



Food and Agriculture  
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White Paper

# Mediterranean food consumption patterns

*Diet, environment, society, economy  
and health*





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## Acronyms and abbreviations

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CDO	Controlled Designation of Origin
CFS	Committee on World Food Security
CIHEAM	Centre International de Hautes Études Agronomiques Méditerranéennes
CIISCAM	International Interuniversity Study Centre on Mediterranean Food Cultures
CNR	Italian National Research Council, Italy
COLI	Cost of Living Index
COST	European Cooperation in Science and Technology
CRA	Agricultural Research Council, Italy
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Development, UK
EC	European Commission
EEA	European Environment Agency
ENEA	National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development, Italy
ESF	European Science Foundation
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCPI	Food Consumer Price Index
FDM	Fundación Dieta Mediterránea, Spain
FENS	Federation of European Nutrition Societies
FMFC	Forum on Mediterranean Food Cultures, Italy
GFCM	General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean
GHG	Greenhouse gas
GMO	Genetically modified organism
HHF	Hellenic Health Foundation
HLPE	High Level Panel of Experts on food security and nutrition

ICAF	International Commission on the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition
IISD	International Institute for Sustainable Development
INFOODS	International Network of Food Data Systems
INRAN	National Institute for Research on Food and Nutrition, Italy
IOTF	International Obesity Task Force
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ITFPCHD	International Task Force for Prevention of Coronary Heart Disease
LCA	Life cycle assessment/analysis

## Key messages

- Food and nutrition security is still a problem in many Mediterranean countries, especially southern and eastern ones, while obesity and overweight are also becoming a new challenge.
- Today, the main concern for the Mediterranean food and agricultural sector is to provide simultaneously enough food, in quantity and quality, to meet the nutritional needs of a growing population and to conserve natural resources for future generations.
- Changes towards optimizing both food consumption and food production are important to ensure more sustainable food systems and to achieve food and nutrition security in the Mediterranean region.
- To satisfy the increasing food demand – due mainly to changing food consumption patterns and population growth – food production has to become more efficient with a decrease in food losses and waste and an increase in diet sustainability.
- The Mediterranean diet is widely considered as a healthy dietary pattern and a greater adherence to the Mediterranean diet has been associated with significant improvements in health and nutritional status. It has also been recognized as a sustainable diet because of its lower environmental impact.
- However, current data show a decline in adherence to the Mediterranean dietary pattern in northern as well as southern and eastern Mediterranean countries that is critically eroding the Mediterranean diet heritage, recognized in 2010 by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity.
- The abandonment of traditional habits and the emergence of new lifestyles associated with socio-economic changes pose important threats to the preservation and transmission of the Mediterranean diet to future generations.
- It is urgent to preserve the cultural heritage of the Mediterranean diet as an outstanding resource for sustainable development as it contributes to promoting local production and consumption, encouraging sustainable agriculture and safeguarding landscapes.

- The promotion and the enhancement of the Mediterranean diet is a critical issue for sustainable development to counteract food insecurity and malnutrition in the Mediterranean region.
- All main stakeholders in the agro-food sector in the Mediterranean region should cooperate towards increasing the sustainability of food consumption and production patterns to achieve food and nutrition security.
- Biodiversity also emerges as a crucial component between sustainability and public health that should be taken into consideration.

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## Summary

Today, the principal challenge for the food and agricultural sector is to provide simultaneously enough food, in quantity and quality, to meet nutritional needs and to conserve natural resources for present and future generations. FAO estimates that to satisfy the needs of a growing and richer population with an increased demand for animal products, food production will have to increase by 60 percent towards 2050 (FAO, 2012a). This figure can be reduced by improving production efficiency, changing diets and decreasing food losses and waste.

Food consumption and production trends and patterns are among the most important drivers of environmental pressures. Agro-food systems need to grow within the context of a finite and sometimes shrinking resource base, and must use natural resources in a sustainable manner to preserve the ecosystems on which they rely. Such growth needs to be inclusive and target broader objectives than just primary production; it must include efficiencies along the whole food chain to promote sustainable practices and diets, inside a coherent cultural and social framework. This can be achieved through sustainable food consumption and production driven by to the promotion of more sustainable dietary models. Recently, FAO has started to study the concept of sustainable diets in order to design methods and indicators for their assessment in different agro-ecological zones.

In 2010, FAO and Bioversity International organized an international scientific symposium on “biodiversity and sustainable diets”. One of the major outcomes of the symposium was a consensus position on the following definition of “sustainable diets”: *Sustainable diets are those diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; while optimizing natural and human resources* (FAO/Bioversity, 2010).

The Mediterranean diet has been well characterized scientifically. It is also recognized as a healthier dietary pattern. It is now being analysed in many surveys and is appreciated for its lower environmental impact. For these characteristics, and because it involves a large number of countries, the Mediterranean diet – recognized by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage – has been selected by FAO and CIHEAM for the assessment of diet sustainability models.

However, despite the well-documented health and environmental benefits of the Mediterranean diet, current data show a decline in adherence to the Mediterranean diet pattern in the Mediterranean area.

The Mediterranean region is passing through a “nutritional transition” in which problems of undernutrition coexist with overweight, obesity and food-related chronic diseases. This nutrition transition is alarming as it has negative impacts on health systems. The key nutrition challenges facing the eastern and southern Mediterranean region are protein–energy malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, obesity and nutrition-related chronic diseases.

Drivers of consumption patterns and lifestyles are economic, technological, cultural, social and political. Global consumption levels and patterns are affected, among others, by population growth, urbanization and the rise in affluence and living standards.

Fundamental and radical changes in the whole food system are indispensable for achieving sustainable food and nutrition security in the Mediterranean region.

Improving sustainable food consumption patterns in the Mediterranean region requires sustainable supply chains, minimizing pressure on natural resources and externalities over the life-cycle – including the reduction of water consumption, and of food losses and waste – and promoting sustainable diets.

Given the importance of food consumption patterns as drivers of human well-being as well as environmental degradation, urgent steps must be taken to assess current food consumption patterns

# 1. Objectives of the white paper

This white paper aims at contributing to the overall development of the Feeding Knowledge Programme, and of its Euro-Mediterranean Network on Research and Innovation for Food Security. In particular, it is addressed to the priority 5 “Mediterranean food consumption patterns: diet, environment, society, economy and health” to facilitate an interdisciplinary dialogue and exchange among members of the scientific community on the need to improve the sustainability of food consumption patterns and diets in the Mediterranean area and to achieve the goal of food and nutrition security.

The objective of this document is to highlight the role that the current food consumption patterns play in food and nutrition security, public health, environment protection and socio-economic development in the Mediterranean region. The ultimate aim is to stimulate a multidisciplinary dialogue among the Euro-Mediterranean scientific community on the sustainability of current food consumption and production patterns in the Mediterranean region and beyond, to identify the research activities and policy actions needed to move towards more sustainable Mediterranean food systems.

The paper addresses several interdisciplinary and interdependent issues related to food consumption patterns; sustainable diets; health implications of the current food consumption patterns; food environmental footprints; food production systems; food economics; food cultures and sociology; food losses and waste; food system governance and policies.





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## 2. Rationale

Food security, as defined by the World Food Summit in 1996 (FAO, 1996) and revised then in the World Summit on Food Security in 2009 (FAO, 2009), depends on four pillars: (i) Food availability: sufficient quantities of food available on a consistent basis; (ii) Food access: physical and economic access to appropriate foods for a nutritious diet; and (iii) Food use: appropriate use based on appropriate means and knowledge of basic nutrition and care; (iv) Stability in food availability, access and utilization.

Food security is a complex sustainable development issue, linked to health through malnutrition, but also to economic development, environment, and trade. Food insecurity has significant consequences for individuals as well as for society, including malnutrition, obesity, disease, and poverty.

The cost of malnutrition is both direct and indirect, because overnutrition, like undernutrition, not only has an immediate deficit impact on public health systems, but also an indirect impact on the gradual deterioration of human capital and the inevitable loss of productivity (Hassan-Wassef, 2012). The extent and severity of the health problems linked to food, which affect development, social activity and human beings' creative and productive capacity, have moved the food security issue higher up in the range of global concerns (Hassan-Wassef, 2012).

Unsustainable food consumption and production patterns are increasing food insecurity and putting more stress on ecosystems, the supply of resources, goods and services, and human social systems and well-being. Food consumption and production patterns are among the most important drivers of environmental pressures: land degradation, declining soil fertility, unsustainable water use, over fishing, and marine environment degradation. The social and economic costs of diet-related illnesses are straining individuals, families and national healthcare budgets. Consumption trends, through their direct impact on food accessibility, are adversely affecting food and nutrition security especially of the poor in developing countries.

The challenge of feeding the growing world population, which is expected to reach 9 billion people in 2050, requires new strategies and new multicultural and multisectorial rethinking capable of generating new forms of dialogue, at different levels, towards a more sustainable use of the available natural and human resources, to ensure food and nutrition security (Godfray *et al.*, 2010). Eating patterns, which are important drivers for building sustainable agricultural and food systems, are often neglected in the research and policy areas (Guyomard *et al.*, 2011).

In the early 1980s, the notion of "sustainable diets" started to be explored to recommend diets which would be healthier for the environment as well as for consumers (Gussow and Clancy, 1986). But, with food globalization and

the increased industrialization of agricultural systems, with no attention to the sustainability of agro-food ecosystems, the sustainable diet concept was abandoned for many years.

In the late 1990's the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its governing body, the Conference of the Parties (COP), began to recognize the importance of biodiversity for ensuring food security. By 2004, the COP formally acknowledged the linkage between biodiversity, food and nutrition, and the need to enhance sustainable use of biodiversity to combat hunger and malnutrition. Two years later, the COP adopted the framework for a cross-cutting initiative on biodiversity for food and nutrition (Toledo and Burlingame, 2006), and by 2010, this initiative has merged with the work on sustainable diets (FAO/Bioversity, 2012).

Recently, the interest in sustainable diets has again been raised by international scientific societies and UN agencies (American Dietetic Association, American Nurse Association, American Planning Association and American Health Association, 2010; American Public Health Association, 2007; DEFRA, 2009, 2011; FAO/Bioversity, 2012; FAO, 2010, 2012b; UNEP, 2012a, 2012b; UNSCN, 2012). A growing body of evidence of the non-sustainability of current dietary trends published in technical reports (EC/JRC, 2009; SDC, 2009, 2011; WWF, 2011; Esnouf *et al.*, 2013; Pluimers and Blonk, 2011; Guyomard *et al.*, 2011) has further highlighted sustainable diets as an important element for a shift towards sustainable food consumption and production.

Food consumption is variably affected by a whole range of factors including food availability, food accessibility and food choices, which in turn may be influenced by geography, demography, disposable income, socio-economic status, urbanization, globalization, religion, culture, marketing, and consumer attitude (Kearney, 2010). A recent study (Kastner *et al.*, 2012) indicates an inverse relationship between the two main drivers for increased land requirements for food production: with socioeconomic development, population growth decreases and, at the same time, diets become richer in energy density. In many regions, dietary change may override population growth as the major driver behind land requirements for food in the near future.

