



COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Twenty-ninth Session

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Proposal for an International Day of Fruits and Vegetables

Executive Summary

Fruits and vegetables are important for human health and nutrition. Nutrition and health effects of their daily consumption have been extensively researched and documented. Fruit and vegetable production and consumption are linked to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), most importantly 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".

The observance of an International Day of Fruits and Vegetables is proposed to create a platform to sensitize the general population and decision-makers about the importance of the contribution of fruits and vegetables to human nutrition, the importance of including them in dietary patterns, as well as of their social, cultural and economic value. This initiative would also facilitate the continued advancement of the reduction of food loss and waste of fruits and vegetables throughout the entire supply chain, and towards sustainable production systems. Such a day would further provide continuity to the efforts initiated during the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables in 2021.

Suggested action by the Committee

The Committee is invited to:

- review* the proposal by the Government of the Republic of Chile to establish the observance by the United Nations (UN) of an International Day of Fruits and Vegetables, and *provide guidance* as deemed appropriate;
- endorse* the draft Conference Resolution, as contained in Annex A, and submit the proposal for approval by the 176th Session of the FAO Council and adoption by the 44th Session of the FAO Conference.

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

Ms Nancy Aburto
Deputy Director
Food and Nutrition Division (ESN)
Tel: +39 06 570 51121
Email: Nancy.Aburto@fao.org

I. Background

A. *The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*

1. Fruit and vegetable production and consumption are linked to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), most importantly 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".

B. *Nutrition, healthy diets, and health*

2. Fruits and vegetables are important for human health and nutrition. Nutrition and health effects of their daily consumption have been extensively researched and documented.

3. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a minimum intake of 400 grams per day of fruits and vegetables to prevent chronic, non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular diseases and certain types of cancer, prevent weight gain, and mitigate the risk of various vitamin and mineral deficiencies¹.

4. However, despite recognition of their nutritional value, in 2017, worldwide per capita consumption of fruits and vegetables was estimated to be 20-50 percent short of the WHO minimum recommended intake. In 2017, low intake of fruits and vegetables featured among the top ten risk factors for mortality across the globe. That same year, it was estimated that worldwide, 2.5 million deaths could be attributed to low consumption of fruits and 1.8 million to diets low in vegetables.²

5. The UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution proclaiming the *United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025)*, called on FAO and WHO to lead the implementation of this Decade together with various Agencies of the UN system, such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the multistakeholder platform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). The UNGA 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.

6. The Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN-2), held in November 2014, and the International Symposium on Nutrition convened by FAO and WHO in December 2016, highlighted the need to implement sustainable food systems that promote healthy diets. Many healthy dietary patterns are characterized by an abundant consumption of fruits and vegetables.

7. Recommendation 10 of ICN-2 establishes, *inter alia*, the promotion of crop diversification and increased fruit and vegetable production. National strategies and plans are being developed to encourage the consumption of fruits and vegetables.

8. Owing to their recognized role in health and nutrition, and the low consumption of fruits and vegetables, the vast majority of countries include recommendations on the consumption of these food groups in their national dietary guidelines for the promotion of healthy diets.³

9. When prepared without added saturated fat, sugar or excess of salt, fruits and vegetables are an important part of healthy diets. They are excellent sources of multiple nutrients including vitamin C, carotenoids, potassium and fibre. They also constitute a principal source of dietary bioactive compounds, i.e. substances that are associated with improved health and often contribute to the rainbow of colours characteristic of fruits and vegetables.⁴ Nutrients and bioactive compounds

¹ WHO (World Health Organization). 2023. WHO. Geneva [Cited 28 August 2024].

<https://www.who.int/tools/elena/interventions/fruit-vegetables-ncds>

² GBD Collaborators. 2019. Health effects of dietary risks in 195 countries, 1990–2017: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017. *The Lancet*, 393(10184): pp.1958-1972.

³ FAO, n.d. Food-based dietary guidelines. FAO. Rome. [Cited 28 August 2024].

<https://www.fao.org/nutrition/education/food-based-dietary-guidelines>

⁴ Rickman, J.C., Barrett, D.M. and Bruhn, C.M. 2007. Nutritional comparison of fresh, frozen and canned fruits and vegetables. Part 1. Vitamins C and B and phenolic compounds. *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture*, 87(6): pp.930-944.

supplied vary significantly among crop species, cultivars or genotypes, agronomic management, preharvest environmental conditions, postharvest management and culinary practices⁵. Good agronomic, storage, and preparation practices, as well as the consumption of a variety of fruits and vegetables, are therefore key to obtain the health and nutrition benefits they offer.

10. There is convincing evidence that fruit and vegetable consumption reduces the risk of hypertension, coronary heart disease and stroke. In addition, there is probable evidence of an association between an increased consumption of fruits and vegetables and lower incidence of several types of cancer. Possible evidence of a correlation between fruit and vegetable consumption and the prevention of body weight gain has been identified. Finally, some evidence points to possible links between fruit and vegetable consumption and multiple other health and disease outcomes, such as mental health, bone health, and eye health, although more evidence is needed to establish clear relationships.⁶

C. Food security, improved livelihoods and inclusive economic growth

11. The primary role of the food and agriculture sector is to adequately feed and nourish 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.

