**Hellenic Republic**



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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Growing the seeds of innovation at the Agricultural University of Athens.**

On Wednesday, December 20 2023, an event was held at the Agricultural University of Athens, entitiled: “Growing the seeds of innovation”, in collaboration with Industry Dispruptors Game Changers, under the framework of cooperation as regional ΕIT FOOD Hub in Greece. The Rectorate Authorities have participated actively into that action, thus taking into serious account the special role of the Vice Rector for Research, Finance and Development, Mr. Thomas Bartzanas, Professor and the engagement of the Vice Rector for the European University, Internationalization and Student Affairs, Ms. Helen Miliou, Professor, through their key positions on the issues raised.

At the outset of the Conference, the Minister of Rural Development and Food, Mr. Eleutherios Agkenakes, has highlighted by his speech the necessity for the universal integration of new technologies and innovation into the agrifood sector, stating that such an undertaking proves to be of vital importance, since it makes a contribution to the reduction of production costs, by means of digitalizing all the procedures, inasmuch optimizing inputs, towards the production of high quality foods, while leading at the same time to decreasing the environmental footprint and consequently contribute to climate change mitigation”. The Minister has briefly presented the new actions of innovation and digital technologies which are promoted through the Common Agricultural Policy – CAP, emphasizing the significance of education and the transfer of knowledge to the production chain, as well as praising the prominent role the Agricultural University of Athens may have, regarding these actions.

 The Vice Rector for Research, Finance and Development of the Agricultural University of Athens and Chair of the Governing Board of Smart Agro Hub, Mr. Thomas Bartzanas, highlighted the three main pillars – challenges, as far as the agricultural sector is concerned, which have actually constituted the main subject areas of the Workshop organized, namely, the use of digital technologies, the assessment of sustainability impact throughout the production chain, besides their connection with the production of quality food with a competitive advantage. In addition, the Vice Rector has laid emphasis on the contribution of the Agricultural University of Athens, as a key supporter in all projects and schemes implemented on the part of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food, with a view to providing a tight correlation between innovation and production, as well as the pertinent knowledge transfer.

Furthermore, at the opening of the Conference, the internal member of the Governing Board of the Agricultural University of Athens, Mr. Dimitrios Tsitsigiannis, Professor, has extended his speech and in the course of the Conference, the Vice Rector for the European University, Internationalization and Student Affairs, Ms. Helen Miliou, along with Mr. Iordanis Chatzipavlidis, the Managing Director of the Property Management and Development Company of the Agricultural University of Athens, have taken part by making their meaningful interventions.

The Head of EIT FOOD HUB Greece and co-founder of Industry Disruptors Game Changers, Mr. Michalis Stangos, has mentioned the function of ΕΙΤ FOOD at both the existing opportunities for achieving synergies and also the objectives to be fulfilled by the company Smart Agro Hub, established by the Agricultural University of Athens and ten (10) Agrotechnology companies, stressing the creation of an Organization that takes the lead, building bridges for fostering potential partnerships among the academic – research knowledge, the products and services of Agrotechnology companies with the ultimate goal of attaining the most effective and efficient incorporation and use by the Greek farmer.

The General Director of Smart Agro Hub, Mr. Fotis Chatzipapadopoulos has referred to the advantages offered by smart agriculture, which applies data from field

and microclimatic conditions, stressing the importance of proper interpretation and analysis of the relevant data, in a round table discussion with Mr. Dimitrios Tsesmelis, Director of Technology Products and Services - NEUROPUBLIC S.A and Mr. Vlasis Tsezos, Chief Executive Officer at Agritrack, under the coordination of Mr. Spyros Fountas, Professor at the Agricultural University of Athens.

 The Vice Rector for Research, Finance and Development of the Agricultural Univeristy of Athens, Mr. Thomas Bartzanas, has coordinated the following debate on sustainability and resource savings into which, Ms. Elena Koukouna, Senior Sustainability & LCA Analyst in Smart Agro Hub S.A. has taken part, featuring the service of sustainability analysis, through a life-cycle analysis of Smart Agro Hub, accompanied by Ms. Maria-Eleni Dimitrakopoulou, Research Project Manager at Agroknow company, having considered FoodAcai, in addition to the impact of Artificial Intelligence in the primary sector.

 In the next section, the Deputy Mayor of Development Planning, Digital Transformation, Integrated Rural Development & Tourism of the Municipality of Heraklion, Mr. Giorgos Sisamakis in discussion with Mr. Aris Kefalogiannis, an innovator & entrepreneur in fine foods and VP of EJ Gourmet, have both mentioned the uniqueness of the Cretan Cuisine and the emergence of Heraklion as a Creative UNESCO's City of Gastronomy, as well as the added value being the result brought by such a development in the tourism product of the region, besides the need for enterprises to support and embrace innovation.

In parallel to the Conference, the “Smart Agro Lab Start Up Selection took place, entitled: from the business idea to the Εntrepreneurship Agribooster Program”, namely the process for the selection of start ups which are to take part in Smart Agro Lab, being the incubator for innovative business initiative in the agri-food sector, the final evaluation of which is to be completed in the days ahead.

The main conclusion of that event with reference to the journey of innovation,

based on the Farm to Fork strategy, is summarized in coupling technological-digital solutions that promote sustainability and provide benefits for consumers and producers, upgrading the agri-food industry.