

Article

The Great Month of October A Symphony of World Food Day and World Egg Day

SHRIDHAR speaks



Tarun Shridhar
Former Secretary,
Ministry of
Fisheries, Animal
Husbandry and
Dairying,
Govt. of India

"I'm so glad I live in a world where there are Octobers." The quote from Canadian author LM Montgomery's celebrated book *Anne of Green Gables* should gladden the hearts of all closely associated with the food sector, for in the month of October- a month ushering in the Fall, a time perfect for focusing on dreams and goals- we celebrate two of the most significant events related to food, one after the other: World Food Day on 16th October, preceded by the World Egg Day on the second Friday of the month which happened to be 11th October.

"Right to foods for a better life and a better future" is the theme of this year's World Food Day. Please note, food has been expressed as a plural "foods". The FAO explains this curious expression thus, "Foods' stands for diversity, nutrition, affordability, and safety. A greater diversity of nutritious foods should be available in our fields, in our markets, and on our tables, for the benefit of all."

Complementing this thematic statement emphasising the right to 'foods' and recognising their immense diversity is the simple yet powerful theme of World Egg Day 2024: "United by Eggs". Isn't it wonderful that the amazing egg, in the global quest of food and nutritional security, has the potential to connect and unite people from all corners of the world. The International Egg Commission

explains, "eggs can be found in cuisines across our planet's cultures and countries, showcasing their universal appeal and essential role in global nutrition."

The right to adequate food, as a universal human right, is enshrined in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). It is interlinked with other essential rights, such as the right to health, water, education, and life itself. The right to food is legally binding for 172 countries under the ICESCR, requiring them to take concrete steps to prevent hunger and achieve food security and nutrition. States hold the primary responsibility for respecting, protecting, and fulfilling this right. This includes ensuring that people have the means to produce and procure food that is "nutritious, free from harmful substances, and culturally acceptable." In brief, the universally recognised and accepted right binds the states to ensure a) everyone has access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to live with dignity; b) social inclusion addressing inequalities, and empowering marginalised communities; c) a human rights-based approach that encourages participation, accountability, non-discrimination, human dignity and empowerment; and d) a future where the right to food is guaranteed reducing the risk of food crises caused by diverse factors such as political instability, climate change, and economic shocks.

"The world's farmers produce enough food to feed more than the global population yet, hunger persists," admits the FAO, "a specialised agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger." The goal of this "specialised agency" is described as "to achieve food security for all and make sure that people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives." The World Food Day commemorates the establishment of FAO on 16th October 1945 in Quebec,

Canada during the first session of the United Nations. 75 years have gone by and the FAO evaluates the state of food and nutrition in the world informing us that "around 733 million people are facing hunger in the world." This hunger is further characterised, quite tragically as "acute and chronic." The reasons may be many, from the vagaries of the weather to conflicts to economic downturns, yet it points towards a collective failure of the global community and the inter-governmental institutions, such as the FAO. The magnitude of the problem is further exacerbated when we find that hunger "impacts the poor and vulnerable most severely, many of whom are agricultural households, reflecting widening inequalities across and within countries."

If this state of affairs was not disturbing enough, "over 2.8 billion people in the world are unable to afford a healthy diet." Unhealthy diets are the leading cause of all forms of malnutrition- undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency and obesity. A staggering 43% of the world's population is afflicted by either hunger or malnutrition. Shouldn't it call for serious introspection leading to interventions that are effective rather than symbolic. We in India have to demonstrate greater purpose and intent in addressing the twin challenges of hunger and malnutrition as we hold a position way down near the bottom of the Global Hunger Index (GHI). India is placed at position number 105 in a list of 127 countries; our neighbours appear to have been more serious on this issue as their positions are: Sri Lanka 56, Nepal 68 and Bangladesh 84. Even if we were to legitimately question this ranking, the gravity of the problem cannot be undermined.

The silver lining, rather a golden sunny side up, against this grey backdrop is provided by the humble egg seeking to "unite" the world of food and nutrition. World Egg Day was established in Vienna in 1996 by the International



Egg Commission (IEC) to celebrate the power of the egg on the second Friday in October each year. Egg, a potent nutritious powerhouse, has fans around the world, hence it is an appropriate candidate to create a "united" world of food. While we are proclaiming the "right to food" for a "better life and better future", we had celebrated the incredible egg "for a healthy future" during the year gone by.

Its nutritional power carries immense potential to combat common nutrient deficiencies across the world: the oval-shaped versatile egg contains as many as 13 essential nutrients in one small package; and the package is super yummy. Egg offers a solution, if not the whole at least a major part of what the FAO is looking for to combat malnutrition. The IEC gives us a cheerful dose of optimism on Egg Day, "as well as being an environmentally friendly animal protein source and their abundance of nutritional benefits, eggs have the power to bring people together. They can play a crucial role in fostering cross cultural understanding and promoting solidarity within communities across the world."

How about "Eggs for world peace and harmony" as the theme for the future World Egg Days? After all, for most of the cultures and beliefs around the world, the egg has been a symbol of the genesis of gods, the earth and life.

The key messages IEC aims to deliver during this year's World Egg Day are ambitious no doubt, yet they communicate the boundless power and energy of this awkward humpty-dumpty to foster a "united" world much beyond its quest for health and nutrition. IEC illustrates and articulates it convincingly in the following manner.

Egg offers a solution, if not the whole at least a major part of what the FAO is looking for to combat malnutrition

United in the pursuit of health: Eggs are nutrient dense, contributing to health, development and function of the body and brain. Eggs provide essential vitamins, minerals and high-quality protein which are vital for every stage of life. Eggs are widely available sources of high-quality protein, making them accessible to people across different socio-economic backgrounds, fostering unity in nutrition. Choosing eggs helps contribute to a healthier planet for all of us. Eggs require few resources and

produce few greenhouse gas emissions. Eggs are a simple, versatile and complete source of nutrition.

Uniting people through tradition: Eggs are a universal food found in cuisines across cultures and continents, bringing people together through shared culinary traditions. Eggs play a central role in many cultural and religious festivals, highlighting their significance in bringing communities together.

Uniting families and supporting communities: Supporting local egg farmers boosts local economies and food security. This fosters a sense of unity and collective well-being within communities. Due to their outstanding versatility, eggs can be enjoyed as an ingredient or the centre of a dish, for any mealtime throughout the day. Nothing brings people together like the joy of a home-cooked meal, make sure to add an egg to amplify your nutrient intake."

"October Theory" trending on social media calls it a time of introspection, reflection and to set new goals. The twin days of food and egg this month should awaken the world to admit that "a hungry man is not a free man." And hence resolve to invest in the creation of a food secure and nutritious world.