

## **Buying and Feeding**

### **How women can make healthy food choices for themselves and their families and be responsible consumers / fair trade**

Let me start this way:

**“Women can make a difference.”**

In highly developed countries as well as in emerging and less developed countries, almost everywhere on our planet, women take care of their families.

Women take care of, and buy and prepare food for, babies and the elderly, they have to keep in mind families with younger as well as older children, in school, at work, themselves in pregnancy, and people in old age.

Sicknesses increase as a result of malnutrition:

either from too much of the wrong type of food or too little food altogether.

In developing countries starvation is often the (terrible) case.

Sicknesses due to malnutrition cause high pressure on the health systems and economies in industrialised nations.

So nowadays prevention of malnutrition is more important than ever.

Healthy food, in combination with exercise, is the key to a healthy life.

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports on the growing epidemic of chronic diseases affecting both developed and developing countries.

In highly industrialised countries an enormous variety of food is at our disposal on the shelves of supermarkets.

With this over-supply, it is tempting to buy more than is really needed in the household. In consequence, more and more food lands in the trash can, some of it even unopened and in the original packaging.

In the European Union an estimated half of the food is wasted.

Throwing away food is an ethical problem.

### **Food in plentiful supply in a throw-away society?**

Facing the hunger in the world, facing the rising prices of food, facing also the speculation in food commodities, facing the devastating influence of wasting resources in our environment, we have to change our view of food.

A higher regard for food is absolutely essential.

The real worth of foodstuffs is higher than the price tags indicate.

Each buyer can contribute to stop the wastage of food, the waste of resources.

We have to learn to eat and enjoy food more consciously.

We should start to consume more consciously and to buy more consciously.

Everybody should be aware of the high value of food.

Good nutrition starts with sensible shopping. One of the most urgent tasks of our schools is to focus on the value of healthy eating and taking exercise.

Children in industrialised countries as well as in developing ones, cannot be taught soon enough to savour the pleasures of eating healthily.

As women's organizations, as NGOs, we can initiate projects to influence people to be responsible consumers, consumers with responsibility for themselves, for their families and for the environment. We can influence and educate women to act as **the** authorities in the market chain. Women, as consumers, can change a lot of things for the better by simply boycotting certain undesirable products, and so showing their market power.

The official authorities, as consumer services, offer a lot of important information, both through the internet and in brochures.

They give advice as to the meaning of the "best-before date" as well as for food preservation, the planning of grocery shopping and the utilisation of recipes for leftovers.

They inform consumers about the codes on food, about additives, food quality requirements, about advertising and sustainability in consumption, and the environmental hazards of specific products.

### **What should women consider when shopping?**

Quality of food should have a priority over price.

Preference should be given to organically sourced products.

Use of seasonal foods and food grown in the near region is preferable.

Choosing food which has been transported in ways that minimise environmental damage must be given priority as well as fairly traded products such as coffee, tea, and juices.

Less transportation means less damage to the environment and reduces the volume of waste.

Preference should be given to ecologically advantageous, reusable packaging.

The German Minister of Agriculture, a woman (Ilse Aigner) gives tips for responsible shopping.

- Plan wisely what you want to buy! Draw up a shopping list. Will most of the family be out for much of the week? Will guests come? Avoid bad buys.
- Check the shelf life of food. Examine the product carefully! Your eyes and nose are the best inspectors.
- Shop wisely for bargains! Single-person households can avoid food wastage by only buying small portions. Family-size servings and ultra-large packets may seem cheaper but they may be too expensive if they end up in the waste bin. Organise buying/shopping communities with friends and neighbours.
- Store food properly in order to maintain its quality for as long as possible.
- Don't cook more than is actually needed.
- Use leftovers: freeze them, or – with imagination – enjoy cooking and creating delicious meals out of them!

Do not shop only in the supermarket, go to regional markets and farmers' markets.

## Feeding

Let us go back to slow food and avoid fast food.

