

Food security, safety and quality: Do they go hand in hand?

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The fear for serious shortage of food to be able to feed the exponentially growing world population in the relatively near future is widespread. As available arable land is limited, the discussions generally focus on either further expansion of intensive farming or on the need for eating less protein from meat. However, these arguments are mostly used by rich countries with very high animal protein intakes and not enough arable land. They would rather buy or lease land in developing countries to satisfy their consumption needs. In addressing food security in poor countries and emerging economies, the focus should not be so much on food in general but rather on the adequate availability of essential nutrients. In Africa, micronutrient malnutrition is a much bigger problem than undernourishment (under-nutrition). The lecture will address food security from a practical angle applicable to both rich and developing societies and focusing on essential dietary nutrients, agricultural efficiency (e.g. stay away from growing crops for fuel, avoid single crop farming), and food fortification. Other factors which strongly affect food security are food safety and quality. Food safety can be compromised by chemical and microbiological contamination, the latter of which poses a considerably higher risk than the former. The safety of food can also be challenged by food adulteration which, unfortunately, is and not restricted to the rich countries in Europe, the US and China, but happens also in developing countries where generally regulatory compliance monitoring and control systems are limited. The lecture will address several aspects of the food production and food processing chain, the pivotal role of small producers and consumers, responsibilities and tasks of governmental policy and monitoring authorities, and, last but not least, the need for broad education and training at higher (academic) as well as lower levels. The future of any country is defined by the level of education of its people!