



**MESSAGE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
BRAULIO FERREIRA DE SOUZA DIAS
on the occasion of
WORLD HEALTH DAY
7 APRIL 2015**

Biodiversity underpins dietary diversity and access to sufficient food is a cornerstone of food security and a fundamental determinant of health. The existence of a diversity of genetic varieties and breeds of plant and animal foods, including wild food, can jointly contribute to ecosystem resilience, good nutrition and health. A lack of variety reduces food options for people, which can have a health impact. In this way, global declines in biodiversity in terrestrial, marine and freshwater systems will present major public health challenges particularly in low- and middle- income countries. The protection of biodiversity therefore can contribute to ensuring better health outcomes around the world.

This year, World Health Day focuses on the important issue of food safety. A safe food supply protects people from the risks of food poisoning and foodborne diseases, acute or chronic and contributes to food security. Unsafe food can lead to many health problems including diarrhoeal and viral diseases, reproductive and developmental problems, and even cancers. Food safety is an important part of food security, ensuring that food supplies are safe and not a danger to populations.

Biodiversity can play an important role in building food security and nutrition through its role in the provision of food. A diversity of species as the basis for food can help ensure and enhance food quality, diversification of crops and diets, help ensure a source of food to the poor in times of crisis, and as a key component of traditional food systems and food cultures.

Biodiversity also contributes to human health through the maintenance of a healthy microbiota. Humans, like other living beings, have a microbiota - ecological communities of commensal, symbiotic and pathogenic microorganisms that literally share our body space and outnumber our human cells ten to one - providing vital functions for human survival. Interaction with microbes present in the environment is an important part of the maintenance of our human microbiota. Reduced contact of people with the natural environment and biodiversity, and biodiversity loss in the wider environment, leads to reduced diversity in the human microbiota, which itself can lead to immune dysfunction and disease.

As the world's population grows, the need to meet increasing demand for food creates both opportunities and challenges for food safety and security. Let us recognize the ways in which biodiversity can help us to meet these challenges.



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On World Health Day, let us remember that biodiversity and healthy ecosystems are the lifeblood of food and nutritional security. Safe food production underpins sustainable development through its support to livelihoods, national economies, trade and tourism, and its contribution to food and nutrition security. Biodiversity conservation can make an important contribution to this objective and to the development of safer, healthier, more resilient and sustainable food production systems.
