



MAKING AGRICULTURE WORK FOR NUTRITION

Synthesis of guiding principles

The food and agriculture sector is essential to human nutrition, but food and agriculture interventions do not always contribute to positive nutritional outcomes. Specific attention is required to make agriculture “nutrition-sensitive”. But what does this mean in practice?

This question has taken on a particular importance as a growing number of countries and development institutions are responding to the UN Secretary General’s Zero Hunger Challenge and joining the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement.

In recent years, many multilateral, bilateral, and civil society organizations have produced guidance on improving nutrition impact through agriculture. FAO has therefore carried out a review of these materials through an extensive consultation process. The results are available in the report **“Synthesis of Guiding Principles on Agriculture Programming for Nutrition”** available on: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/017/aq194e/aq194e00.htm>

The report summarizes the main messages emerging from the guidance, describes gaps that were identified through the stakeholder consultation, and analyzes how the recommendations compare with conclusions from major reviews of the scientific literature. It concludes with suggestions to strengthen knowledge, commitment, and action to make agriculture work for nutrition.

The review identified a high degree of consensus among development institutions. Recommendations are synthesized into a list of 20 main messages (see overleaf), which broadly fit into three categories: planning a program or policy, main program activities (taking action), and a supporting set of factors based on governance, policy, and capacity.

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PLANNING FOR NUTRITION

1. Incorporate explicit nutrition objectives in agricultural policy and programme design.
2. Assess the context and causes of malnutrition at the local level, to maximize effectiveness and reduce negative side effects.
3. Do no harm. Identify potential harms, develop a mitigation plan, and set in place a well-functioning monitoring system.
4. Measure nutritional impact through programme monitoring and evaluation.
5. Maximize opportunities through multisectoral coordination.
6. Maximize impact of household income on nutrition, such as through increasing women's discretionary income.
7. Increase equitable access to productive resources (e.g. land, water, credit).
8. Target the most vulnerable groups, including smallholder farmers, women, and poor/food insecure households.

TAKING ACTION

All approaches should:

9. Empower women, the primary caretakers in households, through: income; access to extension services and information; avoiding harm to their ability to care for children; labor and time-saving technologies; and support for rights to land, education, and employment.
10. Incorporate nutrition education to improve consumption and nutrition effects of interventions. Employ agricultural extension agents to communicate on nutrition as feasible.
11. Manage natural resources for improved productivity, resilience to shocks, adaptation to climate change, increased equitable access to resources through soil, water, and biodiversity conservation.

These can be combined with approaches to:

12. Diversify production and livelihoods for improved food access and dietary diversification, natural resource management, risk reduction, and improved income.
13. Increase production of nutrient-dense foods, particularly locally-adapted varieties rich in micronutrients and protein, chosen based on local nutrition issues and available solutions.
 - ◆ Horticultural crops are highly recommended, to improve year-round micronutrient intakes and healthy diet patterns, and to increase income (especially women's).
 - ◆ Produce animal-source foods on a small scale, including fish and livestock, to improve intakes of micronutrients, protein, and fat; keep production small-scale to avoid harms to the natural resource base.
 - ◆ Harness the potential of nutritious underutilized foods (e.g. indigenous crops), which often have high nutrient content, low input requirements, and can generate income.
 - ◆ Increase legume production for their nutritional value and their attribute of nitrogen fixation, which can improve soil fertility and yields and reduce inputs.
 - ◆ Invest in biofortification as a complement to other approaches.
 - ◆ Staple crop production may be necessary but insufficient for addressing undernutrition.
 - ◆ Cash crops are unlikely to improve nutrition on their own.
14. Reduce post-harvest losses and improve processing.
15. Increase market access and opportunities, especially for nutritious foods that smallholders may have a comparative advantage in producing.
16. Reduce seasonality of food insecurity through diversification throughout the year, improved storage and preservation, and other approaches.

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

17. Improve policy coherence supportive to nutrition, including food price policies, subsidies, trade policies, and pro-poor policies.
18. Improve good governance for nutrition, by drawing up a national nutrition strategy and action plan, allocating adequate budgetary resources, and implementing nutrition surveillance.
19. Build capacity in ministries at national, district, and local levels, and increase nutrition staff.
20. Communicate and continue to advocate for nutrition.