

WORLD OLIVE DAY 2024
30 Years of the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid
Madrid, November 21, 2024 (10.00 Madrid time)

Teodoro Miano - Introductory note

His Excellency
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, **Luis Planas**,

His Excellency
Deputy Minister Agriculture, Fisheries and Food,
Mr **Mohammad Boroumandi**

Mrs **Ana Castro**,
Vice President, Spanish National Research Council (CSIC)

Mr **Javad Mirarab**,
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Mr **Jaime Lillo**,
Executive Director, International Olive Council (IOC)

Authorities,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentleman

CIHEAM believes the Mediterranean Diet can be a tool to promote sustainable food production and consumption in the Mediterranean region. The diet's focus on seasonal, local, and traditional foods strengthens the **connection between producers and consumers**. By promoting the Mediterranean Diet's principles of frugality and moderation, we can **reduce food waste**, particularly in households. Addressing food waste is crucial for reducing the environmental impact of our current food systems. Beyond its well-known health benefits, the **Mediterranean Diet** has a lower environmental impact than other diets due to its emphasis on frugality, sobriety, and reduced consumption of animal products, which significantly impact soil, water resources, and greenhouse gas emissions.

The Mediterranean region shows unique characteristics

Global Climate Change Hotspot. The Mediterranean basin is severely affected by global warming, with **temperatures rising faster** than the global average, impacting populations' **incomes**, nutrition, health, water access, and increasing inequalities and migration.

National Resources Overexploitation. Food systems in the Mediterranean are threatened by overexploitation of resources, urban expansion, industrial relocation, geopolitical conflicts, and climate change. The growing global population further strains these systems, increasing the demand for food production and impacting value chains. The **Mediterranean's population** is expected to increase significantly by 2050, making careful management of natural resources crucial. **Water scarcity, soil degradation, and biodiversity loss** are major concerns exacerbated by climate change. These issues disproportionately affect the southern and eastern Mediterranean shores, highlighting existing inequalities.

The overexploitation of water resources is further intensified by **mass tourism**, which places additional strain on water supplies. Despite some positive developments, the fishery sector remains under pressure due to **unsustainable fishing practices**. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that promotes sustainable resource management, addresses climate change impacts, and ensures equitable access to resources for all Mediterranean populations.

Hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. Food security in the Mediterranean is under pressure from climate change, geopolitical tensions, and demographic shifts. These factors impact the **availability, accessibility, and quality of food**, leading to public health concerns and a decline in the traditional Mediterranean diet. The overreliance on imports, exacerbated by conflicts like the Russia-Ukraine war, has increased the region's **vulnerability** to food price volatility. Additionally, the lack of traceability and control over food quality poses risks to public health.

While undernutrition is not widespread, except in impoverished areas, the **rising prevalence of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases** indicates a shift away from the healthy Mediterranean diet. This shift is driven by lifestyle changes, globalization, and the abandonment of traditional food practices. Furthermore, food waste remains a significant challenge, undermining efforts to ensure food security and sustainability. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that promotes sustainable and resilient food systems, strengthens regional cooperation, and prioritizes the health and well-being of Mediterranean populations.

Strong inequalities and increased disparities. The Mediterranean region faces **significant inequalities** across various demographics. **Youth unemployment** is a major concern, with rates in some areas among the highest globally. **Women** and

girls experience **marginalization** due to structural barriers and limited access to resources and opportunities. Additionally, there's a growing **gap between urban and rural areas**, with rural populations facing higher poverty rates and limited access to basic services.

These inequalities, exacerbated by climate change and resource pressures, drive migration and urbanization. However, **migration** also presents **challenges**, with young people and women being particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Addressing these complex issues requires targeted policies that promote youth employment, empower women, and invest in rural development to create a more equitable and inclusive Mediterranean region.

A Mediterranean institutional framework to be strengthened. To boost regional integration in the Mediterranean, increased multilateral cooperation is essential. This involves reinforcing programs that fund smart agricultural development projects, promoting balanced trade relations, and establishing new partnerships focused on training, mobility, and collective resource management. Additionally, transparent evaluations of these initiatives with civil society involvement are crucial for success.

Since 2010, CIHEAM and FAO have collaborated on a program focusing on the sustainability of food production and consumption in the Mediterranean, using the Mediterranean Diet as a case study. This program is based on four pillars of sustainability: reduced environmental impact, biodiversity, health and nutrition benefits, socio-cultural values, and positive economic returns for the community.

CIHEAM has actively contributed to the discourse on the Mediterranean Diet through the publication of numerous reports and articles, often in collaboration with international partners. Furthermore, CIHEAM has played a key role in organizing and co-organizing three World Conferences dedicated to the Mediterranean Diet:

- **1st Mediterranean Diet World Conference**

Revitalizing the Mediterranean Diet. From a healthy dietary pattern to a healthy Mediterranean sustainable lifestyle. Milan, July 2016

- **2nd Mediterranean Diet World Conference**

Strategies towards more sustainable food systems in the Mediterranean region. Palermo, May 2019

- **3rd Mediterranean Diet World Conference**

Towards more sustainable and resilient food systems in the Mediterranean countries. The Mediterranean Diet as a strategic resource for accelerating the Agenda 2030 in the region. Bari, September 2022

CIHEAM actively promotes Sustainable Mediterranean Food Systems, and particularly the Mediterranean Diet. One example is the SFS-MED Platform, developed with UfM and FAO. This partnership leverages their combined strengths to foster collaboration, engage diverse stakeholders, drive transformative change towards sustainable food systems in the Mediterranean region and possibly attract greater support from donors and international financial institutions.

The Mediterranean Diet, as a healthy and sustainable model, plays a pivotal role in achieving these goals and advancing the 2030 Agenda in the region.

In this context, olive oil, especially Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO), is a cornerstone of the Mediterranean diet. Its unique composition and high-temperature resistance make it ideal for both cooking and flavor enhancement. EVOO's health benefits include cardiovascular disease prevention and potential cancer risk reduction. Its widespread use in traditional Mediterranean cuisine amplifies the nutritional value of meals.

While intensification can negatively impact the environment, sustainable farming practices and support for traditional methods can mitigate these effects. Olive orchards provide benefits like preventing desertification and acting as carbon sinks, but it's crucial to identify and minimize the environmental impacts of certain production phases.

CIHEAM's recent research and cooperation efforts have **expanded beyond agricultural production** to focus on the sustainability of entire food systems, encompassing the processing, distribution, marketing, and consumption of food. This approach enables a deeper understanding of the challenges in ensuring food and nutritional security.

Sustainable Food Systems are essential for achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are a prerequisite for food and nutrition security, as well as social, economic, and environmental sustainability in the Mediterranean region.

The current unsustainable food systems in the Mediterranean are contributing to the

erosion of the region's cultural food heritage, which is the foundation of the Mediterranean Diet's inscription on UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list.

In conclusion, the Mediterranean Diet stands as a beacon of sustainability, offering a pathway to address the pressing challenges of our food systems. By embracing its principles of frugality, seasonality, and locally sourced ingredients, we can foster a healthier and more sustainable future for the Mediterranean region and beyond. CIHEAM remains committed to promoting the Mediterranean Diet and its values, working towards a food system that nourishes both people and the planet.