Nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food systems

Discussion No. 91 from 1 to 22 July 2013

As part of the preparations leading up to the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), a Preparatory Technical Meeting is to be held at FAO Headquarters from 13 to 15 November 2013. More information is available at: www.fao.org/ICN2.

To feed into and inform this meeting, a series of online discussions are being held on selected thematic areas. This ICN2 online discussion “Nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food systems” builds on earlier FSN Forum debates “Linking Agriculture, Food Systems, and Nutrition: What’s your perspective?” and “Making agriculture work for nutrition: Prioritizing country-level action, research and support”. It invites you to share evidence and exchange views on how to improve policies, programmes and interventions for making agriculture and food systems more responsive to nutrition. Policy and programme options as well as institutional arrangements for improving diets and raising levels of nutrition, particularly of the poorest and most nutritionally vulnerable, as well as ways to improve monitoring and evaluation of their impact and cost-effectiveness will be sought.

Improving nutrition must begin with food and agriculture. This is because the poor and most nutritionally vulnerable depend in large part upon agriculture for their livelihoods. Notwithstanding the importance of the role of agriculture in producing food and generating income, employment and livelihoods, it is the food system as a whole i.e. the post-production sector beyond agriculture including processing, storage, trade, marketing and consumption that nowadays contributes significantly more to the eradication of malnutrition.

“Nutrition-enhancing” are approaches that address the underlying determinants or basic causes of malnutrition. Nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food systems are those that effectively and explicitly incorporate nutrition objectives, concerns and considerations, improve diets and raise levels of food and nutrition security. Actions may include making more nutritious food more accessible to everyone or to specific targeted groups, supporting smallholders and boosting women’s incomes, ensuring clean water and sanitation, education and employment, health care, support for resilience and empowering women in a deliberate attempt to explicitly improve diets and raise levels of nutrition.

Food-based approaches recognize the central role of food, agriculture and diets in improving nutrition. Agriculture and food-based strategies focus on food as the primary tool for improving the quality of the diet and for addressing and preventing malnutrition and nutritional deficiencies. The approach stresses the multiple benefits derived from enjoying a variety of foods, recognizing the nutritional value of food for good nutrition, and the importance and social significance of the agricultural and food sector for supporting rural
livelihoods. The multiple social, economic and health benefits associated with successful food-based approaches that lead to year-round availability, access to and consumption of nutritionally adequate amounts and varieties of foods are clear. The nutritional well-being and health of individuals is promoted, incomes and livelihoods supported, and community and national wealth created and protected.

The causal pathway from the food system to nutritional outcomes may be direct - as influenced by the availability and accessibility of diverse, nutritious foods and thus the ability of consumers to choose healthy diets, as well as indirect – mediated through incomes, prices, knowledge and other factors. Interventions that consider and affect food systems as a whole can potentially achieve more widespread nutritional outcomes than single uncoordinated actions.

We invite you to comment on the background papers and materials for the ICN2 made available for this discussion. In addition your comments on the expert papers that have been prepared in response to FAO’s Call for Experts that are available at this link as well as your responses to the following questions would be welcome:

- **Policy issues:** What policies can make agriculture and food systems more nutrition-enhancing? What are the knowledge gaps in policies associated with nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food systems?

- **Programme issues:** What do nutrition-enhancing agriculture and food systems look like? What have been the success stories and lessons learned from programmes at country level? How can we monitor the impact of such programmes on food consumption and nutrition?

- **Partnerships:** How can we work across sectors and build strong linkages between food and agriculture, social protection, employment, health, education and other key sectors? How can we create sustainable partnerships? how can we build effective governance for nutrition?

While we encourage you to provide comments on any or all of the above at any stage of the discussion, we propose focus is given in the first week to discussing the first set of questions.

The outcome of this online discussion will be used to enrich the discussions at the preparatory technical meeting on 13-15 November 2013 and thereby feed into and inform the main high level ICN2 event in 2014.

We thank you in advance for your time and for sharing your knowledge and experiences with us.

We look forward to your contributions.

**The facilitators:**
Jody Harris, Senior Research Analyst, Poverty Health and Nutrition Division, IFPRI.
Leslie Amoroso, Programme Officer and member of the ICN2 Secretariat, FAO, Rome, Italy

[find out more about the facilitators here](#)