



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



16 October 2024

# World Food Day

# RIGHT TO FOODS

for a Better Life and  
a Better Future

**LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND**



# FROM RIGHT TO REALITY

The right to food is a basic human right enshrined in international law. And still, not everybody in the world today has access to the foods they need to lead a healthy life.

The reasons are numerous. Right now, around 733 million people go hungry mainly because of conflicts, weather shocks, inequalities, and economic downturns.

Over 2.8 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet. That means, even if they are consuming enough calories, they may not be getting the nutrients and diversity they need to be healthy.

Simply put, almost half the global population today is not getting the nutrients they need to thrive – and, in some cases, survive.

This means that roughly half the world is more likely to get sick, become chronically ill or lack the stamina to lead an active life – all because of something so basic as a lack of access to adequate food.

This is the reason for action. Now.

We know from experience that producing more food alone is not the answer. After all, in absolute terms, food producers worldwide are already producing enough to feed us all.

The answer, instead, lies in coordinated, collective action to ensure that enough nutritious and safe foods are available everywhere to anyone at an affordable price.

The plural of “foods” is important because diversity is essential to proper nutrition. It is equally important for the long-term health of the environment on which we rely to produce these foods and which needs biodiversity to thrive.

The right to food, then, is about far more than calories for survival – it’s about healthy diets, variety, and the ability to flourish.

Rights alone don’t fill stomachs. But they frame our collective aspirations for the kind of world we want to live in. They create concrete obligations for governments to take action – and they should encourage all of us to do our part to ensure they are fully realised.

# UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES... ...AND SOLUTIONS

Challenges and solutions are context specific. But we can identify global trends that jeopardize the right to food. As many of these are connected, addressing them in isolation will not yield the change we need. So, even though some challenges may have specific solutions, they must, as much as possible, be part of holistic and collective actions.

## THE CHALLENGE

# MALNUTRITION IS UBIQUITOUS

Malnutrition exists in all countries and socio-economic classes, whether it's **undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies** or **overweight and obesity**. What's more, in many parts of the world, various forms of malnutrition occur at the same time.

Worldwide, some 2.5 billion adults and 37 million children under the age of five are now overweight.

At the same time, some 1.6 billion women and children are deficient in one or more vitamins and minerals. This is at least in part because they lack access to a healthy diet and it affects their health, growth and brain development.

Many **children are not growing properly**. 22.3 percent of children under five years of age are stunted, meaning they are too short for their age, while 6.8 percent are wasted or too thin for their height. Here, too, diet plays a key role.

Diets containing too many unhealthy foods also contribute to the rise of **cardiovascular diseases, diabetes** and certain **cancers**. These are not just individual problems but also national ones, as illness puts pressure on public health systems and people are less able to contribute to society.

These problems also relate to agrifood systems, since the nutritious, diverse foods needed in a healthy diet are insufficiently available or affordable.

**Poverty and soaring food prices** can make people reach for less nutritious, and often less expensive foods. But income growth, paradoxically, can do the same.

Add to that **globalization, urbanization** and an **ever-faster pace of life**, and the result is an increasing number of people who opt for convenient, unhealthy food that is often undesirably high in sugar, fats and salt.

We overall **spend less time preparing meals at home** than previous generations, and when we do go shopping, we increasingly rely on pre-prepared and ultra-processed food. In some locations, these are more readily available and less expensive than fresh produce and other nutritious foods.

THE SOLUTION

# INVEST IN HEALTHY DIETS FOR ALL

The solution to unhealthy diets seems simple: get everyone everywhere eating more healthily. The reality, of course, is more complex. Governments need to **incentivize the production and sale of more nutritious foods** and provide consumers with **accurate and consistent information** about food products and healthy choices. And they must support **everyone's right to a healthy diet, especially those who lack the financial means to**. This requires policies and

investments, ideally in the form of national plans that bring all these aspects together.

At the same time, consumer organizations need to **advocate for consumers' needs and rights** in consultation with the food industry and governments, call for national plans and initiatives, and engage with them.