There is growing evidence of the cost of diets for the environment, society and public health nutrition (Haines *et al.*, 2009; Holdsworth, 2010; Hawkesworth *et al.*, 2010; Lock *et al.*, 2010; O'Kane, 2012; Delaney Burke, 2012; Clonan and Holdsworth, 2012). A growing body of research is showing that the achievement of substantial reductions in food-related GHG emissions to mitigate climate change must be addressed, not only by how we produce and distribute our food but also by what we eat (Marlow *et al.*, 2009; Garnet, 2011; Macdiarmid *et al.*, 2012; Vieux *et al.*, 2012). Recommendations for lowering energy inputs and greenhouse gas emissions from household food consumption include diets with less meat and dairy products, more in-season vegetables and more locally produced and fresh foods (Carlsson-Kanayma, 1998, 2009; Carlsson-Kanayma *et al.*, 2003; Trichopoulos, 2012).

A European Commission study (EC/JRC, 2009), which analyzed the impact on the European environment caused by changes in the European diets, showed that current food consumption accounts for 27% of all environmental impacts in the EU-27, and highlighted a prominent role of meat production on environmental impacts generated along the food chain. Also, the European study pointed out that suggested dietary alterations imply changes in the structure of agricultural and food production sectors but that the impact on existing production structures would be limited, while more environmental benefits from a change in diet in the EU-27 will occur at a global level (EC/JRC, 2009).

According to studies on of “food miles”, transport represents only a small part of overall food chain emissions and, therefore, “food miles” are a poor indicator of food impacts (Garnet, 2011; Edwards-Jones *et al.*, 2008; Weber and Matthews, 2008; AEA Technology Environment, 2005), even if it does vary considerably, depending on country of origin and cultivation or production systems (Sim *et al.*, 2007). It is important to acknowledge that ‘food miles’ should not be used as a main indicator for the environmental impacts of food products. The assumption that locally grown food is better for the environment is not always true, as some regions of the world employ more resource- efficient practices than others for the same production (Kissinger, 2012).

Sustainability, water, food security and diets are intimately connected. With rising incomes and urbanisation, dietary patterns with pronounced regional and cultural differences are shifting towards consumption patterns higher in animal products, which increase water demand (Renault and Wallender, 2000; Lundqvist *et al.*, 2008). Dietary patterns with high meat consumption require more energy, water and land resources (Pimentel and Pimentel, 2003; Gerbens-Leenes and Nonhebel, 2005).

The Mediterranean diet, acknowledged by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage, has been well scientifically characterized also as a healthier dietary pattern, and is a recommended plant-based dietary pattern (Bach-Faig *et al.*, 2011). It is now being analyzed in many surveys and appreciated for its lower environmental impact (Gussow, 1995; Duchin, 2005; Baroni *et al.*, 2007; EC/JRC, 2009; CIISCAM, 2009; Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition, 2010; Burlingame and Dernini, 2011; FAO/CIHEAM, 2012; Dernini *et al.*, 2013; Sáez Almendros *et al.*, 2013<sup>1</sup>).

For these characteristics and, because it concerns a large number of countries, the Mediterranean diet has been jointly identified by FAO and CIHEAM as a case study for its assessment as a sustainable diet model. The Mediterranean diet has nutritional, economic, environmental and socio-cultural characteristics that make

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<sup>1</sup> In this Spanish case study, the adhesion of the Spanish population to the MDP would have a marked impact in all the considered environmental footprints. The MDP pattern in Spain would reduce GHG emissions (72 percent), land use (58 percent) and energy consumption (52 percent), and to a lower extent water consumption (33 percent). On the contrary, the adhesion to a western dietary pattern would imply an increase in all these descriptors of between 12 and 72 percent.

it particularly relevant for such a case study for the characterization of sustainable diets in different agro-ecological zones.

The case study of the Mediterranean diet as a sustainable diet model may clarify what is required for an environmentally sustainable food system and for more eco-friendly food based dietary guidelines. It should lead to innovative intersectoral efforts to counteract the degradation of ecosystems, loss of biodiversity and simplification of diets through the improvement of sustainable dietary patterns culturally accepted in the Mediterranean region.

The improvement of the sustainability of the food consumption patterns, with particular attention to enhancement of the sustainability of the Mediterranean diet, as a country-based sustainable diet model, and to the reduction of food waste and losses, is a critical priority for the food and nutrition security in the entire Mediterranean region in general, and southern and eastern Mediterranean countries in particular.

In the final declaration of their ninth meeting – held in Malta on 27 September 2012 – the Mediterranean Agriculture Ministers underlined “...*the role of the Mediterranean diet as a driver of sustainable food systems within the strategies of regional development and on that of traditional local products, since quantitative food security must also be complemented by qualitative approaches*” (CIHEAM, 2012).

Recent events in the Near East and North Africa (MENA) region have put more attention and pressure on food security. Therefore, it appears necessary to engage even more in strengthening and furthering research and political actions in sustainable food consumption and production in the Mediterranean region (Hassan-Wassef, 2012).

The sustainability of the Mediterranean food systems is under a pressing threat, as was forecasted in the 2005 Mediterranean Strategy on Sustainable Development: “*Mediterranean agricultural and rural models, which are at the origins of Mediterranean identity, are under increasing threat from the predominance of imported consumption patterns. This trend is illustrated in particular by the decline of the Mediterranean dietary model despite the recognized positive effects on health. The prospective scenario for the expected impacts of trade liberalization, climate change and the lack of efficient rural policies offers a gloomy picture in some southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, with the prospect of aggravated regional imbalances, deeper ecological degradation and persistent or accrued social instability.*” (UNEP/MAP, 2005).

One of the most important challenges faced especially by southern and eastern Mediterranean countries is food and nutrition security (FAO, 2011a). The Mediterranean area in general and SEMC in particular are passing through a “nutrition transition” in which malnutrition problems (protein–energy undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies) coexist with overnutrition problems (overweight, obesity), and food-related chronic non-communicable diseases. This nutrition transition is alarming as it has negative impacts not only on health systems but also dramatic economic, social and environmental implications. These

interdisciplinary issues are interdependent or related, directly or indirectly, to the sustainability of Mediterranean food consumption patterns, especially the decrease of adherence to the traditional Mediterranean diet (WHO, 2010).

Many developing countries are undergoing diet transitions, bringing them closer to the diets prevalent in the western countries, i.e. with more energy-dense foods. There follows an increase in the incidence of diet-related non-communicable diseases, which are superimposed on the health problems related to undernutrition that still afflict them. Wider adoption of food consumption patterns akin to those of the Mediterranean diet hold promise of contributing to mitigate adverse effects of diet transitions (Alexandratos, 2006).

Across the Mediterranean region, there is “unequalitarian drift” in the current relationship between northern Mediterranean countries and southern and eastern ones, where many difficulties are encountered due to the existing economic and social disparities. In fact, the macroeconomic indicators of the Mediterranean region emphasize the marked heterogeneity among the countries and a growing gap between the advanced economies in the northern shores and less developed ones in the southern/eastern ones. Moreover, other social and economic features make a contribution to the considerable development differences between the two Mediterranean shores (Hervieu and Thibault, 2009): the demographic divide; the densely populated rural areas; the natural resources (soil and water) scarcity; the erosion of the Mediterranean diet model; and climate change and the loss of biodiversity.

In many Mediterranean countries, eating habits are changing following the introduction of Western-style dietary patterns. The urbanization of society, the integration of women into the labour market and retail development are modifying dietary behaviour considerably. Such changes are disrupting the long-established ecological, social and economic equilibriums of the area (Boulier, 2012). The loss of agricultural diversity occurring around the Mediterranean basin is having negative repercussions on the food security and livelihood of populations living in the region. An exacerbation of the genetic erosion of agro-biodiversity due to globalization trends and climate change is reducing the sustainability of local production systems, along with the capacity to safeguard the Mediterranean diet heritage, based on indigenous food species and varieties (FMFC, 2010).

The Mediterranean agrarian landscape, in its ecological, cultural, social and economic dimensions, is mostly a food-based landscape inextricably linked to the Mediterranean diet. The symbolic value of food and its identification and differentiation have led to the creation of strong links between local food and local heritage and identity, the construction of cuisines de terroir(s) and, according to economic values, to local-food production knowledge and skills through the establishment, for example, of systems modelled on geographical indication of provenance (FAO, 2004; 2009). These products of origin-linked quality are strongly connected to the sustainability of the Mediterranean area by contributing to rural development and the preservation of biodiversity (Vasilopoulou, Dilis and Trichopoulou, 2013).

The Mediterranean diet concept has nutritional, economic, environmental and socio-cultural characteristics that make it particularly relevant as a case study for the characterization of sustainable diets in different agro-ecological zones.

In 2010, the inscription of the Mediterranean diet on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was approved with the following description:

*“The Mediterranean diet constitutes a set of skills, knowledge, practices and traditions ranging from the landscape to the table, including the crops, harvesting, fishing, conservation, processing, preparation and, particularly, consumption of food. The Mediterranean diet is characterized by a nutritional model that has remained constant over time and space, consisting mainly of olive oil, cereals, fresh or dried fruit and vegetables, a moderate amount of fish, dairy and meat, and many condiments and spices, all accompanied by wine or infusions, always respecting beliefs of each community. However, the Mediterranean diet (from the Greek *diaita*, or way of life) encompasses more than just food. It promotes social interaction, since communal meals are the cornerstone of social customs and festive events.”* (UNESCO, 2010)

The Mediterranean diet is the alive and evolving result of the millennial history of the Mediterranean (Berry, Arnoni and Aviram, 2011). The Mediterranean diet is transmitted from generation to generation, and is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to the change of their environment and their history.

The general term “Mediterranean diet” implies a common dietary pattern in Mediterranean countries; however, there are differences in the dietary patterns of the Mediterranean populations (Keys, 1970; Kromhout *et al.*, 1989; Trichopoulou and Lagiou, 1997). The Mediterranean diet is characterized by its links to the various food cultures and traditions of the different countries of the Mediterranean area. Mediterranean diets are far from homogeneous; they involve a wealth of typical products and are extremely varied. This “dietary polymorphism” partially reflects religious and cultural differences (Manios *et al.*, 2006; Berry, Arnoni and Aviram, 2011). The most important factors that contributed to this huge diversity of foods and diets in the Mediterranean are: extremely varied geographical and ecological environments; succession of different dominant peoples (Hebrews, Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, Byzantines, Ottomans, Spanish, Portuguese, etc.) that introduced and/or diffused different crops and foods throughout the Mediterranean basin.

There is a contrast in food intake patterns between the Northern Mediterranean countries, Balkan countries and Southern Mediterranean countries. Diets in Southern Mediterranean countries are mainly vegetarian as only a small proportion of calories is of animal origin; cereals are the basic ingredient and pulses the main protein source. In Northern Mediterranean countries, food intake has higher animal produce content. Balkan countries have an intermediate diet and intake structure; their diet is richer in animal products than in Southern Mediterranean countries but contains more cereals and pulses than in Northern Mediterranean countries (Padilla,

2008). It is noteworthy that significant dietary differences can be observed even within the same country. In Italy, for instance, the consumption of cereals, fruit and vegetables is higher in the southern part of the country (Lupo, 1997).

The importance of the Mediterranean diet as an example of a sustainable diet lies not only in its specific foods and nutrients, but also in the methods used to characterize and analyse it and the philosophy of sustainability that is at its core (Burlingame and Dernini, 2011).

