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Proposal for an International Year of Fruits and Vegetables

Executive Summary

Fruits and vegetables contribute significantly to human nutrition, food security, health and to the generation of income and employment for smallholders and family farmers. Notwithstanding their nutrition and health benefits, worldwide per capita consumption of fruits and vegetables is estimated to be 20-50 percent short of the minimum FAO and WHO recommended intake. Furthermore, large quantities of fruits and vegetables produced and intended for human consumption, are never consumed, owing to high levels of losses (qualitative and quantitative) and waste across the supply chain, contributing to wasteful use of resources.

In order to draw attention to the important role of fruits and vegetables in healthy diets, the Latin America and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) proposes to establish the observance by the UN System of an International Year of Fruits and Vegetables in 2021. The purpose of the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables would be to raise awareness of the nutrition and health benefits of fruit and vegetable consumption, advocate for healthy diets through increased consumption of fruits and vegetables and to promote international efforts to boost fruit and vegetable production in a sustainable way and reduce losses and waste in their supply chain from production to consumption.

FAO's support to this initiative is particularly important, bearing in mind that it is the UN specialized agency that leads international efforts to defeat hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition and is mandated to raise levels of nutrition, sustainably improve agricultural productivity and reduce food losses and food waste, taking into account sustainable production and consumption practices.

Suggested action by the Council

Considering the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025, the important role of fruits and vegetables in healthy diets, and an urgent need (1) to raise awareness of the nutrition and health benefits of fruit and vegetable consumption, and (2) to advocate for healthy diets through increased consumption of fruits and vegetables as well as (3) to promote international efforts to boost fruit and vegetable production in a sustainable way and reduce losses and waste in their supply chain from

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production to consumption, the GRULAC proposes to establish the observance by the UN System of an International Year of Fruits and Vegetables on an exceptional basis in 2021.

The Council is invited to:

- 1) endorse the proposal by the GRULAC to establish observance of an **International Year of Fruits and Vegetables** in 2021 and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.
- 2) make a recommendation on the Draft Conference Resolution presented in *Appendix A* to the 41st Session of the Conference (June 2019).

Queries on the substantive content of the document may be addressed to:

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I. Background

1. Fruits and vegetables are important for human health and nutrition. Benefits of their daily consumption have been extensively researched and documented.
2. FAO and WHO recommend a minimum intake of 400 g per day of fruits and vegetables to prevent chronic non-communicable diseases such as heart diseases, cancer, diabetes or obesity, as well as to prevent and mitigate various micronutrient deficiencies¹. However, despite recognition of their nutritional benefit, worldwide per capita consumption of fruits and vegetables is estimated to be 20-50 percent short of the FAO/WHO minimum recommended intake.
3. Low intake of fruit and vegetables is among the top 10 risk factors for mortality across the globe. According to the Global Burden of Disease Study, worldwide 3.4 million deaths can be attributed to low consumption of fruit and 1.8 million to diets low in vegetables².

A. Nutrition

4. The UN General Assembly resolution proclaiming the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025, calls on FAO and WHO to lead the implementation of this decade together with the various agencies of the UN system, such as the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN) and the multi-sectorial platform of the Committee on World Food Security. The resolution confirms the commitment to stop the rising trend of overweight and obesity, along with reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases related to diets.
5. The Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN-2) convened in 2014, and the International Symposium on Nutrition convened by FAO and WHO in December 2016, both highlighted the need to implement sustainable food systems that promote healthy diets. Healthy diets are defined, among other aspects, as diverse since they include a variety of foods and the abundant consumption of fruits and vegetables³.
6. Recommendation 10 of ICN-2 establishes, inter alia, the promotion of crop diversification and increased fruit and vegetable production⁴. Globally, national strategies / plans are being developed to reduce the intake of so-called critical nutrients (fats, sugar, salt and calories) and encourage the consumption of fruits and vegetables.
7. Many countries include in their dietary guidelines, recommendations on the consumption of fruits and vegetables.

¹Fruit and Vegetables for Health: Report of a joint FAO/WHO Workshop. Kobe, Japan. 2004.

[Http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/456001/icode](http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/456001/icode)

² Global, regional, and national comparative risk assessment of 79 behavioural, environmental and occupational, and metabolic risks or clusters of risks in 188 countries, 1990–2013: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013, *Lancet* 2015: 386, 2287-323.

³FAO publication "Influencing Food Environments for Healthy Diets", 2016. www.fao.org/3/a-i6484e.pdf

⁴ Framework for Action of the Second International Conference on Nutrition, 2014. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mm215s.pdf>

B. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

8. The integration of fruits and vegetable production with nutrition and health, is highlighted in the context of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2, 3 and 12: SDG 2- "*End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture*", SDG 3: "*Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*", and SDG 12, "*Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns*".

C. The agricultural sector and food security

9. The primary role of the food and agriculture sector is to adequately feed people by increasing the availability, affordability and level of consumption of varied, safe and nutritious foods that are in line with dietary recommendations and environmental sustainability.

10. Development of the fruit and vegetable sector has a positive impact on income generation and on the food security and nutrition of smallholders and family farmers, as well as on rural and urban consumers. Efficient distribution networks and markets, which are key requirements to facilitate the physical access of consumers to safe fruits and vegetables are, however, often lacking in rural and urban areas of many developing countries.

