



PRESS RELEASE



INTERNATIONAL DAY
for
**BIOLOGICAL
DIVERSITY**
Our Biodiversity,
Our Food, Our Health
— 22 MAY 2019 —

International Day for Biological Diversity - *Connecting to “Our Biodiversity, Our Food, Our Health”*

- *UN commemorates International Day under theme “Our Biodiversity, Our Food, Our Health”.*
- *International Day for Biological Diversity highlights the importance of nature in people’s daily lives, offers concrete steps to make our food systems healthier and more biodiversity-friendly.*
- *Thought leaders in the environmental, health and food communities join forces to promote the importance of biodiversity and healthy ecosystems.*
- *Biodiversity Day observance comes on the heels of landmark report showing ‘unprecedented’ decline in biodiversity and ecosystem services – the bedrock for our life support system.*
- *Day aims to boost public engagement to heighten nature-based solutions in policy, practice and community actions in support of a new framework for biodiversity governance, to be adopted next year, under the Convention on Biological Diversity.*

22 May 2019 – The United Nations celebrated the International Day for Biological Diversity by examining the fundamental role of nature in ensuring human health and good nutrition.

"Biodiversity is the food we eat, the water we drink, and it is also the air we breathe. More than that, biodiversity is part of us, as we humans are part of nature," said Dr. Cristiana Paşca-Palmer, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). "The truth is that without healthy nature and biodiversity, we cannot have quality nutrition, and without quality nutrition we cannot have good health – as simple as that."

Observed every year on 22 May, the International Day for Biological Diversity throws a spotlight on biodiversity and healthy ecosystems as the basic support system for all life on Earth. The 2019 theme, "Our Biodiversity, Our Food, Our Health", aims to spread awareness of how food systems, nutrition and health all depend on the natural environment.

"On this International Day for Biological Diversity, I urge all – governments, businesses and civil society – to take urgent action to protect and sustainably manage the fragile and vital web of life on our one and only planet," UN Secretary-General António Guterres said. "By halting environmentally harmful



practices, diversifying our food systems and promoting more sustainable production and consumption patterns, we can improve global health, increase food security and strengthen resilience to climate change.”

Countries, organizations and individuals around the world joined in the celebrations, hosting events and discussions about biodiversity, food and health. Outreach on these issues has never been more important. And in this context, the CBD Secretariat launched a new website (<https://www.cbd.int/idb/2019/>) featuring messages from thought leaders, educational materials and the latest research on biodiversity, food and health. The aim is to heighten nature-based solutions in policy, practice and boost public engagement and community actions in support of a new framework for biodiversity governance, to be adopted next year, under the Convention on Biological Diversity at its 15th Conference of the Parties in Kunming, China.

In [a joint statement](#), Dr. Paşca-Palmer and Slow Food International President Carlo Petrini said biodiversity loss in agriculture and food production is a major security issue, threatening both the environment and human health.

“The human and community impact of this global homogenization and loss of agrobiodiversity is striking. Locally varied food production systems, including related indigenous, traditional and local knowledge, and the diverse cultures and skills of women and men family farmers, are under threat,” they said.

While people in most parts of the world currently have access to a greater variety of food than previous generations, the global diet as a whole—what people actually eat—is becoming more homogenized. Among the concerning trends, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) says:

- In the last 100 years, more than 90 per cent of crop varieties have disappeared from farmers’ fields
- Of the 6,000 plant species cultivated for food, 9 account for 66% of total crop production
- About a third of fish stocks are overfished, and 60% have reached their sustainable limit.

Loss of diversity in our food systems contributes to malnutrition and unhealthy diets, which are major risk factors of noncommunicable diseases such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Biodiversity loss also has a direct impact on the availability of both traditional and modern medicines and the prospects for discovering new ones.

The interplay between biodiversity, food systems and health has been examined in a number of important reports in recent months. The IPBES Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, published this month, named agricultural production among the key drivers of biodiversity loss as well as a major source of the carbon emissions contributing to climate change.

The FAO released its State of the World’s Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture report in February, warning of a decline in agrobiodiversity, the variety of life and ecosystem services needed to feed the world. “We urgently need to promote the use of biodiversity-friendly practices in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture. This day reminds us of the need to do better and to act together,” said Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General for Climate and Natural Resources at FAO.

In January, the EAT-Lancet Commission report offered a scientific view of what could make up a healthy diet resulting from a sustainable global food system. “Our current unsustainable food system is a leading cause for our global health crisis and is at the heart of the environmental catastrophe facing the planet,” EAT Foundation founder and president Gunhild Stordalen said. “Food is also responsible for 25 per cent

of all greenhouse emissions and the single most important cause of biodiversity loss. Changing what's on our plates and how it got there will help tackle almost all of today's major collective challenges."

Beyond raising awareness about the challenges, the International Day for Biological Diversity focuses attention on the transformative action needed to restore balance. Improving the sustainability of food systems is highlighted as an imperative to underwrite human health and advance the goal of living in harmony with nature. "It is now more important than ever to think about how we are using, or indeed misusing, the basics," UN Development Programme Administrator Achim Steiner said. "We have local, indigenous and scientific knowledge which proves that production does not have to mean destruction."

People are also encouraged to align their daily choices to long-term sustainability goals. Among the concrete steps people can take to make their diets more biodiversity-friendly are: reducing meat consumption; purchasing local and seasonal produce and patronizing sustainable agri-businesses; composting food scraps; and reducing food waste and unnecessary packaging. Individuals, organizations and businesses are invited to register such commitments through the [Action Agenda for Nature and People](#), a campaign to raise awareness and ambition on biodiversity goals.

"The links between biodiversity, ecosystems, and the provision of benefits to human health are deeply entrenched in our global commitments to curb biodiversity loss and climate change and also serve as crucial entry points for achieving of the Sustainable Development Goals," Dr. Paşca-Palmer said. "These challenges are really daunting, but solutions also exist, and we know that with broad actions we can overcome all these threats."

For more information on the Action Agenda for Nature and People, visit the [Action Agenda website](#). For images, quotes and statements, background information and other resources, please visit the [Biodiversity Day webpage](#).

NOTES TO EDITORS

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and entering into force in December 1993, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources. With 196 Parties, the Convention has near universal participation among countries. The Convention seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing are supplementary agreements to the Convention. The Cartagena Protocol, which entered into force on 11 September 2003, seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology. To date, 171 Parties have ratified the Cartagena Protocol. The Nagoya Protocol aims at sharing the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way, including by appropriate access to genetic resources and by appropriate transfer of relevant technologies. It entered into force on 12 October 2014 and to date has been ratified by 117 Parties.

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