



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
GOALS



16 October 2019  
**World Food Day**

# OUR ACTIONS ARE OUR FUTURE



## HEALTHY DIETS

FOR A  
**#ZEROHUNGER**  
WORLD

Working for #ZeroHunger



# More than hunger

For decades, the world was making progress in the fight against hunger. Now, the number of undernourished people is on the rise again. More than 820 million people, or roughly one in nine people, are going hungry. But food security in our times isn't only a matter of quantity, it's also a question of quality. Unhealthy diets have now become a leading risk factor for disease and death worldwide. There is an urgent need to make healthy and sustainable diets affordable and accessible to everyone.

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## Tips for a healthy diet

- Eat enough, safe, nutritious and diverse foods to lead an active life and reduce the risk of disease.
- Add fruits, vegetables, legumes (e.g. lentils, beans), nuts, seeds and whole grains.
- Limit the intake of foods that are high in fats (especially saturated fats), sugar and salt.
- All of the above should be complemented with regular physical activity.
- You can consult your national food-based dietary guidelines to learn more about different local foods that can provide the required intake level of nutrients.

## A nutrition crisis

People who experience moderate levels of food insecurity or worse, including those who do not have regular access to enough nutritious food, are at greater risk of various forms of malnutrition. Malnutrition affects one in three people and can take the forms of vitamin and mineral deficiencies, stunting, wasting, overweight and obesity. An unhealthy diet is the leading risk factor for deaths from non-communicable diseases, including heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers. Health problems linked to obesity are costing national health budgets up to USD 2 trillion per year.

## Why is this happening?

In recent decades, we have dramatically changed our diets and eating patterns as a result of globalization, urbanization and income growth. We have moved from seasonal, mainly plant-based and fiber-rich dishes to high calorie diets, which are high in refined starches, sugar, fats, salt, processed foods and often marked by excessive consumption of meat. People spend less time preparing meals at home, and consumers, especially in urban areas, increasingly rely on supermarkets, fast food outlets, street food vendors and take-away restaurants. In much of the world, guaranteeing availability and access to healthy diets remains an enormous challenge. This can be true of people with limited financial resources, including smallholder agricultural producers and families in crisis situations caused by conflict, natural disasters and the impact of climate change. Some people, due to where they live, don't even have the option to purchase fresh and nutritious foods.

## What needs to change?

Our way of producing, supplying and consuming food has to change. From the farm to the plate, our food systems currently favour production of high-yielding staple crops. In addition to the impact on our diets, intensified food production, combined with climate change, is causing a rapid loss of biodiversity. Today, only nine plant species account for 66 percent of total crop production despite the fact that, throughout history, more than 6 000 species have been cultivated for food. We currently rely on only three crops (wheat, maize and rice) to provide nearly 50 percent of the global dietary energy supply. A diverse variety of foods is crucial for providing healthy diets and safeguarding the environment.

## Beyond the Green Revolution

A half century ago, concerns about how to feed everyone in a growing world led to the Green Revolution, a rapid expansion in agricultural production and food distribution, which helped to prevent billions of people from dying of hunger. But this approach, over time, has favored agricultural practices that have also had a negative impact on natural resources like soil, water, forests and air quality, and exacerbated the impact of climate change.

## The language of hunger

The language of hunger used by the international community is beginning to reflect the urgent need to transform diets and food systems. In 2015, countries adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty and hunger, protect



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the planet and ensure prosperity for all. The Zero Hunger goal, or SDG2, specifies not only the need to end hunger but, also, the need to achieve food security by improving access to nutritious food while using sustainable agricultural methods.

## UN Decade of Action on Nutrition

FAO jointly leads the implementation of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025) with the World Health Organization and in collaboration with other UN agencies and partners. The Nutrition Decade was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 2016 with the aim to strengthen joint action around reducing hunger and improving nutrition around the world and to support countries in their specific commitments to improve nutrition. Brazil, Ecuador and Italy were the first three countries to make such commitments and other countries are developing plans. Several countries are leading Action Networks to put in place policies to enhance healthy diets.

## Supporting solutions

FAO makes use of its broad network of offices, partners and technical expertise to provide support for global, regional and national food security and nutrition policies, strategies and programmes, including:

- providing technical support at the global level aimed at improving and promoting healthy and sustainable diets;
- providing countries with information on various dimensions of malnutrition and working with them to develop food and nutrition policies, strategies, legislation and dietary guidelines;

- offering a toolkit on nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems with e-learning modules to support food and agriculture professionals in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of nutrition-sensitive programmes, investments and policies;
- other capacity development and awareness-raising programmes.



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### SOFI 2019

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) is an annual flagship report jointly prepared by FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. The report targets a wide audience, including policy-makers, international organizations, academic institutions and the general public, providing information on progress towards ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition.

**Launch: 15 July 2019, New York**

### Breaking the cycle

The effects of malnutrition can be imprinted, passing from one generation to the next, which makes healthy diets for mothers and young children all the more important.

# Working with countries

FAO uses its technical expertise in various disciplines to support countries in their commitment to improve food security and nutrition.