D. Family farming

11. Fruit and vegetable production generates comparably higher levels of income when compared to grains and other traditional staple crops and offers immense scope to increase the income levels of smallholders, and family farmers while improving the productivity of scarce resources. When compared to other crop production sectors, the fruit and vegetable sector is far more labour intensive, thereby generating employment and income.

12. The fruit and vegetable sector is, however, highly vulnerable to the risks of crop failure owing to drought, pests and diseases and adverse weather conditions and its high perishability which could negatively impact producers' income, fruit and vegetable availability as well as cost to the consumer.

E. Gender: The role of rural women

13. Women play a key role in promoting the sustainable diversification of agriculture. Fruit and vegetable production, indeed, provides a major source of employment, for women and youth in rural areas.

14. Women are the ones who usually decide on food consumption in their homes. Women spend more on food, health and education for children than when resources are controlled by men. When women participate in household decision-making, especially on household food purchases, this is associated with improved diversity in the household diet. Both women and men must be made aware of the health benefits of fruit and vegetable consumption.

F. Sustainable Production Systems

15. The production of fruits and vegetables offers opportunities to increase the efficiency of the use of land, water and other farm inputs. At the same time, fruit and vegetable production often requires larger quantities of inputs than do staple crops, including chemicals to ensure high productivity and protection from pests. Efforts to increase fruit and vegetable production must, therefore, be accompanied by efforts to ensure the adoption of environmentally-friendly agricultural practices which do not endanger consumer health and positive socio-economic impacts on livelihoods and income.

16. It is important to recognize and protect the vast range of fruits and vegetables available around the world. Indigenous fruits and vegetables may be better adapted to local and changing climate conditions and may also offer comparably good nutritional quality.

G. Food Loss and Waste

17. Fruits and vegetables are highly perishable owing to their high moisture content and delicate nature. If not harvested at the correct stage of maturity and handled properly in the supply/value chain, from harvest to consumption, they suffer high levels of losses (qualitative and quantitative) and waste.

18. When compared to other categories of food commodities (dairy, fish, grains, etc.) fruits and vegetables suffer the highest levels of losses and waste in the production-to-consumption continuum, reaching up to 42 per cent of what is produced.

19. Losses and waste in fruits and vegetables represent significant amounts of resources - including land, water, labour, energy and other inputs used in their production that does not ultimately meet the intended purpose of feeding people.

20. Losses and waste in fruits and vegetables also represent a waste of micronutrients and have negative economic impact (loss of profit for small farmers and higher cost for consumers) and environmental (greenhouse gases produced in landfills, ecological impacts).

II. Objectives of the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables

21. Given the importance of fruits and vegetables for nutrition, health, income and employment generation and other relevant dimensions of sustainable development, the GRULAC proposes to establish observance of the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables in 2021, in order to raise awareness of the nutritional and health benefits of fruit and vegetable consumption and to advocate for healthy diets and lifestyles through increased consumption of fruit and vegetables. Awareness will be raised among governments on the importance of generating public policies that promote the development of sustainable food systems to deliver fruits and vegetables for consumption in healthy diets paying attention to production systems operated by smallholders and family farmers, the reduction of fruit and vegetable losses and waste and the sustainable use of natural resources. GRULAC requests the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) to endorse this proposal (see *Appendix A*).

Appendix A**Draft FAO Conference Resolution****International Year of Fruits and Vegetables**

Considering the urgent need to raise awareness of the nutritional and health benefits of fruit and vegetable consumption and to advocate for healthy diets through the increased sustainable production and consumption of fruit and vegetables;

Recalling the UN General Assembly resolution proclaiming the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016-2025, and the need to implement sustainable food systems that promote healthy diets, which include a variety of foods and the abundance of the consumption of fruits and vegetables;

Recalling recommendation 10 of the Second International Conference on Nutrition, ICN-2 that establishes, inter alia, the promotion of crop diversification and increased fruit and vegetable production;

Recognizing the important contribution of fruits and vegetables in the prevention of non-communicable chronic diseases, especially cardiovascular and cancer, obesity and diabetes;

Noting the importance of sustainable farming and production practices to the livelihoods of millions of rural farm families and small family farmers around the world;

Cognizant of the important contribution of fruits and vegetables, and particularly indigenous crops, to food security, nutrition, livelihoods and incomes of family farmers especially small family farmers;

Concerned over the high levels of losses and waste in the fruits and vegetable supply/value chains, and the negative economic, environmental and social impacts of these losses and waste;

Recognizing the need to empower women through education, to assure the quality of family diets;

Recognizing that the observance of an International Year of Fruits and Vegetables in 2021 by the international community would contribute significantly to raising awareness of the nutritional and health benefits of fruit and vegetable consumption and promote global attention to increasing healthy diets and lifestyles through fruit and vegetable consumption, while directing policy attention to addressing production issues and losses and waste;

Stressing that costs for implementation of the Year and the FAO involvement will be covered by extra-budgetary resources to be identified;

Requests the Director-General to transmit this Resolution to the Secretary General of the United Nations with a view to having the General Assembly of the United Nations consider at its next session, declaring 2021 as the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables.