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Ushering horticulture into a new era of research-based novelty

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Horticulture, as one of the main agricultural pillars, plays a leading role in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* currently adopted by the United Nations. Well-balanced but creative and far-sighted models for the future of the horticultural sector are needed to assure food security, decrease poverty, counteract environmental degradation and combat climate change. During the last few decades, the international horticultural scientific community has produced a large body of research aiming to support the development of this critical agricultural sector. *Italus Hortus (IH)* aims to contribute to this challenging goal, covering all aspects of horticulture where a science-based innovation is possible and required. One of these aspects is the definition of innovative cultivation strategies and post-harvest technologies to allow yield stability and quality improvement. The latter includes also the design of cultivation models that by increasing the resilience of the horticultural crops, can mitigate the impact of climate change on the quantitative and qualitative yield performance of the cultivations. At the same time, horticulture will become one of the main actors of a more circular and climate-neutral economy. Increasing attention will be given to the study of cultivation strategies that can help to reduce soil degradation, and the negative effects of current horticultural management on the environment (smart and efficient use of the required inputs, introduction of environmentally-friendly biodegradable plastics, etc.). Some of these goals will be also achieved by increasing the technological level of agriculture including integrating modeling, proximal/remote sensing, mechanization/automation/robotics, mapping, geomatics, decision making, and/or statistics to define a more precise and smart horticulture. In addition, our scientific community will play a major role in supporting the research of innovative cropping systems, such as vertical farming and other solutions useful for the development of urban greening/agriculture (vertical gardens) and/or space farming.

As new Editors of *Italus Hortus*, we are fully aware of the large volume of new science-based insights that the horticultural sector is eager for. We are enthusiastically committed to facilitating its dissemination and we will work to make *Italus Hortus* play a significant role in defining the horticulture of the future. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the former Editor-in-chief, Prof. Paolo Inglese, the former and current Editorial Boards, and all the paper authors and reviewers for the outstanding job they have done so far or they will do in the future.