The Mediterranean diet has been widely scientifically reported to be a model of healthy eating and a greater adherence to the Mediterranean diet is associated with significant nutrition and health benefits (Willett *et al.*, 1995; Nestle, 1995; ITFPCHD, 2000; Serra-Majem, Roman and Estruch, 2006; Sofi *et al.*, 2008; Maillot *et al.*, 2011). The health benefits of the Mediterranean diet and its prophylactic effects against chronic diseases have been well established by the scientific community, since the pioneer Seven Countries Study, conducted by Ancel Keys, established the association of a traditional Mediterranean dietary pattern with a markedly reduced incidence of coronary heart disease mortality (Keys, 1970, 1980; Keys and Keys, 1975). On the basis of this initial knowledge, scientists constructed dietary scores of adherence to the traditional Mediterranean diet by indexing positively those beneficial foods that are mostly consumed in traditional Mediterranean diets, and negatively the foods less consumed and more typical of the Western industrialized world (Trichopoulou *et al.*, 1995; Menotti *et al.*, 1999; Sánchez-Villegas *et al.*, 2003; Fidanza *et al.*, 2004; Serra-Majem *et al.*, 2004a; Serra-Majem, Roman and Estruch, 2006; Bach *et al.*, 2006; Gerber, 2006; Issa *et al.*, 2011). Indeed, numerous more recent studies confirmed that better adherence to the traditional Mediterranean diet is systematically associated with a markedly reduced risk of cardio-vascular events and mortality (Trichopoulou *et al.*, 2003; Trichopoulou, Bamia and Trichopoulos, 2005, 2009; Martínez-González *et al.*, 2002, 2009; Estruch *et al.*, 2013, 2006; Buckland, Bach and Serra-Majem, 2008; Buckland *et al.*, 2009; de Lorgeril *et al.*, 1994; Mendez *et al.*, 2006; Panagiotakos *et al.*, 2006; Sánchez-Villegas *et al.*, 2006; Zazpe *et al.*, 2011), with a lower incidence of the metabolic syndrome (Tortosa *et al.*, 2007; Babio *et al.*, 2009; Kastorini *et al.*, 2011; Kesse-Guyot *et al.*, 2012) and of type 2 diabetes (Martínez-González *et al.*, 2008). The data from a series of case-control studies showed, in general, that high intakes of foods typical of the traditional Mediterranean dietary pattern – i.e. fruit, vegetables, whole grains, olive oil and fish – were associated with a reduced risk of developing various types of cancers (La Vecchia, 2004; Bosetti, Pelucchi and La Vecchia, 2009; Vernele *et al.*, 2010).

In 2005, “the Rome Call for a Common Action on Food in the Mediterranean” (FMFC, 2005), further re-activated the process of interdisciplinary dialogue started in 2002 by the Forum on Mediterranean Food Cultures, CIHEAM MAI-Bari, Mediterranean Diet Foundation and Sapienza University of Rome, among the international Mediterranean diet scientific community for a consensus position on a redefinition of the Mediterranean diet (Serra-Majem *et al.*,

2004b). This process continued in 2009, at the Third International CIISCAM Conference, held in Parma, Italy, where a consensus position was reached on a new revised, updated and unpatented Mediterranean diet pyramid as well as on the Mediterranean diet as an example of a sustainable diet (CIISCAM, 2009). In 2010, this new Mediterranean diet pyramid was further developed at the Eighth International Congress on the Mediterranean diet, held in Barcelona, Spain (Bach-Faig *et al.*, 2011; Dernini *et al.*, 2012).

The new revised Mediterranean diet pyramid was conceived as a simplified mainframe in order to be adapted to the different country-specific variations related to the various geographical, socio-economic and cultural contexts of the contemporary Mediterranean lifestyle. To counteract the current dramatic decline of the healthy traditional Mediterranean diet pattern all around the Mediterranean area, it was aimed at better popularizing its applicability for present daily lifestyle, without leaving out the different cultural and religious traditions and different national identities present in the Mediterranean area. The concept of frugality and moderation was emphasized because of the major public health challenge of obesity.

This new revised Mediterranean diet was presented as an example of a sustainable diet in which nutrition, local food production, biodiversity, culture and sustainability are strongly connected together, with a lower impact on the environment. The concepts of seasonality, fresh and locally-grown products, culinary activities, biodiversity, traditional, local and eco-friendly products, of variety of colours for fruits and vegetables were introduced together with main

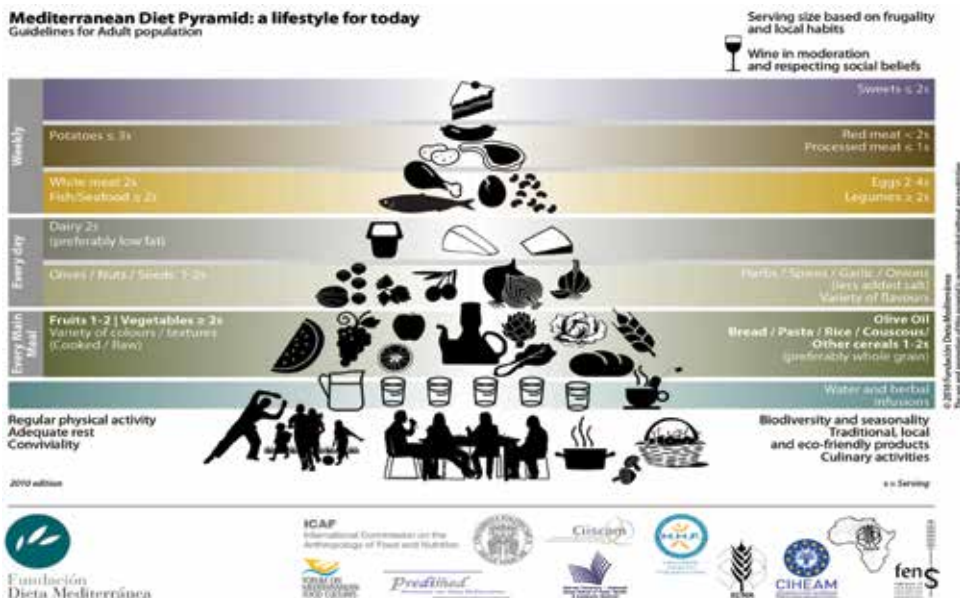


Figure 1: The new Mediterranean diet pyramid

Source: Bach-Faig *et al.*, 2011.



meals, conviviality and physical activity. Main foods included in the common food basket are: an abundance of olive oil and olives, fruits, vegetables, cereals (mostly unrefined), legumes, nuts and fish, moderate amounts of dairy products (preferably cheese and yoghurt) and low quantities of meat and meat products. Wine in moderation was considered acceptable when it was not contradictory to religious or social norms.

The Mediterranean diet, through its new revised pyramidal representation (Bach-Faig *et al.*, 2011), shows that it not only offers considerable health benefits but also respects the environment. In fact, the various represented food groups in the pyramid can also be evaluated in terms of their environmental impact.

But despite the well-documented health and environmental benefits of the Mediterranean diet, current data show a decline in adherence in Northern, Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries (IOTF, 2005; Garcia-Closas *et al.*, 2006; Belahsen and Rguibi, 2006; da Silva *et al.*, 2009; Vareiro *et al.*, 2009; León-Munoz *et al.*, 2012). The evolution of food consumption in the Mediterranean countries is not encouraging, as these countries have followed the trend towards higher proportions of energy-dense foods (Alexandratos, 2006).

Paradoxically, just as the Mediterranean diet is becoming more popular in the world and increasingly recognized by the international scientific community, the Mediterranean populations are moving further and further away from this dietary model (Lacirignola and Capone, 2009).



## 3. Analysis of problems and assessment indicators

The main health, nutrition, economic, cultural, social and environmental issues related, directly or indirectly, to the ongoing nutrition transition and decrease in adherence to the Mediterranean dietary patterns – two parallel processes that are undermining the very bases of food and nutrition security – in Mediterranean countries in general, and SEMC in particular, are briefly discussed hereafter. A preliminary list of indicators for assessing the sustainability of the current Mediterranean food consumption patterns and transition towards more sustainable food systems is also proposed as a basis for further discussion.

### 3.1. PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Recent trends and projections in the Mediterranean area (UNEP/MAP/Plan Bleu, 2011, 2010, 2008, 2006; Plan Bleu, 2012; FAO, 2012b; UNEP/MAP, 2005) were analysed to identify priority challenges to be addressed for improving the sustainability of the diets and food consumption patterns in the Mediterranean area.

#### 3.1.1. Nutrition and health: malnutrition and decline of adherence to the Mediterranean diet pattern

The Mediterranean area could be described as passing through a “nutritional transition” in which problems of undernutrition coexist with overweight, obesity and food-related chronic diseases. Comparative regional data are shown in the Global Nutritional Index (Rosenbloom, Nitzan-Kaluski and Berry, 2008).

Undernutrition is still significant in the South of the Mediterranean: 9.2 million people in 2001–03, 3.9 percent of the population of the zone, compared with 7.3 million people in 1990–92, 3.8 percent of the population (CIHEAM, 2008). Data referring to 2008 show that the rates of stunting among children under five years of age are also very high in many Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries: 26.3 percent in Albania, 14.9 percent in Algeria, 10.5 percent in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1.0 percent in Croatia, 28.9 percent in Egypt, 12.0 percent in Jordan, 10.8 percent in Lebanon, 20.7 percent in Libya, 22.5 percent in Morocco, 10.2 percent in Palestine, 0.5 percent in Serbia, 27.7 percent in the Syrian Arab Republic, 6.2 percent in Tunisia (UNICEF, 2012), and 10.3 percent in Turkey (Hacettepe University, 2009; UNICEF, 2012).

According to WHO, overweight and obesity rates in Mediterranean countries continue to rise. Currently reported rates for overweight and obesity are as follows: 54.4 and 21.3 percent in Albania; 45.5 and 16.0 percent in Algeria;

67.9 and 33.1 percent in Egypt; 50.7 and 18.2 percent in France; 53.7 and 20.1 percent in Greece; 54.1 and 19.8 percent in Italy; 61.8 and 27.4 percent in Lebanon; 64.3 and 28.8 percent in Malta; 46.8 and 16.4 percent in Morocco; 59.1 and 24.0 percent in Portugal; 62.0 and 26.6 percent in Spain; 53.7 and 22.3 percent in Tunisia; and 61.9 and 27.8 percent in Turkey (WHO, 2011).

Recent surveys are pointing out that many countries in the Mediterranean area are drifting away from the Mediterranean diet healthy pattern and current Mediterranean food consumption patterns show a decline in their adherence to the traditional Mediterranean diet (IOTF, 2005; Garcia-Closas, Berenguer and Gonzalez, 2006; Belahsen and Rguibi, 2006; da Silva *et al.*, 2009; Vareiro *et al.*, 2009; León-Muñoz *et al.*, 2012). In the decline of the adherence to the Mediterranean diet, there are two major concerns: an increase in the consumption of saturated lipids (e.g. meat, dairy products, etc.) and sugar, and a decrease in the consumption of complex carbohydrates (e.g. cereals and legumes). A recent study clearly showed that the easiest way to reach all nutrient recommendations was to select more Mediterranean-type food (Maillot *et al.*, 2011).

In the Southern Mediterranean countries, populations are suffering from undernutrition as well as chronic nutrition-related diseases, which are increasingly leading to disabilities and death. The data reported on this region show that there is a shift in dietary habits from a traditional Mediterranean diet to industrial food, which could explain, in part, the nutritional and metabolic disorders reported in the region's population. Unhealthy eating practices in the Southern Mediterranean countries include high consumption of saturated fats and refined carbohydrates, low consumption of fibre and sedentary behaviour (Belahsen and Rguibi, 2006).

In the Northern Mediterranean countries, there is a growing trend of obesity and overweight with increased chronic nutrition-related diseases. There are three trends that can be identified here: (i) a tremendous increase in the consumption of lipids, which is explained by the higher consumption of animal fats (dairy products and meat consumption increasing as incomes rise), but even more by the consumption of vegetable oils used for cooking and seasoning or included in various industrial foodstuffs; (ii) an increase in the consumption of simple carbohydrates, connected in particular with the consumption of beverages and foodstuffs with a high carbohydrate content, and a simultaneous decrease in the consumption of starches (bread consumption has dropped by half in the last 50 years in France, and potato consumption has dropped by two-thirds over the same period); and (iii) a change in the total protein content, where the share of animal proteins is increasing to the detriment of vegetable proteins (Padilla, 2008).

The Mediterranean diet is inextricably linked to biodiversity. Indeed, biodiversity plays a key role in ensuring dietary diversity as nutrient composition between foods and among varieties/cultivars/breeds of the same food can differ dramatically. In order to guarantee that local Mediterranean diets are healthy, and that the average level of nutrient intake is adequate, it is important that the biodiversity level is kept high. Mediterranean local food biodiversity has received

relatively little attention concerning its nutritional value in the scientific literature, especially on nutraceuticals from plant species, with potential health benefit effects, traditionally used in rural communities (Heinrich, Müller and Galli, 2006).

### **3.1.2. Economy: population growth, urbanization, food prices, food waste**

Population growth in the Mediterranean Basin is marked by a widening gap between the northern and southern shores: in the North, the growth rate is levelling off and the population is ageing, whereas the population in the South is increasing rapidly and steadily. Between 1990 and 2010, the Mediterranean population has grown at an average annual rate of 1.16 percent, from 374 million to 473 million inhabitants. Today, 25 percent of the Mediterranean population is under 15 years of age and 25 percent of the 15 to 24-year olds are unemployed. As demonstrated in the recent events of the Arab spring, the construction of a sustainable future for the Mediterranean's young population is one of tomorrow's major challenges (Plan Bleu, 2012).

For the Mediterranean area, the globalization of the economic field is introducing changes in the distribution and availability of food products (imports, commercial innovation and transformation of retail sales). At the same time, changes in lifestyles and food habits are being introduced as a result of this transition from tradition to modernity (Florensa and Aragall, 2012).

The urbanization of society, the integration of women into the labour market and retail development are deeply modifying Mediterranean dietary and lifestyle patterns. New forms of distribution and sales are increasing the availability of certain food products leading to a loss of the Mediterranean food structure in northern countries and notable food imbalances in southern countries (Florensa and Aragall, 2012).

Within the globalization process, the pressure from the agro-food market has changed the production methods, i.e. forced the abandonment of some crops, long-established livestock farming techniques and traditional crafts. It has imposed new networks and sales systems, and modified consumption habits. This impact entails loss in the knowledge and practices that have contributed historically to the identity of the Mediterranean peoples and have built a rich and complex food universe in the Mediterranean area (González Turmo, 2012). Recently, the overall perspective of this "most vibrant theatre of human interaction in history" has been well told by Abulafia (2012).

Ancient vineyards, orchards and olive groves have been uprooted to make way for large-scale fruit or olive plantations and mixed rotational farming has been replaced by intensive monocultures. This has not only caused the loss of wildlife-rich habitats but has also had a major socio-economic impact on large parts of the region as many small-scale farmers have been forced to abandon their land to go and search for jobs elsewhere (Padilla, Capone and Palma, 2012).

Price volatility has a strong impact on the poor and on food importing countries, especially where diets are less diversified. It also risks modifying diets,

especially of the poorest as they tend to shift to cheaper, less preferred and often poorer quality foods (HLPE, 2011).

The distribution of food losses and waste along the food chain varies between regions. Relatively speaking, losses in the first part of the food chain, which are due to poor harvesting techniques, lack of transport and poor storage in combination with climate conditions, are more important in developing countries (Lundqvist, de Fraiture and Molden, 2008), where 40 percent of food losses occur at the post-harvest and processing level while in industrialized countries more than 40 percent of the losses occur at the retail and consumer level, i.e. food is wasted (FAO, 2011a). A study carried out in 2005 to estimate household food waste – using a sample of 500 households in Ankara (Turkey) – showed that waste accounted, on average, for 9.8 percent of the daily energy intake per person i.e. 215.7 kcal/person (Pekcan *et al.*, 2006).

Reducing in the entire Mediterranean area the amount of food lost or wasted throughout the food chain (i.e. from farm to fork) would help improve food security and nutrition. Furthermore, reducing food losses and waste will also ease pressure on water scarcity. To do so, it is crucial to address losses all along the food chain and alert consumers to the environmental impacts of their diets and the negative effects of wasting food.

### **3.1.3. Environment: water scarcity, climate change and biodiversity loss**

Water scarcity is the most critical development problem in the Mediterranean area and the single most important factor in limiting agricultural growth. Water availability in the region has been declining steadily since the late 1950s. Water resources in the Mediterranean region, according to Plan Bleu, are limited, fragile and unevenly distributed (UNEP/MAP/Plan Bleu, 2008).

The most critical situation is recorded in the Near East and North Africa (MENA). Water demand has doubled during the second half of the twentieth century to reach 280 billion m<sup>3</sup> per year for all riparian countries in 2005. Agriculture is the main water-consuming sector and accounts for 64 percent of total water demand: 45 percent in the North and 82 percent in South and East. According to the projections of the Blue Plan baseline scenario, water demand is increasingly met by an unsustainable water production (UNEP/MAP/Plan Bleu, 2008). Thus, improving the water demand management, water saving, rational water use and, in some cases, reuse of waste water even desalination projects to increase water availability especially for agriculture, is of paramount importance for sustainability in the Mediterranean area.

According to the Fourth IPCC report (IPCC, 2007), the Mediterranean is one of the major regions of the world where global warming will threaten environment and human activities (UNEP/MAP/Plan Bleu, 2008). Climate change is likely to affect agriculture and food security in the region primarily through changes in temperature, precipitation, extreme climatic events and sea level rise (Skuras and Psaltopoulos, 2012). Climate change may result in such adverse effects as

further deterioration of water scarcity, land degradation, crop failures, loss of rangeland and other vegetation covers, livestock deaths, and fisheries production and quality decline. Desertification is also a major threat to productivity in the Southeastern Mediterranean countries. People in the dry areas mainly depend on agriculture and exploitation of natural resources for their livelihood and are hard hit by desertification. Of the 243 million hectares of agricultural land resources in the Mediterranean region, 63 percent are located on the southern shores but only 39 percent are deemed to be arable land. This area is decreasing under the pressure of urbanization and the rapid development of tourism, and soil quality is deteriorating due to the erosion from wind and rainfall and the intensive use of irrigation (risks of salinization).

The Mediterranean Basin is a major centre of plant diversity (Heywood, 1998), one of the eight centres of cultivated plant origin and diversity, with over 80 crops listed (Vavilov, 1951). The Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot is the second largest hotspot in the world. The rich biodiversity of the Mediterranean terrestrial and marine flora and fauna, including many endemic species, is currently threatened by standardization of cultivation practices, monoculture, chemical contamination, overexploitation of natural resources, mechanization, and changes in lifestyles that are affecting traditional production systems across the Mediterranean area and have reduced the spectrum of the biodiversity, particularly relevant in preparing healthy and nutritious food recipes at the foundation of the Mediterranean diet heritage.

Changes in the landscape and ecosystems have increased in recent decades, especially in the Mediterranean. The main pressure on these ecosystems and their biodiversity comes from tourism, urban development in coastal areas, overfishing, intensive farming and irrigation, and the abandonment of traditional agricultural practices (Numa and Troya, 2011).

Furthermore, indigenous knowledge on how to recognize, cultivate and use these local crops is also being lost at an unprecedented rate. The genetic diversity of food crops and animal breeds is diminishing rapidly. In fact, at the beginning of the twenty-first century it is estimated that only 10 percent of the variety of crops that have been cultivated in the past are still being farmed, many local varieties being replaced by a small number of improved non-native varieties (Millstone and Lang, 2008).

The disappearance of ecological corridors and the homogenization of the natural mosaics are also threatening the survival and the reproduction of numerous wild species, many of direct economic importance (Zurayk, 2012). Environmental pressure is rising, particularly as a result of tourism, urban concentration in coastal areas, the development of intensive agriculture, the overexploitation of natural resources, overgrazing and the abandonment of traditional agricultural practices. Some effects of these pressures, such as changes in vegetation cover and habitat loss, can be estimated, but others are very difficult to quantify. About 18 percent of Mediterranean species are threatened with extinction, and

it is estimated that only 5 percent of the original vegetation remains relatively intact in the Mediterranean region (FAO, 2013). The loss of agricultural diversity occurring around the Mediterranean area could threaten the food security and livelihood of populations living in the region.

Many scientific assessments have sounded the alert about the negative impacts of a 30-year-old trend of the generalized exploitation of demersal stock that generated a gradual decline of fish resources and catches in the Mediterranean (Plan Bleu, 2012). For instance, there is overfishing of ground fish, some 50 percent of which are being exploited beyond the limits of biological safety leading to dire consequences for stock survival. According to the latest evaluations carried out by the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), while exploitation is moderate in the case of small pelagic species, large pelagics, and in particular the blue-fin tuna, are in a critical situation. The stock of blue-fin tuna spawning adults is facing a serious risk of depletion. Swordfish are also threatened because of overcapture of their young (Plan Bleu, 2012).

#### **3.1.4. Socio-cultural factors: homogenization of lifestyles and erosion of the Mediterranean diet cultural heritage**

Food plays a central role in social and cultural life in the Mediterranean area. It is deeply influenced by the evolution of traditional values towards post-modern values as well as by the globalized production system.

Changes in intergenerational relationships and gender relationships, the role of women in society and interrelationships with the rest of the world (tourism and migrations) are having important effects on Mediterranean lifestyles, including a Westernization of food consumption patterns in the Mediterranean area. These changes are influenced to a large extent by urbanization, organization of working time, growing participation of women in economic life, fewer household members, fewer generations living together, desocialization and collective environment (Padilla, 2008; Berry and De Geest, 2012). With the spread of compulsory schooling, the collective environment is gradually replacing the traditional family group, and this is happening at an increasingly early stage in people's lives. Young people's tastes are now formed to a large extent outside the family, in places where food is simplified and industrialized and rarely reflects Mediterranean traditions.

The population in the South is mainly young. By 2020, 36 percent of the population in the South will still be under 20 years of age compared with 20 percent in the North. It is a well known fact that young people who are going through the phase of a break between generations ("adolescent revolt") are more open to media influences and fashion trends, and that they cultivate a certain degree of ambiguity between modern food that has a social identity appeal and traditional food (Padilla, 2008).

For all these factors, the Mediterranean diet pattern is presently in decline among consumers because of standardization of lifestyles, loss of awareness and



appreciation, particularly among younger generations, about their own cultural food heritage.

