

Mediterranean Diet: A Model for Integral Ecological Development 10 Recommendations for the G7 Agriculture

From the UNESCO Network of the Emblematic Communities
of the Mediterranean Diet

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On the occasion of the G7 Agriculture, the Mediterranean Diet Emblematic Communities present 10 strategic recommendations to promote sustainable, inclusive, and resilient agriculture as the basis of a model that aims for global fertility, longevity, and prosperity.

These recommendations are inspired by the principles of the Mediterranean Diet, a cultural model and lifestyle recognized by UNESCO as an intangible heritage of humanity. The guidelines propose concrete actions to protect biodiversity, promote ecological transition, protect local agricultural traditions and improve global food security. With a focus on regenerative farming practices, nutrition education, and support for rural communities, these recommendations are key to achieving the G7 and Agenda 2030 sustainability goals.

The Mediterranean Diet, inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010 and 2013, is not merely a collection of eating habits but a comprehensive development model. It integrates agricultural sustainability, biodiversity conservation, social cohesion, and public health. Rooted in centuries-old traditions across various Mediterranean communities, it embodies a holistic approach to sustainable development that is highly relevant to today's global challenges.

In the face of pressing global issues like climate change, food insecurity, biodiversity loss, and rising health crises, the Mediterranean Diet offers a viable pathway for building sustainable, healthy, and resilient communities. The **G7 2024** agenda, which focuses on climate adaptation, food system transformation, and rural resilience, aligns closely with the core values of the Mediterranean Diet. The **Italian G7 Presidency (2023)** has underscored the need for sustainable food systems and inclusive rural development, making the Mediterranean Diet an exemplary model for global policy.

Drawing insights from the **UNESCO Nomination Files (2010 and 2013)**, these 10 policy recommendations highlight how the Mediterranean Diet can serve as a guide for G7 policy frameworks, fostering environmental stewardship, public health, and social well-being in line with the G7's strategic goals for 2024.

1. Promote Regenerative Agriculture as a Foundation for Sustainable Food Systems

The Mediterranean Diet is deeply intertwined with regenerative agriculture, which focuses on improving soil health, enhancing biodiversity, and reducing environmental impact. Practices such as crop rotation, composting, and agroforestry, long practiced in Mediterranean regions, offer effective models for global agricultural systems to enhance soil fertility and carbon sequestration.

UNESCO Reference: The **2013 Nomination File** emphasizes how regenerative farming techniques in **Cilento, Italy** and **Koroni, Greece** are fundamental to the long-term sustainability of local ecosystems.

G7 Target: Supports the **G7 goal of promoting climate-resilient agriculture**, essential for reducing agricultural emissions and ensuring food security in the face of climate change.

2. Strengthen Local Food Systems and Short Supply Chains

Local food systems and short supply chains are essential for creating more sustainable, resilient, and equitable food systems, which are at the heart of the Mediterranean Diet. By prioritizing local, seasonal, and organic products, governments can reduce food miles, lower carbon emissions, and enhance the economic viability of small-scale farmers. Strengthening short supply chains not only supports local economies but also improves food security by reducing the vulnerability to global supply chain disruptions, a growing concern in the context of climate change and geopolitical tensions.

To achieve this, governments should:

- **Promote local markets and direct producer-to-consumer sales:** Expanding the presence of local farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs fosters stronger connections between consumers and producers. This ensures that consumers have access to fresh, nutritious, culturally appropriate food and locally-sourced products, while farmers receive fairer prices for their goods, creating a mutually beneficial economic loop. Markets like these are central to Mediterranean communities, where they contribute to local identity and support agrobiodiversity by promoting the sale of regional, often unique, crop varieties.
- **Reform procurement policies for public institutions:** A key policy tool for strengthening local supply chains is through public procurement, particularly for institutions such as schools, hospitals, and government facilities. Governments should reform procurement guidelines to prioritize local, organic, and seasonal products. This aligns with the Mediterranean Diet's principles of using fresh, minimally processed ingredients, and it can serve as a driver for change

by setting an example for the broader population. By mandating the use of locally-sourced food in public institutions, governments can create stable demand for small-scale producers and organic farmers.

For example:

- **School canteens** could source fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains directly from nearby farms, promoting a healthier diet for children and educating them about the benefits of local food systems.
- **Hospitals** could serve meals based on fresh, organic, and seasonal ingredients, which are vital for patient recovery and long-term health. This shift would reduce dependence on heavily processed and imported foods, improving the nutritional quality of public institution meals while lowering their environmental footprint.
- **Support for local cooperatives and logistics hubs:** Strengthening the infrastructure for local food systems also requires investments in cooperative models and logistics hubs that can help small producers access larger markets. By creating regional hubs for processing, packaging, and distributing local food, governments can enhance the efficiency of short supply chains while maintaining their sustainability. These hubs can also support organic certification processes, allowing more small farmers to enter organic markets without the prohibitive costs of certification.

UNESCO Reference: The **2010 Nomination File** highlights the importance of local food markets and short supply chains in communities like **Tavira, Portugal** and **Brač, Croatia**, where local agricultural products are prioritized not only for economic resilience but also for maintaining cultural and environmental sustainability.

