



Mediterranean diet must be protected and promoted, says FAO

The first in a series of Mediterranean diet-related events began at the Food and Agriculture Organization's headquarters in Rome during September, bringing together experts ranging from anthropologists and nutritionists to representatives from the United Nations.

The opening event began by exploring the principles of the Mediterranean diet, as well as engaging in discussions about its origins, history and traditions which date back more than 2,000 years to ancient Romans.

At the launch, FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu said that the Mediterranean diet promotes local food production and consumption patterns. He added that it encourages sustainable agriculture, safeguards landscapes and has a low environmental footprint.

Qu, who became the first Chinese to head the UN food agency back in August, cautioned that the Mediterranean diet, like many other traditional diets around the world, is being lost to modern eating habits. He pointed to an increasing reliance on "easy eating" options provided by fast-food outlets and supermarkets.

Population growth, globalization, urbanization and economic pressures are all causing changes in our food systems, diets and consumption patterns—each of these can lead to unhealthy diets with worrying consequences on people's health and lives, and countries' economies.

In fact, research published in April by the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) in Seattle revealed that unhealthy diets are now responsible for 11 million preventable deaths globally per year, more than smoking tobacco, making it the world's number one cause of death and disability.

Access to healthy diets such as the Mediterranean diet is critical for achieving the Agenda 2030, a collection of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the UN General Assembly in 2015. This is why initiatives protecting and supporting traditional healthy diets are to be commended and knowledge of these diets must be expanded, noted the FAO Director-General.

"Ultimately, sustainable and healthy foods are good for the body and the soul, and [they] are the basis for people to have a productive, healthy and happy life," concluded Qu Dongyu.

The Mediterranean diet, which includes vegetables, nuts, fish and extra virgin olive oil, is often praised by scientists in published studies for its health benefits, thanks in part to the nutrient oleic acid. Boasting a range of 55-83 percent of this beneficial monosaturated fatty acid, Italian varieties of extra virgin olive oil are said to contain the highest levels.

The international TAICHI project is spreading information about the health benefits of using extra virgin olive oil for cooking to Mainland China and Taiwan.

Co-funded by the EU and promoted by the two main consortia of Italian olive growers, Italia Olivicola and UNAPOL, the TAICHI project offers consumers all the information they need to understand olive oil through its website, various social media platforms and OurOliveOil APP – available in the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

Sources:

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