



PRESS RELEASE

Bringing forgotten food back to farmer fields and consumer tables

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Forgotten foods or Neglected and Underutilized Crops (NUS), traditionally cultivated among many indigenous communities, are the family of crops that have over time suffered the wrath of food consumption trends and eating habits. However, the industrialization of agriculture pushed them away from the global agricultural and research systems. Though popular for their nutrient-dense value and low input in production, crops, such as pseudocereals, small millets, grain legumes, tuber crops, sea buckthorn, and minor fruits, are referred to as 'forgotten foods'.

The Regional Consultation on Forgotten Foods in Asia-Pacific held on 28 May 2021 aimed to improve recognition of forgotten food by multi-stakeholders, and discuss collective strategies to mainstream this food at the regional level. "Together with farmers and other innovation actors in the Asia-Pacific region, we need to define the change needed for research systems and value chain," said Dr. Ravi Khetarpal, Executive Secretary, Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI).

A regional Manifesto on Forgotten Foods emerged from the meeting attended by around 250 participants. The Manifesto will encourage a fundamental change from the current -yield-for-immediate-profit- structure towards a multi-functional, diversified agri-food structure that will reap benefits for the planet, farmers and consumers.

"The next focus should be combining food security, nutrition security and the need for sustainable diets," said Joanna Kane-Potaka, Assistant Director General - External Relations, International Crops Research Institute for Semi-arid Tropics (ICRISAT). "This is going one step further with food that is good for you, the planet and the farmer," she pointed out.

The diverse talks saw an active participation of farmers, development professionals, scientists, and government officials from South and Southeast Asia, Central Asia and the Pacific. Discussions centred around the importance of forgotten crops and the way forward to bring them back to farmers' production, research and policy agenda, as well as consumers' tables.

"There is a huge need to address productivity and quality in forgotten grains," according to Dr. Birte Komolong, Program Director, Agricultural Systems, National Agricultural Research Centre, Papua New Guinea.

A recent regional found that majority of small farmers are in favour of bringing back such forgotten foods once given some financial support and market linkages. "The traditional seeds and the knowledge to grow them are very important. Our emphasis should be on preserving, growing and, conserving this knowledge around traditional seeds," emphasized Ms. Salome, a farmer representative.

Equally important is investment in sustainable agricultural technologies, innovative processes for capacity development, as well as effective ways to lobby and advocate for innovation in food diversification that will reward small farmers and consumers in Asia-Pacific and beyond. "Food

diversification is required to ensure climate-resilient nutrition,” stressed Prof. Sayed Azam-Ali, Chief Executive Officer, Crops for the Future.

The Regional Manifesto on Forgotten Foods in Asia-Pacific will create new opportunities for transforming local, regional, and global paradigm to enhance crop diversity and create new pathways for smallholder farmers. It will promote a participatory approach in building a resilient community that will acknowledge indigenous farmer’s knowledge to drive accelerators of change and bring together new practices of research. It also envisages a participatory system of seed that improves access, availability and promotes opportunities for conservation.

Such regional manifestos are now being developed at different regions of the world, and will feed into a common shared vision of a ‘Global Manifesto’. It will be collectively presented in United Nations Food Systems Summit in September 2021, aiming at a global visibility and acceptance. Consequently a ‘Global Plan of Action on Forgotten Food’ is envisaged, which will be pitched to donors for undertaking various activities for mainstreaming at the global level.

The webinar was led by the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI) in partnership with the Global Forum of Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAR), Alliance Bioversity-CIAT and Crop for Future, as well as the Asian Farmers Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA), M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), International Crops Research Institute for Semi-arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and Barli Development Institute for Rural Women (BDIRW).