

UN Food Security

The World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as existing “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life”. Commonly, the concept of food security is defined as including both physical and economic access to food that meets people's dietary needs as well as their food preferences. In many countries, health problems related to dietary excess are an ever increasing threat. In fact, malnutrition and foodborne diarrhea are becoming a double burden.

Food security is built on three pillars:

- **Food availability:** sufficient quantities of food available on a consistent basis.
- **Food access:** having sufficient resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet.
- **Food use:** appropriate use based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care, as well as adequate water and sanitation.

Food security is a complex sustainable development issue, linked to health through malnutrition, but also to sustainable economic development, environment, and trade. There is a great deal of debate around food security with some arguing that:

- There is enough food in the world to feed everyone adequately; the problem is distribution.
- Future food needs can - or cannot - be met by current levels of production.
- National food security is paramount - or no longer necessary because of global trade.
- Globalization may - or may not - lead to the persistence of food insecurity and poverty in rural communities.

Issues such as whether households get enough food, how it is distributed within the household and whether that food fulfils the nutrition needs of all members of the household show that food security is clearly linked to health.

Agriculture remains the largest employment sector in most developing countries and international agriculture agreements are crucial to a country's food security. Some critics argue that trade liberalization may reduce a country's food security by reducing agricultural employment levels. Concern about this has led a group of World Trade Organization (WTO) member states to recommend that current negotiations on agricultural agreements allow developing countries to re-evaluate and raise tariffs on key products to protect national food security and employment. They argue that WTO agreements, by pushing for the liberalization of crucial markets, are threatening the food security of whole communities. Related issues include:

- What is the net impact of the further liberalization of food and agricultural trade, considering the widely differing situations in developing countries?
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- To what extent can domestic economic and social policies - and food, agricultural and rural development policies - offset the diverse (and possibly negative) impacts of international policies, such as those relating to international trade?
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- How can the overall economic gains from trade benefit those who are most likely to be suffering from food insecurity?
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- Do gains “trickle down” to enhance economic access to food for the poor?
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- How can food and agricultural production and trade be restrained from the over-exploitation of natural resources that may jeopardize domestic food security in the long term?
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- How to ensure that imported food products are of acceptable quality and safe to eat?