3. Incorporate Sustainable Food and Nutrition Education, Including School Gardens

Education plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable diets and raising awareness about healthy eating habits, fostering a strong connection between local food production, landscapes, and consumption, and directly influencing the future behavior of younger generations. Embedding the principles of the Mediterranean Diet into school curricula is essential to ensure that children learn about the importance of nutrition, biodiversity, and sustainable agriculture from an early age. One practical and impactful way to implement this is by introducing **school gardens** as part of educational programs, which can serve as living classrooms to teach students about the origins of food, agricultural practices, and the environment—spaces that offer “a tangible and timely contribution” to the current discourse on

sustainable and green transitions. This is education for the future transformation of today's food systems.

School gardens offer numerous benefits:

- **Hands-on learning:** By involving children in growing fruits, vegetables, and herbs, they gain a deeper understanding of how food is produced, the importance of seasonality, and the effort required to cultivate food in a sustainable way. This practical experience fosters a sense of responsibility and connection to the natural world.
- **Nutritional awareness:** Gardens provide opportunities to integrate lessons on nutrition, teaching students how fresh, home-grown produce contributes to a balanced and healthy diet. This approach mirrors the Mediterranean Diet's emphasis on consuming fresh, local, and seasonal produce.
- **Environmental stewardship:** Gardens help children develop environmental awareness by teaching them about sustainable agriculture, composting, water conservation, and biodiversity. They can also demonstrate how small-scale, organic farming practices can contribute to combating climate change and preserving ecosystems.
- **Conviviality and shared meals:** School gardens also offer the opportunity to highlight the importance of sharing food experiences like cooking together or shared meals, a core value of the Mediterranean Diet. Preparing and eating meals together fosters a sense of community and social connection, which has proven benefits on mental and emotional health. Shared meals encourage mindful eating, promote emotional well-being, and reduce feelings of isolation, reinforcing the social and psychological benefits of food.

In Italy, the **PON Edugreen** project (Programma Operativo Nazionale "Per la scuola") serves as a leading example of integrating sustainability and environmental education into the school system. Launched as part of a broader educational reform program funded by the European Union, **PON Edugreen** aims to create green, innovative learning environments, particularly through the development of school gardens and outdoor learning spaces.

PON Edugreen provides Italian schools with funding and resources to:

- Develop school gardens where students can grow their own fruits, vegetables, and herbs.
- Use these spaces as part of the formal educational curriculum, teaching students about biology, ecology, nutrition, and sustainability in a hands-on manner.
- Encourage interdisciplinary learning, where subjects like science, health, and geography are connected through practical gardening activities.

By promoting school gardens, **PON Edugreen** helps schools become centers of sustainable education, aligned with the principles of the Mediterranean Diet. These spaces not only provide students with

practical skills but also foster a greater appreciation for local food systems, biodiversity, and environmental stewardship.

Governments and educational policymakers should look to models like **PON Edugreen** to expand similar initiatives globally. Encouraging the creation of school gardens can:

- **Teach students the importance of local food production** and reduce reliance on imported, processed foods.
- **Introduce children to the principles of the Mediterranean Diet**, emphasizing the value of fresh, seasonal, and healthy foods.
- **Encourage healthy eating habits** by allowing children to grow and taste the fruits and vegetables they've cultivated, thus fostering a lifelong connection to nutritious, plant-based foods.

UNESCO Reference: The **2010 Nomination File** discusses the role of education in maintaining the Mediterranean Diet's traditions, particularly in passing down knowledge about agriculture and food culture from generation to generation. This is evident in regions like **Cilento, Italy**, where educational programs are closely tied to local food production.

G7 Target: The promotion of school gardens and nutrition education directly supports the **G7's goals of improving global nutrition and fostering sustainable consumption patterns**. It aligns with the broader agenda to encourage healthy, sustainable diets and integrate food system education into school curricula, helping to build food sovereignty and environmental awareness from a young age.

4. Preserve Traditional Agricultural Knowledge and Practices

Traditional agricultural knowledge, including organic farming, seed saving, and sustainable irrigation methods, is vital for food security and biodiversity conservation. This knowledge, which forms the backbone of the Mediterranean Diet, must be preserved and transmitted to future generations to adapt to environmental and economic changes. Governments should integrate traditional knowledge into modern agricultural policies to foster more resilient and sustainable farming practices.

UNESCO Reference: The **2010 Nomination File** emphasizes the role of traditional agricultural practices in communities such as **Chefchaouen, Morocco** and **Soria, Spain**, where knowledge of local crops and farming methods is key to preserving biodiversity and agricultural sustainability.

G7 Target: Aligns with the **G7's focus on rural resilience** and biodiversity conservation, ensuring that traditional farming practices are protected and promoted in global food systems (preservation of seeds from local, indigenous plants; this is connected with the preservation of biodiversity).

5. Strengthen the role of farmers as custodians of the land and promote agricultural resilience

Farmers are not just food producers but fundamental custodians of rural territories. Their role is crucial for ensuring food security and maintaining the integrity of rural areas, which are pillars of ecological and social stability. Protecting and supporting farmers' incomes is essential to enabling them to adopt sustainable and regenerative practices that improve soil health and safeguard biodiversity. Promoting the protection of agricultural income not only ensures the continuity of local agricultural traditions but also helps to guarantee global food security in the face of climate change and increasing economic pressures.

