

CIMMYT and Belgium



CIMMYT is an international organization dedicated to solving tomorrow's agricultural challenges today. Since 1987, Belgium and CIMMYT have forged a partnership built on shared commitments to poverty reduction, food security, and sustainable development. Belgian funding and scientific collaboration have helped CIMMYT drive major advances in wheat health, maize improvement, conservation agriculture, and food safety—delivering tangible, lasting benefits to smallholder farmers across Africa, Asia, Mexico, and Latin America, as well as to research and farming communities in Europe.

In Africa, Belgium's support has been pivotal in expanding CIMMYT's work to strengthen climate resilience, improve soil health, and enhance smallholder access to improved seed and sustainable agronomy. Joint initiatives have promoted conservation agriculture practices that reduce input costs, build soil fertility, and increase yields for farmers facing drought and degraded soils. Belgian-backed CIMMYT research on wheat rusts and maize diseases has protected harvests in East and Southern Africa, helping stabilize food supplies and rural incomes.



These same scientific platforms, data systems, and genetic innovations **now reinforce food security globally including in Europe**, where **CIMMYT-derived wheat lines** account for **around 63% of the wheat** area planted. In addition, CIMMYT's global pest and disease early warning system helps safeguard yields in Belgium and around the world from emerging outbreaks.

Through this enduring collaboration, Belgium's scientific excellence and development leadership are amplified by CIMMYT's global reach. Together they protect farmers in Belgium, Africa, and beyond from new threats; stabilize grain production and markets; and make agriculture more resilient and sustainable for future generations.

CGIAR King Baudouin Award: 3 Times Awarded

The CGIAR King Baudouin Award, granted by the King Baudouin Foundation in Brussels, recognizes outstanding contributions to agricultural research and development.

1988: Veery wheat varieties, high-yielding and stress-tolerant wheat adopted in Asia and Latin America.

2004: Rice-Wheat Consortium in the Indo-Gangetic Plains, enabled large-scale adoption of zero-tillage wheat in India and Pakistan.

2006: Development of over 50 drought-tolerant maize varieties in collaboration with smallholder farmers across eastern and southern Africa. ►

Joint evolution of the CIMMYT–Belgium partnership

1993-2004 Wheat disease research

Led international workshop (1997) at CIMMYT HQ with 22 countries; improved disease resistance and seed health



2001-2007 Conservation agriculture

Built wheat disease greenhouse in Nepal, strengthening regional research capacity.



2007 Food safety innovation

Developed rapid detection method for wheat toxins





◀ Much of this work has contributed to improved wheat varieties now widely grown across Europe. According to a recent impact assessment, wheat lines developed through CIMMYT-led international breeding efforts underpin a significant share of the region's wheat area.



These improved varieties are estimated to add about

3.5 million tonnes
of production annually in the European Union, including around
57,000 tonnes
per year in Belgium and Luxembourg alone.

Belgian leadership across CIMMYT's global network

Belgium's leadership in agricultural innovation is embodied by Bram Govaerts, CIMMYT's Director General and KU Leuven graduate. Under his direction, the MasAgro program (2010–2021), funded by Mexico's Secretariat of Agriculture, became an international model for climate-smart farming and science-driven development, delivering tangible results in the region: **more than 500,000 farmers** adopted improved maize and wheat varieties, **over 1 million hectares** were managed under resource-efficient practices, and climate-smart innovation hubs operated in more than 30 Mexican states.

By increasing productivity and resilience in a major food-exporting partner such as Mexico, programs like MasAgro contribute to more reliable cereal and feed supplies for

European markets, supporting food and livestock systems in Belgium and across the EU.

Recognized by Belgium for his global contributions to sustainable agriculture, Govaerts has received both the **Belgian Development Cooperation Prize** (2003) and the **Christophe Plantin Prize** (2024) for advancing science that links agricultural innovation with peace and prosperity. His work has influenced policies on sustainable farming in Mexico and beyond. Under his leadership, Belgium-CIMMYT partnerships continue to flourish, reinforcing collaborations in agricultural innovation and global food security.

Several Belgian scientists have contributed significantly to CIMMYT's impact worldwide, from wheat and maize research to mechanization and beyond. Their expertise strengthens CIMMYT's research excellence and ensures Belgium's lasting influence on global agricultural innovation.



Belgium's scientific expertise strengthens CIMMYT's global leadership, uniting research, innovation, and impact across continents.

- **Jelle Van Loon** – Regional Representative for Latin America and Interim Associate Program Director for the Sustainable Agrifood Systems Program (SAS).
- **Pieter Rutsaert** – Economist trained at KU Leuven and Ghent University, focusing on market research for crop breeding and seed systems.
- **Simon Fonteyne** – Agronomy Lead for SAS Latin America, specialized in regenerative agriculture and sustainable intensification.



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2025