INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE ON FOOD SECURITY IN A CHANGING WORLD

Justin M. Nolan¹ and Andrea Pieroni²

Food security, or access to sufficient, healthy, and nutritious foods, presents a serious challenge for scholars committed to the advancement of human health and well-being. Food insecurity poses a multifaceted biocultural problem that includes chronic malnutrition, metabolic and degenerative diseases, and the hastening decline of sustainable food production and subsistence practices. Despite numerous advances made by food scholars, anthropologists, folklorists, ethnobiologists, and others who seek to improve human nutrition and its constituent cultural and natural resource bases, food security remains relatively neglected in studies of the ecology of food procurement, preparation, preservation, consumption, and distribution.

Many local and indigenous communities worldwide are presently facing new and dramatic challenges linked directly to climate change and concomitant food shortages and inequalities, including health problems associated with hypernutrition and malnutrition (e.g., Lawrence et al. 2010; Lobell and Burke 2010; McDonald 2010). Intellectually, ethnobiologists are uniquely situated to examine human access to foods in ways that may strengthen food security for the benefit of present and future generations. Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is increasingly important among international stakeholders committed to the systematic improvement of food security and shaping culturally sensitive approaches to public health and nutritional policy development. The study of traditional knowledge of foodways necessarily entails understanding how communities protect, procure, prepare, and consume local foods sustainably within ecological systems (e.g., DeSoucey and Téchoueyres 2009; Turner 2008; Mirsky 1981). Taken in concert, these findings can in turn promote innovative collaborative strategies to strengthen food security effectively and lastingly in other regions of the world (Hinrichs and Lyson 2007).

The contribution of ethnobiology to food security is furthermore crucial to advancing current discussions and debates surrounding food sovereignty (Declaration of Nyéléni 2007). This dialogue stresses the rights of local communities to define their own food systems, including the agency of the local communities which produce, distribute, and consume their own foods at the center of decisions regarding food systems and policies (Wittman et al. 2010). Ethnobiologists have a special opportunity to establish innovative, collaborative platforms together with local communities and indigenous groups, environmentalists, food activists, and NGOs for implementing sound strategies of ensuring food

¹. Corresponding author. Department of Anthropology, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701
². University of Gastronomic Sciences, Bra/Pollenzo, Italy