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Staple Food Consumption Influencing Economic, Social, Cultural, Nutritional, and Public Health Aspects in Brazil

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Abstract

In 2016 the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa) launched an initiative (movement) entitled “Rice and Beans: the Brazilian Food” aiming to demonstrate the nutritional importance of diets based on these products via the dissemination of customized information about their nutritional and functional aspects. This initiative was launched because in the last decades the food industry has offered several products and services reshaping the eating patterns. A substitution of culinary preparations based on fresh or raw grains/cereals for almost ready or semi-ready foods was the consequence. In Brazil, the change affected the consumption of rice and beans, the staple foods of the population, with negative consequences in economic, social, cultural, nutritional, and public health aspects. This situation is not restricted to Brazil. The World Health Organisation recommends to governments to guide populations towards more healthy food choices. The movement was planned in three stages: 1) consumption diagnostics, 2) evaluation of the data from the first stage by a multidisciplinary team, 3) disclosure of clarifications to the population of critical points identified in the surveys. The data was obtained by diagnosis was carried out with consumers in the states of Goiás and Mato Grosso. The diagnosis identified aspects related to changes in eating habits that affect the consumption of rice and beans. However, they remain essential food, regardless of age and family income. On the other hand, it was detected the need to better inform the population, with scientific arguments, about the benefits of consumption, with special attention to people with diseases, such as obesity, arterial hypertension, diabetes, high levels of triglycerides and cholesterol. The results corroborate and subsidise the main proposal of movement that institutions and agents in the production chains promote the dissemination of information on nutritional and functional characteristics of rice and beans to different profiles of Brazilian consumers, encouraging them to prefer more healthy diets. Summarising, steps one and two were performed as planned. To perform step three, it still is necessary to gain the support of more food chain members to overcome some obstacles related to funding and dissemination of information to consumers.

Keywords: Consumption patterns, food culture, food security, nutrition security, sustainable diets