

World Food Day: Honoring our Culture.

On October 16, World Food Day brings people together to highlight the importance of raising awareness in terms of food security, sustainable eating habits, and the benefits of healthy diets. This is a great reminder of how important our dietary choices are in helping shape a healthier future for both people and the planet we live in. While modern diets in the past seven decades have increased fivefold towards animal-based options [1], in recent years there has been growing acknowledgement on the benefits of following a more plant-rich diet [2]; one that not only helps nourish our body, but also sustains our environment. For me, World Food Day is the perfect occasion to take a moment and reflect on my culture and heritage. Mexico has rich dietary traditions but has undergone countless transformations over the centuries.

Indigenous peoples of Mexico used to thrive on plant-rich diets before the arrival of the Spanish. With endemic ingredients like corn, beans, chili peppers, and a variety of fruits and vegetables [3], the Mexican indigenous peoples obtained all the nutrients they needed for a healthy balanced diet. Not only was this diet nutrient dense, but it was also fundamentally sustainable, relying on agricultural practices that were harmonious with the environment. The traditional Mexican diet was evidence to the ecological awareness of indigenous communities, who cultivated a wide variety of crops using a method called the milpa system [4]. A system of raised soil beds which allowed for multiple crops to grow together, enriching the soil, and ensuring food security. This diet helped support strong, healthy communities for generations, as well as their environment.

The Spanish conquest brought profound changes to the Mexican diet. Europeans introduced new foods such as dairy products, wheat, sugar, and meat from livestock. This led to a prominent increase of animal-based foods in the indigenous peoples' diets. Even though these additions brought with them new sources of nutrition, they also resulted in a consumption decline of traditional plant-based foods. This dietary shift contributed to different health complications over time, including increased rates of chronic diseases like diabetes and hypertension – issues that the modern Mexican society continues to struggle with. [3]

Today, there continues to be growing recognition on the benefits that a plant-rich diet provides, not just in Mexico but around the world. Diets that are rich in fruits, legumes, whole grains, and vegetables are highlighted for their effect in reducing the risk of chronic diseases. In addition to that, plant-rich diets are more sustainable, require fewer natural resources for their production, and produce a much smaller environmental footprint. [2]

That is why for this World Food Day, we invite you to reconnect with your culinary heritage and explore the benefits of trying out a plant-rich diet. We should embrace the wisdom of our ancestors, and incorporate more sustainable nutrient dense meals, not only to honor our cultural heritage, but to also support the global efforts to create more resilient food systems. On this World Food Day, let us all pause and take a moment to reflect on the wisdom of our ancestors, who cultivated and revered the foods that help sustain them. By returning to these plant-rich diets, we are not only improving our health, but we are also contributing to a more sustainable and equitable world. Our ancestors' diets did not only have a focus on the nourishment they provided, but also focused on respecting the land, preserving biodiversity, and fostering a sense of community; all aspects modern society could focus more on.

This year, to help everyone get in touch with your culture, we are inviting you to participate in our World Food Day recipe contest. You can submit a plant-rich cultural recipe that celebrates what our planet has to offer, and the traditions of our ancestors. Whether it is an honored family recipe, or a modern twist on a traditional recipe, your contributions can help inspire others to embrace more sustainable eating practices. As we look to the future, let's pave the way for more balanced, sustainable eating habits that will not only benefit us, but also future generations.

Join us this October 16th and celebrate World Food Day by <u>sharing your favorite plan-rich recipe</u>! The deadline to submit your recipe is October 11th, 2024, and the winners will be announced October 18th, 2024.