

Event 1

The Living Bank: Open Day at the World's Largest Banana Genebank

Discover how investing in crop genetic diversity at the Musa genebank in Leuven protects food security, supports profitable farming, and builds resilience for communities worldwide.

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| Date | Friday, 5 June 2026 |
| Time | 09:30 - 14:00 |
| Venue | Musa Genebank, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium |
| Format | Open day: guided tours, panel discussion, networking reception |
| Language | English (with bilingual elements in Dutch for the guided tour) |
| Admission | Free and open to all; no registration required |
| Organised by | Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, CGIAR |
| Partners | KU Leuven, Meise Botanic Garden, FAO World Banana Forum |

About This Event

What does investing in nature actually look like? Sometimes it looks like 1,700 banana varieties growing in a laboratory in Leuven. The Musa genebank, managed by the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT (CGIAR) under FAO mandate and hosted at KU Leuven, is one of humanity's most important investments in nature. As the world's largest collection of banana and plantain genetic diversity, it holds accessions from approximately 40 countries and has distributed samples to over 120 countries. It safeguards against crop disease, climate change, and the silent erosion of the agricultural biodiversity that farmers, food systems, and communities depend on.

On this open day, the Alliance (CGIAR) invites the public, students, researchers, farmers, policymakers, and businesses to visit this remarkable collection and explore what investing in agrobiodiversity means in practice. Guided tours will be led by Alliance scientists, showing how genetic diversity is conserved, characterised, and applied to help farming communities adapt and thrive.

Objectives

- Raise public awareness of the Musa genebank as a global common good held in trust for humanity under the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.
- Demonstrate the concrete returns on investing in crop genetic diversity for food security, farming resilience, and climate adaptation.
- Engage a broad public audience, including families, students, researchers, and policymakers, in a direct encounter with agrobiodiversity science.
- Contribute to the EU Green Week 2026 theme: investing in nature, rewarding for people and business.

Definitive Agenda

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| 09:30 | Doors open. Exhibition and crop diversity showcase accessible. Welcome by Alliance (CGIAR) staff. |
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| 10:00 | Opening welcome: Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT + KU Leuven. |
| 10:15 | Guided tours of the Musa genebank begin: rotating groups of 15–20 participants, 45 minutes each, led by Alliance scientists Sebastien Carpentier and Bart Panis. |
| 12:00 | Panel discussion: 'What is a banana worth? Investing in crop diversity for resilient food systems.' Moderated by Carlo Fadda (Alliance), with KU Leuven Plant Institute, FAO World Banana Forum, Meise Botanic Garden, and Lilian Karikari, Executive Secretary, Afruibana (remote contribution). |
| 13:00 | Networking reception with agrodiverse food and drinks. |
| 14:00 | Close. |

Speakers and Partners

Confirmed Speakers

- Carlo Fadda, Director of Biodiversity for Food & Agriculture, Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT - panel moderator and scientific lead.
- Sebastien Carpentier, Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT - Banana Programme Leader and guided tour lead.
- Bart Panis, Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT - Musa Genebank Manager and guided tour lead.
- Lilian Karikari, Executive Secretary, Afruibana (African Fruit and Banana Trade Association) - remote panellist; African banana and fruit producers' perspective.
- Steven Janssens – Research Scientist, Meise Botanic Garden and KU Leuven

Partner Organisations

- KU Leuven Plant Institute - plant genetic resources and agrobiodiversity science; host institution.
- Meise Botanic Garden - botanical conservation perspective.
- FAO World Banana Forum - global value chains and food security.

Planning Note

This event contributes to the EU Green Week 2026 theme of investing in nature, rewarding for people and business, and aligns with the following Green Week themes: Biodiversity, Sustainable agriculture, Nature-based solutions, Ecosystem services, Innovation, Bioeconomy, Management of natural resources, and Sustainable economic growth strategy.