A lot of working people, school children and patients in hospitals depend on canteen food. Here the caterers have a high degree of responsibility and should be given guidelines and supervised appropriately.

Nevertheless it is important that women do not neglect the preparation of fresh food themselves and pass this knowledge over to their kids, girls and boys. Vitamins and other vital ingredients are destroyed by overcooking and lengthy storage. It is very easy to learn the basic know-how of cooking - and by the way, cooking is an extremely creative business, especially so with the family or friends. And not only for women!!

Eating less meat is better for our health and better for the environment. We know that raising cattle requires a tremendous amount of water and energy. Replacing meat – or at least some of the meat – by eating fish or vegetables is good for the health as well as the environment. Also the ecological balance benefits and the ecological footprint on this planet will have a better impact.

We have already learned intensively how important and vital small scale farming is. That it can feed the family or even a whole community. In many developing countries it has proven to be an income generating source for women, raising them from the level of subsistence farming to commercial agriculture. Accompanied by a fair trade and tax system it is one of the best means of reducing hunger in the world. It could be an educational task for women's groups and NGOs to organize contacts to fair trade organizations in the corresponding countries.

Even without being a farmer yourself, you can start growing something. There are initiatives in more and more industrialized countries to use even tiny pieces of land to raise some vegetables, potatoes, or herbs. Quick-growing nutritious crops like beans, zucchinis or peppers have proven advantageous in many projects of Soroptimist International in developing countries. Hundreds of projects have been executed in partnerships with clubs in less developed and developed countries, making the best out of the ideas of the first and the money of the second.

Just a few examples. We

- initiated kitchen- and school gardens in Kenya and in Rwanda. (By the way the government of Rwanda also promotes the kitchen garden scheme.)
- we set up and maintain school gardens in industrialised as well as developing countries. In this context the information material of the FAO is very practical (CD "How to set up and maintain a school garden").
- our Soroptimist club in Kiev, Ukraine, is creating a school garden with aromatic plants for blind or partially-sighted children.
- our Club Bamako-Lumière in Mali has distributed micro credits to women and educates women-farmers on how to produce and market medicinal plants.

- growing rice in Madagascar is a joint, large-scale project of 12 SI clubs of the country.

It would be good to initiate more school gardens, even gardens for children in the kindergarten have a great potential. Look at Michelle Obama! She is giving an excellent example of kitchen gardening with the small garden behind the White House.

Soroptimists have recognized the value of water and food for years. Currently, as President of Soroptimist International of Europe, I am busy organizing a European Congress in Berlin next year with the theme “Visions of Paradise - Soroptimists Go for Water and Food”.

To conclude

**The Aims of the 2013 European Congress in Berlin are:**

- to raise awareness of the inequity in distribution of water and foodstuffs, in addition to the problems arising from the non-availability of water or food; and at the same time stimulate an active discussion of and engagement in these topics
- to focus on agriculture with emphasis on science and technology solutions as well as local and traditional knowledge, to inform members and stakeholders of new, practice-based, developments in the fields of agricultural and nutritional research and development
- to inform participants about the main challenges in increasing farm-level productivity and biodiversity in a sustainable manner
- to champion food security, so that all people have access to sufficient and safe food, to decrease the burden of illness and diseases
- to encourage more sustainable forms of energy, reducing the environmental footprint of agriculture
- to highlight a problem-oriented approach to biotechnology, such as the use of genetically modified crops
- to stimulate a problem-oriented approach to subsidies, policy framework, property rights and land grabbing
- to advocate a holistic integration of natural resource management; soil, water, plant and animal diversity, and ecosystem services, and to report on prior educational and further-educational programs. Conference participants shall be encouraged to act as sources of information within their own Soroptimist clubs and be ‘multipliers’ of information after they return home.

I would like to invite you to come to Berlin and I will be happy to send an invitation to those who are interested.

Thank you very much for your attention!