Despite its increasing popularity worldwide, the Mediterranean diet, inscribed by UNESCO, in 2010, in the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, is today endangered in all countries of the Mediterranean area. The abandonment of traditional healthy habits and the emergence of new lifestyles associated with socio-economic changes pose important threats to the preservation and transmission of the Mediterranean diet to future generations (Dernini, 2011). The inscription of the Mediterranean diet in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List has put on the sustainability agenda, as a safeguarding measure, the utmost critical need of the inventory of this “intangible heritage”. This inventory is both a complex process and indispensable tool in order to evaluate and decide what, and how, the intangible cultural heritage of the Mediterranean diet should be protected and transmitted (Reguant-Aleix and Sensat, 2012). However, there is at the present moment, three years after the Declaration, a big deficit, especially at the government and public policies level, to act practically in relation to safeguarding the Mediterranean diet. A real work of this nature is still urgent (González Turmo and Medina, 2012).

### 3.2. ASSESSMENT INDICATORS

In the context of sustainable consumption and production (SCP), indicators can also show whether a society’s consumption and production patterns lead to more socially equitable and environmentally sustainable development. In this regard, indicators of SCP are inextricably linked to broader sets of indicators on environment and sustainable development, including poverty reduction (UNEP, 2008).

A number of international organizations and some governments have developed sets of indicators for SCP, mostly as part of wider-ranging indicator sets for sustainable development (SD) but also as part, or in support, of dedicated SCP strategies (Watson *et al.*, 2010). International organizations involved in the development of SCP indicators and indicator sets include the UNCSD, its Secretariat in UNDESA and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). More recently, UNEP has been involved in providing guidance for developing countries in developing SCP action plans including a model SCP indicator framework for use by these countries (UNEP, 2008). The EU Sustainable Development Strategy required Eurostat to develop a set of sustainable development indicators (SDI) and review and update this every two years.

According to the International Institute for Sustainable Development “an indicator quantifies and simplifies phenomena and helps us understand complex realities” (IISD, 1997). According to OECD, an indicator is “a parameter, or a value derived from parameters, which points to, provides information about, or describes the state of a phenomenon/environment/area, with a significance extending beyond that directly associated with its value” (OECD, 2003).

According to FAO, an indicator does not reduce to the data on which it is based; it generally comprises elements (a cut-off value, a frame of reference, a mode of expression, etc.) that allow a relatively universal appreciation of the information it supplies and also facilitate comparison in time and space (FAO, 2005).

### 3.2.1. Criteria for selecting indicators

To select the most effective indicators, the following criteria were considered (Watson *et al.*, 2010):

1. *Relevant to the question being asked.* The indicator should be the best indicator currently available to answer the question.
2. *Understandable i.e.* clear, simple and unambiguous.
3. *Graphically representable.*
4. *Readily interpretable i.e.* clear which direction the indicator should develop to lead to greater sustainability.
5. *Relevant* in most EEA member and collaborating countries, i.e. not restricted to an issue that is limited to a few member countries.
6. *Monitorable*, i.e. based on data that are readily available in member and collaborating countries, or could be made available at reasonable cost-benefit ratio and with regularity within time frame of policy cycle (i.e. updated each year and with maximum four year time delay).
7. *Reliable and consistent*, i.e. data collection and analysis methodologies should preferably be consistent from country to country and at the very least be consistent within a given country from year to year.
8. *Representative*, i.e. can be taken to represent current SCP trends within a given sector, final consumption cluster, etc.

From a literature review (Maclaren, 1996) on social, environmental, health and sustainability indicators, the following criteria, commonly used in the process of selecting indicators, were also considered:

- scientifically valid;
- representative of a broad range of conditions;
- responsive to change;
- relevant to the needs of potential users;
- based on accurate accessible data;
- based on data that are available over time;
- understandable by potential users;
- comparable with indicators developed in other jurisdictions;
- cost-effective to collect;
- attractive to the media; and
- unambiguous.

In the identification process of the indicators considered relevant, as descriptive of the major issues related to the assessment of the Mediterranean diet's sustainability, the Bellagio sustainability assessment and measurement principles were also taken into consideration (IISD/OECD, 2009). In the identification

process of the Mediterranean diet sustainability indicators, the set of indicators provided by the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for enabling and encouraging people to eat a healthy, sustainable diet was also taken into account (DEFRA, 2009). Also taken into consideration were the sustainable development indicators used to monitor the EU sustainable development strategy (Eurostat, 2011).

### **3.2.2 Potential identified indicators**

An initial set of indicators to assess the sustainability of the Mediterranean diets was identified at the CIHEAM International Workshop held in 2011 in Bari (Table 1).

Then, through a series of meetings jointly conducted by CIHEAM MAI-Bari and FAO held from January to June 2012, and through an online brainstorming process, held from June to September 2012, a second set of Mediterranean diet sustainability indicators, still under discussion, was identified together with a first outline of a methodology:

#### *A. Nutrition and health indicators*

- A1. Diet-related morbidity/mortality statistics
- A2. Fruit and vegetable consumption/intakes
- A3. Vegetable/animal protein consumption ratios
- A4. Dietary energy supply/intakes
- A5. Dietary diversity score
- A6. Dietary energy density score
- A7. Nutrient density/quality score
- A8. Food biodiversity composition and consumption
- A9. Nutritional anthropometry
- A10. Physical activity/physical inactivity prevalence

#### *B. Environmental indicators*

- B1. Water footprint
- B2. Carbon footprint
- B3. Nitrogen footprint
- B4. Biodiversity (to be determined)

#### *C. Economic indicators*

- C1. Food consumer price index (FCPI): cereals, fruit, vegetables, fish and meat
- C2. Cost of living index (COLI) related to food expenditures: cereals, fruit, vegetables, fish and meat
- C3. Distribution of household expenditure groups: food
- C4. Food self-sufficiency: cereals, fruit, vegetables
- C5. Intermediate consumption in the agricultural sector: nitrogen fertilizers
- C6. Food losses and waste (to be determined)

Table 1. Potential indicators for assessing the sustainability of the Mediterranean diet, CIHEAM-Bari 2011.

Thematic areas	Pressure/ impact indicators	
	Production	Consumption
Environment and natural resources (including agro-biodiversity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Water footprint</li> <li>- Carbon footprint</li> <li>- Ecological footprint</li> <li>- Energy efficiency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Share of organic and eco-friendly food consumption</li> <li>- Food biodiversity consumption</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rate of biodiversity erosion</li> <li>- Share of land under organic agriculture</li> <li>- Share of land under sustainable management</li> <li>- Use of agro-chemicals (pesticides, fertilizers)</li> <li>- Number of CDO, PDO, PGI (food quality labels)</li> <li>- Resilience capacity of production systems</li> <li>- Change in arable land area</li> <li>- Change in aquatic resource</li> <li>- Share of area dedicated to urban and peri-urban agriculture</li> <li>- Organic matter content (soil fertility)</li> <li>- Level of food processing</li> <li>- Carrying capacity</li> <li>- Number and acreage (ha) of GMO varieties</li> </ul>	
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Degree of self sufficiency (trade balance)</li> <li>- Regional (sub-national) income</li> <li>- Employment</li> <li>- Availability of total supply (products from Mediterranean crops)</li> <li>- Volatility of prices and yields</li> <li>- Fair price /trade</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Food expenditure/weekly or monthly income</li> <li>- Share of home food consumption on total consumption</li> <li>- Cost of obesity and non-communicable diseases (NCDs)</li> </ul>
Society and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Land price</li> <li>- Economic impact of organic agriculture</li> <li>- Diversification of food production</li> <li>- Number/capacity of farm structures</li> <li>- Number of SME in agro-food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of traditional products still in use</li> <li>- Number of direct sale outlets and farmer markets</li> <li>- Social Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) index</li> <li>- Gender empowerment</li> <li>- Level of transmission of traditional knowledge to new generations</li> <li>- Number of socio-cultural events on Mediterranean food cultures</li> <li>- Number of training sessions related to Mediterranean food cultures</li> <li>- Number of gastronomic tourism itineraries</li> </ul>

Thematic areas		Pressure/ impact indicators	
		Production	Consumption
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Degree of multifunctionality of agriculture</li> <li>- Level of salary of farm workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consumer perception and attitude towards MD</li> <li>- Number of consumer organizations</li> <li>- Level of active involvement of the young in MD promotion</li> </ul>
Nutrition, health and lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Share of diets that is locally produced</li> <li>- Household food security</li> <li>- Prevalence of obesity and non-communicable diseases</li> <li>- Level of physical activity</li> <li>- Burden of nutrition-related diseases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Biodiversity and food composition.</li> <li>- Nutrient profile of foods</li> <li>- Food energy density</li> <li>- Level of food processing in the diet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mediterranean diet adherence scores and new Mediterranean diet pyramid</li> <li>- Number of young people adhering to the Mediterranean diet/ food consumption pattern- Level of consumption of traditional foods and dishes</li> <li>- Share of eco-friendly and organic food consumption</li> <li>- Biodiversity in food consumption</li> <li>- Dietary diversity score (food choice)</li> <li>- Ratio fresh/ processed foods</li> <li>- Nutrient adequacy scores</li> <li>- Diet energy density</li> <li>- Nutritional anthropometry</li> <li>- Biochemical measurements of nutritional status</li> <li>- Adequate diet affordability</li> <li>- Frugality</li> <li>- Time spent on food preparation</li> <li>- Time for rest/ sleep</li> <li>- Number of meals consumed with family (conviviality)</li> </ul>

*D. Socio-cultural indicators*

- D1. Collective participation, cohesion, conviviality and commensality: proportion of meals consumed outside home.
- D2. Involvement of consumer in the preparation of food: proportion of already prepared meals.
- D3. Traditional diets relevance: consumption of traditional products (e.g. proportion of product under PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) or similar recognized traditional food.
- D4. Transmission of knowledge: mass media activities and products dedicated to traditional food. Proportion of mass media initiatives dedicated to the knowledge of food background cultural value.

## 4. Conceptual framework

The FAO regional priority framework for the Near East points out that “with limited and fragile natural resources, high population growth and an increasing demand for food, the Near East region is structurally unable to feed itself. In addition, both the prevalence of high poverty rates in some countries and inadequate food consumption patterns are major causes of food insecurity and malnutrition. The region has wealthy but food-deficient countries as well as poor countries with higher levels of food production, which makes the food security challenges of this region somewhat unique. The key objectives of this priority area are to achieve a reduction in hunger and malnutrition in the region in line with the targets of the World Food Summit (WFS) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through support of regional and national food security initiatives” (FAO, 2012d).

In some Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, the civil and political unrest or revolutions have shown the vulnerability of these countries in terms of food security and the limits of sectoral approaches used in the past to manage interdependent issues connected to food security (Hassan-Wassef, 2012).

By taking in consideration the UN-HLTF comprehensive framework for action on food and nutrition security, a comprehensive approach for tackling food and nutrition security in the Mediterranean area should require: (i) taking into account the interconnectedness and interactions between the food and nutrition security dimensions – availability, access, utilization and stability; (ii) addressing the full spectrum of food and nutrition security, including food production, procurement and distribution of food, and safety-net strengthening; (iii) integrating cross-cutting issues – such as gender equity, ecosystems and natural resources management, and climate change mitigation and adaptation; and (iv) ensuring multisectoral engagement and coordination on agriculture, social security, trade and market, employment, health, education, nutrition, and humanitarian assistance. In practice, adopting a comprehensive approach calls for maximum synergy and coordination among all components of food and nutrition security and the sectors which influence them (UN-HLTF, 2011).