In the **Philippines** and seven other countries in South and Southeast Asia, FAO has helped to strengthen the capacities of smallholder and family farmers to maintain quality and freshness and reduce post-harvest losses, while also reducing prices at the consumer end. Fruit and vegetable consumption in many Asian countries is relatively low, in part due to high costs and perishability.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, FAO has helped to set up a logistics centre to coordinate purchasing, testing and distribution of fresh produce from local farmers for school-feeding programmes. Smallholder farmers have new income opportunities and children have access to healthy, diversified diets.

In **Panama**, food-based dietary guidelines were adopted for the first time for children under the age of two years in 2018, adding to dietary guidelines previously adopted and revised for other segments of the

population. The country is one of several in Latin America and the Caribbean, that have adopted or revised these guidelines in the past three years, with the support of FAO.

In **Yemen**, FAO is helping to provide cash and agricultural livelihoods support amid a growing humanitarian crisis, while also empowering water user associations to better manage the country's scarce water resources.



## SPOTLIGHT: Improving nutrition education at African universities

An FAO survey in seven African countries found that university training programmes on nutrition tended to focus only on scientific knowledge while neglecting the students' capacities in nutrition education and communication. Awareness-raising skills are essential to sharing information with the public and improving policies and programmes. FAO developed and made available an 11-module course for undergraduate students in English and French. More than 2 000 students in ten countries were trained as of early 2019. The course has also been presented in Honduras and Sri Lanka and is being adapted for use elsewhere in Africa and in India.



# What can **countries** do?

There are many ways in which governments can help to reduce hunger, improve nutrition and transform food systems by addressing the root causes of malnutrition in all its forms.

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- Increase the availability and affordability of diverse and nutritious foods for healthy diets by setting, enforcing and regularly updating national dietary guidelines and nutrition standards.
- Design and implement nutrition-sensitive policies and programmes in line with national guidelines. Strengthen legal frameworks and strategic capacities to support this.
- Work across sectors to improve food and agricultural policies, including those which support school food and nutrition programmes, food assistance to vulnerable families and individuals, public food procurement standards and regulations on food marketing, labelling and advertising.
- Enable consumers to make healthier food choices through mass-media, public awareness campaigns, nutrition-education programmes, community interventions and nutrition labelling.
- Support solutions rooted in food production (agriculture, livestock, fisheries, forestry) to reduce malnutrition, increase dietary diversity and improve nutrition for a healthier and sustainable future.
- Adopt nutrition-sensitive, food-production practices that focus less on high-yielding staple crops and more on diversity and nutritional quality.
- Monitor and reinforce the need for agrobiodiversity. Do this not only for dietary health but, also, to protect biodiversity and natural resources, improve productivity and income, and increase the resilience of farmers to challenges such as climate change.

## **SPOTLIGHT: Food vouchers for healthier diets**

In Bangladesh, e-vouchers distributed to refugees for use in designated food outlets in camps help individual shoppers to improve their diets by encouraging them to purchase nutritious, fresh foods. The e-vouchers provide access to twenty different food items, twelve of which are mandatory.



## SPOTLIGHT: Promoting healthier urban eating

In the Republic of Korea, the city of Seoul has declared every citizen's right to adequate food and launched a master plan designed to tackle rising obesity and other dietary issues through a series of actions, including:

- increasing the number of vegetable-fruit vending machines, fruit-package retailers and fruit cafes available at public transport hubs and public institutions;
- using logos that identify restaurants as offering low-salt meal options;
- certifying “smart meals” with lower levels of fat and salt at restaurants, child-care centres, corporate cafeterias, and pre-packed meals distributed by convenience stores, so that even youth who purchase convenient, cooked or processed foods can still choose healthier options;
- offering social assistance like food vouchers and public kitchens;
- promoting nutritious cuisine for city dwellers.



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## SPOTLIGHT: Dietary guidelines for better health

Food-based dietary guidelines provide advice on foods, food groups and dietary patterns to ensure healthy diets for the general public. They help to promote overall health and prevent non-communicable diseases. More than 100 countries worldwide, with the support of FAO, have developed dietary guidelines, which are adapted to their nutrition-related situations, food availability, culinary cultures and eating habits. In some cases, countries are beginning to link their dietary guidelines to the environmental impact of producing or using certain foods.



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# What can the **private sector** do?

Private sector businesses have enormous influence over food systems and people's access to affordable, healthy diets. As a food manufacturer, retailer or other food-related business, you have numerous opportunities to improve the quality of food and drink products, the information available to consumers and the ways in which products are marketed.

- Continue to develop and provide affordable and nutritious food choices to consumers and aim to provide greater dietary diversity and quality. Limit the levels of saturated fats, trans fats, added sugars and salt in existing products.
- Phase out advertising, promotion of, and discounts on, foods that are high in fat, sugar and/or salt, especially when targeted at children and adolescents.
- Provide consumers with adequate and easy-to-understand product and nutrition information and avoid nutrient claims (such as “high/low fat” or “enriched”) that are used mainly to boost the competitiveness of a product and which may, instead, mislead consumers about its overall nutritional quality.
- Make it a priority to improve nutrition and food safety along the food chain.



