

## Farming First

### IFPRI *Knowledge Fair* Speech

#### “Growing Better: Linking ag and nutrition”

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The foundation of nutrition is agriculture. Farming in all its many forms - crops, livestock, horticulture and orchards – provide the range of healthy foods necessary for a good diet.

As is being discussed throughout the conference, there are many variables that impede proper nutrition, many of which are socio-economic. However, without question, access to an adequate volume of food is the first precursor to all other steps to improving nutrition globally. **Quite simply, agriculture and nutrition are inextricably linked.** It is a credit to IFPRI, that it should bring together Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health into a single discussion – one that has gone unaddressed for too long.

Continued focus on improving agricultural productivity is an important precondition to realising food security goals, including nutrition security. By better growing food, we can meet a wider range of nutritional needs. By better linking the policy discussions of agricultural development and health, we can further well being.

Food security is not only about the **quantity** of food which we consume; it is also about the **quality** and **diversity** of that food as well. We need to look at how much choice people have, and the quality of the food they eat. Malnutrition, often called the “hidden hunger”, can lead on to life-threatening illnesses. Either caused by a lack of protein (protein-energy malnutrition) or micronutrients such as iodine, vitamin A and iron (micronutrient deficiency), malnutrition weakens immune systems, exacerbates the effect of childhood diseases such as measles, malaria, pneumonia and diarrhoea, and can permanently impair long-term physical and cognitive development.

The issue of nutrition insecurity affects one billion people's health and is related to the deaths of almost 10 million people each year.

With that in mind, Farming First – a coalition of farmers groups, scientists, engineers, business, and development NGO's – has been calling for an increase in the **Quantity, Quality and Diversity** of food. We urge policymakers and development practitioners to support the following three recommendations to help agriculture further nutrition security:

1. **Increased productivity through the use of improved agronomic practices.**  
For instance, increased use of crop rotation is good farming practice, but it also means a more diversified diet. Steps such as growing a cereal, a legume and an oilseed in succession helps replenish soils, protect against crop diseases and pests, and means a better diet that includes a protein and some vegetable fat, as well as starch. Other practices such as conservation tillage and avoidance of pre and post harvest losses (particularly on delicate, nutrient rich fruits and vegetables) can further both farming and nutrition. The need to reduce losses also extends all the way down the food chain. Investment in food infrastructure can help to address appalling waste of food. FAO estimates that poorly developed systems for handling, storage, packaging, transportation, and marketing of agricultural products in developing countries results in post-harvest losses ranging from 15-50%.
2. **Biofortified foods** are bred to have higher amounts of micronutrients and can help provide essential vitamins and minerals. For instance, Golden Rice contains higher amounts of beta-carotene and iron, with potential benefits for 250 million children who risk blindness due to vitamin A deficiency and 1.4 billion women who suffer from anaemia due to iron deficiency.
3. **Micronutrient-enriched fertilizers** improve soil fertility, helping to support higher yields of more nutritious food. Poor soil quality is a significant factor that leads to micronutrient deficiencies in humans – if the soil is not rich in all the necessary nutrients, food products will not contain the necessary nutritional balance.

At the Farming First display, here in the Knowledge Fair, we have several case studies and supporting documents highlighting some of these practices in action.

Unfortunately, many successful agricultural programs remain disjointed and localized. Sharing of knowledge is essential and linking agricultural goals to broader social needs like poverty reduction, nutrition, and well being is a policy gap that has gone on too long.

Just these three recommendations can help improve health, boost livelihoods, and address development challenges. Let's not forget to look to agriculture as the cornerstone to achieve **Quantity, Quality, and Diversity** in food.