



NORTHERN COUNTRIES GEAR UP FOR WORLD FOOD DAY 2008

World Food Day (WFD) has long been seen an important event for developing countries, but now many developed countries also seize this yearly opportunity to reflect on food-related issues. In most countries the lead is taken by civil society organizations to put on events inspired by the annual WFD theme. Activities are usually designed to raise awareness of issues related to hunger in the world, to advocate for action and to lobby decision makers. In a few countries, including Italy, home to the Rome-based food agencies, the government is active in promoting the celebration of WFD, especially in schools.

The programmes vary enormously from country to country depending on national context and needs. To get a picture of how they saw WFD, we interviewed representatives from CSOs and the UN in a number of developed countries and what emerged was a multifaceted image. Our itinerary goes from Japan (FAO Liaison Office) and the US (National Committee for World Food Day), to Sweden (FAO office in Stockholm), Germany (German Agro Action), UK (UK Food Group) and Ireland (GORTA), heading back to Spain (FAO /WFD) and Italy (ISIA).

All of the countries that we contacted participate in WFD in a proactive and well-informed way and some of them such as Ireland, Japan and Spain see it as one of the most important events in their annual programmes. Since 1981 outstanding leadership for the US event has been provided by Ms Patricia Young, working out of FAO's Washington office: she also initiated the preparation of the highly acclaimed educational programme - Feeding Minds Fighting Hunger. At the other end of the spectrum, the most surprising apprentice organizers are Italian designers from the Institute for Industrial Art (ISIA) in Florence who are organizing a symposium linking design for sustainability and food. The academic world is also taking the lead in celebrating WFD in Sweden and Spain, with both countries inviting senior political figures to participate in events at their most prestigious universities. In the UK, Germany and Japan, civil society organizations will organize debates, as well as numerous sports and charity events, whereas Ireland has decided to have a more corporate focus for WFD 2008.

The choice of participants depends on the country context, with the organizers targeting audiences that they believe are best able to respond to the messages that they are seeking to put across. Whatever their aim, all countries have strong media coverage at their disposal in order to embrace an even larger audience.

Despite their differences, all of those interviewed expressed their full agreement on the choice of WFD 2008 theme. A well-established German NGO would have welcomed a more in-depth analysis of issues relating to chronic hunger and Ireland would have appreciated more complete guidelines from WFD organizers.

In general, expectations are positive, especially in terms of putting agriculture high on the development agenda, which, according to Japan and several other countries, is the first step towards improving future world food security. UK expressed the urgency to raise awareness of the need for food sovereignty as well as of localization of food systems throughout the world in order to provide healthy food, secure livelihoods and vital ecosystems.

While there is much diversity in the way in which WFD will be celebrated, there is one underlying message that cuts a cross all countries - the need to hold governments accountable for delivering on their recently restated commitments to bring about rapid reductions in the incidence of hunger. "Do not promise what you cannot fulfil" is German Agro Action's way of expressing this concern. The widely expressed view is that WFD can make a significant difference to the prospects for achieving universal food security.

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