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## WHAT IS A HEALTHY DIET?

Healthy diets are achieved by consuming a diversity of safe foods that provide adequate nutrients important for health, a balanced intake of energy and macronutrients, and moderation of foods and dietary components that increase the risk of diet-related non-communicable diseases.

# MONO CROPPING & LOSS OF FOOD DIVERSITY

Unsustainable agricultural practices are among the biggest drivers of biodiversity loss – and, right now, that decline is happening faster than at any time in human history.

This matters because biodiversity is crucial to food and agriculture. It enriches our diets and makes our agrifood systems more resilient to shocks, so that communities can have access to plenty of nutritious food even in the face of climate change.

Over the last decades, the focus on a limited number of staple foods such as rice, wheat, maize and specialized commodity crops, has boosted efficiency and reduced costs. But it has also compromised the resilience of

agrifood systems and reduced the diversity of the foods we produce and eat.

Today, only nine plant species account for 66 percent of our global crop production. To put this into perspective: there are around 6 000 plant species humans have cultivated for food throughout the ages and could choose to grow again.

In our aquatic world, too, diversity is disappearing, be it for different and perhaps even more worrying reasons: nearly a third of fish stocks are overfished. Likewise, almost 30 percent of local livestock breeds are now at risk of extinction.



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## WHAT ARE AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS?

The agrifood system covers the journey of food from farm to table. That means, from the moment it is grown, to when it is harvested, processed, packaged, transported, distributed, traded, bought, prepared, eaten and ultimately disposed of. It also includes all of the people who are involved in these processes, as well as the activities, investments, tools and choices that help us get these foods and agricultural products.

# TRANSFORM AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS

Diversity loss is one of many challenges that need to be addressed through our agrifood systems. To ensure our food is not just abundant and affordable, but also diverse and nutritious, we will need to transform agrifood systems in ways that make them **more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable**. This means transforming the way our food is produced, distributed, and consumed.

Transforming our existing systems means considering all actors, processes, and outcomes, laws and policies governing agrifood systems, and how everything relates to each other.

Making agrifood systems more diverse requires policies that protect, promote and regenerate biodiversity. That includes reintegrating traditional breeds of livestock and

diverse plant species and producing sustainably across all agricultural sectors.

It also depends on the private sector shifting away from unhealthy foods and making a greater diversity of safe, nutritious food available for people as they go about their everyday lives.

Finally, diversity also means having a variety of production options. And for that, people need equitable access to resources like land, water, forests, fisheries, and livestock.



# MILLIONS IN CRISIS GO HUNGRY AND MALNUTRITION SOARS

According to the latest Global Report on Food Crises, more than 280 million people experienced high levels of acute food insecurity in 2023 – and many of the crises that caused hunger last year are still ongoing in 2024. Simply put, hundreds of millions don't have enough to eat and are stuck in situations their bodies cannot sustain for long. The food they eat may not be safe and make them sick, they may be skipping meals, reducing portion sizes and often don't know where their next meal is coming from, or when.

**Conflict** is the major driver of food crises worldwide, followed by **extreme weather** and **economic shocks**. Conflict not only threatens the safety of people in conflict areas, but also the destruction of agricultural areas for food production, triggering forced displacement, and worsening food insecurity and malnutrition.

The Gaza Strip and the Sudan are prime examples. Famine looms in the whole Gaza Strip and in 14 areas in the Sudan, and both have seen much of their agricultural land damaged by war. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, an innovative multi-partner initiative for improving food security and nutrition analysis and decision-making, reports that Gaza has recorded the sharpest decline in food security on record.

**Lack of humanitarian access** to crisis areas and **limited international funding** and cooperation are two major limitations to responding swiftly and robustly to these and other crises and alleviating the suffering of people facing the worst kinds of hunger, poverty and malnutrition.





# GUARANTEE ACCESS TO HUMANITARIAN AID

Ultimately, peace is a prerequisite for food security, and the Right to Food is a basic human right. Where there is conflict, providing safe, unhindered and multi-sectoral humanitarian aid is essential to save and protect lives.

