
How can food and farming research deliver for the long-term public good?

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If food and farming research is to deliver for the public good, it must ensure that such research takes adequate account of agrobiodiversity – the diversity of crops, animals, fish and other species that are part of all production systems.

Agrobiodiversity is necessary to secure the long-term sustainability of food production systems, achieve food security, and embed the principals of food sovereignty in food systems. Research on improved use and availability of, as well as access to, agrobiodiversity will be fundamental to achieving these objectives.

Agrobiodiversity must be included in debates on the nature and content of food and farming research. This means making sure that the farmers and communities who are developers and custodians of that diversity are fully engaged in the research setting process. It also means ensuring that the research agendas recognise and respond to their roles and needs, and takes full account of their importance for the continuing maintenance and use of that diversity.

Farmers and communities that maintain agrobiodiversity include indigenous peoples and farmers in marginal environments who are often excluded from the research setting processes and whose cultural and production practices are often undervalued, if not denigrated. These include shifting cultivators and pastoral peoples around the world.

Their inclusion in any research setting process and in the development of research priorities is therefore an essential part of the development of an ethical research agenda that delivers for the long-term public good. This will require transdisciplinary research approaches that take account of different world views and traditional knowledge.