

News Release



Date: 14 October 2005
No. : 220/2005
Time of release: 11.00 hrs

Theme:
General Statistics

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27 November 2005

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Special Observances

World Food Day

On Sunday the 16th of October, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations will be celebrating its 60th anniversary since its foundation in 1945. This year's theme, "Agriculture and Intercultural dialogue", focuses on the contribution of different cultures to world agriculture and stresses the importance of intercultural dialogue as a precondition against hunger and environmental degradation. World Food Day activities are observed every year in more than 150 countries.

The birth of agriculture occurred with the substitution of crop and livestock domestication instead of hunting and gathering. The evolution of society began as settlers started forming groups of people and in turn started domesticating wild crops and animals. Due to this phenomenon, populations started to grow and excess populations started migrating to new lands. As it can be seen the history and evolution of world agriculture is full of intercultural dialogue. The potato, which was grown in South America, was transferred to Northern Europe. Maize, which is originally from the Americas, now feeds much of Africa. Europe and Africa contributed their plants to the Americas, including coffee, grapes and wheat.

The first domesticated animal is probably the wild goat. The domestication of the wild goat had a profound impact on culture. Goats provided milk, and since they reproduced quickly, goats were a ready source of meat. The goat also provided fibre for weaving and skins for clothing. The goat also allowed humans to migrate to other lands, since their food could walk with them and as the goat could thrive in harsh conditions, they gave the human race the flexibility it needed to live almost anywhere. This mobility facilitated contact and increased intercultural dialogue.

Intercultural dialogue occurs everytime people from different cultures meet and listen to what the other person has to say. Agriculture is no different. Intercultural dialogue takes place through travelling, migration, international institutions, meetings and trade negotiations. Everytime an exchange of ideas by experts from different country occurs, intercultural dialogue has taken place.

One form of intercultural dialogue where societies may feel threatened is world trade. More often than not, trade negotiations are not dialogues between equals. Poor farmers from developing countries are not able to compete at an international level, whilst farmers in developed countries are able to export their subsidised produce to developing countries at par or below production cost. Only fairer trading systems and an increase in intercultural dialogue will developing countries be able to compete on an international level.

According to FAO statistics, at the start of the new millenium, approximately 2.57 billion people engage in agriculture, fishing, hunting and forestry as their livelihood. Agriculture, for billions of people around the world, is not primarily an economic activity but it is also a way of life. Agriculture not only contributes to economic prosperity but other non-monetary contributions of agriculture include habitat and landscape, soil conservation, conservation of bio-diversity, and rural development. Another important feature of agriculture today, in both developed and developing countries, is farm tourism where city dwellers take a new interest from where their food comes from.

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The local scenario

The various civilisations that have set foot on Malta over the years, through intercultural dialogue, have all played an important role in the evolution of agriculture. The potato which was first brought to Europe by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century is also grown in Malta. Today, approximately 1,100 hectares with potatoes out of 9,600 hectares of Utilised Agricultural Area are grown in Malta and Gozo. This amounts to roughly 11.5 percent of the total utilised agricultural area in Malta. Forage crops, which are mainly wheat, and which was originally founded in Southeast Asia occupies approximately 50 percent of the total utilised agricultural area.

It is said that the Babylons where the first civilisation, around 5,000 years ago to utilise milk as a drink. Today, Malta is self-sufficient in the production of drinking milk, with approximately 40,000 tonnes of raw milk passing to dairies every year, of which, 30,000 tonnes are used for human consumption.

Intercultural dialogue in Malta has not just taken place with the exchange of crops and animals with the different civilisations occupying the territory but also between institutions. Recently, the Agricultural Minister from Tunisia was in Malta in order to enhance agricultural co-operation between the countries and also to exchange crops and animals to live in different habitats.

Intercultural dialogue is a pre-requisite if sustainable agriculture is to be maintained ■

Abstract of agricultural statistics data

Total Utilized Agricultural Area	10,794
Potatoes	1,207
Fodder	5,197
Land under orchards	465
Land under vineyards	615
Vegetables	2,886

Labour Force

Full time	1,579
Part time	16,287
Total	17,866

as per FSS 2003

2004 Data

Raw milk intake (tonnes)	41,122
Annual Pig Slaughters (Heads)	104,504
Annual Cattle Slaughters (Heads)	4,822
Annual Broiler Slaughters (Heads)	3,895,233
Number of Pigs	76,853
Number of Cattle	19,408
Number of Sheep	14,130
Number of Goats	5,635