Global cooperation and coordination are key to ensuring that the humanitarian agencies distributing life-saving assistance have unimpeded and secure access to communities and that people in crisis can **access humanitarian aid safely**. This includes cash, food assistance and emergency agricultural supplies to protect and restart local food production, emergency livestock interventions to keep animals alive and other actions to ensure that affected people can quickly access nutritious foods.

Guaranteeing access to critical aid also means **fully funding emergency appeals in a timely manner**.

Food security and nutrition – and, by extension, the realization of the right to food – require good governance and peace. Peace, in turn, is not sustainable when people go hungry. That's why governments and the international community need to adopt **a transformative approach** that combines emergency interventions with larger efforts towards crisis prevention, peace building and development action that makes people's lives and livelihoods more resilient to future shocks.





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## THE CHALLENGE

# UNSAFE FOOD

Unsafe food can cause sickness and even death. At the very least, it prevents people from reaping the benefits of the nutrients available in their food. Food can become unsafe at any point in the supply chain. Contaminants, like bacteria or chemicals, can enter food through water or soil, for example, or through the equipment used to process it. Food can also spoil if it's not properly handled, stored and transported.

What's more, many of the bacteria that contaminate our food are now increasingly resistant to antimicrobials, making foodborne diseases more difficult to treat.

Climate change also affects food safety because it changes how bacteria, parasites and chemicals interact with our food and how quickly they grow and spread.

# APPLY FOOD STANDARDS

International food safety and quality standards govern how our food is produced, processed and distributed. Implementing these standards – which are set by a body called the Codex Alimentarius Commission – keeps our food safe and free from substances that can negatively affect our health.

Concretely, they encourage governments to develop legislations, operate adequate food control systems, provide trainings to food producers and handlers, and communicate with consumers about food safety and healthy diets. They also provide guidance to governments on how to be ready to respond to food safety emergencies when they happen.

Governments need to commit to upholding rigorous standards that protect consumers, hold businesses

accountable, and invest in research to determine the safety of pesticides, food additives, GMOs or processing technology.

What's more, government plans should look holistically at the way humans, animals and plants connect with each other and affect each other's health.

Producers and businesses must take these standards seriously and adapt their production to address overarching public health issues like anti-microbial resistance. They should find ways to reduce antibiotic use in the production of meats, seafood, dairy and other agricultural products. Limiting the spread of antimicrobial resistance requires coordinated action under the One Health approach to ensure sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for all.



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## ONE HEALTH

Food safety is a core tenet of One Health, an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals and ecosystems. The approach is used by many organizations and governments and rooted in collaboration across borders and disciplines.

# WORKING WITH GOVERNMENTS ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD

What bridges the gap between right and reality is action. As FAO's mandate and expertise cover all elements of our agrifood system, it is well-positioned to work with governments on holistic plans and projects that tackle multiple challenges and bring us closer to the system change we need to realize the right to adequate food for all.

In **Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Senegal** and **Tunisia**, FAO is encouraging young entrepreneurs to become actors for change in their local agrifood systems through “**agri-accelerators**” – spaces that connect them to the funds, business advice and opportunities they need to make smart investments in agriculture.

In **Suriname**, FAO is working with Indigenous Peoples and local communities to harness their traditional knowledge and sustainable practices in pineapple production. The project is introducing them to new business models, and techniques for post-harvest handling and processing that allow them to

