room 1L08
17:30 for 18:00	Buffet supper in the Meadow Suite	

Wednesday 27 th May 2026		
Time	Session 2: Futures in motion <i>Exploring scenarios for food systems transformation</i>	This session moves from signals to plausible futures. It will explore how different trends might interact between 2035 and 2050 and what this implies for research and partnerships.
9:00 – 11:00	Thematic track 1: Multi-actor innovation and private sector engagement <i>Moderator: Jelle Maas, WUR</i>	
	The role of seed-aid in a protracted crisis context: A localization strategy from South Sudan.	Herrington K. et al.
	Rural entrepreneurship and multi-actor innovation in Benin's agri-food systems.	BioViva MJE et al.

	The International Innovation Hub (IIH).	Broin et al.
	Drivers of transformation in Syrian agriculture since 2000 and future pathways towards 2050.	Alhamada et al.
	Woody plant encroachment in southern Africa: implication for livestock production	Tjelele et al.
	Modern arable and diverse ley farming systems can increase soil organic matter faster than global targets	Gantlett, R.
	Makerspace Education for Hybrid Agricultural Energy Systems in Uganda	Rafat Al Afif et al.
	Thematic track 2: Climate change, resilience, and adaptation <i>Moderator: Emelie Zonabend, SLU</i>	
	Shifting agricultural practices and crops can contribute to food security and climate resilience: example of soy-maize research and capacity building in Malawi and Zambia.	Baron J. et al.
	Addressing livelihood precarity, food insecurity and gendered social change through natural farming in dryland India: can Andhra Pradesh Community-managed Natural Farming deliver transformative climate-sensitive agrifood systems?	Osbahr H. et al.
	Farmer Centred Research for Improving the Adoption of Indigenous Grains in Local Production Systems.	Ndegwa H. Maina
	Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on physical and economic access to food in developed countries: What can we learn from the EU countries?	Pawlak K.
	Researchers in Sustainability Transformation.	Rosengren L. and Sell M.
	Cellular Agriculture and Food Futures: Beyond Consumer Acceptance.	Nkobou A.
	Thematic track 3: Research-policy interfaces, and Africa-Europe collaboration <i>Moderator: Sylvain Perret, Agrinatura</i>	
	The International Research Consortium on Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (IRC-FNSSA): from consolidation to implementation.	Annor Frempong I. et al.
	The impact of USAID's shutdown in South Sudan and implications for the transformation of fragile agri-food system.	Deng Chol D. et al.
	Bridging Science and Policy for Food System Change.	Rokka S.
	The African Livestock Observatory.	Ainslie A.
	The TSARA initiative	Schill M.
	The DeSIRA LIFT+ Service Facility.	Dang Van C. et al.
	Institutionalising Foresight for Food Systems Change: Experience and Lessons from Foresight4Food.	Woodhill J.
11:00 – 11:30	Coffee break and poster session	

11:30 – 12:30	Plenary session Pitch from thematic tracks discussions. This session will synthesise and prioritise key insights emerging from the thematic tracks. Each track will deliver a short, structured pitch addressing: - One key insight or emerging trend - One critical uncertainty - One implication for research, partnerships or action The session will generate a concise set of strategic insights to inform the final panel discussion and overall conference conclusions.	Facilitator: <i>Jim Woodhill, University of Reading</i> <i>Contributors to reflection and action</i> Ravi Khetarpal , Executive Director, APAARI Romano De Vivo , Vice-Chair, GFAIR
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch	
13:30 – 15:00	Session 3: Choices that shape tomorrow Panel discussion <i>From scenarios to strategy: the evolving role of research and partnerships</i> Building on previous discussions, this plenary session will translate foresight insights into strategic choices for research institutions, universities and networks such as Agrinatura. Guiding question: How must research evolve to remain relevant, credible and impactful across multiple possible futures? <i>Moderator: Isolina Boto, Agrinatura</i>	Shenggen Fan , Chair Professor, Academy of Global Food Economics and Policy, China Eugenia Saini , Executive Secretary, FONTAGRO, Latin America Paul Lindley OBE , Chancellor of the University of Reading, founder of Ella's Kitchen and children's welfare campaigner Aggrey Agumya , Executive Director, FARA
15:00 – 15:15	Key takeaways and next steps for Agrinatura Closure	Ioannis Dimitriou, President, Agrinatura
15:30 – 17:30	Post-conference CEA-FIRST session <i>Navigating the Food Systems Polycrisis: Anticipating Future Research Priorities through Africa–Europe Partnerships</i>	CEA-FIRST Consortium

Posters

Title	Authors
Do Experts' Opinions Matter in Resilience Measurement? Evidence from Expert Elicitation and Non-Additive Aggregation	Aminu R, Bardsley N, Balcombe K
Building knowledge systems for regenerative agriculture to achieve agricultural sustainability goals: Lessons from the KIARA project	Cardey S
Advancing Sustainable Agricultural Value Chains through Strengthening Transdisciplinary Skills and Cooperation in East African Doctoral Education.	Chaloupkova P
Farming energy: Assessing the impact of integrating agriculture and renewable energy production on farm management practices	Dickins T
Using Foresight to Inform Climate Resilience Initiatives in Uganda	Galabuzi J
Co-designing effective pollinator friendly food labelling	Kerry B
Barriers to Adoption of Systems of Rice Intensification with reference to the impacts of gender inequality on female rice farmers in Liberia	Khan M
Working in partnership. How can farmers best inform peer-reviewed science, and scientists best inform farmers?	Mauchline, A.
The impacts of Lopholaena coriifolia encroachment on grassland vegetation along a topographical gradient	Maziko Y, Monegi P, Tjelele J
Implication of fire as a post-thinning tool for savanna understorey vegetation and ecosystem structure	Monegi P et al.
Co-Creating Business Cases for Nutrient-Dense Value Chains: A Multi-Actor Innovation Model from Uganda	Nangosha E, Namboze J, Sebatta C, Bukenya R, Sengooba P, Kikomeko PK, Kansabe S, Aguma L, Obot N, Yossa ID
Sustainability Linkages and the Trade Effects of Technical Non-Tariff Measures: Empirical Evidence from Global Palm Oil Sector	Peci J
Scenarios for sustainable livestock futures in Europe	Staton T and Smith L
The effect of deficit irrigation on strawberry propagation	Swann W and Hadley P
Who's milking the system?	Szkolnicka W
From Participation to Co-Leadership: Advancing Youth and Gender Inclusion in Agricultural Research and Innovation through YPARD	Tesdall, G, Mandal, T, Acquaye, K, and Maiga, M.