



AVRDC

The World Vegetable Center

MEDIA release

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Not by Bread Alone

Why vegetables must be on the plate for economic development, food security, and health

Doha, QATAR -- 10 June 2010 -- It may be a high ranking, but it is not a healthy one: Populations in six countries in the Middle East and North Africa are among the world's top 10 for diabetes prevalence.

Dr. Dyno Keatinge, Director General of AVRDC – The World Vegetable Center, discussed the problem in a presentation on “Fighting the Battle Against Poverty and Malnutrition by Diversifying Cropping Systems with Fruit and Vegetables” today at the Qatar Green Foundation. “Over the last 40 years we’ve focused on overcoming hunger, but our success in increasing the production of staple crops has come at a great cost, both to agricultural diversity and community health,” said Keatinge. “You can’t live on bread alone and be healthy.”

AVRDC – The World Vegetable Center signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Al Sulaiteen Agricultural and Industrial Complex (SAIC) on 9 June 2010 to promote vegetable research and development in the region.

Increasingly, people in the developed and developing world alike have diets high in carbohydrates and fats. In many developing countries, more than 70% of diets now consist of just one staple. While staple crops such as rice or maize are important for food security, they don’t provide much protein, vitamins, or other vital micronutrients. The emphasis on starchy staples leads to higher rates of obesity—a known risk factor for cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and other chronic health problems that strain already-stretched health care systems.

The prevalence of type 2 diabetes in the Middle East is now among the highest in the world. With rapid economic development and changes in lifestyle, increasing numbers of people in the region are afflicted with the disease.

Recent trends point to a decrease in consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables in the region. “The key need is for balanced diets,” said Keatinge. “Vegetables are our best source of the vitamins, micronutrients, and fiber the human body requires for health. They add much-needed nutritional diversity to diets.” Yet vegetable consumption in most countries, developed or developing, is well below recommended minimum standards.

The concept of balance and diversity extends to agriculture and economics. “Vegetables are less risk-prone to drought than staple crops, as they typically have a shorter growing time,” said Keatinge. “They can maximize scarce water supplies and soil nutrients.”

Growing vegetables is one of the most potent means available for small-scale farmers to generate income on and off the farm. A labor-intensive activity, vegetable production creates jobs and diversifies local cropping systems. It

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encourages entrepreneurship in marketing fresh produce and processing the harvest, which helps develop rural infrastructure and strengthen local economies.

Global investment in agricultural research grew rapidly during the 1960s and 1970s to address poverty. After successes in grain production were achieved, research investment dwindled in the 1980s and stagnated from 1990 onwards. "Support for agricultural research must be increased now to meet the growing demand for food without deterioration of the agricultural resource base," said Keatinge. "Vegetables have an important role to play in transforming and diversifying agriculture to safely provide food, income, and employment for the poor, foster economic growth, and improve resource conservation and environmental protection."

AVRDC – The World Vegetable Center conducts vegetable research and development activities to benefit small-scale farmers and improve nutrition across the globe. The Center's technologies—including heat- and drought-tolerant tomato and pepper lines, grafting, drip irrigation, and nethouse and other sheltered production methods—help farmers diversify their cropping systems, spread their risk, generate more income, and produce nutritious, health-promoting vegetables for their families and communities.

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AVRDC – The World Vegetable Center is the principal international nonprofit institute for vegetable research and development. Founded in 1971, the Center develops vegetable lines and sustainable technologies to increase the production and consumption of nutritious, health-promoting vegetables in developing countries, leading to more income opportunities and healthier diets for the poor. Primary target groups are small, disadvantaged landholders in Africa, Asia, and Oceania. Headquartered in Taiwan, AVRDC – The World Vegetable Center has regional offices in Thailand, Tanzania, India, and Dubai UAE, and staff located in many developing countries. <www.avrdc.org>



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