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Bimonthly Updates

Ethiopian Sustainable Food Systems and Agroecology Consortium Bimonthly Newsletter



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ESFSAC
Ethiopian Sustainable Food Systems and Agroecology Consortium

Editorial Message

Welcome to the August 2026 edition newsletter of our bimonthly newsletter.

In this edition, we highlight how knowledge-sharing, youth leadership and locally driven action are strengthening resilient and sustainable food systems across Ethiopia and Africa. We share practical, people-centred stories that demonstrate how young people, communities and partners are transforming ideas into meaningful action through agroecology, innovation and collaboration.

We hope these stories will inspire reflection, learning and collective action. As you read, we invite you to consider how the lessons and experiences presented can inform your own work, strengthen partnerships and encourage greater investment in youth-led food-system solutions. Together, we can build inclusive, equitable and resilient food systems that benefit both people and the planet.

As ESFSAC, we remain committed to working together with our partners, communities, and stakeholders. We believe that by sharing knowledge and supporting local best practices, we can build better food systems for everyone.

Warm regards,
ESFSAC Team

Jimma Agroforestry Practices

Lessons from Jimma: Where Coffee Grows Beneath the Forest

Morning arrives gently beneath Jimma's green canopy. Sunlight passes through the branches of tall indigenous trees and falls softly on coffee plants growing below. Fruit trees, food crops and livestock form part of the same landscape. Birds move through the branches, fallen leaves cover the ground, and farmers begin their daily work. Here, trees are not obstacles to farming they are essential partners in it.

Farmers in Jimma are responding to declining soil fertility, unpredictable rainfall, rising temperatures and increasing pressure on farmland. Their answer can be seen in the way they bring trees, crops and livestock together. Tall trees provide shade and protect coffee shrubs from excessive heat. The fallen leaves decompose and enrich the soil, while their roots help reduce erosion and retain soil moisture. Some trees also provide fruit, animal feed, fuelwood, timber and other products that families can use or sell.

During its best-practice documentation visit, ESFSAC team walked through these farms and listened to the people who have shaped and sustained them. The team observed that successful agroforestry is not simply about having many trees on a farm. It is about creating the right relationships between them and harvest products throughout the year. Farmers carefully select useful species, manage spacing and prune branches so that annual crops underneath receive enough shade, sunlight and airflow.

"The tall trees provide more than shade to our coffee. They feed the soil, enhance soil moisture content, support our family and help protect the farm soil for the next generation." responded Abba Jabel - who is an agroforestry farmer from Jimma.



Agroforestry farm from study kebele, where coffee, enset, banana, others and beehives are integrated

A further strength of these farms is the way farmers have adapted agroforestry to their own needs and local conditions. Rather than following a fixed model, they draw on generations of indigenous knowledge to decide which trees to retain, which crops to grow beneath them and how to manage the available space. This practical knowledge allows the farm to produce food and income while maintaining the ecological functions that sustain it. In this way, agroforestry becomes more than a farming technique, it is a way of managing the land that connects household wellbeing with the health of the wider ecosystem.

The most powerful lesson from Jimma is maintaining layers of diversity. Instead of relying on one crop as source of food or income, families obtain different benefits from coffee, fruits, food crops, livestock and multipurpose trees. When one product performs poorly, another may help the household manage the loss. At the same time, the layered farms provide habitats for birds, insects and other living organisms that keep the ecosystem healthy.

ESFSAC recognized this carefully managed, multilayered farming system as a best agroecological practice with valuable lessons for other areas. Its strength lies not in one particular tree or food crop as such, but in the way farmers purposely design and manage the entire farm as an interconnected living system. Communities seeking to adapt the practice should, therefore, select species and combinations suited to their local context: soil, climate, available land size and livelihood priorities rather than copying Jimma's model exactly.

As the afternoon light fades beneath the canopy, one message remains clear: in Jimma, farmers are not choosing between forests and food production. They are showing how the two can grow together, one supporting the other. By documenting and sharing the experience from Jimma agroforestry, ESFSAC team hopes to promote farmer-to-farmer learning and encourage extension service providers, researchers and decision-makers to recognize, strengthen and scale locally rooted agroforestry practices. These are critical to ensure sustainable food production and family well-being.

Workshop Recap: Familiarizing Stakeholders with the National Agroecology Strategy (2026–2040): A Pathway to Sustainable Food Systems

On 17 June 2026, a diverse group of stakeholders gathered in Addis Ababa around a shared question: **How can Ethiopia turn its National Agroecology Strategy into meaningful action?** Organized by the Ethiopian Sustainable Food Systems and Agroecology Consortium (ESFSAC) in collaboration with Land for Life Ethiopia, the stakeholder familiarization workshop brought together participants from government and regional institutions, civil society, research and academia, development partners, the private sector, youth-led organizations, women's networks and the media. The workshop provided an important opportunity to explore the newly launched National Agroecology Strategy for Food System Transformation (2026–2040), deepen understanding of its objectives and implementation mechanisms, and begin building the partnerships needed to translate its vision into practice.

