

Nigerian Traditional Food System and Nutrition Security
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Nigeria traditional food system supports a wide variety of foods produced from the different agro-ecological zones. Traditional foods are foods produced locally which form part of the food culture inherent in the locality. The local climate enables the cultivation of such crops either for subsistence or for cash or both. They are accepted by rural communities by custom, habit and tradition as appropriate and desirable food. The traditional foods include staples such as cassava, yam, cocoyam, sweet potatoes, plantains, and maize. Others include oilseeds, legumes, fruits and vegetables, herbs and spices. Communities have evolved their own preferences and food habits over the years and have been sustained by the traditional food system. The trend is changing with changing food habits occasioned by the influence of fast foods industries. Roots and tubers are mainly cultivated and consumed in the humid savannah and rainforest agro- ecological zones. These stretch from middle belt to southern part of Nigeria. While cereals (maize, sorghum, millet, acha, rice, beni seed) and legumes (cowpeas, pigeon pea, African yam bean, ground nut, bambara nut etc) are mainly produced and consumed in the savannah and semi-arid agro-ecological zone. Various dishes are made from the foods cultivated in the different zones. Studies carried out in southern states in Nigeria have shown that traditional Nigerian foods fed to children 3 - 5 years and school age children supplied adequate energy, protein, iron, vitamin A thiamin, niacin and ascorbic acid. Vegetables made significant contributions to ascorbic acid intake and red palm oil contributed largely to the vitamin A intake. The results from this study show clearly that when properly prepared and combined, Nigerian traditional foods can assure nutrition security even in all segments of the society including the under-fives and school age children. It is however sad that a large segment of the population are shifting to less nutritious high energy urbanised diets leading to emergence of overweight and obesity occurring side by side undernutrition