

ICA Rectors and Deans Forum 2026

The Strategic Role of Life Science Universities for Food Systems Resilience and Global Food Security

The Annual ICA Rectors and Deans Forum is this year hosted and co-organised by the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca.

The event will take place at the Biodiversity Research Centre at Cluj-Napoca, Romania, on 15-16 October 2026.

This Forum will bring together university leaders, EU and national policymakers, researchers, international organisations, and other stakeholders to explore how life science universities can strengthen their role in advancing food systems resilience and global food security.

The Forum will also provide a space for reflection on academic leadership in a rapidly changing and increasingly polarised world, examining the evolving responsibilities of university rectors and institutional leaders.

Objectives

- Explore the strategic role of life science universities in strengthening food systems resilience and global food security amid climate, geopolitical, and societal challenges.
- Foster dialogue and collaboration between universities, policymakers, industry, and international organisations to support sustainable agricultural and food system transitions.
- Highlight the contribution of education, research, innovation, and science-based policy to resilient, sustainable, and inclusive food systems.
- Reflect on the evolving responsibilities of university leadership in promoting academic values, societal trust, and institutional resilience in an increasingly polarised world.

Key Themes

Day 1 will focus on food systems resilience and global food security, addressing major challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, geopolitical instability, supply chain vulnerabilities, technological transformation, and changing societal expectations.

Day 2 is dedicated to the Special Rectors' Forum, examining the evolving role of university leadership in an increasingly uncertain and polarised world. Themes will include institutional autonomy, crisis leadership, public trust in universities and science, civic responsibility, and the role of universities in fostering dialogue, democratic resilience, and social cohesion.

Expected Outcomes

- Strengthen strategic cooperation among life science universities;
- Generate policy and leadership reflections on food systems resilience;
- Promote interdisciplinary and international collaboration;
- Encourage greater university engagement in public policy and societal dialogue;
- Contribute to shaping future institutional strategies in education, research, and innovation;
- Develop a shared vision for the future role of life science universities and their leadership.

Participants

- Rectors, presidents, and deans of life science universities;
- Representatives of European and international organisations;
- Policymakers and public authorities;
- Researchers and academic experts;
- Innovation and industry stakeholders;
- Representatives from agricultural, environmental, and food sectors.

ICA Gala and Excellence Awards

The ICA Excellence Awards recognize individuals each year who advance the values and goals of ICA towards 2030. This year, the awards will be presented during the annual ICA Rectors and Deans Forum **Gala Dinner on 15 October 2026 at Cluj-Napoca, Romania.**

Selection criteria are the following:

- Contribution to research, innovation, and the sustainable circular bioeconomy
- Promotion of education and teaching in the field of bioeconomy
- Strengthening cooperation, networking, and knowledge exchange across Europe
- Achieving impact in line with ICA's values and mission

The awards recognize achievements across three categories:

- ICA Excellence Award – Lifetime Achievements
- ICA Excellence Award – Early-Stage Academic
- ICA Excellence Award – Networking

Details on the call for nominations and the nomination procedures can be found on the ICA website:

<https://www.ica-europe.info/call-for-nominations>



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