

All the participants together in Cahors. To the right of the centre, standing and wearing a blue jacket and tie, Pierre Sourzat, President of the IWEMM8.

Roger's beautifully tended truffle plantation.



## TRUFFLES

# IWEMM8 in Cahors

From 10 to 13 October, Pierre Sourzat acted as President of the IWEMM8 – the International Workshop on Edible Mycorrhizal Mushrooms – and hosted scientists, growers and traders from more than 25 countries at the venue in Cahors, France.

*By Judith Evenaar, food consultant and truffle grower*

**W**ine and truffles have brought prosperity to Cahors and the department of Lot. Many vineyards were established from the 13th century onwards on the chalky terraces surrounding the city. However, in the second half of the 19th century a phylloxera plague destroyed all the vines. The chalky soil turned out to be extremely suitable for truffle growing. In the glory years, around 1900, the train to Paris and Toulouse was always fragrant with truffles because so many were transported. During the world wars, there was a lack of manpower to maintain the plantations, and post-war urbanisation caused further deterioration in the truffle growing regions. Production declined from 1000 to 50 ton per annum for the whole of France, and from 300 to 30 tons for the Lot specifically. The department is currently home to around 100 growers with approximately 1000 ha of truffle plantations. Despite high investments in the sector by the French authorities and the EU, production has shown hardly

any growth in the past decades. Higher temperatures and periods of persistent drought in the region caused by climate change present another threat to the future of the truffle!

### Research and production

The IWEMM8 in Cahors promised a diverse programme for the participants, with 112 presentations on the development of edible mycorrhiza covering fields such as genetics, ecology, cultivation, biodiversity and mycotourism. A marked transformation regarding both research and practical thinking is that the truffle no longer needs to be tamed and forced to reveal all its secrets. Monoculture, which is the generally applied strategy in truffle growing, is no longer considered to be the best approach to truffle production. It is being replaced by the belief that interaction between the truffle fungus, the host plant, bacteria and companion plants is required, and that the role played by growers should be supporting and facilitating. A huge breakthrough will be the use of the fifth