



Sustainable Diets and Biodiversity: Directions and Solutions for Policy, Research and Action

A review by Cristina P. Rodríguez Torres

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Undoubtedly, “sustainability” has become a very valuable term during the last years. This term refers to a balanced course, which addresses the environment, society and economic development. There is an emergent recognition about the effects of the carbon footprint, the importance of the conservation of biodiversity and food security with the growing world population. In this context, two questions will arise. Firstly, how can the goals for humanity and ecology be achieved together? And secondly, is there a linkage between sustainability and health? In order to answer these inquiries, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and Biodiversity International propose a compilation of scientific opinions presented in the International Scientific Symposium.

Many experts from all over the world debated and contributed with their knowledge, and shared different points of view regarding these debates. Therefore, from the gathered information, the book seeks to establish a connection between these demanding issues, which are used as an approach to the development of sustainable diet models. In addition, it analyses the food production systems in response to the worldwide problem of hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

To be more specific, a formal definition of a sustainable diet has been built. It constitutes a nutritious balanced diet that promotes a decrease in its environmental impact, while preserving the local natural resources, biocultural diversity, and health for the present and future generations.

Furthermore, a sustainable diet should address the security and accessibility of food on an equal and fair trade way, with the support of seasonal foods (Burlingame 2010, p.7). It is also pointed out that the direction of sustainable food

development includes the use of water and land for agricultural practices, which means that there is an environmental footprint of food production systems and modern diets with focus on consumer choices. To give a rough idea of the situation, meat and meat related products contribute to 12% to the global warming whereas fruits and vegetables only add 2%, based on a study about the environmental impact of the products consumed in the EU (Iannetta et al. 2010, p.276).

The FAO encourages us, as consumers, to think about the effects of our dietary patterns. Changes in our lifestyles can play a significant role on the conservation of nutrition, health and ecology. It can be possible to achieve through the discovery and appreciation of many less known or abandoned plant species and by incorporating them into our diet. Additionally, it is recommended that the genetic material of the traditional seeds, for instance, should be protected with the respective local knowledge about the methods of cultivation and their usage. Something vital is to avoid falling on intensive agriculture and deforestation.

There are 7000 domesticated plant species employed for food production. Despite this, barely 30 crops are been cultivated such as corn, rice and wheat which meet 50% of the food needs of the world (Petrillo 2010, p.227). The FAO underlines the importance of the support to farmers and rural development through buying local food varieties and enhancing the acceptance of more sustainable agricultural systems.

Moreover, organic farming is considered a model for a sustainable agricultural system, as well as the Mediterranean diet, which according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), has become



a perfect model for sustainable diets, mainly because it includes a greater proportion of fruits and vegetables and a moderate consumption of meat (among other characteristics) (Petrillo 2010, p.228).

In conclusion, we can accomplish something worthwhile by simply starting with small changes. The future of food can be shaped by joint efforts from all of us. In fact, it is necessary to take actions at the national and international level. The creation of detailed guidelines, policies and the initiative of running projects are fundamental for the development of sustainable diets, along with the total food supply chain.

References

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Cristina P. Rodríguez Torres is from Ecuador and obtained her bachelor degree in Nutrition Science in Argentina. At the present, she is studying a master program in Germany, called International Food Business and Consumer Studies at University of Kassel. She has experience in the field of clinic nutrition and food management, especially in catering services and hospitals in South America. Her aspiration for the moment is to complement her knowledge abroad in the food business sector, with focus on food technology, quality management and organic food system.