

Message from Dr. Francesco Branca, Director, Department of Nutrition for Health and Development, World Health Organization (WHO), on the International Day for Biological Diversity, 22 May 2019

On May 22nd, we celebrate the International Day for Biological Diversity, and this year the theme is “Our Biodiversity, Our Food, and Our Health.”

As the Director of Nutrition for Health and Development at the World Health Organization., I am of course very pleased about the choice of this theme as it aptly recognizes the essential interplay between biodiversity, nutrition, our health and the health of our planet.

In this 2016-2025 UN Decade of Action on Nutrition, we, at the World Health Organization envision a world free from all forms of malnutrition, where all people achieve health and well-being. Biodiversity is critical to our work in promoting healthy diets and making food systems more resilient and sustainable.

We need to eat a wide variety of foods from different food groups, to ensure a healthy and balanced diet. Our food systems need to be sustainable, equitable, accessible, resilient AND diverse. Biodiversity is protective of crop loss from weather impacts and disease, which is especially important in the face of climate change. Rich biodiversity also provides ecosystems with natural pest management, soils with nutrients needed for healthy crops, and insects that are needed to pollinate plants.

Our food systems are becoming increasingly more homogenous and dependent on a small number of global crops, so we must renew our efforts to protect biodiversity, especially amongst indigenous and local species.

There is urgent need to raise awareness on the link between biodiversity and nutrition. We need a wide variety of animal and plant life. In order for us to survive and thrive, we must continue to recognize that improving nutrition is greatly dependent upon our protection of biodiversity around the world. The Health agenda and Environment agendas are in fact the same agenda: that of our survival!

Protecting biodiversity is a win-win opportunity—both for the health of people and for the health of the planet. Happy celebrations!

