

# Food Plants International

*Helping the hungry feed themselves well through being good stewards of God's amazing resources*



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## Enjoying diversity

In agriculture and horticulture the most commonly used word these days is diversity. It is considered to enable more sustainable production and balanced diets. In some ways this goes contrary to classic agriculture and the mindset of many scientists. As I have mentioned previously, 50 years ago when I was a science teacher, a book purported to be able to discern the potential future careers for students by whether they had a reductionist or diversity outlook on issues. Arts students tended to have a diverse outlook and science students reduced things to one simple issue. This was presumed to enable the science oriented ones to analyze and find one fundamental solution to issues.

As mentioned in last month's newsletter I am setting up a resource centre to display our food plants information. I estimated there were 2,000 posters but may have underestimated considering all the smaller format ones. While arranging the displays I found myself fighting an inner battle over whether I thought like a reductionist scientist or in fact enjoyed diversity. Should I for example put all the cereals together, or all the plants in one botanical group together, or put all the plants of one country together, etc. Or should I arranged them for colour and size and showing a diversity of edible parts and plant types. The database could easily sort out this richness into whatever grouping of information someone wanted. This process caused me to reflect on my life's career and attitude to enjoying and exploring the richness of the diversity. This morning, reading a scientific article, I became especially interested when it mentioned that Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia, had 55 banana, 133 breadfruit, and 171 yam varieties. It made me want to go there. (Our database has 147 edible plant species in Pohnpei, but I haven't had information on the varietal diversity.)

Many years ago, when I was collating information for Papua New Guinea, one top scientist tried to convince me that I was wasting my life trying to deal with a diversity of plants and needed to focus on one critical aspect of one variety of one crop, if I ever wanted to build a professional career. It wasn't with some profound insight into the future but possibly a more inherent personal orientation that helped

Diversity for good diets and the health of the planet



Posters showing plant diversity

me maintain my fascination with diversity. The strategic re-thinking on the future of agriculture in the last 5-10 years now comes down very, very strongly on the side of maintaining and using diversity. They consider the sustainability of the environment as well as enriched diets depends on it. During my student days I also studied a number of arts subjects such as sociology and anthropology, and several Biblical and theological subjects. I actually found them much easier than the narrow rigour of science subjects, as my academic results probably showed. I feel affirmed that I am recognised for having compiled the most comprehensive database of edible plants in the world and see it as a meaningful application of my Christian faith. Enjoying doing it is a bonus!

I still shudder when someone proposes reducing this richness and diversity to one high yielding variety or using some reductionist technique such as hybridisation or GMO technology. Hundreds of years of adaptation and development of diversity could be lost and the whole world be poorer. Usually their motive is profits and they call this Economic Rationalism, or ECORATS for short. No wonder children around the world are protesting.

With thanks for your interest,

*Bruce*



Posters showing diversity in edible plants

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