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Food-based Approaches for Improving Diets and Raising Levels of Nutrition



Biodiversity and Sustainable Diets

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The concept of “sustainable diets” is receiving renewed attention as the world struggles with many natural and man-made disasters. Implicit in the concept of sustainable diets are food and nutrition security through a food-based approach. Biodiversity was linked to explicitly address the relevant environmental issues. The spectrum of biodiversity covers the ecosystem, the species within that ecosystem, and the genetic resources within species (e.g., varieties, cultivars, subspecies, breeds). Thus, food biodiversity is a topic equally at home in the sectors of agriculture, health and the environment. The most recent forum to address the topic was an International Scientific Symposium Biodiversity and Sustainable Diets held at FAO 3-5 November 2010. An outcome of the Symposium was an agreed definition: **Sustainable Diets are those diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; while optimizing natural and human resources.** Aligned with the Symposium was a survey conducted to seek opinions from the scientific community about sustainable diets. Overwhelmingly, the respondents listed high chemical inputs into agriculture, monoculture agriculture, and intensive livestock industries as being incompatible with sustainable diets, while listing eco-friendly agricultural practices, locally adapted food species and varieties, and nutritional adequacy as fundamental. Nutrition and biodiversity converge as one common path leading to food security and sustainable development. They feature directly in the Millennium Development Goals to halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger, and to ensure environmental sustainability. In combination, nutrition and biodiversity will provide the foundation for achieving these Goals. The concept of sustainable diets should become a reference for addressing some of the nutritional and environmental challenges that we face, not the least of which is one billion hungry people worldwide.

