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## UN launches Year of Fruit & Veg

Next year is the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables, with hopes the occasion can unite professionals and consumers to transform the food system



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF  
FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

2021

**T**his week saw the official launch of the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables 2021, as designated by the UN General Assembly.

According to the UN's Food & Agriculture Organisation, the IYFV 2021 is a unique opportunity to raise awareness of the important role of fruit and vegetables in nutrition, food security and health, as well as in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

During a virtual launch moderated by Marcela Villarreal, director of partnerships and UN collaboration at FAO, speakers from across the world highlighted the aims of the International Year of Fruit and Vegetables.

FAO director general Qu Dongyu stressed fruit and vegetables' essential contribution to health and nutrition, not least during the current Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the importance of

addressing waste and losses in the supply chain.

As the Covid-19 crisis continues, Villarreal called for a re-examination of our food systems. "We must come together to ensure nutritious food reaches the most vulnerable," she said, "leaving no one behind."

She said it was fundamental to bring all actors together, including not just governments and international organisations like the UN and WHO, but also consumers, in order to transform our food systems and ensure food is both produced and consumed in a sustainable way.

Helena Leurent, director general of FAO partner Consumers International, welcomed the fact that consumer knowledge was increasing rapidly.

"Understanding of the link between food and health is now much greater, knowledge about who produces the food and how it is produced is sharper, and

our sense of the climate crisis is much more urgent," she said. "People are concerned about a system that doesn't serve our needs, they are questioning what it means to be sustainable and they are questioning who they can trust. It is time to work together to get past these dark times."

Leurent added that it was crucial to see consumers not just as end-users of a product, but as active partners in changing the entire system.

Andre Leu, ambassador of IFOAM Organics International, said that with the reality of climate change already upon us, including more frequent extremes of drought and flooding, adaptation and resilience were now essential. The place to start, he suggested, was the soil.

"Building up the soil organic matter, we can increase the ability of the soil to absorb the water from these extreme rain events and hold it," he said. "When you go into the dry seasons these soils

are then more resilient to droughts. On average these crops will yield 30 per cent higher than conventional soils with low organic matter. This is how we keep farmers secure in the future. With a small amount of funding we can scale this up and make a huge difference to food security."

According to Villarreal, a key moment in the International Year of Fruit and Vegetables will be the UN Food Systems Summit, to be held in the autumn. The aim of the event is to offer a platform for ambitious new actions, innovative solutions and plans to transform food systems.

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