

## Organizers

### Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

In the international context and in cooperation with developing countries, SDC's soil-related programmes and projects deal with combating desertification and land degradation, promoting sustainable land management, and supporting, at an international level, implementation of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT) of land and other natural resources.

### Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN)

FOEN is committed to ensuring the availability of sufficient and fully functioning soil for all required uses. FOEN's Soil Section works to protect soil against pollutants as well as physical and biological threats such as erosion and compaction. It assists the cantons in implementing the federal ordinance on soil pollution, and informs the public.

### Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG)

Soil is the foundation for agricultural production. As the federal government's centre of competence for the agricultural sector, FOAG is mandated to implement and further develop legislation on quantitative and qualitative soil conservation. In cooperation with the research institute Agroscope, FOAG conducts research on sustainable land use.

### Agroscope

Agroscope supports soil-related policymaking and practice by conducting applied research and long-term monitoring of this scarce resource. Agroscope investigates ways of evaluating soil fertility and provides tools for sustainable agricultural use of soils. Agroscope also manages the Swiss Soil Monitoring Network (NABO), which is operated jointly by FOEN and FOAG.

### Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern

CDE's research helps to preserve the fundamental role of soils in natural ecosystems, agriculture, and food security. In collaboration with partners from the global South and North, CDE works to advance sustainable land use and improve human well-being.

### World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT)

CDE hosts WOCAT, a global network of sustainable land management (SLM) specialists. The goal of WOCAT is to unite efforts in knowledge management and decision support to enable scaling up of SLM. In early 2014 WOCAT was officially recognized by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) as the primary recommended database for SLM best practices.



Join us in celebrating the **World Day to Combat Desertification and the International Year of Soils**

**Wednesday, 17 June 2015**  
**15:00 to 19:00**

**University of Bern, 3012 Bern**  
**UniS Building, Schanzeneckstrasse 1, Room A003**

**WOCAT**  
World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC  
Federal Office for the Environment FOEN  
Federal Office for Agriculture FOAG  
Agroscope

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**UNIVERSITÄT  
BERN**  
CDE  
CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT  
AND ENVIRONMENT

## Background

### International Year of Soils 2015

Highlighting the global importance of soils, the UN General Assembly declared 2015 the International Year of Soils (IYS). The IYS is a major opportunity to raise awareness of how important soils are for food security and for sustaining essential ecosystem functions. This event showcases examples of how soils maintain livelihoods and provide income to farmers in the North and South.

### World Day to Combat Desertification

The value of soils in drylands is the focus of this year's World Day to Combat Desertification on 17 June. Over 2 billion people live in drylands and build their livelihoods on soils. Drylands support half of the world's livestock and account for nearly half of the world's farmland. They also store 46% of the planet's carbon inventory. However, desertification and land degradation are occurring across large areas of drylands, affecting their productivity.

### Farmers' perceptions and local value

Our event will highlight the value of two examples of dryland production familiar to consumers in Switzerland: wine and rooibos tea. At the event, women farmers from a vineyard in Switzerland and a rooibos tea plantation in South Africa will talk about the challenges of production on these fragile and marginal soils.

### Global perspective on soils

Farmers worldwide share the challenges of improving soil fertility, reducing soil erosion, and managing scarce water resources. But many dryland farmers produce only for local markets that do not reward efforts for sustainable land management. The International Year of Soils highlights the value of such efforts and is hoped to spur action to conserve soils worldwide – for a stable climate, a balanced water cycle, and sound ecosystems, which are vital for human well-being.

### Speakers

**Ronald Vargas Rojas**, soils and land management officer at the Food and Agriculture Organization, working for the Global Soil Partnership Secretariat. Strong focus on assessment and management of soil resources globally.

**Gudrun Schwilch**, research scientist at the Centre for Development and Environment of the University of Bern. Focus on sustainable land management, soil and water conservation, and ecosystem services.

**Maria Kotze**, organic rooibos tea farmer in South Africa. Has farmed on the family farm since 2007 and provides guidance on sustainable production, soil management, and pest control in a local cooperative.

**Noel Oettlé**, Environmental Monitoring Group's Rural Programme Manager in South Africa. Supports small-scale rooibos farmers in conserving soils and biodiversity, adapting land use practices to climatic variability, and promoting Fairtrade products in global markets.

**Madeleine Mercier-Mottet**, Swiss winemaker who produces, together with her father, the wines of the Domaine Mercier in Sierre, Canton Valais. Joined the parental vineyard in 2012 after training for six months at the Opus One vineyards in Napa Valley, California.

## Programme

- 15:00 **Welcome address**  
**Yves Guinand**, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- 15:10 **A global perspective on the value of soils**  
**Ronald Vargas Rojas**, Food and Agriculture Organization
- Examples of sustainable land management in the Mediterranean region**  
**Gudrun Schwilch**, Centre for Development and Environment, University of Bern
- 16:00 **Farmer video on the principles of sustainable land management**  
WOCAT Video
- 16:15 **Interactive exhibition about the diversity and functions of soils**  
We will present several best-practice examples of sustainable land use methods from Switzerland and around the world. Our guest speakers will hold a tasting of rooibos tea and wine.
- 17:15 **Farmers' dialogue**  
Practice experts from South Africa and Switzerland discuss the challenges of growing wine and rooibos in drylands, and present their land management strategies to the public.
- **Maria Kotze**, organic rooibos tea farmer, South Africa
  - **Noel Oettlé**, Environmental Monitoring Group, South Africa
  - **Madeleine Mercier-Mottet**, winemaker, Domaine Mercier, Switzerland
- 18:45 **Reception with refreshments**
- Moderator: Ruedi Küng, InfoAfrica  
This is a public event. Participation is free of charge.