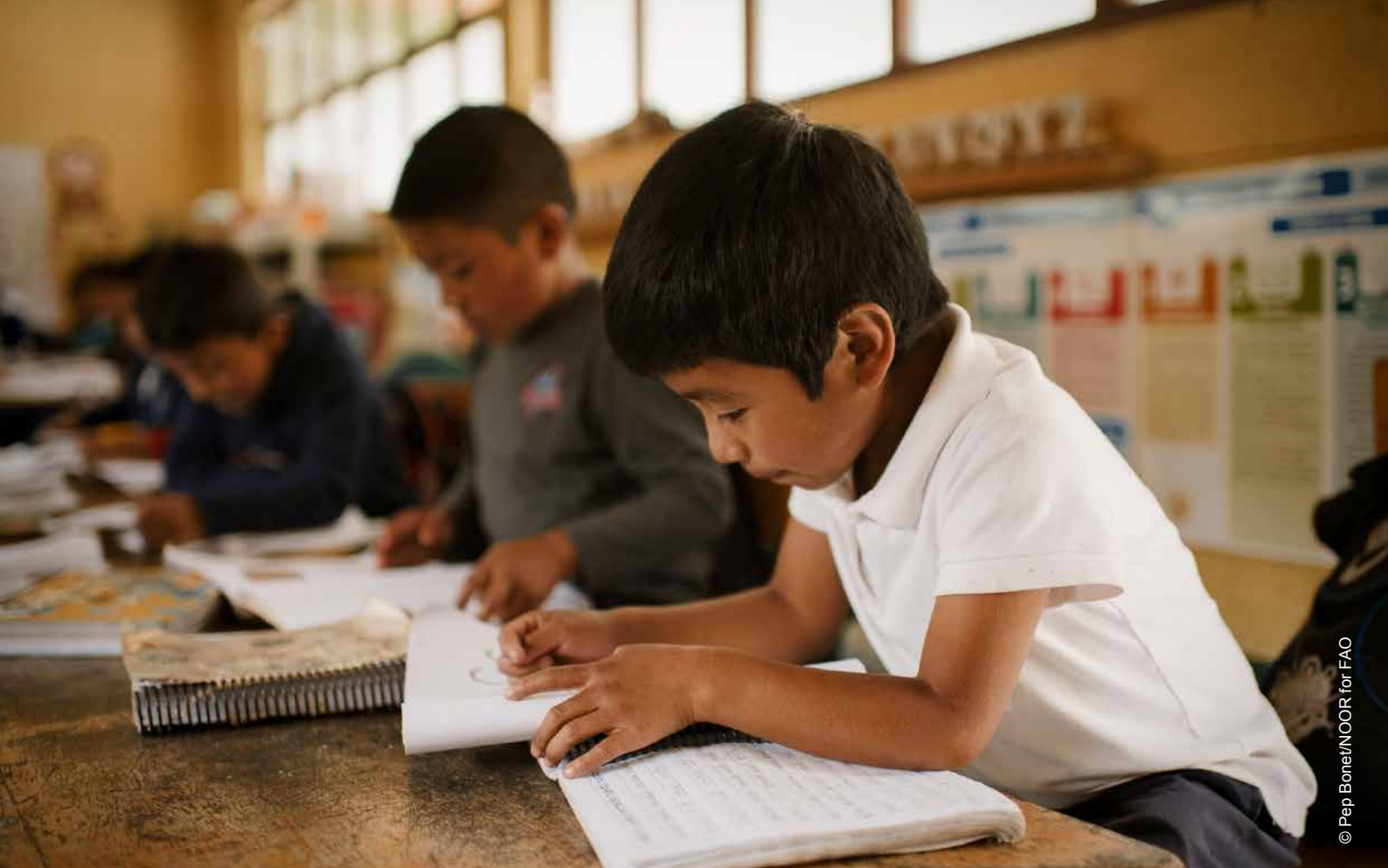
reach **new markets for organic foods** at home and abroad.

To better connect cities with surrounding rural communities that produce fresh, nutritious foods, FAO started the **City Region Food Systems programme** in **Sri Lanka, Zambia, Madagascar, Rwanda, Colombia** and **Ecuador**. The initiative works with local authorities, producers, and companies to increase rural-urban linkages to boost food security and nutrition in cities.

From fishing net weavers to jam producers, FAO has been empowering dozens of **women-led cooperatives** in rural parts of **Türkiye** with training and equipment, so women can

become financially independent for the first time. This increases their community involvement and resilience.