At the heart of the discussions was a recognition that agroecology is more than a set of farming techniques—it is a pathway toward a more sustainable, resilient, inclusive and nutrition-sensitive food system. The National Agroecology Strategy responds to interconnected challenges including soil degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss, and food and nutrition insecurity, with a vision for 2040 centered on empowered communities, restored ecosystems, climate resilience and equitable access to resources.

Opening the workshop, Dr. Bayush Tsegaye, Executive Director of ESFSAC, emphasized that food security must go beyond production volumes to ensure safe, nutritious and sustainably produced diets. Diversity based farming is key to build healthy generation. The Strategy therefore brings together six interconnected objectives spanning resilient agricultural practices, knowledge and research, inclusive markets, policy and governance, social inclusion, and healthy diets.

The expert panel during the event highlighted the need for healthy ecosystems, resilient communities and locally relevant solutions, emphasizing nutrition, soil health, integrated pest management, local value chains, and youth- and women-led enterprises. Participants also stressed putting farmers and communities at the center by integrating indigenous knowledge with science, research and education. Moving the Strategy into action will require stronger coordination, clear institutional roles and sustainable financing, supported by public-private partnerships and innovative funding. These priorities were reinforced through commitments to knowledge documentation and exchange, curriculum development, biodiversity conservation, postgraduate training and wider public awareness.

Key Highlights

- **Healthy ecosystems, healthy foods:** Agroecology links soil health, nutrition, biodiversity and resilient food systems.
- **Farmers at the center:** Policy and strategy formations should put farmers at the center.
- **From strategy to action:** Coordination, clear roles and sustainable financing are essential to bring the starategy into meaningful action.

The workshop was, therefore, more than a familiarization exercise, it was a step toward building a collective ownership of Ethiopia's agroecological transition. The National Agroecology Strategy provides a long-term roadmap to 2040, but its success will depend on sustained collaboration among government, researchers, academia, civil society, farmers, development partners, businesses, youth, women and communities.



Participants of the workshop

Campaign Feature: Ethiopia's Green Legacy Tree Planting Day 2026

Ethiopia's Green Legacy Initiative (GLI), initiated by Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed, has grown into a powerful national movement for restoring degraded landscapes, protecting biodiversity and strengthening resilience to climate and environmental pressures. Since its launch in 2019, the initiative has brought together citizens, institutions, civil society organizations and partners around a shared commitment: to restore the ecosystems that sustain communities, livelihoods and food production.

On the 3rd of August 2026, millions of Ethiopians began gathering early morning across cities, towns, villages, farms, schools, and public institutions with a single purpose – to plant 800 million tree seedlings in a single day. By planting 805.3 million seedlings, Ethiopians showcased their commitment for collective action. At a time when the world is confronted with intensifying climate change, accelerating land degradation, and growing biodiversity loss, Ethiopia's campaign offers a striking example of environmental action carried out at extraordinary scale. Ethiopia also shared seedlings, technical experience, and restoration practices with other African nations, arguing that environmental degradation, desertification, and climate vulnerability require continental solutions.

ESFSAC joined the team of Civil Society Organizations coordinated by the Population, Health and Environment (PHE) Ethiopia Consortium and who planted tree seedlings at Gara Gatira Mountain.



Participants planting seedlings during the national Green Legacy Campaign Day

The activity brought together 38 civil society organizations, which collectively planted 4,200 tree seedlings—exceeding the initial target of 3,000 seedlings. The action demonstrated the power of collective effort and the important role of civil society in advancing Ethiopia's environmental restoration agenda.

For ESFSAC, participation in the Green Legacy Initiative reflects the strong connection between healthy ecosystems and sustainable food systems. The lasting impact of Green Legacy depends on protecting, nurturing and monitoring seedlings so that they survive and grow into healthy trees. As Dr. Bayush Tsegaye, Executive Director of ESFSAC, emphasized, "Planting a seedling is an act of hope, but protecting it until it becomes a healthy tree is our shared responsibility." Sustained community involvement and collective care will be essential to turning today's planting into tomorrow's environmental gains. The tree seedlings planted today are more than a number—they represent a shared investment in healthier landscapes, stronger communities and a greener future for generations to come. Planting creates the opportunity; collective care sustains the legacy.



Participants of the national Green Legacy Campaign Day

"Planting a seedling is only the begining; nurturing it into a thriving tree is where the real legacy begins."

