

The current and potential contribution of home-grown vegetables to diets in South Africa[#]

EMW Maunder* and JL Meaker

University of KwaZulu-Natal, Discipline of Dietetics and Human Nutrition, School of Agricultural Sciences and Agribusiness, Private Bag X01, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg 3201, South Africa

Abstract

In this paper the current and potential utilisation of crops (bought and home produce) in diets in South Africa is reviewed. Available data shows that at all levels, national, household and individual, the amounts of fruits and vegetables available and consumed are about half the WHO (2003) recommendations of at least 400g per day. To counteract this, the South African Food Based Dietary Guidelines promote fruit and vegetable consumption.

The 1999 National Food Consumption Survey (NFCS), showed that in South Africa, nationally, 17% of the sample produced crops only, 9% produced crops and livestock and 8% produced livestock only. Median intakes of nutrients such as energy, vitamin A and calcium for children in rural households with crop and livestock production, although raised, were still below requirements. However, evaluation of an intervention which combined production of vitamin A rich crops in home gardens with nutrition education and growth monitoring, showed vitamin A intakes increased above required levels. Another possible approach is the promotion of the consumption of indigenous vegetables, which are rich sources of several micro-nutrients. The 1999 NFCS data showed that ten percent of the children in rural areas consumed wild leaves/spinach.

In conclusion, the traditions of crop production and indigenous vegetable consumption can be built on, by the combined efforts of agriculturalists and nutritionists. The increased utilisation of indigenous crops in the South African diet would contribute to combating both under-nutrition and over-nutrition.

Keywords: home gardens, home produce, crop production, indigenous vegetables, nutrition