UNISG - University of Gastronomic Sciences

Lectio Magistralis

FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva

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Ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to be here today.

The work of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations FAO - has many connections to what brings you to this university.

I will talk about some of these links today. And, hopefully, we will find ways to strengthen them.

I want to start by giving a few numbers on hunger.

According to FAO 2012 figures, almost 870 million people are chronically undernourished today. A big number. But we are still better off than in 1990, when we had one billion hungry people.

But we still need a big push even to reach the Millennium Development target for 2015 of halving the proportion of hungry people in the world. According to our estimates, less than 50 countries out of nearly 190 have already achieved the first Millennium Development Goal.

Despite our advances, one in every eight human beings still survive day-to-day without satisfying their right to food, perhaps the most basic human right.

That is unacceptable. And hard to believe considering that, today, the world already produces sufficient food for all.

When FAO was created in 1945 in a world devastated by war there was not enough food for all. So, increasing production was the obvious answer to hunger.

We succeeded. In the last 50 years the world increased the availability of food per capita in more than 40 percent.

Today, the main problem of hunger is not lack of supply.

This is an important difference. It means that if we want to end hunger, raising production is not enough.

It is also important to note that, paradoxically, over 70 percent of the food insecure population lives in rural areas of developing countries.

In theory, they should be able to produce enough food to feed themselves. But that is not always the case.

So, today, the main reason for hunger is lack of access due to the fact that people cannot buy the food they need or don't have access to the resources to produce it.

Lack of access to decent jobs and income, to quality inputs, to natural resources, to training, to markets. It's an ongoing list.

For poor consumers, when food prices go up they simply don't have enough money to buy the food they need. So, they usually either eat less or change their diets.

Normally from more nutritious, fresher and healthier food, that is more expensive, to cheaper and calorie richer food.

But this change does not have to be for the worse, if we diversify our diets and recover lost crops.

FAO estimates that throughout history over seven thousand different crops have been used for human consumption.

Many of them have disappeared or have been abandoned, and with it we are losing genetic biodiversity.

Biodiversity that will be important to improve different varieties of crops, making them more resistant to face water scarcity, higher temperatures and other consequences of climate change.

The food we are losing is being substituted by a handful of food commodities, that have become the basis of diets worldwide.

Rice, wheat, maize, soybean and potatoes respond for almost 3/4 of all we eat nowadays.

This leads to a "monotonous" diet, using a term coined by Josué de Castro, from Brazil, one of the first to look at the phenomenon of hunger from a political perspective.

This monotony has consequences for ecosystems, biodiversity and our health.

Intensive production of a few crops can lead to degradation and we have already talked about loss of biodiversity. Health wise, the monotony can cause micronutrient deficiencies.

But, as you know, we are not condemned to go down this road.

There still are hundreds, thousands of different types of plants, tubers, roots and seeds that can make part of our diets. Some are under-utilized, others forgotten.

To give only a couple of examples. Cassava in Africa, also known and eaten as yuka or mandioca in South America.

And quinoa, the treasure from the Andes.

This year, by the way, is the International Year of the Quinoa, that celebrates its nutritious value and adaptability to different climates and geographic conditions, ranging from sea level to 4000 meters above sea level and temperatures from -4 to 38 degrees Celsius.

I would like to call on the Slow Food Movement to help us make quinoa known all around the world.

How? Cookbooks with quinoa recipes! Using quinoa in the events that you will have this year! Promoting quinoa-based

dishes in your restaurants! Studying quinoa as part of the work you do at this university! These are just a few examples of what you can do.

The International Year of the Quinoa also reminds us of other under-utilized crops that can have a positive impact on food security. It is a powerful rallying call.

They are crops that smallholders and subsistence farmers can produce for their own consumption and for selling in markets.

Recovering these crops is a way towards food security. It also means rediscovering lost flavors and identifying new ones.

That is something that unites all of you to the poor farmers throughout the world.

In fact, FAO and the Slow Food Movement have a project mapping food biodiversity in four African countries.

Four Presidium products were identified through this project: Kenema Kola nuts in Senegal, wild palm oil in Guinea Bissau, katta pasta in Mali and salted millet couscous in Senegal.

Farmers who produce these products participated in last year's Terra Madre event.

This link to markets completes a virtuous circle: recover traditional crops, support local production and link them to markets, allowing for an increase in their income.

Let's stop for a moment and speak of the cultural value of food.

This component is a frequently forgotten part of the concept of food security.

Food security was defined by the 1996 World Food Summit as existing when all people have, at all times, physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that

meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

I want to put an emphasis in **food preferences**. People need to have access to food they want to eat, food that is culturally acceptable to them.

I don't need to go into too much detail on how this is important.

Let's just recall the example of the Mayan populations of Central America and Mexico. Their identification to maize was so complete that they used to refer to themselves as Men of Maize.

Your interest in rediscovering different foods is a way to recognize the cultural value of food, a value that is often forgotten in today's globalized and fast world.

We have already covered most of the components of the concept of food security, let's speak about another one: food safety.

Even though the food we eat is much safer today than ever before, the recent horse-meat scandal and the serious threats posed by Salmonella and Echerichia Coli clearly show that we still need to improve safety in the food chain.

As students and professionals of the food sector, this is also an area of concern for you and in which you can and should be active.