12. 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, that are key requirements to facilitate the physical access of consumers to safe fruits and vegetables, however, often lack in rural and urban areas of many low- and middle-income countries.

13. Fruit and vegetable production generates higher levels of income when compared with grains and other traditional staple crops. It offers immense scope to increase the well-being of smallholders and family farmers while improving the use of scarce natural resources. When compared with other crop production systems, the fruit and vegetable sector is far more labour intensive and requires efficient post-harvest services and market linkages thereby generating employment and income opportunities.

14. The fruit and vegetable sector is, however, highly vulnerable to the risks of crop failure owing to drought and adverse weather conditions, nutrient deficiencies in soils, pests and diseases, which can negatively impact production, incomes, and the availability and cost of fruits and vegetables to the consumer.

D. Gender: The role of women

15. Women play a key role in promoting the sustainable diversification of agriculture. Women are overrepresented among retailers of fruits and vegetables, but obtain lower monthly income given that these tend to be lower profit commodities.⁷ Fruit and vegetable production provides a major source of employment for women in rural areas.

16. Women play a central role in household food consumption decisions and tend to prioritize spending on food, health, and education more than men.⁸ When women are involved in decision-making, households often experience greater dietary diversity, which is crucial for overall food security and nutrition. Empowering women to make decisions within the household can lead to

⁵ Toscano, S., Trivellini, A., Cocetta, G., Bulgari, R., Francini, A., Romano, D. and Ferrante, A. 2019. Effect of preharvest abiotic stresses on the accumulation of bioactive compounds in horticultural produce. *Frontiers in plant science*, 10: p.1212.

⁶ Wallace, T.C., Bailey, R.L., Blumberg, J.B., Burton-Freeman, B., Chen, C.O., Crowe-White, K.M., Drewnowski, A., Hooshmand, S., Johnson, E., Lewis, R. and Murray, R. 2020. Fruits, vegetables, and health: A comprehensive narrative, umbrella review of the science and recommendations for enhanced public policy to improve intake. *Critical reviews in food science and nutrition*, 60(13): pp.2174-2211.

⁷ FAO. 2023. The status of women in agrifood systems. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc5343en>

⁸ Essilfie, G., Sebu, J., & Baako-Amponsah, J. (2024). Does Women's Empowerment Matter for Household Food Security? Evidence From Northern Ghana. *Sage Open*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241245076>

significant reductions in food insecurity⁹ and foster greater dietary diversity for household members. Therefore, both women and men must be made aware of the health benefits of fruit and vegetable consumption and its contribution to a healthy diet.

E. Natural resources and sustainable production systems

17. Fruits and vegetables are often cultivated by smallholder farmers in diversified and integrated systems that promote multiple ecosystem services, such as pollination and soil fertility. Emphasizing diverse production methods and refocusing on the underutilized local fruits and vegetables is a potential key to sustainable conservation and utilization of biodiversity.

18. 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, the sustainable production of fruits and vegetables is knowledge-intensive, and efforts are needed to adopt environmentally friendly agricultural practices which do not endanger the environment, market access or consumer health.

19. It is important to recognize and protect the diversity and vast range of fruit and vegetable species and their varieties available around the world. Local and indigenous fruits and vegetables are often better adapted to local environments and changing climatic conditions. Moreover, they are often rich in nutrients and constitute significant elements of cultural identity.

F. Food Loss and Waste

20. 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.

21. When compared with other categories of food commodities (dairy, fish, grains, etc.) fruits and vegetables suffer the highest levels of losses in the supply chain from harvest up to, but not including, retail at 33 percent.¹⁰ Waste at retail and consumer levels is also high.

22. Losses and waste in fruits and vegetables represents also a waste of significant amounts of resources, including land, water, labour, energy and other inputs used in their production that do not ultimately meet the intended purpose of contributing to food security and nutrition.

23. Moreover, losses and waste in fruits and vegetables represent a waste of micronutrients and have negative economic (loss of profit for small farmers and higher cost for consumers) and environmental (greenhouse gas emissions, natural resource degradation) impacts. The reduction of food loss and waste of fruits and vegetables can significantly contribute to agrifood systems transformation and is essential to mitigate their environmental impact and to contribute to global food security and nutrition.

II. Rationale for the establishment of an International Day of Fruits and Vegetables

24. Considering the above-described contribution of fruits and vegetables to food security and nutrition, livelihoods and inclusive economic growth and their contribution towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is critical to raise global awareness of their importance and promote public policies to encourage their consumption and sustainable production through the establishment of an annual International Day of Fruits and Vegetables.

25. The proposal to celebrate the International Day of Fruits and Vegetables continues efforts to fulfil the key objectives of the "International Year of Fruits and Vegetables 2021" (IYFV 2021). That year was an opportunity to promote and increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables in the

⁹ Rashid, F. N., Sesabo, J. K., Lihawa, R. M., & Mkuna, E. (2024). Determinants of household food expenditure in Tanzania: implications on food security. *Agriculture & Food Security*, 13(1), 13 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40066-023-00462-0>

¹⁰ Data available through <https://www.fao.org/platform-food-loss-waste/flw-data/en>

world's population, with the aim of encouraging healthier diets, reducing nutrient deficiencies and the incidence of several non-communicable diseases. In addition, IYFV 2021 sought to become an engine of development for the communities involved in the production of fruits and vegetables around the world.

