
Eating and Healing is aimed at exploring the idea that food can heal. The underlying argument of the volume is that, around the world, indigenous and rural people do not separate food and medicine, but rather consider them in a continuum. From the use in Spain of herbal teas as digestive beverages, to the antioxidant properties of Tibetan foods, we learn that the continuum concept is not unique to a single culture, but a common way in which humans use the natural environment. The various chapters of the volume describe a range of wild and semi-domesticated foods that traditionally have been used both as food and medicine. Although most chapters focus on the use of wild and semi-domesticated plants, the consumption of other foods (i.e., fish, mushrooms, seaweed) suggests that the overlapping nature of food and medicine is not particular to the plant kingdom, but a common way of conceptualizing.

The publication of this volume is timely. The book appears at a moment in which the use of food as medicine is gaining attention among the general public in Western society. The volume, however, presents a refreshing perspective of the link between food intake and health. While medical doctors recommend the intake of dietary supplements and food scientists work to develop new “miraculous” foods (such as the golden rice) containing the nutrients lacking in many diets, this book is a call to go back to the essentials, to look at the local resources around us, and to consider the cultural context interwoven with the consumption of foods and medicines.

As a whole, however, the volume does not present an overly optimistic and simplistic approach. Throughout the book, different authors point at three potential caveats of generalizing the ingestion of traditional foods as medicines. First, plants that are highly nutritious also have the potential to be highly toxic, so it is not possible to generalize their consumption without further inspection. Second, the eating of traditional foods and medicines is culturally prescribed and their intake disregarding the cultural system associated to them can result in a loss of effectiveness. Last, promoting the consumption of wild foods as medicines can increase the demand of those foods with potential pernicious effects on their sustainable use because of overextraction.

By addressing the interface between food, medicine, and culture, Eating and Healing fills an important gap in ethnobiological research. The volume, however, would have benefited from including more quantitative contributions testing the various hypotheses presented. For example, quantitative data should allow researchers to test whether, in fact, people maintaining traditional diets enjoy better health. Future studies on the topic would benefit from using quantitative methods to test the relations between food and medicine.

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As the world’s population continues to increase, the need to enhance food production is pertinent. This improvement in food production will require integrative approaches to ameliorating difficulties with crop production and increasing crop yields. This book is a special issue of the Journal of Crop Improvement. The collection of articles is based on the premise that a systems approach, including breeders, geneticists, biochemists, physiologists, pathologists, and statisticians among others, will be needed to effectively address improving food production.

The first three articles of the book focus on the issue of enhanced food production and crop improvement at a global scale. The first article by L. T. Evans entitled “Is Crop Improvement Still Needed?” sets the stage for articles to follow by addressing the need for continuing to improve crop production output and crop nutritional quality largely due to the enduring lack of food in less developed countries. Notably, the largest increases in the population are likely to occur in these countries that are most affected by food insecurities. Thus, ongoing improvements in crop pro-