Achieving food and nutrition security involves (a) ensuring consistent availability and accessibility of sustainably-produced, nutritious and safe food; and (b) reducing and/or eliminating losses and waste in food production, processing and consumption. Food production and availability should be increased in ways that are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable (UN-HLTF, 2012).

Considering that in the Mediterranean region (i) present food production and processing, food supply and distribution, and food consumption systems are not sustainable due to biodiversity loss, natural resources degradation, climate change, high energy input for food production and consumption as well as poverty; (ii) present vulnerability of many Mediterranean rural communities, and particularly (iii), Mediterranean diet erosion and increasing consumer behaviour towards overconsumption. For all these reasons, urgent measures are needed in Mediterranean countries to promote sustainable food consumption patterns and to enhance better adherence to the Mediterranean diet as a sustainable diet model.

Increased adherence to the Mediterranean dietary pattern among the Mediterranean populations, together with a reduction of food losses and waste, can contribute to the improvement of food security and nutrition in the Mediterranean region in general, and SEMC in particular, by improving the sustainability of Mediterranean food consumption and local production patterns. Moreover, the promotion of seasonality and local products would also reduce food miles with a reduction of emissions due to distribution and transportation.

This increased adherence to the Mediterranean diet will improve dietary diversity and plant-based food consumption, with lower GHG emissions. It will contribute to reducing biodiversity loss and consumption of animal-based food (meat, dairy products) and the use of natural resources, especially water, thus increasing food production, and effectively contributing to climate change mitigation. It is particularly important to take into consideration the fact that water resources are becoming very scarce in the Mediterranean region.



## 5. Research needs

The challenge of feeding the growing world population requires strategies and multicultural and multisectoral rethinking capable of generating new forms of dialogue, at different specialist levels, such as the ecological public health nutrition approach (Rayner and Lang, 2012), towards a more sustainable use of the available natural and human resources, to ensure food and nutrition security as well as the sustainability of the food systems. In addition to highlighting the importance of access to food, the more holistic concept that recent definitions of food security leads to identifies a wide range of research challenges, from food production to food consumption, spanning the humanities and social and economic sciences (Pálsson *et al.*, 2011), as well as nutritional and environmental sciences.

In the Mediterranean region, research has historically concentrated on agronomy and its associated sciences as most food comes from crops, although livestock and fisheries also received considerable attention. However, research that considers multiple aspects of food security and food systems is needed. While research on producing food has enabled remarkable gains to be made, the dominance of these research fields has overshadowed many other important aspects of research related to the entire food system.

Food systems, and the analyses of food security they underpin, provide a rich ground for research. While there is a long list of research questions in agricultural science, there is a major need to extend the research agenda in non-agricultural aspects. Technical fixes alone will not address the food security challenges, and adapting to future demands and stresses requires an integrated food system approach, not just a focus on agricultural practices (Ingram, 2011). According to Goodman (1997): *“Food systems represent all processes involved in feeding a population, and include the input required and output generated at each step. A food system operates within, and is influenced by, the social, political, economic and environmental context.”*

Globalization, industrial development, population increase and urbanization have changed food production and consumption in ways that profoundly affect ecosystems and human diets. The trends are alarming, highlighting the inadequacy of the present food supply and dietary patterns. Considering: (i) that present food production and processing, food supply and distribution, and food consumption systems are not sustainable due to biodiversity loss, natural resources degradation, climate change, high energy input as well as poverty; (ii) the present vulnerability of many Mediterranean rural communities; and particularly (iii) Mediterranean diet erosion and increasing consumer behaviour towards overconsumption;

urgent measures are needed to promote adherence to the Mediterranean diet as a sustainable dietary pattern in Mediterranean countries.

Many people in the Mediterranean region are still food-insecure, despite world-wide production currently being, in aggregate terms, sufficient for all. Research that considers multiple aspects of food security and food systems is needed, with particular regard also to assessing the environmental, economic, social, cultural, health and nutritional sustainability of the current food consumption patterns and diets as drivers of food production.

Cross-sectorial and interdisciplinary research on food consumption in the Mediterranean region should lead also to innovative intersectoral efforts to reverse the degradation of ecosystems, prevent further loss of biodiversity and redress the excesses and imbalances of diets through the improvement of sustainable dietary patterns culturally accepted in the Mediterranean region.

The improvement of the sustainability of the food consumption patterns requires attention to food loss and waste as a critical priority for food and nutrition security in the entire Mediterranean region. It is assumed that an increased adherence to the Mediterranean dietary pattern, including a reduction of food losses and waste, can contribute to the improvement of food and nutrition security in the Mediterranean region in general and SEMC in particular, by improving the sustainability of Mediterranean food consumption and production patterns.

All in all, the main priority research themes regard: diet-related health implications, food- and agricultural production-related environmental footprints, food cultures and sociology, and food losses and waste.

### **5.1 NUTRITION AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF THE CURRENT FOOD SYSTEM**

One of the most important challenges faced especially by SEMC is food and nutrition security (FAO, 2011a). The Mediterranean area in general and SEMC in particular are passing through a “nutrition transition” in which malnutrition problems (protein–energy, undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies) coexist with overnutrition problems (overweight, obesity), and diet-related chronic diseases. This nutrition transition is alarming as it has negative impacts not only on health systems but also dramatic economic, social and environmental implications. These issues are interdependent or related, directly or indirectly, to the sustainability of Mediterranean food consumption patterns, especially the decrease of adherence to the traditional Mediterranean diet (WHO, 2010). Therefore, multidisciplinary research is urgently needed to help understand and counteract this “nutrition transition”.

Nutrition transition occurs in conjunction with epidemiological transition towards non communicable diseases and has serious implications in terms of public health, economic growth and nutrition policy. Nutrition transition is malnutrition ensuing not from a need for food, but the need for high-quality nourishment. Foods rich in vitamins, minerals and micronutrients, such as fruit, vegetables and whole grains, have been substituted by foods heavy in added

sugar, saturated fat and sodium (WHO, 2010). Food systems that promote increased food intake and non-healthy foods, together with physical inactivity, lead to “*obesogenic societies*” (Kickbusch, 2010). In fact, the nutrition transition is associated with an increase in overnutrition and obesity. It also appears to bear a causal relationship to the disease burden and mortality transition referred to as the “*epidemiological transition*” (Omran, 1971; FAO/WFP/IFAD, 2012).

The prevalence of overweight and obesity has reached alarming rates in the region (Hossain, Kawar and El Nahas, 2007; Sibai *et al.*, 2003; Jabre *et al.*, 2005; Chakar and Salameh, 2006). According to WHO (2011), overweight and obesity rates in Mediterranean countries are high and continue to rise.

The inadequate dietary intake is the immediate factor causing undernutrition that is increasing in many countries of the Eastern Mediterranean region (including North Africa and the Near East). Therefore, undernutrition remains a major health problem in the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean with consequences that are too grave to be ignored (WHO, 2010).

The development of guidelines for the study of the Mediterranean diet as a sustainable diet model can contribute to enhance more adherence to the Mediterranean diet and clarify what is required for an environmentally sustainable food system and for more eco-friendly food-based dietary guidelines.

An increased adherence to the Mediterranean dietary pattern among the Mediterranean population can contribute to improve food and nutrition security in terms of food availability, food access and food utilization. Increased adherence to the Mediterranean diet, characterized by a high consumption of plant-based foods (cereals, fruit, vegetables) and lower consumption of animal-based food (meat, dairy products), can increase the efficiency of the use of natural resources, especially water, thus increasing food production.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned, the research topics regarding this theme include the following:

- Relationship between Mediterranean diets and non-communicable diseases (e.g. obesity/overweight).
- Nutrition transition and related health problems (e.g. obesity, malnutrition).
- Role of nutrition, food safety and lifestyle factors in non-communicable disease development and prevention.
- Beneficial health and nutrition benefits of typical and local Mediterranean products.
- Characterization of functional and nutritional properties of Mediterranean food products.
- Characterization of the current food consumption patterns in the Mediterranean countries.
- Mediterranean eating patterns and diet diversity.
- Observation, analysis and understanding of the evolution of food behaviour and its determinants.

- Development of interdisciplinary studies on ecological public health and nutrition

## **5.2 ECONOMICS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN FOOD SYSTEM**

For most people, a key factor determining access to food is its affordability. This is dependent not only on food cost but also on the disposable income that can be spent on food. Access is also determined by the way society allocates food to its members and food preferences (Ingram, 2011).

The problem of hunger has been accentuated by high food prices and their volatility. In low-income countries, food consumption expenditures typically account for 50 percent or more of household budgets. In lower-middle-income countries the figure is about 40 percent. The principal causes of food insecurity remain poverty and inadequate incomes (OECD, 2013).

For many Mediterranean consumers, income is a major barrier to freedom of nutritious and sustainable food choice (Kickbusch, 2010). Price volatility has a strong impact on the poor and on food-importing countries. It also risks modifying diets, especially of the poorest as they tend to shift to cheaper, less preferred, and poorer quality foods (HLPE, 2011). Pressures on food prices are exacerbated by volatile market dynamics and inadequate global coordination (Giovannucci *et al.*, 2012; Headey and Shenggen, 2010).

Economic analyses have shown that diets with a lower energy density – i.e. calories provided by whole grains and fresh produce – tend to be associated with higher food costs than calories from refined grains, added sugars and added fats (Rolls, Drewnowski and Ledikwe, 2005).

Some knowledge gaps regarding the economics of the Mediterranean food consumption patterns are reported hereafter:

- Impact of a higher adherence to the Mediterranean diet on the consumer prices of the typical Mediterranean food products and on the cost of living, especially food expenditures.
- Adherence to the Mediterranean diet and health public spending.
- Access to and affordability of high-quality Mediterranean food products for different socio-economic groups.
- Food price volatility and food access, especially by the poor.
- Impacts of incentives and subsidies on the sustainability of the food system.
- Valorization of typical and traditional Mediterranean food products.

## **5.3 FOOD-RELATED ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINTS**

Diets are a significant factor in a number of critical sustainability issues such as: climate change; public health; social inequalities; biodiversity; energy, land and water use; etc. (Reddy, Lang and Dibb, 2009).

In the Mediterranean, environmental degradation – the primary driving forces being population, consumption and technology – has reached proportions that require immediate action (UNEP, 2010).

The type, composition and quantity of food that is produced and consumed affects CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (carbon footprint) (Lam *et al.*, 2010), land use (ecological footprint) (Wackernagel and Rees, 1996) and water resources demand (water footprint) (Mekonnen and Hoekstra, 2010).

The environmental effects of different dietary patterns depend on many factors, including the proportion of animal and plant foods (Smil, 2000; Carlsson-Kanyama, Pipping Ekstrom and Shanahan, 2003; Carlsson-Kanyama and Gonzalez, 2009).

The world is becoming increasingly concerned about the high dependence of the global food system on fossil fuels (FAO, 2011b). Under globalized food systems, produce is often transported long distances, requiring high consumption rates of non-renewable resources (Mundler and Rumpus, 2012). Heinberg and Bomford (2009) showed the interface between the energy crisis and the food crisis. The dependency on fossil fuels of the present food system presents a major risk to food security (Heinberg and Bomford, 2009; Kickbusch, 2010).