26. The celebration of IYFV 2021 was framed within the two important United Nations initiatives: the Decade of Family Farming (2019-2028) and the Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025). The Decade of Family Farming aims to highlight the crucial role that family farming plays in eradicating hunger and building a sustainable food future. The Decade on Nutrition seeks to accelerate the implementation of global commitments on nutrition, achieve goals related to nutrition and non-communicable diseases by 2025, and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs by 2030.

27. An International Day of Fruits and Vegetables would create a platform to sensitize the population and decision makers about the importance of the contribution of fruits and vegetables to human nutrition, the importance of including them in dietary patterns, as well as of their social, cultural and economic value. Such a celebration would positively impact public health and the fight against non-communicable diseases. In addition, this initiative would facilitate the continued advancement of the reduction of food loss and waste of fruits and vegetables throughout the entire supply chain. Such a day would provide continuity to the efforts initiated during the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables in 2021.

28. Furthermore, an International Day of Fruits and Vegetables would help to integrate small farmers, family farming and indigenous communities into sustainable production chains at local, regional and global levels. This inclusive approach would not only strengthen the rural economy but would also enable the benefits of agricultural development to be shared equitably, fostering the resilience of these communities in the face of global challenges, such as climate change.

29. This initiative would also make visible the crucial role that women play in the production, processing and marketing of fruits and vegetables. By recognizing and promoting their role in these activities, it would contribute to gender equality and women's economic empowerment, thus strengthening the social and economic fabric in rural and urban areas.

30. Annual celebrations could involve various initiatives, such as awareness raising supported by advocacy materials, technical publications, documentaries, field demonstrations, webinars and other international, regional and national events, and the promotion of regional or global networks. In addition, each year could focus on key issues, including topics related to the reduction of food loss and waste, the promotion of good practices for the sustainable production of fruits and vegetables, and innovative approaches to promoting their consumption.

III. Implementation mechanism

31. The International Day of Fruits and Vegetables will be implemented by FAO Members with the support of relevant FAO technical divisions, specialized offices and centres. During its celebration, the participation of interested regional and national organizations, scientific and academic institutions, as well as producers and their organizations will play a crucial role.

32. Resources to ensure the celebration of the International Day of Fruits and Vegetables would be sought through extra-budgetary contributions received through trust funds, and as in-kind contributions by relevant partners.

Annex A

Draft Conference Resolution

Recalling that the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables in 2021 successfully highlighted the importance of increased cultivation, availability and consumption of fruits and vegetables for improving human nutrition, food security, and hence achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);

Recognizing the urgent need to further raise awareness and to promote and facilitate actions towards increased availability, accessibility and consumption of fruits and vegetables in order to achieve the SDGs by 2030;

Affirming that adequate fruit and vegetable consumption is a cornerstone of healthy diets and leads to the prevention of several nutrient deficiencies and non-communicable diseases, and that consuming a variety of fruits and vegetables is key to obtain the health and nutrition benefits they offer;

Recognizing that worldwide fruit and vegetable intake falls short of recommendations and accounts for more than an estimated 5 million deaths annually;

Recognizing that promoting the sustainable production of fruits and vegetables in a changing climate requires cropping system diversification (including neglected and underutilized species) and offers opportunities to generate income, protect the environment, and create social equity and decent jobs;

Recognizing women's critical role in household food production, procurement, preparation and child feeding, as well as in production, sale and distribution of locally produced fruits and vegetables;

Recognizing that the development of the fruit and vegetable sector can positively impact income generation especially for smallholders and family farmers, as well as for rural and urban consumers;

Recognizing that fruits and vegetables are highly perishable and suffer high levels of losses and waste when there are no adequate post-harvest services and market linkages;

Acknowledging that strengthening of agrifood systems that includes the important role of fruits and vegetables can support all pillars of sustainability;

Recognizing that the celebration of an International Day of Fruits and Vegetables is an opportunity to promote healthy diets and sustainable production and that it will allow focused attention on global and national level policies to overcome challenges of production, value chains, consumption and losses and waste of these products;

Trusting that such an initiative would establish a platform and encourage actions to promote and implement activities in favour of preserving and sustaining global fruit and vegetable resources, as well as raise awareness of the importance of fruits and vegetables for health and in addressing issues of global concern, including hunger, malnutrition, inequities, poverty and threats to the environment;

Stressing that additional costs of activities arising from the implementation of the International Day of Fruits and Vegetables be met through voluntary contributions, including from the private sector;

Requests the Director-General to present this Resolution to the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGA) and the President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations for informational purposes;

Encourages FAO Member Nations to take the requisite steps to ensure the consideration of the Resolution to observe 4 March as an International Day of Fruits and Vegetables at forthcoming sessions of the UNGA, as appropriate.