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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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Replacement of Contentious Inputs in Organic Farming Systems (RELACS) – a comprehensive Horizon 2020 project

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Organic farmers adhere to high standards in producing quality food while protecting the environment. However, organic farming needs to improve continuously to keep meeting its ambitious objectives. The project 'Replacement of Contentious Inputs in Organic Farming Systems' (RELACS) will foster the development and adoption of cost-efficient and environmentally safe tools and technologies to further reduce the use of external inputs on organic farms across Europe as well as in Non EU Mediterranean countries. Project partners will provide scientific support to develop fair and implementable EU rules to improve current practices in organic farming. Farm advisory networks in 11 European countries will reach out to farmers to ensure effective dissemination and adoption of the tools and techniques.

RELACS builds on results of previous research projects and takes far-advanced solutions forward. This will be brought about by

(i) taking forward the development of four most advanced copper alternatives, integrate these with agronomic preventive measures and develop locally adapted plant protection strategies for major crops

(ii) developing and integrating the three most advanced alternatives to mineral (paraffin) oil into pest control strategies, which take into consideration existing agronomic and biocontrol approaches, in the Mediterranean regions

(iii) assessing acceptable sources of fertilizers from recycling technologies and matching regional needs with available nutrient sources

(iv) developing integrated endoparasite control strategies for ruminants by exploiting complementary direct and preventive tools based on the use of bioactive feed plants and a biocontrol agent

(v) reducing dependency on antibiotic use in dairy cows by transferring preventive Animal Health and Welfare Planning protocols and by refining farmers' experience of use of essential oils for direct mastitis control

(vi) exploring the potential for reduction of synthetic Vitamins E and B2 usage by revising and validating the requirement definitions in livestock diets and by development of GMO-free vitamin-producing yeast strains.

The products and management practices will be evaluated in different conditions in the EU and Mediterranean third countries. RELACS will develop implementation roadmaps by analysis of the socio-economic conditions required for acceptance and adoption of alternatives and provide scientific support for relevant EU policies to develop fair, reliable and implementable rules. Rapid dissemination and adoption of techniques along the food value chain will be achieved via established dissemination structures in 12 European countries.

The project was developed by involving actors from research, farming, advisory services and industry from the very start hence implementing a truly multi-actor approach. RELACS has 29 direct and third party partners from 13 countries and is coordinated by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) in Switzerland.