Many Mediterranean indigenous species are important ingredients in the preparation of century-old traditional food recipes. Owing to their peculiar nutritional value and taste, these resources contribute to making local food preparations diverse, attractive and healthy at the same time. Unfortunately, globalization of agricultural markets and changes in lifestyles are having a profound impact on the conservation and use of these resources leading to their irreplaceable loss (FMFC, 2010).

Given the fact that nutrient contents of foods can differ significantly based on growing conditions (e.g. trace elements) and the local species and varieties of foods (e.g. vitamin contents), research attention needs to be given to analysing the nutrient content of local food biodiversity. It is only possible to ensure sustainable diets and bridge nutrient gaps when data on the nutrient contents of foods in the food supply are known (Burlingame, Charrondiere and Mouille, 2009). The activities of FAO/INFOODS rely on additional data generation through ongoing research programmes and analytical laboratories. Similarly, research on dietary intakes and food consumption patterns is needed in order to assess the contribution of food biodiversity to achieving positive nutritional outcomes (FAO/INFOODS/Bioiversity, 2010).

The main identified research topics regarding environmental footprints related to food consumption and production include:

- Water, carbon, ecological, energy and nitrogen footprints of food consumption and production.
- Resource efficiency, design of resource circulation and recycling systems, and integrated waste management in the modern food supply chains.
- Developing scenarios regarding the impact of the current food consumption

patterns on natural resources in the Mediterranean.

- Environmental impacts of new technologies for food processing/packaging, storage, logistics and distribution.
- Standardization and harmonization of metrics to assess environmental impacts of the food chain.
- Contribution of the Mediterranean diets to biodiversity conservation and promotion.
- Local food and sustainability.

#### **5.4 FOOD CULTURES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

Changes in intergenerational and gender relationships, the role of women in society and interrelationships with the rest of the world (tourism and migration) are having the main effects on Mediterranean lifestyles and food consumption patterns (Padilla, 2008). Urban design and sedentary activities contribute to the many health and nutrition challenges (WHO, 2010).

Plenty of other, often related, causes can explain nutrition transition in general and the erosion of the traditional Mediterranean dietary pattern in particular. These include income increase (Smil, 2002; Speedy, 2003), the adoption of culturally driven dietary patterns, and the deployment of long food chains and of global food players (Finardi, Arfini and Turrini, 2010).

The Mediterranean diet is currently under an increasing erosion process from the effects of globalization, the homogenization of lifestyles, the loss of awareness and appreciation, and the lack of interest among younger generations about their own cultural food heritage. A silent cultural erosion resulting from new lifestyles is affecting the diversity of food cultures that makes Mediterranean foods so diverse and traceable to local territories and traditions. Such a phenomenon is undermining also the identity of millions of people living in this area whose traditions are so intimately linked to food cultures (Dernini, 2011).

Research on socio-cultural factors on food consumption among the different Mediterranean populations and cultures should be developed.

Some research topics dealing with cultural and social aspects of Mediterranean food consumption patterns with a particular focus on the erosion of the Mediterranean food-related cultural heritage should be particularly further developed:

- Diet, commensality, conviviality, rituality and sociality.
- Food and Mediterranean cultural identity.
- Influence of age, gender, race, social class and ethnicity on food selection and consumption.
- Relationship between the Mediterranean diet and traditional knowledge of Mediterranean rural communities.
- Factors influencing consumer attitudes, preferences, perception, acceptance.
- Influence of food cultures on food consumption pattern sustainability.
- Transmission of food knowledge to the young generations.

- Traditional foods in the current diets.
- Possible pathways and mechanisms for generating a shift towards sustainable consumption patterns and lifestyles.
- Consumer decision systems and sustainable consumption.
- Social innovations to promote sustainable production and consumption.

### **5.5 FOOD WASTE AND LOSSES**

Reducing in the entire Mediterranean area the amount of food lost or wasted throughout the food chain (i.e. from farm to fork) would help improve food security and nutrition. Furthermore, reducing food losses and waste will also ease pressure on water scarcity. To do so, it is crucial to address losses all along the food chain and alert consumers to the environmental impacts of their diets and the negative effects of wasting food.

Research activities are needed to address the causes, extent and quantification, as well as economic and environmental implications of food loss and food waste in the Mediterranean region.





## 6. Policy needs

Previous policies and actions fell short of addressing holistically the problem of food and nutrition security in the Mediterranean in general and SEMC in particular. In fact, most of the previous strategies focused on food availability, adopting a quantitative approach aiming at increasing agricultural production while little attention, and consequently limited research activities and policy instruments, has been devoted to the other components of food and nutrition security, that is to say food accessibility and food utilization.

Therefore, any strategy to address food and nutrition security in the Mediterranean region should encompass both quantitative and qualitative issues and should also consider interactions that exist between them and with other sectors such as nutrition, health, etc. The focus on sustainable diets integrated in a wider food system is original in this sense and allows grasping the different facets and dimensions of food and nutrition insecurity in SEMC.

In the final declaration of the ninth meeting of the Ministers of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries of the Member Countries of CIHEAM – held in Malta on 27 September 2012 and dedicated to “Food security and food price volatility within the countries of the Mediterranean” – the Ministers and the Heads of Delegation considered that all forms of sustainable agriculture are necessary to meet the challenge of global food security, without overlooking the contributions of the aquaculture and forestry sectors. They also stated that the requirements of food security in the Mediterranean must be seen in a context of multiple challenges (geographical constraints including water and land scarcity, demographic growth and urbanization, climatic changes and environmental threats) and call for more multilateral cooperation and regional solidarity among Mediterranean countries to face these challenges (CIHEAM, 2012).

Enabling food policies address constraints to achieving food and nutrition security and support more efficient functioning of the global and national food, nutrition and agriculture systems. They aim also at enhancing the functioning of supply chains from producers to consumers and supporting the sustainable management of natural resources (IFPRI, 2007). Future food policies must consider both the agricultural and health sectors, thereby enabling the development of coherent and sustainable policies that will ultimately benefit agriculture, human health and the environment (Kearney, 2010).

One of the most important points is the development of one intensive and extensive plan and strategy of preservation, including necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the diversity of the Mediterranean food culture heritage as a critical base for the safeguarding of the Mediterranean diet, understood as a

cultural system. This preservation strategy should strengthen education initiatives, awareness-raising and capacity-building projects and training in the management of the intangible cultural heritage, in order to effectively preserve and to advance the transmission of Mediterranean diet heritage (Medina, 2009).

Food distribution and catering in many Mediterranean countries are concentrated in the hands of a few operators, who influence product supply, safety and price. The media, advertising and retail sectors and the food industry have a powerful influence on dietary choices, sometimes opposing those recommended by public health specialists (WHO, 2010).

In the southern Mediterranean countries, policies to enhance typical and traditional Mediterranean food products should be implemented, by also giving more relevance to their nutritional benefits and lower environmental impacts, within the different Mediterranean dietary patterns.

Possible policy responses to the diet transition problems include measures to raise awareness of the benefits of healthier diets and/or to change relative food prices in favour of such diets (by taxing fattening foods) or, at the extreme, making individuals who follow 'bad' diets, and thus are prone to associated diseases, bear a higher part of the consequent costs borne by the public health systems (Alexandratos, 2006).

Promoting healthy diets and lifestyles requires a multisectoral approach involving the various relevant sectors in societies. The agriculture and food sector figures prominently in this enterprise and must be given due importance in any consideration of the promotion of healthy diets. Food strategies must not merely be directed at ensuring food security for all, but must also achieve the consumption of adequate quantities of safe and good quality foods (WHO/FAO, 2003).

Policies aiming at achieving food and nutrition security in the region should also address the issue of food losses and waste. According to FAO (2012c), strategies for reducing food losses and waste include: (i) application of current knowledge to improve the food handling systems and assure food quality and safety; (ii) removing the socio-economic constraints, (iii) more education for all stakeholders of the chain, including farmers and consumers, (iv) better and adequate infrastructure, including storage facilities and marketing systems, (v) improved research and development capacity; and (vi) special attention to overcoming the limitations of small-scale producers.

Good food system governance is crucial. Increasingly, decisions regarding who produces food, what food is produced, when, where and how that food is produced, and who gets to eat it, are being made by those managing a small number of dominant food firms. Public policy decisions that impact the food system and often facilitate structural change continue to be made at local, regional, national and international levels of government. Meanwhile, farmers, consumers, policy-makers and communities are trying to cope with the impacts that the increasing consolidation and concentration are having throughout the food system.

The governance of the Mediterranean food system is hindered by many problems and constraints, including the lack of a common and shared Mediterranean strategy, from food production to food consumption, towards the development of a sustainable agriculture as well as of sustainable food systems in the Mediterranean region. Therefore, the impacts of the policies and actions for improving the sustainability of the current Mediterranean food consumption patterns – as well as their contribution to achieving food and nutrition security in the Mediterranean area – should also be monitored and evaluated through appropriate indicators. These indicators should be used to formulate measures to safeguard and promote the Mediterranean diet as a joint heritage as well as to make recommendations for multisectoral policy instruments to enhance the sustainability of the Mediterranean agro-food systems and food consumption patterns.

All these actions are necessary to improve the food and nutritional security in the Mediterranean in general and SEMC in particular.



## 7. Food for thought

An action programme should envisage the implementation in the member countries of CIHEAM of a three-year pilot project to develop “*Guidelines for improving the sustainability of diets in the Mediterranean area*”.

The Mediterranean diet, in its various national forms, should be used as a model to describe, understand and improve the sustainability of current Mediterranean food consumption patterns.

In order to measure the sustainability of food consumption, some potential indicators have been identified in this paper with the aim of formulating recommendations for cross-sectoral policy instruments allowing the improvement of the sustainability of the diets and food systems in the Mediterranean area.

The "Mediterranean diet", recognized by UNESCO as an intangible heritage of humanity in 2010, could be considered as a model of sustainable diets in the Mediterranean basin, and able to contribute to the sustainability of the agro-food systems around the Mediterranean and to the valorization of quality products.

Given the importance of diets for health and as drivers of environmental pressure, steps must be taken as a matter of urgency to monitor and measure sustainable diets through analysis of information, development of methods and indicators, and development/promotion of policy guidelines. The assessment and development of sustainable diet models will foster a consensus for action in the Mediterranean region towards nutrition-sensitive agriculture and sustainable development by raising awareness among consumers and governments that agriculture, food, nutrition, health, culture, education, economy, environment and sustainability are strongly interdependent.

Actions to be undertaken in order to change this situation in the Mediterranean region are urgent and represent a timely opportunity to start new strategies for food security.

The development of a methodological approach might be useful for designing policies in order not only to conserve and preserve the Mediterranean diet, as a common cultural heritage and lifestyle, but also to enhance its sustainability. This requires developing a set of comprehensive, coherent, integrated and holistic policies that deal with different spheres and arenas of nutrition, health, lifestyle, society, culture, education, economy, environment, and agro-biodiversity.

A shared methodological approach development will facilitate dialogues among members of the scientific community concerning the sustainability of diets in the Mediterranean area, and towards the development of a feeding knowledge network that could be considered as a “Euro-Med pilot sustainability laboratory”. Such an initiative might provide solutions to counteract the increasing pressure

on its fragile natural resources exacerbated by the changes of Mediterranean food consumption patterns, in order not only to conserve and preserve the Mediterranean diet as a common cultural heritage, but also to promote sustainable food systems for the benefit of all the peoples living in the Mediterranean area.

