

# **Health, the environment and traditional foods**

**Antonia Trichopoulos MD, PhD**

**Food is central to life**

**but also**

**plays an important role  
in the environment**

**Food production is close to exceed  
environmental limits**

**The question is,  
can we combine proper nutrition  
with  
preservation of our environment?**

***“Countries, communities and cultures that maintain their own traditional food systems***

***are better able***

***to conserve local food specialities with a corresponding diversity of crop varieties and animal breeds.***

***They are also more likely to show a lower prevalence of diet-related chronic diseases.***

***The Mediterranean diet offers a clear example”.***



**Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations**



**For the production of traditional foods , local products are generally used.**

**Cultivation of local products contributes to a sustainable environment and employment of local people,**

**thus**

**promoting the balance between the territory and the people**

**Several traditional foods could  
represent healthy and  
ecologically friendly choices  
that also support local economies**

# **Nutrition claims: a potentially important tool for the endorsement of Mediterranean traditional foods**

**Investigation of the potential of 194 traditional  
Greek foods to bear nutrition claims**

***Vasilopoulou, Dilis & Trichopoulou.  
Mediterranean Journal of Nutrition and Metabolism, 2013.***



**The average number of claims  
per Greek traditional food was 5**

**Overall, about 1024 nutrition claims  
were relevant for the 194 traditional foods studied**

**Of those claims, 529 were related to  
vitamins and minerals**

# **Importance of Studying Traditional Foods**

**For many, reputation for health properties**

**Promotion of local biodiversity**

**Expression of culture, history and lifestyle**

**Development and economic sustainability  
of rural areas**

# **NOVA classification system**

already been applied to data from more than 20 countries

**Enables systematic attention to be paid  
to industrial food processing**

## Contribution of foodstuffs classified by degree of industrial processing in household in Greece

<u>Food groups and food items</u>	<u>% of total energy</u>
Group 1: Unprocessed and minimally processed foods	26.2
Group 2: Moderately processed culinary ingredients	41.3
Group 3: Ready-to-consume products	32.5
<i>Processed products</i>	7.4
<i>Ultra-processed products</i>	25.1

Source: DAFNE databank

**Market power readily translates into political power.**

**Few governments prioritize health over big business**

**Dr Margaret Chan**

**Director-General of the World Health Organization**

**Will traditional dietary patterns survive ?**

**There is consensus in the  
international scientific literature  
that dietary patterns may be more  
relevant than specific foods,  
and  
such dietary patterns, particularly  
the ecologically friendly  
Mediterranean diet, merit the  
attention of EU public health  
officials.**

**It has also been shown that variants of the Mediterranean diet are feasible choices even for non-Mediterranean countries.**

**Mediterranean diet has been consistently shown, in Mediterranean and non-Mediterranean populations, to promote good health and longevity.**



**How can we preserve this knowledge for the future generations?**

**Are we doing enough to support traditional dietary patterns**

**rather**

**than continuously stating how good these diet are ?**

- **Safeguard or reintroduce traditional foods**
- **Promote engagement of potential stakeholders, from nutrition scientists to environmental experts, to culinary leaders**
- **Take steps to promote food biodiversity and sustainable ecosystems**

**Dietary patterns may be more relevant than  
specific foods**

**Health promoting dietary patterns, notably patterns  
relying on locally produced ecologically friendly foods**

**merit**

**the attention of EU public health officials**



**As individuals and  
as members of social groups**

**we should do our best to transmit**

**the knowledge and the practice of**

**the traditional dietary patterns**

**to the generations to come**

**in order to .....**

Clay statuette of a woman teaching her daughter how to cook.  
Boston Museum of Fine Arts 5<sup>th</sup> century BC.



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- **Contribute to better health**
- **Preserve cultural tradition**
- **Support agricultural economy**
- **Protect the environment**

**THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR ATTENTION**

