

Proposal for an appropriate use of the expression “food security” in Italian

During the past decade, food issues have been at the centre of international concern, so much so that the theme of the latest Universal Exposition was “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life”. Two factors contributed to such phenomenon: 1) the steady increase in the cost of food commodities since the beginning of this millennium and the subsequent food price crises and 2) the debate on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (the 1st of which aimed at halving poverty and hunger by 2015), and the discussion concerning the new Global Development Agenda. The food price crises recorded in 2007 and 2010 showed the vulnerability of the world system and sent millions of people in back in poverty causing social unrest in those countries where, on average, at least 30%-50% of the household income is spent on food. Such unrest was one of the causes of the so-called Arab Springs. The debate on Sustainable Development priorities for the period 2016-2030 emphasised that fighting hunger and malnutrition has to be a clear commitment of the International Community and that food is fundamental for people wellbeing and a critical factor in major economic, social, and environmental development process.

It is important that the Italian scientific community and practitioners can adequately contribute to this debate. To this end, it is crucial to use a terminology in line with the one endorsed at international level. A key expression that may cause misunderstanding is “food security”. Internationally, according to the definition provided during the 1996 World Food Summit, “food security” is achieved when “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. Therefore, such a concept implies the availability as well as the access to sufficient and quality food according to hygienic, health, and nutritional standards. In the original English text, reference is made to access “to sufficient safe and nutritious food”, where the term “safe” implies that food is fit for consumption and hence causes no harm to human health.

In Italy, the term “food security” is instead commonly used to highlight, more specifically, food quality and hygiene. In such a way, reference is made to “food safety” rather than to the (broader) “food security” excluding, in this way, crucial aspects such as food availability and access alongside to the effective nutritional value of what people consume. In France, for example, food safety is commonly translated as “healthy food security”.

The adjustment of these terms to international concepts would permit to point out in which way unavailability and inadequate access to food impact sizable parts of the world population, like it is happening in the Eurozone. A change in perspective is necessary to widen our horizons and encourage more effective actions to improve production and to fight food waste.

Therefore, we propose to use the Italian expression "*sicurezza alimentare*" for the above mentioned broader concept as indicated at the 1996 World Food Summit; whereas the expression "*salubrità alimentare*" should be used to describe the good quality of food as far as health and hygiene are concerned, hence in translating "*food safety*".

Mauro Ghirotti,
Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, Italy

Luciano Venturi,
formerly Local Health Unit, Ravenna, Italy*

Giorgio Battelli,
formerly Department of Veterinary Medical Sciences, University of Bologna, Italy

*Corresponding authors at: luciano.venturi@hotmail.com