

**Message from Dr Ronald P. Cantrell, Director General
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on the Observance of World Food Day: Bio-diversity for Food Security**

Food security is about ensuring that everybody enjoys regular access to the nourishing food people need to live healthy, active and productive lives. For the world's poor, it means the ability of parents to provide their children with nutritious meals with the knowledge that they can do so every day.

As the staple food of almost 3 billion people, rice is central to the lives of most of the world's poor. Any global strategy to alleviate hunger and poverty must therefore involve rice. On the occasion of World Food Day, in this International Year of Rice 2004, I would like to stress the importance of the theme for this year's program: biodiversity for food security.

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) appreciates that preserving crop biodiversity is essential to improving rice production in the diverse and challenging environmental conditions in which rice is grown around the world. Within the International Rice Genebank at IRRI, over 100,000 accessions of both wild and cultivated rice species are held in trust for mankind. This diverse genetic material is made available to researchers worldwide in line with international agreements regarding germplasm exchange.

This storehouse of diverse genetic resources contains a multitude of useful characteristics. Some varieties tolerate climatic extremes of cold, heat and drought. Others thrive in nutrient-poor or toxic soils, and still others resist pests and diseases. Other rice qualities such as the nutritional content and physical appearance of the grains also vary greatly. These characteristics give scientists the tools to breed nutritious and appealing rice varieties suitable for an array of growing conditions.

As our constantly changing environment evolves, and as farming practices advance, this collection of diverse rice species will continue to be an invaluable resource. We should all work towards preserving rice and other food crop biodiversity and so make an essential investment in alleviating hunger now and in the future.