In the Liptako-Gourma region that connects **Burkina Faso, Mali** and **Niger**, FAO and the International Organisation for Migration are **reducing conflicts** between farmers and nomadic pastoralists through a dispute alert system called the **Transhumance Tracking Tool**, plus a conflict resolution system designed for the context. Migration routes have changed due to climate change and insecurity and increased rows over resources like water and pasture have been resolved quickly with help of the tool.



## ACTION SPOTLIGHT

# NATIONAL SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES

**Brazil's** national school feeding programme is a prime example of how to realize the right to food holistically: every public school-going child receives a balanced meal at lunchtime, regardless of their income. Because food is produced locally, family producers get a steady income from the fresh produce, milk or meat they sell under contract to the local government; and regional food systems are transformed by an ongoing demand for nutritious, local, sustainably-produced foods. Thanks to that steady demand, small

businesses can build resilience and invest in growing and diversifying their production – and that, in turn, means a greater variety of foods is available to schools and the region as a whole. Importantly, its impact is far reaching and consistent, because it is backed by national policy and resources ensuring its success. Similar projects are underway in **Kenya** and **Sri Lanka**.



Family farming preserves traditional food products, contributes to food security and healthy diets, and protects our natural resources. At the same time, family farmers often cannot afford enough food themselves, as they lack access to land, water, seeds, credit and markets. In response, FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) are spearheading the **UN Decade of Family Farming 2019-28** to promote **global awareness**, policies and investments that help family farmers access the technology,

infrastructure and markets they need to thrive.

In **Colombia, Malawi, Paraguay, Philippines** and **Tunisia**, FAO is working with fishing communities and local governments to expand social protection and economic inclusion of the most vulnerable by helping them diversify their production, build alternative income sources and connect to new markets, so their livelihoods are more stable and resilient to shocks.

Since 2014, rural women in 10 countries have been improving their food security, incomes and political participation through the **Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment**. Now in its second phase, the joint initiative of FAO, IFAD, the World Food Programme, and UN Women ensures women get to participate and benefit from economic activities and gain access to the resources they need to do so.

## ACTION SPOTLIGHT

# PREVENTING FAMINE IN GAZA AND THE SUDAN

In the **Sudan**, where over half the population, 25.6 million people, are acutely hungry including 755 000 who are facing catastrophic conditions, FAO's emergency seed distribution campaigns are helping family farmers plant staple grains and vegetables amid ongoing violence. The crop production kits include enough sorghum and millet seeds to feed a family of five for a year and to generate an income by selling surplus. They also include various short-cycle seeds that ensure families can harvest quickly. In addition, FAO is providing veterinary care and feed to keep livestock alive and healthy. In all, FAO reached some 15 million of the worst affected people in 2023 and aims to reach another 9 million in 2024.

In the **Gaza Strip**, as of June 2024, the risk of famine remains high and 95 per cent of the population faced high levels of food insecurity given the continued conflict and severely restricted humanitarian access. FAO has delivered about 365 tonnes of animal feed to 2 900 livestock-keeping families and aims to deliver 1 500 tonnes by the end of 2024. Keeping livestock alive and nourished is key to ensuring people can produce milk, eggs, and meat. FAO also aims to prevent the spread of animal diseases by delivering shelters and vaccines and to replace lost livestock if safe humanitarian access is guaranteed.



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## ACTION SPOTLIGHT

# SMARTER, RESOURCES-FRIENDLY AGRICULTURE

Rural families in **Uzbekistan** and **Viet Nam** are improving their agricultural production in greenhouses in ways that enable them to produce more food with less pesticides, mineral fertilizers, water, and labour.

Water and fertilizer management, for example, was improved using drip irrigation systems that deliver soluble nutrients to plants more efficiently, and tests are underway to run the greenhouses on renewable energy.



# ACTIONS FOR US ALL

Realizing the right to “foods” requires collective action. Here are some ways to plug in.

## Farmers

- Practice sustainable agriculture that enhances biodiversity and manages natural resources responsibly.
- Produce more diverse foods.
- Advocate for policies that empower small-scale producers, family farmers and women.
- Reduce food loss.
- Follow regulations and good practices to make sure foods produced are safe.