UNESCO Reference: The 2010 Nomination Dossier highlights the central role of local farmers in maintaining sustainable agricultural traditions in regions such as Chefchaouen, Morocco, and Tavira, Portugal, where the sustainable management of agricultural landscapes is closely tied to biodiversity protection.

G7 Objective: Promotes economic support for farmers in line with the G7 goals of agricultural resilience and environmental protection.

6. Reduce Food Waste Through Traditional Preservation Techniques

Reducing food waste is essential for combating climate change and improving food security. The Mediterranean Diet incorporates traditional preservation methods such as drying, curing, and fermenting, which reduce waste and ensure that seasonal produce is used efficiently. Governments should promote these practices to reduce food waste across the supply chain, from production to consumption.

UNESCO Reference: The 2010 Nomination File emphasizes how communities in **Koroni, Greece, Agros, Cyprus** and **Cilento, Italy** have long utilized food preservation techniques to reduce waste and maximize the use of local resources.

G7 Target: Supports the **G7's commitment to halving global food waste by 2030**, in alignment with the **UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 12.3)**.

7. Promote the Mediterranean Diet as a Model for Public Health

The Mediterranean Diet is well-known for its health benefits, including reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases, obesity, and diabetes. Governments should promote this diet as a model for public health policies, integrating it into national dietary guidelines to reduce the incidence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and improve population health.

UNESCO Reference: The **2010 and 2013 Nomination Files** both emphasize the health benefits of the Mediterranean Diet, which is based on a balance of plant-based foods, healthy fats (Extravirgin Olive Oil), and traditional culinary practices.

G7 Target: Aligns with the **G7's health agenda**, which promotes healthy diets and lifestyles to reduce the global burden of NCDs.

8. Foster Biodiversity Through Sustainable Farming Practices

The Mediterranean Diet inherently supports biodiversity through its reliance on diverse, locally adapted crops and traditional plant varieties. By promoting polyculture and agroforestry, Mediterranean communities preserve the genetic diversity of crops and animals, ensuring resilience against pests, disease, and climate change. Governments should promote policies that protect and enhance agrobiodiversity, ensuring the sustainability of food systems.

UNESCO Reference: The **2013 Nomination File** emphasizes how traditional agricultural practices in regions like **Cilento, Italy** ("Cilento and Vallo di Diano" UNESCO MAB Biosphere Reserve - hotspot for Mediterranean Biodiversity) and **Tavira, Portugal**, support biodiversity through the preservation of local plant varieties and the maintenance of diverse ecosystems.

G7 Target: Aligns with the **G7's biodiversity conservation goals**, ensuring that sustainable agriculture plays a central role in reversing biodiversity loss while securing food production for future generations.

9. Empower Women in Agriculture and Knowledge Transmission

Women have historically played a crucial role in the Mediterranean Diet, particularly in agricultural production, food preservation, and the transmission of traditional knowledge. In many Mediterranean communities, women are the primary custodians of food traditions and sustainable farming practices. Governments should support and empower women in agriculture through targeted policies that

promote gender equality, enhance women’s access to resources, and recognize their role in sustainable food systems.

UNESCO Reference: The **2010 Nomination File** highlights the essential role women play in Mediterranean communities, particularly in **Chefchaouen, Morocco, Agros, Cyprus** and **Koroni, Greece**, where they preserve and pass down agricultural knowledge and food traditions.

G7 Target: Aligns with the **G7’s commitment to gender equality and inclusive development**, ensuring that women are empowered as leaders in sustainable agriculture and rural development.

10. Promote Cultural Heritage and Rural Tourism to Support Sustainable Development

The Mediterranean Diet is not just a way of eating but also a cultural heritage that fosters community identity, social cohesion, and economic development. Promoting cultural heritage, including culinary traditions and rural tourism based on the Mediterranean Diet, can stimulate local economies, especially in rural areas. Governments should develop policies that support sustainable tourism initiatives, encouraging visitors to engage with local food cultures while protecting the environment and preserving traditional practices.

UNESCO Reference: The **2013 Nomination File** highlights the importance of rural tourism in regions such as **Brač, Croatia, Agros, Cyprus** and **Cilento, Italy**, where tourism based on the Mediterranean Diet has become a vehicle for promoting sustainable development and preserving cultural heritage.

G7 Target: Supports the **G7’s focus on sustainable economic growth** and promoting cultural heritage as a driver for inclusive rural development and environmental conservation.

These recommendations underscore how the Mediterranean Diet offers a blueprint for sustainable, resilient, and healthy communities, aligning with the G7’s 2024 strategic priorities of climate adaptation, food security, and biodiversity preservation. By leveraging the principles embedded in the Mediterranean Diet, governments can create policies that support environmental sustainability, cultural heritage, and public health, offering a pathway towards more sustainable global food systems.

Mediterranean Diet Focal Point - UNESCO Network of the Emblematic Communities

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