This year, by the way, the Codex Alimentarius celebrates its 50th birthday. As you know, the Codex plays an important role in developing and harmonizing international food standards. Its standards, guidelines and codes of practice protect the health of consumers worldwide and ensure fair practices in food trade.

There is another concept I want to refer to now, which is the concept of sustainability.

The way we produce and consume food has a central role in sustainability.

The Green Revolution allowed us to increase per capita availability of food by over 40 percent, as I said before.

But it also showed its limits: the loss of food diversity because of the focus on a few crops and the impacts on the environment because of the intensive use of chemical inputs and natural resources.

Looking ahead, our figures show that in 2050 we will need to increase food production by 60 percent to feed the over 9 billion people that will live in the planet.

The Green Revolution was absolutely essential and is rightfully credited to have saved over one billion people from starvation in the last decades.

But it wasn't able to end hunger, as I noted at the beginning.

And increasing production with the same input intensive approach would take too heavy a toll on the environment.

We are already seeing the impacts of climate change and land degradation in the world around us.

So we need a doubly green revolution. One that increases local production, but does so sustainably.

At FAO we call this save and grow. I have a book on this approach that I brought for your library.

Small-scale producers, local production and consumption circuits and recovering traditional crops are an important part of this new trend.

After all, the only reason why we need more food is to feed the hungry, and they live predominantly in rural areas of developing countries.

We can help them produce more, we can help them produce food that they are used to eat. And we help virtuous processes start moving.

Local circuits of production and consumption can make economies bloom. And are processes close to what bring you here.

Up to now, we have spoken mainly about production, now I want to talk about consumption.

First, because it is another aspect of sustainability.

Every year, one-third of the food we produce gets lost or wasted.

Food loss occurs in the post harvest and is more often in developing countries. Governments and institutions, including FAO, are working on reducing loss through better infrastructure, specially addressing better transport and storage capacity in developing countries.

But a lot more needs to be done. Including addressing food waste.

Consumers in rich countries waste around 220 million tons of food every year. That is almost as much as the entire net food production of sub-Saharan Africa.

Individually, the numbers are also impressive: per capita waste by consumers is between 95 and 115 kilograms a year in Europe and North America.

At the other extreme, in Sub-Saharan Africa and South and Southeast Asia, consumers throw away only 6 to 11 kilograms a year.

We have just launched the campaign Think Eat Save with the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and other partners that aims to raise awareness on the need to waste less.

I would like to see the Slow Food Movement onboard this campaign.

And while we know that eating better should also reduce food waste, more studies on food waste are welcome.

Do supersized portions and fast food diets make us waste more food? Does slow food, food and nutrition education reduce waste? Perhaps these are questions that this university can help us answer.

We also need to learn to eat better.

While one out of every eight people suffer from hunger, over half a billion people are obese and are at greater risk of falling ill to a variety of non-communicable diseases.

Rising obesity rates are caused by many different factors, including urbanization, economic growth and other transformations.

It is safe to say that we are not being able to cope with these changes as well as we could, at least not with regards to nutrition.

Consumer awareness and food and nutrition education programs can help us change the way we eat and relate to food.

This is important in all countries. In fact, in many developing countries relatively high levels of obesity co-exist with significant undernourishment.

Wasting less and eating better are goals that can go hand in hand.

In today's fast-food world, two for one promotions and super-sized portions are an invitation to eat more than we need. Slow Food itself is, of course, a reaction to this trend. And even fast food can give the consumer healthy options.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, FAO supports the Chefs against Hunger movement that has produced a handful of cookbooks that offer tasty and healthy dishes with crops that are accessible to the poor population in the region.

In the next three years, FAO and the World Health Organization, WHO, will promote a series of international events related to nutrition.

They should include a technical meeting with the participation of civil society, private sector and the academia this November.

In November 2014, FAO and WHO will co-organize the International Conference of Nutrition. And, in 2015, nutrition will have a prominent presence in the ExpoMilano.

This sequence offers us a golden opportunity to advance on the issue of nutrition.

Hopefully, we will be able to agree on a common set of principles, a policy framework that will help countries design and implement their own nutrition strategies.

I hope that the Slow Food movement can actively participate in these events.

Ladies and gentlemen, I think that it is safe to say that all of us share the vision of a hunger-free and sustainable world. Your work already contributes to this vision, but I would like to invite you to do even more.

How? Helping society as a whole take the next bold step we need: commit to ending hunger within our lifetimes.

That is the bold goal set by the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in the Zero Hunger Challenge, launched last year during the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development.

That was a fitting occasion, since we cannot call development sustainable while millions of people suffer from hunger and extreme poverty.

The Zero Hunger Challenge has five elements:

- First, ensuring people have adequate access to food all year long;
- Second, ending child stunting;
- Third, making all food systems sustainable;
- Fourth, doubling the productivity and income of smallholders; and,
- Fifth, zeroing food loss and waste.

FAO has already embraced the Zero Hunger Challenge. I invite you to do the same.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have showed today how FAO and Slow Food have many shared areas of interest:

- Recovering traditional crops;
- Promoting quinoa in its international year;
- Supporting smallholder production and linking them to markets;
- Improving food chains;
- Promoting sustainability in production and consumption;
- Reducing food loss and waste
- Diversifying diets and improving nutrition.

There is a lot we already do together. And a lot more that we can do. I am confident we will and that, when we do, the results will be better than when we work alone.

Thank you very much.