## Private Sector

- Make more nutritious and diverse foods available at affordable prices.
- Support small-scale food producers and family farmers.
- Promote corporate social responsibility through ethical, sustainable production and inclusive business models.
- Apply all standards and good practices to make sure foods produced are safe.
- Market foods responsibly and avoid promoting unhealthy foods to children.





## Academia & Civil Society Organizations

- Hold governments accountable by collecting data, identifying areas for improvement, and measuring progress towards targets and goals.
- Collaborate with policymakers to base policies and strategies on data and evidence.
- Promote healthy diets and sustainable agrifood systems.
- Transfer the latest knowledge and technology to farmers and decision-makers through partnerships and trainings.

## All Of Us

- Raise your voice to influence decision-making.
- Choose local and seasonal foods to support biodiversity.
- Embrace healthy diets and lifestyles.
- Understand food labels to make healthy food choices.
- Learn ways to identify food safety issues and to keep food safe.

Find more actions on [fao.org/world-food-day](https://fao.org/world-food-day)



## SCIENTIFIC ADVICE ON FOOD STANDARDS

When national and international bodies set food standards and regulations, they need solid scientific evidence and advice. Think, for example, of our food labels that tell us the amount of sugar and salt that's in pre-packaged foods, or if food colouring, pesticide, GMOs and

other technologies have been used to produce it.

In many cases, that evidence and advice comes from FAO. For over 50 years, FAO has been collaborating with the World Health Organisation to provide neutral and independent scientific advice on chemicals,

biological agents, technology and nutrition to national food control systems and to the Codex Alimentarius Commission that sets global standards on food safety and nutrition.



# KEY FACTS

Around **733 million people** are facing hunger in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Some **22.3% children** under the age of five **are too short** for their age and **6.8% are too thin** for their height.<sup>1</sup>

Over **2.8 billion people** in the world are **unable to afford a healthy diet**.<sup>1</sup>

Worldwide, **women** are **1.3% more** likely to be moderately or severely **food insecure** than men.<sup>1</sup>

More than **1.6 billion women** and **children** across all world regions are **deficient** in one or more **vitamins or minerals**.<sup>2</sup>

Some **2.5 billion adults** and **37 million children** under the age of five **are overweight**.<sup>3</sup>

Some **890 million** adults are **living with obesity**.<sup>3</sup>

**Conflict and violence** are **primary causes of hunger**. Nearly half of all people suffering acute hunger in 2023 were caught in conflict – almost **135 million people in 20 countries**.<sup>4</sup>

**Climate change** disproportionately **affects the rural poor** and their agricultural yields and productivity.<sup>5</sup>

Yearly, **600 million people fall ill** and **420 000 die** from eating **contaminated food**.<sup>6</sup>

**Indigenous Peoples** represent more than **19%** of the **extreme poor**.<sup>7</sup>

The world's **smallholder farmers produce** around **a third of the world's food**.<sup>8</sup>

Globally, **13% of food is lost** during harvest and transport<sup>9</sup>, and **19% is wasted** at the retail and consumer stage.<sup>10</sup>

## NOTES

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16 October 2024  
**World Food Day**

Collective action across over 150 countries worldwide is what makes World Food Day one of the most celebrated days in the UN calendar. Hundreds of events and outreach activities bring together governments, businesses, civil society organizations, the media, and the public, including many young people. They promote worldwide awareness of hunger and spark action for the future of food, people and the planet.

**#WorldFoodDay** 2024 shines a spotlight on food as a human right. The campaign raises awareness worldwide about the need for everyone to have access to a variety of nutritious, affordable, safe, and sustainable foods. It's time to work together and create a better, more sustainable future for all. Make World Food Day YOUR day. Join the call by organizing an event or activity and show how you are taking action.



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**#WorldFoodDay**  
**#FoodHeroes**  
[fao.org/world-food-day](http://fao.org/world-food-day)

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

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