In 2011, FAO and UNEP formed a joint Sustainable Food Systems Programme, within the 10-year Framework of Programmes of the SCP, to improve the efficiency of resource management and reduce the intensity of pollution in food systems from production to consumption, while at the same time addressing issues of food and nutrition security. CIHEAM, in collaboration with the FAO/UNEP Sustainable Food Systems Programme, could play a lead role in identifying and catalysing partnerships with other intergovernmental organizations, national governments, UN and EU agencies, the private sector and NGOs, to enhance the transition of the Mediterranean food systems towards a more efficient sustainable consumption and production pattern.

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## ANNEX 1

# Conclusions of the CIHEAM International Seminar “The Sustainability of Food Systems in the Mediterranean Area”

25–26 SEPTEMBER 2012, VALETTA, MALTA



CIHEAM – Centre International de Hautes Etudes Agronomiques Méditerranéennes – with the technical cooperation of FAO (Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division) and in partnership with MOAN has organized the International Seminar on “The Sustainability of Food Systems in the Mediterranean Area”, held in Malta, from 25 to 26 September 2012. This document summarizes the main issues and makes proposals for actions to be implemented in the Mediterranean Basin and highlights concrete projects that can be funded in the coming years.

The main objective of this Seminar, beyond the intrinsic value of the exchanges that took place among the participants (about 70 Euro-Mediterranean experts, senior officials of ministries and international organizations, researchers, etc.), was to provide an innovative approach to reconcile food and nutrition security with sustainability including the use of resources while ensuring the protection of the environment, the adaptation of production systems to climate change, social enhancement and conservation of the Mediterranean diet cultural heritage.

To this end, the participants hope that the recommendations of the seminar will be brought to the attention of the Ministers of Agriculture of the 13 CIHEAM member countries, during their 9<sup>th</sup> meeting on 27 September 2012.

The participants have also emphasized the importance of the role played by CIHEAM, a privileged space for exchanges and analyses aimed at developing cooperation in the Mediterranean basin, a role that has been confirmed and strengthened in the year 2012 by the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its establishment.

The participants focused their consultations in two separate sessions:

1. Food systems and sustainable diets: the Mediterranean diet as a pilot study
2. Organic and quality schemes: sustainability challenges and prospects in the Mediterranean region

## CONTEXT

The participants in the Seminar have made the following observations about the evolution of food systems in the Mediterranean countries:

- Current food consumption and production patterns are not sustainable in the Mediterranean basin due to biodiversity loss, degradation of natural resources, pesticide contamination, climate change, high energy and water consumption, dietary patterns and eating habits changes and high dependency on imports as well as poverty and vulnerability of many rural and urban Mediterranean communities, and particularly the erosion of the Mediterranean diet,
- Currently, in the Mediterranean basin, we have multiple burdens of malnutrition – undernourishment, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity – due to recent and dramatic shift in dietary patterns. The trends of diet-related diseases (e.g. overweight, obesity, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and certain cancers) are alarming, highlighting the inadequacy of the present food systems and dietary patterns. According to WHO (NCD Country Profiles, 2011), overweight and obesity rates in Mediterranean countries continue to rise.
- The protective effect on health of a good adherence to a Mediterranean-type diet has been repeatedly evidenced by scientific and medical studies since the 1960s pioneer Seven Countries Study.
- Consequently, urgent measures are needed to promote and disseminate the global concept of “sustainable diets”.<sup>1</sup> For instance, recent scenarios built to model future sustainable agriculture and food consumption acknowledge the necessary changes towards integrated and agro-ecological systems of production as well as a change in the consumption pattern with a higher plant/animal food ratio.
- In 2012 the European Commission has presented to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions, “Innovation for sustainable growth: a bioeconomy for Europe”, which, among other things, envisages activities to spread information among consumers about food products adopting a scientific approach (highlighting the benefits of nutrition, methods of production and sustainability of the environment) and to promote a healthy and sustainable lifestyle.

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<sup>1</sup> “...Sustainable diets are those diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable; nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy; while optimizing natural and human resources.” FAO/Bioversity International (2010). *Biodiversity and Sustainable Diets - United Against Hunger*. Report of a scientific symposium; 3–5 November 2010, Rome.

- In 2008, at the 26th FAO Regional Conference for Europe, it was recommended to promote local and traditional food products as an essential way for realizing food sovereignty and biodiverse and resilient food production. Several member nations urged FAO to direct more efforts towards market access and consumer awareness of high value traditional products, acknowledging that traditional agriculture practices are often the only farming methods possible in difficult agro-climatic areas. Several delegations agreed that “organic” was a quality designation important for consumers and significant for sustainable agriculture and environment, and countries needed FAO support in establishing a regulatory framework for implementing and protecting this designation. Many delegations highlighted the Mediterranean diet being rich in biodiversity and nutritionally healthy. Indeed, the promotion of the Mediterranean diet could play a beneficial role in the development of sustainable agriculture in the Mediterranean region.
- The traditional and tradition-based innovative food products are a good way to give value to local biosystems, economies and communities and to improve sustainable development.
- Sustainable rural development, organic agriculture and geographical indications were mentioned specifically in the First Conference of Ministers of Agriculture held in Venice in 2003 within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Organic farming and geographical indications are also mentioned together in various international strategic documents concerning Mediterranean region. Furthermore, development agencies, national governments, private operators and NGOs, working on individual and institutional capacity building for the sustainability of agrofood system, are increasingly taking account the many potential synergies between food quality schemes and certification.

The participants also reflected that the “traditional Mediterranean diet”, recognized by UNESCO as an intangible heritage of humanity in 2010,<sup>2</sup> should be considered as a model of sustainable diet in the Mediterranean basin, and able to contribute to the sustainability of the agro-food systems around the Mediterranean and to the valorisation of quality products.

As a result of these observations, the participants to the seminar felt that the attention of the Ministers of Agriculture of the 13 member countries of CIHEAM, who will meet on 27 September 2012, should be drawn particularly on the increasingly unsustainable situation of food systems around the Mediterranean affecting a large proportion of citizens who currently reside in the Southern and

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<sup>2</sup> « ... derives from the Greek word “*diaita*” – way of living – it is a social practice based on “know-how, knowledge, and traditions ranging from the landscape to the table and that concern, in the Mediterranean basin, cultures, harvest, fishery, conservation, preparation, cooking and, in particular, the way of consuming » (UNESCO, 2010).

Northern Mediterranean, and on methods and strategies to be adopted to reverse this negative trend.

### **PROPOSALS FOR AN ACTION PROGRAMME**

The participants agreed that actions to be undertaken in order to change this situation are urgent and represent the conditions to permanently modify the observed processes and to develop and implement new strategies for achieving sustainable food systems in the Mediterranean. They relate in particular to:

- The previous statements made by the CIHEAM's countries Ministers of agriculture in 2008 and 2010, summarized by their final declaration in (Istanbul, 8 May 2010), reporting that it is necessary to: *"...Work to promote a healthy and sustainable regional food production system following the standards of the Mediterranean diet that foster the spirit of conviviality and favour consumption of local and seasonal products, particularly by encouraging regional networks to support public decisions for the protection, promotion and marketing of Mediterranean products and the development of environmentally sound agricultural production systems..."*
- The need to reconcile food and nutrition security and sustainable use of resources while ensuring the local food demand and the protection of the environment, and resilience of production systems to climate change and their contribution to its mitigation.

The sustainability of Mediterranean food systems, which represents an important area of thinking and action for governments and international organisations should replace the short-term approaches. In this context, the use of certification and quality assurance measures (geographical indications, organic agriculture, PDO, etc.) is a very effective means of adding value to products in local and international markets.

### **ACTIVITIES TO BE DEVELOPED**

#### **Session I**

#### **Food Systems and Mediterranean Sustainable Diets: The Mediterranean diet as a pilot study with technical collaboration of FAO**

Activities must envisage the implementation, in the 13 member countries of CIHEAM and also member States of FAO, of a pilot project to develop **"Guidelines for improving the sustainability of diets and food consumption patterns in the Mediterranean area"**. The Mediterranean diet, in its various national forms, will be used as a model to describe, understand and improve the sustainability of current diets and food systems.

In order to assess this sustainability, specific indicators should be identified and further developed to be applied to the different 13 CIHEAM's member countries. These indicators will be used, in a first step, to characterize the current production



and consumption systems in the various Mediterranean countries and, in a second step, to identify the changes needed to achieve both production systems and consumption patterns with noticeably better sustainability and resilience. Measures to protect and improve the Mediterranean diet are expected. Scenarios will be constructed through modelling various options. This will form the basis to formulate recommendations for cross-sectoral policy instruments allowing the improvement of the sustainability of Mediterranean food systems and food consumption patterns.

A previous technical workshop and an international seminar gathered 51 experts in CIHEAM-MAI in Bari in 2011 to launch a first exchange on the necessary indicators to be implemented for that purpose. This Task Force already raised a first list of possible and relevant indicators in four domains, environment and natural resources; economy; society and culture; nutrition, health and lifestyle. An action plan was also proposed.

These indicators could also be used to assess the sustainability of diets in other parts of the world.

## Session II

### Organic and quality schemes: Sustainability challenges and prospects in the Mediterranean Region *in partnership with MOAN*

Concerning quality schemes for agricultural products and foods it is suggested to:

- foster cross-border exchange and public-private permanent dialogue through the strengthening of specific **Network initiatives** focussing on quality schemes and labels (e.g. organic agriculture and local identity products) with promising export potential and significant positive implications for the development of local communities and territories;
- establish a cross-border, intergovernmental **Mediterranean Gateway** on quality schemes as well as enhancing bioeconomy through: (i) facilitating continued access to up-to-date information on food quality rules, standards and practices changes; (ii) providing technical assistance and capacity building to institutional and corporate actors; (iii) supporting the design of adequate policies for the integration of Mediterranean small and medium producers and processors into global food quality supply chains; (iv) promoting equivalence and local ownership of food quality standards and schemes; (v) furthering synergies and complementarities between quality schemes; (vi) linking research and enterprising (and clusters) to enhance innovation in agro-food.



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This publication aims at contributing to the overall development of the Feeding Knowledge Programme, by reporting on the work done under its Priority 5: “Mediterranean food consumption patterns: diet, environment, society, economy and health”.

The Feeding Knowledge Programme has been developed by CIHEAM-Bari, in cooperation with the Politecnico of Milan, in the framework of the 2015 Milan Universal Exposition, the theme of which is: Feeding the planet, energy for life. The Programme is part of the intangible legacy of Expo Milan 2015.

The objective of this document is to highlight the role that the current food consumption patterns play in food and nutrition security, public health, environment protection and socio-economic development in the Mediterranean region. The ultimate aim is to stimulate a multidisciplinary dialogue among the Euro-Mediterranean scientific community on the sustainability of current food consumption and production patterns in the Mediterranean region and beyond, and to identify the research activities and policy actions needed to move towards more sustainable Mediterranean food systems.

The publication addresses several interdisciplinary and interdependent issues related to: food consumption patterns; sustainable diets; health implications of the current food consumption patterns; food environmental footprints; food production systems; food economics; food cultures and sociology; food losses and waste; and food system governance and policies.



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