


DIVINFOOD

 Co-constructing interactive short and mid-tier food chains
 to value agro-biodiversity IN healthy plant-based FOOD

Valuing NUCs in sustainable cooking competitions to increase their use in restaurants

Summary

Neglected and underutilised crops (NUCs) are rarely used in restaurants. To make them more popular, DIVINFOOD has joined forces with the first sustainable cooking competition in France. This competition is open to restaurant chefs and cooks with the purpose of promoting NUCs as a key component of sustainability. This type of initiative has great potential for the raising awareness of chefs, cooks, consumers, and policy-makers about the culinary benefits of NUCs and sustainable agriculture, thereby supporting the farmers who grow them agro-ecologically.

Introduction

In Europe, out-of-home consumption accounts for 1 in 5 meals. This is a major lever for supporting the transition of food systems towards sustainability. Sustainable sourcing for restaurants is making slow progress, but still barely includes NUCs. DIVINFOOD collaborated with French stakeholders to open a new avenue for promoting NUCs in restaurants.

Solution / practical recommendation for practitioners (farmers, small-scale processors, etc.)

The DIVINFOOD project joined forces with the first Sustainable Cooking Competition, organised in 2023 in France, to promote NUCs as a key element of sustainability. The introduction of NUCs into the culinary contest emerged from a partnership with a well-known chef, concerned by sustainability and supporting agroecological farmers. As a DIVINFOOD partner, this chef had the opportunity to test the DIVINFOOD ‘meat-bean’ (haricot viande in French) in his cuisine and developed some new recipes. Through this experience, he learned to value this NUC and to promote it to other chefs involved in organising the Sustainable Cooking Competition.

The contest was a success, involving 8 young chefs who creatively showcased the NUC in their recipes. The initiative received strong media coverage in the professional and general press, raising awareness about NUCs among a wide range of chefs, cooks, consumers and policy-makers. The second edition of the competition, held in 2024, highlighted a second DIVINFOOD NUC, which is the grass pea (chíchero in Portuguese).

This type of initiative can be replicated in Europe. The first step is to identify one or more chefs who are interested in sustainability and can act as opinion leaders within their community of chefs. Working with them to test one or more NUCs will enable the chefs to see for themselves the value of NUCs in their cuisine. Once convinced, they can use their networks to develop culinary competitions that celebrate sustainability and showcase the NUCs.



Figures 1-3 Very first Sustainable Cuisine Contest in Lyon-France (2023) with the DIVINFOOD NUC “haricot viande”

(Credit photo : mPmC s.a.s. & Fondation pour la Cuisine Durable)

Benefits (and limits) for practitioners (farmers, small-scale processors, etc.) or stakeholders

There can be no sustainable cuisine without sustainable agriculture, and no sustainable agriculture without cultivated biodiversity. The solution proposed here highlights NUCs as a key element in the sustainability of cuisine and agriculture. It also highlights the role of NUCs as a quality ingredient for inventing sustainable, healthy and tasty recipes.

This type of initiative has the added benefit of raising awareness about the use and benefits of NUCs among chefs, cooks, consumers, future diners, and policy-makers. It is likely to encourage chefs and cooks to pay more attention to the cultivated biodiversity they work with and to make the best of it throughout their recipes. Such events can forge partnerships with farmers who are making great efforts to preserve NUCs and cultivate them in agroecology.

Organising a culinary competition takes time and money, and needs to be well publicised if it is to have any impact. Partnerships with chefs who are recognised in their region and with culinary training centres are keys to the success of such initiatives.

Further information

Weblinks

Events planning company: <https://www.fondation-cuisinedurable.org/fr/projects>

Opinion Chef leader: <https://tetedoie.fr/>

Initiator and go-between company: <https://www.mesproducteursmescuisiniers.com/fr/>

About this practice abstract and DIVINFOOD

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DIVINFOOD - Co-constructing interactive short and mid-tier food chains to value agrobioDiversity IN healthy plant-based FOOD, is running **from March 2022 to Feb 2027**.

The overall goal of DIVINFOOD (a multi-actor, participatory project) is to facilitate the use and increase the value of Neglected and Underutilised Crops (NUCs) in food chains to foster healthier diets and more sustainable food systems.

Project website: www.divinfood.eu

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