



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NORTH AMERICA AND THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS:

“INDIGENOUS FOODS – FOOD SAFETY AND ONE HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS”

1. Indigenous foods are foods that have been cultivated, harvested, processed and consumed by Indigenous peoples for generations and is often closely linked to the fabric of people's traditional practices and ecological knowledge. These foods are often locally sourced and sustainably harvested in the local environment, and they play an important role in the cultural and social identity of Indigenous communities. Such foods can be sourced from the ocean, forest or traditional gardens. These foods are sometimes specific to certain species or varieties of plants, fungi, animals, including fish and seafoods and often are associated with specific regions and cultures. These foods connect people to their ancestors and their land. Indigenous foods are also considered “clean” as they are often minimally processed and free from artificial ingredients. Hence, Indigenous food systems are characterised by sustainability, cultural significance, resilience and sovereignty.
2. As the world faces increasing challenges related to food security and environment sustainability, it is important to learn from and support indigenous food systems. Embracing Indigenous foods systems can contribute positively towards better human and planetary health. However, Indigenous foods are at a crossroads and facing increasing challenges of globalisation and industrialisation while holding immense potential for sustainable food systems and cultural preservation. One key aspect of this is the integration of Indigenous foods into formal markets. Some of the key challenges include; (1) Loss of traditional knowledge; (2) competition from processed foods; (3) Lack of Infrastructure and access to markets and (4) Standardisation and cultural appropriation. On the other hand, there are unique opportunities such as (1) Economic empowerment or opportunities for indigenous communities that could help in reducing poverty and food insecurity; (2) Food security and sovereignty; (3) cultural preservation and (4) having sustainable food systems that promote biodiversity and environment health.
3. It is important to ensure appropriate strategies are implemented for successful integration of Indigenous foods into formal markets and to exploit potential market and trade opportunities both at national level as well as trade within the region. Some of these strategies include (1) Supporting value chain development for indigenous foods from production to processing and marketing; (2) having market access and appropriate infrastructure; (3) providing capacity building training to indigenous producers on but not limited to food safety and quality standards; (4) policy support and (5) consumer education through raising awareness among consumers about the nutritional, cultural, and environmental benefits of Indigenous foods. By addressing these challenges and capitalising on these opportunities, the integration of indigenous foods into formal markets can present a “One Health” approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimise the health of people, animals and ecosystems.
4. In order to protect and support sustainability and resilience of Indigenous food systems, it is vital to adopt and follow appropriate regulations. These can include but may not be limited to (1) Access and Benefit Sharing; (2) Intellectual Property and (3) Food Safety and Quality Standards. In the Pacific Island Region context, there are national examples of regulations related to food such as the Food Safety Act 2003 (Fiji), the Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Expressions Act 2008 (Samoa) and the Environment Act 1998 (Solomon Islands). Moreover, the Papua New Guinea National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (2018 – 2027) outlines several initiatives aimed at promoting indigenous foods. Some of the key indigenous foods in many of the regulations in the Pacific Islands focus on (1) Root crops like taro, sweet potato and cassava; (2) indigenous vegetables and (3) kava which is native to the Pacific Islands. The regulation of indigenous foods in the Pacific Islands is a complex and evolving area. However, there are opportunities to develop quality standards in a regional context through coordination among member countries.