the Pontifical Academy of Sciences

Food Values: The Renaissance of the Mediterranean Diet and its Significance for a 21st Century World

Workshop 14 February 2017

Introduction

Over the last few decades a considerable body of evidence has been published demonstrating the relationship between diet and health. Many studies have evaluated the associations between food groups, foods or nutrients and diseases, and a consensus about the role of nutritional factors in the etiology of common diseases such as cardiovascular and neoplastic diseases has gradually emerged.

The Mediterranean diet has been extensively reported to be associated with a favourable health outcome and a better quality of life.

However, despite the increasing evidence about benefits on health, recent data indicate that adherence to this eating pattern is decreasing also in the Mediterranean regions, particularly among children and adolescents.

Actually, there is increasing evidence that societies where the cost, and indeed perceived value of food is falling with increased availability and industrialisation, are experiencing an increase burden of chronic illness and obesity. Modern societies need to reaffirm the link between natural, sustainable food and the health of individuals and communities.

The value of food should relate to our respect for traditions, cultures and the preparation of meals and the effect on nutrition, enjoyment and health. The "old

ways" which value food as an essential and central part of life are to be promoted, rather than viewing food as an abundant convenience, to be bought as cheaply as possible and consumed in large quantities - refuelling in busy lives, causing obesity and chronic illness.

The value of heritage diets such as the Mediterranean diet is finally becoming understood, and it is vital that this enlightenment results in a renaissance of such traditions for people around the world. This is an opportunity to reawaken peoples' relationship with what they eat in the environment in which they live and improve their health.

The Conference objective is to acknowledge the link between food quality, processing, cultural traditions and health/wellbeing using the Mediterranean diet as the most established example.

Moreover, the Conference will aim to produce a consensus statement to reaffirm and celebrate the vital links between what we eat and our wellbeing and describe the potential cost of failure to value food and its place in a sustainable and healthy world.