

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: ETHICAL ISSUES IN FOOD AND NUTRIENT RESEARCH

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Heads of governments at the 1996 World Food Summit reaffirmed “the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger”. In 1999, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, clarified the ‘right to adequate food’ to mean that every human being should have physical and economic access to food that is culturally and nutritionally acceptable. Increasing world population, conflicts and climate change have created global food shortages. Efforts aimed at solving world hunger through mass production of cheap and readily available food have resulted in agricultural practices that harm the environment, workers and public health, as well as food systems that are changing cultural landscapes and lifestyles.

Epidemiologic data have supported the association between dietary patterns and health effects, such as the high intake of vegetables and fruits and the low risk of chronic disease. The importance of nutrition in building disease resistant body and mental capacity, starting from early life, has also been recognized. However, sustainable food production and processing methods at local levels and achieving healthy dietary patterns in socio-economically disadvantaged groups remains challenging.

This session will be a moderated open forum to discuss the ethical dilemma of addressing food shortages, personal dietary intake and nutritional status in the context of resource availability and food affordability, and the need to comply with ethical principles of the individual’s right to self-determination, beneficence and non-maleficence. The focus of the discussion will be on identifying the unaddressed issues and emerging priorities that the research community should consider from the papers presented in this session.