

Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agricultural Extension Services

Info Sheet
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Eating Well – Staying Well

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Audience
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This graphic shows what foods one could eat for protection, energy, and body building to be healthy and well. (FAO/Zimbabwe 2015)

Farmer 1: “I thought children grew no matter what they eat.”

Farmer 2: “When a child eats a good variety of foods they will be healthier and smarter at school. We feed our child legumes, milk and eggs to be bright, grow, and have energy, and fruits and vegetables for protection from disease.”

(from a TV spot prepared by Alive & Thrive Project, Ethiopia)

Why should agricultural extensionists care about “eating well”?

Even though many smallholder farmers around the world have been able to increase production and earn higher incomes from farming, what families eat and their nutritional status has not necessarily improved. People may not realize it, but some may suffer as a result of poor nutrition.

What do we mean by “eating well”? Eating a variety of foods (e.g., grains, vegetables, fruits, legumes, eggs, milk and other animal products, etc.) helps us to stay healthy, grow, and be strong and energetic.

What do we mean by “poor” eating (usually called malnutrition)? There are three main forms of poor eating: 1) undernutrition (not getting enough energy), 2) obesity (weighing too much) and 3) micronutrient deficiency (not getting enough of the right kinds of food). As a result, people get sick more easily and lack energy, and children and especially babies will not grow as well. It is particularly a concern when mothers do not eat well during pregnancy.

Be well. Eat well. Eating well is more than the choice of food, it also includes how we prepare and store food, how we cook food, and how we keep ourselves healthy and clean (e.g., washing our hands). When we are sick, we may not have any appetite and our body may not be able to utilize the nutrients in the food properly.

What can extensionists do to support better eating?

- Encourage people to eat a variety of foods every day.
- Help families grow and/or buy a variety of foods to eat.
- Teach farm families to store and prepare food so that it stays nutritious longer (and spoils less).
- Encourage good cleanliness practices (e.g. handwashing after work in fields)
- Help farmers plan to avoid “hungry” periods.

Priority populations: We all need to eat a variety of food groups to grow, stay strong, have energy, and fight sickness, but the bodies of young children and women have special needs/requirements.

- **Children** grow quickly during early childhood, yet can only eat small portions, which is why they need a variety of healthy and diverse foods.
- **Women** also have special needs to ensure that they remain healthy during pregnancy and after birth, and that their babies develop well. Before and during pregnancy and breastfeeding, women need more nutritious food than usual.