In this issue

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Received: 18 April 2011 / Accepted: 18 April 2011 / Published online: 30 May 2011
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This issue of Food Security contains a variety of types of contributions. Publication of an opinion piece is a first for the journal and the one by Julian Cribb with the title “Food Security: What Are the Priorities?” is bound to excite comment as is his book “The Coming Famine: The Global Food Crisis and What We Can Do to Avoid It”. The latter appears as one of the book reviews. Lentil and barley are the third and fourth crops, respectively, to be evaluated in the series “Crops that Feed the World”. Five research papers follow and a report of the International Food Policy Research Institute’s conference on “Leveraging Agriculture for Improving Nutrition and Health” held in New Delhi last February. The final papers are four book reviews, including the one already mentioned.

The paper by Willie Erskine and associates suggests that lentil is an under appreciated crop which would benefit from a greater research effort and development. It is valuable nutritionally because of its high protein content and the fact that the amino acid composition of the protein complements that of cereals which tend to be low in lysine. Furthermore, on account of its nitrogen fixing capacity, it helps to restore soil fertility. Adrian Newton and colleagues have provided a comprehensive review of barley, emphasizing its resilience and adaptability to a very wide range of environments. An example of this is found in the paper by Juliane Dame and Marcus Nüsser concerning food security in the mountainous district of Ladakh, India. Here, it is one of the two staples grown, the other being wheat, but farmers there are increasingly favouring the cultivation of barley

because of its greater resilience which includes the fact it may be grown at altitudes as high as 4,400 m!

Two papers follow in which food security in African countries is reviewed. The first of these by Jan de Graff, Aad Kessler and Jan Willem Nibbering summarises the trends in eight Sub-Saharan countries over the past 40 years, while the second by Fatma Ibnouf is concerned with the food security of one country, Sudan, and the critical role of women. de Graff and associates point out that about one-third of Sub-Saharan African countries are food insecure and that cereal imports have increased from about 5% of total consumption in the 1960s to about 25% in the early 2000s. Two of the reasons for this are rapidly expanding populations and the stagnation of yields at about 1 metric tonne ha⁻¹ (in contrast to Asian and Pacific countries where yields have increased to around 3 metric tonnes ha⁻¹ over the same period). However, the diversity of agro-ecological zones in Sub-Saharan Africa, ranging from humid to arid and the great variation in socio-economic indices demonstrate unequivocally that food security in these regions will not depend on any single factor but rather policies developed to fit the requirements of individual countries and specific areas within them. Fatma Ibnouf draws attention to the fact that many men migrate seasonally or permanently from the villages of the Northern Kordofan State of Sudan to participate in conflicts (there is a deep-seated clash of interests between the sedentary farmers and nomadic herdsman) or to search for paid work in the cities—but little money is sent back to the villages to support those left behind. Thus, it is left to the women to provide for their families, undertaking all the agricultural work (some of it traditionally the preserve of men), tending their home gardens, performing their domestic roles and bringing up their children. Nevertheless, they are, by tradition, deprived of the very inputs that would make their

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agricultural activities more productive: viz, access to improved seeds, modern farming methods, credit services, pesticides and marketing facilities. Dr Ibnouf concludes that gender issues are needed to be taken into account in order to achieve food security in this area.

Going further than the papers of de Graff and Erskine and their associates, who point out the lack of extension services, the inadequate link between research and the importance of outreach programmes, Rosamond Naylor discusses how agricultural development should be expanded to address the broader and interrelated issues of international security and human welfare. These are: macro-economic and energy contexts of agricultural development; climate change; deforestation, land access and land markets; farming systems and technology for the ultra-poor; and food-health linkages. In common with de Graff and associates, she points out that there will be no “silver bullets” for all systems and regions, rather success will depend on developing programmes that draw upon the integration of research from the five issues she describes that will benefit the stakeholders.

The economic aspect of food security is taken up by Tey John Yeong-Sheng and Alias Radam in their paper on demand patterns of rice imports in Malaysia. The country imports more than 25% of its rice and hence faced considerable difficulties in the Food Price Crisis of 2007/8. Part of the problem was that more than 90% of the rice was sourced from just two countries, Vietnam and Thailand and this policy appears set to continue. However, the authors suggest that, in the future, rice imports should be sourced from several countries and point out that paddy rice is exported from a number of countries with differing harvest periods covering every month of the year.

An important conference, with the title “Leveraging Agriculture for Improving Nutrition and Health” and instigated by the International Food Policy Research Institute, took place in Delhi during February this year. Jessica Fanzo reports that the conference brought together the three sectors of agriculture, health and nutrition with the aim of understanding clearly how agriculture, as a food

supplier, income generator and provider of growth, could sustainably reduce malnutrition and poor health for the world’s most vulnerable. The conference therefore reflected to a considerable extent the topics of Rosamond Naylor’s paper. Recommendations included filling knowledge gaps as to how agriculture growth impacts nutrition and health outcomes, ensuring that consumers are drivers in the agriculture process so that health risks in the value chain are mitigated, scaling up innovative solutions (but these seemed to be in short supply) and creating a cooperative environment.

The final contributions to this issue are four book reviews. The first concerns the book with the ominous title “The coming famine” but with the subtitle “The global food crisis and what we can do to avoid it” by Julian Cribb, already alluded to. The second reviews Patrick Moore’s *Confessions of a Greenpeace Dropout: The Making of a Sensible Environmentalist*. This is a fascinating read about how the author, a founder of Greenpeace, parted company with movement when he realised that it was against many things but not for very much, perhaps least of all one species, *Homo sapiens*! The third reviews four books which resulted from the International Congress for Plant Pathology held in Turin in 2008. The topics are Recent Developments in Management of Plant Disease, Post Harvest Pathology, The Role of Plant Pathology in Food Safety and Food Security, and Knowledge and Technology Transfer for Plant Pathology. Although the books give a good flavour of the Congress, one startling omission, as the reviewer points out, is the lack of a book on Host-pathogen Interactions and Molecular Plant Pathology, the topic of a plenary session. Finally, referring to a recurring theme in this journal, there is a review of *The African Food System and its Interaction with Human Health and Nutrition*. This is a multi-authored volume which, as the reviewer says, brings together a distinguished group of expert to discuss various aspects of food systems, nutritional challenges and health related issues that require linkage at the planning, policymaking, and programme implementation levels.