Youth Driving Agroecological Entreprenuership

Meet Kirubel Haileselassie, the previous winner of the youth in agroecology competition



Kirubel Haileselassie

ESFSAC: : Kirbuel, please introduce yourself and tell our readers about your agroecology enterprise.

Kirubel: For those who may not know me, my name is Kirubel Haileselassie, and I'm the prize winner of the 2025 Youth in Agroecology Startup Competition. I competed representing **Kirubel and Friends Farm Enterprise**, a venture I co-founded with my friends.

ESFSAC: What agroecological principles and practices are at the heart of your business?

Kirubel: At the heart of everything we do is a simple belief: **farming should work with nature, not against it**. On our farm, we weave together growing vegetables, fruit trees, and beekeeping in a way that support one another - turning farm organic waste into rich soil, creating a thriving habitat for local bees. But we didn't want to stop at our own farm gate. We've brought that same commitment to care, efficiency and sustainability into our aggregation work, partnering with local, urban and peri-urban growers to champion agroecologically produced food. By cutting down food miles, reducing post-harvest waste and keeping things local, we're building a food hub that feeds our community while giving back to the earth.

ESFSAC: How has ESFSAC's recognition, mentorship and network support contributed to your development as a youth agroecology entrepreneur (start-up)?

Kirubel: The support from ESFSAC has been a game-changer for us. It went far beyond the initial award. The recognition gave us immense credibility, which was crucial for a youth-led start-up trying to prove its model. This credibility opened doors that were previously closed. For instance, we were able to build collaborations with institutions that support the agriculture sector through low-interest loans.

The mentorship, networking opportunity not only brought visibility, but also built our confidence to boldly apply and succeed in other calls, helping us refine our strategy and pursue our vision.

ESFSAC: Take us back to the award winning moment — what did it mean to have your enterprise recognized through the ESFSAC Youth Competition 2025?

Kirubel: Winning the 2025 ESFSAC's Youth Agroecology Competition felt like an incredible validation of our startup and it affirmed our team to stand firmly to meet our vision. When they called our name, it wasn't just a personal victory, it was a powerful confirmation that youth-led, sustainable agriculture matters and that our circular food hub model is heading in the right direction. That recognition brought a wave of momentum, giving us the institutional confidence to scale up our aggregation work, connect more local farmers to reliable markets, and prove that agroecology is the future of food.

ESFSAC: Every entrepreneurial journey has challenges. What has been your biggest obstacle, and how did you respond to it?

Kirubel: As many startups, our biggest obstacle was securing finance and managing cash flow to support our growth. To respond, we've taken a multi-pronged approach. We used the ESFSAC's award money, investing in critical inputs and business formalization to build a stronger foundation. We have actively pursued collaborations that offer low-interest loans and applied to other entrepreneurship support programs. Furthermore, we've refined our business plan to be more financially robust, focusing on building reliable and pre-arranged supply linkages.

ESFSAC: Finally, what practical advice would you give to this year's youth finalists who want to turn their agroecology ideas into successful and sustainable enterprises?

Kirubel: My advice is, **believe in your vision** and don't be scared to formalize it. Getting our enterprise registered was a critical step that helped us build trust with partners and opened doors to secure funding. Second, **be persistent and leverage every opportunity**. Use competitions like this not just for the prize money, but for building your visibility, getting valuable feedbacks, and for networking. Apply to every relevant program, attend networking events and connect with every expert you can. Finally, **be practical and plan for financial sustainability**. A great agroecological idea must also be a good business.

Conclusion: Kirubel's journey is a testament to strong commitment and devotion. His work challenges the status quo, transforming the business landscape, creating platforms that empower youth and women, and build spaces that encourages youth creativity and innovation.

Haramaya University
—Building the Basis for Development—

Congratulations to Haramaya University

A Milestone for Agroecology

Haramaya University strengthens its commitment to agroecology through the integration of its Agroecology Innovation and Demonstration Hub with the Africa Centre of Excellence (ACE) for Climate Smart Agriculture and Biodiversity Conservation.

A new chapter has opened for agroecology in Ethiopia as Haramaya University takes a significant step toward institutionalizing agroecology within its research, education, and community outreach. The integration of the Agroecology Innovation and Demonstration Hub with the Africa Centre of Excellence for Climate Smart Agriculture and Biodiversity Conservation is expected to strengthen the University's research, teaching, outreach activities locally, and its international engagement.

The initiative recognizes the complementary contributions of agroecology and climate-smart agriculture in addressing pressing agricultural and climate challenges. These include improving soil health, conserving biodiversity, reducing input costs and greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening food and nutrition security, improving resource and waste management, and building the resilience of vulnerable farming communities.

