Call for proposals for 2nd round of Phase 3 of the Agriculture Green Development (AGD) PhD program of China Agricultural University and Wageningen University & Research

1. The AGD PhD Program

The Sino-Dutch **Agriculture Green Development** (AGD) Programme is a PhD program jointly conducted by Wageningen University & Research (WUR) and China Agricultural University (CAU). It aims for interdisciplinary research on AGD as well as training talented young scientists. The project has been officially approved by the China Scholarship Council (CSC) in 2025 for Phase 3 as the main part of the Sino-Europe AGD Program. In this Phase 3 of the AGD program, we expect to have 66 PhD candidates in total (22 PhDs per year) and 6 postdoctoral researchers (2 researchers per year) for the three rounds of the program during 2026-2028. This program makes it possible for outstanding students from China to pursue a PhD degree from Wageningen University & Research or from China Agricultural University.

This call is for PhD project proposals.

The overall objective of the AGD PhD program is to contribute to the transformation of agriculture towards sustainable development, from high resource consumption and high environmental costs to sustainable intensification with high productivity, high resource use efficiency, high product value, and low environmental risks. The study focuses on China and selects Hainan province as a demonstration region, drawing lessons for the wider community and for the Global South [https://www.wur.nl/en/Education-Programmes/PhD-Programme/AGD-PhD-program.htm].

The AGD PhD program is open for PhD project proposals covering four broad themes (see their short descriptions below): (i) Regional Agriculture Green Development (AGD) in Hainan and Global South, (ii) Agrobiodiversity and farming system, (iii) High quality and high value of tropical crop production, and (iv) AGD for impact for China and Global South.

The AGD PhD program welcomes projects from a wide range of disciplines. Interdisciplinary projects are particularly appreciated.

2. Call for proposals

In 2027, twenty-two (22) PhD candidates are expected to start in AGD Phase 3:

- 10 PhD candidates start with the aim to graduate at WUR. These are 1+3 candidates, who plan to be the first year at CAU and the next three years at WUR.
- 12 PhD candidates start with the aim to graduate at CAU. These are 2+2 candidates, who plan to spend two years at WUR as guest researchers, preferably in their 2nd and 3rd year of the PhD project, and two years at CAU. During the two years in Wageningen, these 2+2 PhD candidates are offered an opportunity to improve their academic skills via, for example, a jointly developed training program with courses relevant to agricultural green development and academic skills, and focus on their research and its collaboration with a hosting WUR chair group.

The PhD candidates will be selected and supervised jointly by WUR and CAU supervisors.

What can be asked: 10 projects are funded this year. A project can consist of two to three PhD candidates: one 1+3 PhD candidate, with one or two 2+2 PhD candidates. Each project has at least two PhD candidates.

What the program offers: Selected projects will receive funding through CSC scholarships that meet WUR and IND requirements. Additionally, a monthly bench fee of €900 for each PhD candidate during their research periods at Wageningen University will be provided.

Scope of the research: The call is open for all research projects within the scope of the AGD program, but **priority** will be given to the following themes:

1) *Regional Agriculture Green Development (AGD) in Hainan and Global South*
   The focus is on developing and applying agricultural green development solutions and management measures to improve the sustainability and resilience of regional agro-ecological systems under emerging drivers: climate change impacts, increasing touristic activities, and socioeconomic developments. The geographical focus is on Hainan Island, its watersheds, and coastal waters (land-sea interactions) as well as its agricultural system. Research and innovation efforts should be oriented towards improving our understanding of the past, current, and future sustainable development strategies for high-value and eco-friendly agricultural systems in Hainan, while generating insights and solutions that are relevant and transferable to other regions in the Global South. Given the recently introduced Free Trade Policy and ecological revolution policy in Hainan, this theme contributes to understanding how those newly introduced initiatives and economic investment, as well as the tourism dynamics, will shape the future agricultural food systems, while ensuring a clean, sustainable environment and healthy marine systems. The theme strongly

proposes incorporating empowering strategies such as the science & technology backyard model for farmers to improve their farm structure and competitiveness in sustainable tropical agricultural systems. Therefore, systems analysis approaches and integrated environmental-economic approaches can be developed to achieve those aims. The integration of social and natural sciences is highly encouraged for an actionable impact.

2) *Agrobiodiversity and farming system*
The agro-ecosystem is a diverse web of life, comprising crops, as well as associated plants and non-crop habitats, containing above- and belowground biota (insects, micro-organisms), some of which cause disease and crop loss while others support plant and crop functioning. This theme explores, in a tropical context, possibilities for conserving biodiversity and utilizing ecosystem services from biodiversity to improve crop health and productivity, and substitute, as far as possible, anthropogenic inputs with natural processes and achieve both high productivity, high product quality, high value, and high environmental quality. Practices like agroforestry (trees with understory cropping and grazing) integrate biodiversity to build resilience while increasing farmers' income. Ultimately, a healthy agro-ecosystem depends on biodiversity for productivity and stability, making them fundamentally interconnected.

3) *High quality and high value of tropical crop production*
Crop nutritional quality generally declines with yield increases as a result of the dilution effect. How to simultaneously improve quality, yield, and nutrient use efficiency of vegetable, fruit, and cereal crops remains a long-standing challenge towards global food security. The primary focus of the "High quality and high value of tropical crop production" theme is to strengthen mechanistic understanding of the physiological processes—together with the underlying molecular and genetic bases—that determine crop quality in tropical regions, and to translate this understanding into physiology-based management strategies. In particular, how to improve the quality of cash crops for higher value-added agricultural production and sustainable food provision? Low pH and nutrient imbalance are two frequent problems of tropical soils. This quality-oriented theme also aims to use mechanistic physiological understanding as the basis for managing soil constraints and to better understand quality crop production along a resilient food supply chain via integrating physiological approaches with modeling and AI techniques in Hainan and other tropical regions.

4) *AGD for impact in China and Global South*
This theme focuses on tropical green sustainable development in and for the Global South, in particular, but not limited to, Africa. Projects under this theme will study, assess and design both green agricultural development practices and systems in the Global South (drawing also on Chinese and European experiences such as STBs), as well as the sustainable agrifood trade and investment relations between China and

the Global South. Issues of food security, resource efficiency, and environmental sustainability in plant, animal, fish, and integrated production systems are related to high-value and high-quality outputs that can contribute to sustainable development in the Global South.

3. Required documents at submission

a. Completed proposal form (see separate file);
b. Short CVs (2-3 pages) of all supervisors with a signature.

4. Application Deadline

Please submit all the documents required using the attached template before **23 December 2026** to agd-csc@cau.edu.cn with the email title '2nd Call for the AGD Phase 3 Program'.

5. Selection Criteria and Review Procedure

Proposals will be selected by the academic committee of the AGD program on the basis of the following criteria: fit with the scope of the AGD program and research priorities, interdisciplinarity, scientific quality, novelty, balance in the program, and feasibility.

6. Timeline

23 Dec. 2026	Deadline for submission of proposals
15 Jan. 2027	Proposals selected & final decision
29 Jan. 2027	Publication of call for PhD candidates (1+3 and 2+2)
22 March 2027	Deadline for candidate applications
16 April 2027	Final decision of PhD candidates' selection by CAU and WUR supervisors.
6 July 2027	Deadline for candidates to meet requirements (e.g. 1+3 should have master diploma and meet language requirement in WUR)
1 August - 1 September 2027	Formal admission of selected PhD candidates (1+3 and 2+2) to the AGD program and application to CSC for the scholarship approval.

7. Contact Information

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At CAU (also for student call): Dr. Jingmeng Wang (CAU)
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