## **SPOTLIGHT: Improving food packaging with private sector know-how**

In most Sub-Saharan countries, inadequate food packaging for fresh and processed foods undermines the competitiveness of local producers. It also contributes to food loss and waste along the food supply chain. An Italian private-sector company, Industria Macchine Automatiche SpA (IMA), is partnering with governments in ten African countries, FAO and the International Trade Centre to help improve food packaging and labelling. This can boost competitiveness and reduce food loss and waste. Working with other partners, including the African Union Commission and the Regional Economic Communities in East and West Africa, IMA is applying its know-how in the design and manufacture of packaging equipment. The company is also a partner in FAO's Global Initiative on Food Loss and Waste Reduction, also known as the SAVE FOOD Initiative.



# What can **farmers** do?

Men and women in agriculture, fisheries and forestry are our primary sources for nutritious foods. They also play vital roles in managing natural resources. If you are a farmer or other food producer, you can influence the sustainability and variety of food supplies.

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- Plant a wider variety of nutritious foods like fruits, vegetables, legumes and nuts.
- Where possible, turn to local, small-scale fishery production as a source of income and affordable, vitamin-rich foods for local communities. Fish provides protein, vitamins, minerals, and polyunsaturated omega-3 fatty acids (which are generally not found in staple crops).
- Manage natural resources sustainably and efficiently and adapt methods to climate change. Produce more food with the same amount of land and water.
- Reduce food loss and waste from harvest to distribution. Take advantage of processing and storage methods to conserve products, where possible.



## Something to think about

While 30 000 plant species are known to be edible, worldwide, only 200 crops are cultivated on any significant scale and only 8 crops (barley, beans, groundnut, maize, potatoes, rice, sorghum and wheat) supply more than 50 percent of our daily calories. Think about this (and ask your policymakers to think about it, too).

# What can **we** all do?

As consumers and members of households, we can make personal decisions to improve family nutrition.

- Increase our intake of fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts and whole grains.
- Limit the consumption of foods that require an excessive use of natural resources, such as water, to be produced.
- Consume fewer foods and drinks which are high in refined sugars, saturated fats and/or salt.
- Consider the environmental impact of the foods we eat.
- Reduce or eliminate consumption of industrialized and convenience foods to favour more diverse and traditional foods, in an effort to support local biodiversity.
- Learn or revisit lessons about local, seasonal foods, their nutritional values and how to cook and preserve them.



## How can civil society organizations help?

Civil society and nongovernmental organizations provide vital links between individuals and communities whose voices are not always heard.

- Set up campaigns, events and networks to help individual citizens take more active roles in legislative and political processes and advocate for making healthy diets a priority on the public agenda.
- Support the wide dissemination of information on the importance of healthy diets to prevent all forms of malnutrition and related diseases.
- Advocate and support health programmes and health-education campaigns.

# Did you **know?**

Over  
**820 million**  
people suffer from **hunger**.



**149 million**  
**children** under five are **stunted**,  
while **49 million**  
are affected by **wasting**.



**670+ million**  
**adults** and  
**120+ million**  
**boys and girls**  
(age 5-19) are **obese**.

**40 million** **children**  
under five are **overweight**.

**Unhealthy diets**, combined  
with sedentary lifestyles, are the  
**No. 1 risk factor for**  
**disability and death** from  
non-communicable diseases.



**Health problems linked to**  
**obesity cost** national budgets  
worldwide an estimated  
**USD 2 trillion**  
in treatment each year.



**Different forms of**  
**malnutrition can co-exist**  
within the same household and  
even the same individual during  
their lifetime and can be passed  
from one generation to the next.

**Environmental damage**  
**caused by the food**  
**system could increase**  
**50-90%** in low- to  
middle-income countries due to  
the increased consumption of  
processed foods and meat.



Some 6 000 **plant species**  
have been cultivated for food  
throughout human history. Today,  
**only 8** of them **supply**  
**more than 50%** of  
**our daily calories**.

**Climate change** threatens to  
reduce both the quality and quantity of  
crops, lowering yields.







### World Food Day

Each year, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) celebrates World Food Day on 16 October to commemorate the founding of the Organization in 1945. Events are organized in over 150 countries across the world, making it one of the most celebrated days of the UN calendar. These events promote worldwide awareness and action for those who suffer from hunger and other forms of malnutrition and for the need to ensure food security and healthy diets for all. World Food Day is also an important opportunity to send a strong message to the public: We can end hunger and all forms of malnutrition in this lifetime and become the Zero Hunger Generation, but everyone needs to work together to achieve this goal.

### Zero Hunger. 100% nutrition.

Achieving Zero Hunger is not only about feeding the hungry. It's also about nourishing people with healthy diets that include a sufficient variety of safe and nutritious foods-while maintaining the health of the planet on which we all depend. Every year, World Food Day calls on us all to take action across all sectors to achieve Zero Hunger.

## FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla  
00153 Rome, Italy

[www.fao.org/wfd](http://www.fao.org/wfd)  
#WorldFoodDay



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