The integration also creates an opportunity to strengthen the link between science and farmers' knowledge and experience sharing. By testing and documenting agroecological practices and connecting research with the realities of farming communities, Haramaya University can contribute to ensuring that knowledge generated through research translates into practical actionable solutions. At the same time, farmers' experiences and needs can inform research, teaching, innovation, and policy dialogue.

Going forward, aligning academic programs, research, and community outreach with agroecological principles will be essential. The University's leadership has expressed its commitment to supporting this transition and maximizing the potential of the Hub by demarcating nearly 6 ha of land. The hub will be space for research, demonstration, learning, innovation, and knowledge exchange for university students, researchers, youth, women and other partners.

As an African Centre of Excellence, Haramaya University is well positioned to become a leading platform for advancing agroecology, climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable food systems in Ethiopia. The on-going MSc program on Agroecology and Food Systems has laid the foundation for this milestone.

ESFSAC warmly congratulates Haramaya University, its leadership, faculty, researchers, students, and partners on this important achievement. We look forward to stronger collaboration and continued leadership from the University in advancing inclusive, resilient, and sustainable food systems.



High level Decision-makers of the University during the final consultative meeting

Food Culture : Traditional Dish From South Africa

A taste of South Africa - Umngqusho

Umngqusho is a traditional *Xhosa* dish from South Africa. It is made mainly from samp (crushed dried maize/corn) and beans. It has been an important staple food in the communities and is valued because it is filling, nutritious, and relatively inexpensive. Umngqusho is also famously associated with former South African president **Nelson Mandela**, who mentioned it as one of his favourite foods.



Key Ingredients

- 2 cups dried samp
- 1 cup dried sugar beans or other dried beans
- 5–6 cups water
- 1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- 1 small onion, finely chopped (optional)
- 1–2 tablespoons cooking oil (optional)

Instructions

1. **Soak the samp and beans:** Rinse them thoroughly and place them in separate bowls. Cover with plenty of water and soak overnight. This helps them cook faster and become tender.
2. **Drain and rinse:** The next day, drain the soaking water and rinse the samp and beans.
3. **Cook the beans:** Put the beans in a large pot with fresh water. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for about 45–60 minutes, or until they begin to soften.
4. **Add the samp:** Add the samp to the pot and add enough water to keep everything covered. Continue cooking over low to medium heat for approximately 1–2 hours, stirring occasionally.
5. **Check the texture:** The samp and beans should be soft and tender. Add more hot water during cooking if the pot becomes too dry.
6. **Seasoning:** Add salt toward the end of cooking. You can also fry the chopped onion in a little oil and stir it into the umngqusho.
7. **Finish with butter:** Stir in the butter or margarine for a richer, creamier flavour.
8. **Serve:** Serve hot as a main dish or side dish. It can be eaten on its own or accompanied by meat or vegetables.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Get ready for a series of exciting upcoming events that will bring together experts, policy makers, and stakeholders to advance sustainable food systems.

- **Event Title:** Youth in Agroecology Startup Competition Awarding Event organized by The Ethiopian Sustainable Food Systems and Agroecology Consortium.
  Date & Place of Event: 4 September 2026 at BlueSpace, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

- **Event Title:** Continental Convening on strengthening African civil society climate action on food systems and agriculture towards COP32.
  Date & Place of Event: 7- 9 September 2026, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

- **Event Title:** National Agroecology Conference with a theme: Agroecology for Environmental Health, Sustainable Food Systems and Climate Resilience.
  Date & Place of Event: 29 October 2026, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Launch of the My Food is African: Volume 2 — How Citizens Are Reclaiming African Food Systems.



Have you discovered Volume 2 of My Food Is African yet?

This powerful new Barefoot Guide was launched on 26 May 2026, it brings together voices from across Africa to explore how citizens, farmers, traders, journalists, activists, and communities are reclaiming their food systems—from local markets and school gardens to national parliaments and global policy spaces. Building on Volume 1, it goes beyond what we eat to ask who controls our food, who benefits, and what happens when citizens take back their power. Read more...

We are excited to invite you to be featured in our upcoming October edition of ESFSAC's newsletter. If you have any projects, achievements or announcements you'd like to share, please send us your content by mid-October. This is a wonderful opportunity to showcase your work. For submissions or inquiries, feel free to contact us or email your content to: contact.esfsac@gmail.com / newsletter@esfsac-ethiopia.org. We look forward to featuring your highlights.

Ethiopian Sustainable Food Systems and Agroecology Consortium (ESFSAC)

Consortium Members

- MELCA Ethiopia
- Land for Life Ethiopia
- PELUM Ethiopia
- Enhanced Rural Self-Help Association
- Pesticide Action Nexus Ethiopia
- Agri Service Ethiopia
- CST Ethiopia
- Home Grown vision
- PHE Ethiopia
- Ethio-Organic Seed Action
- Action Aid Ethiopia
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