Spotlight on… Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

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The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a United Nations organisation with its headquarters based in Rome. The mandate of FAO is to raise levels of nutrition, improve agricultural productivity, better the lives of rural populations and contribute to the growth of the world economy. It also acts as a neutral forum where different countries can meet to debate international policy and negotiate agreements.

There are eight departments in FAO. Food safety and nutrition pertains to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Protection. Although FAO covers a broad range of food-related topics, e.g. food composition, additives, nutrition education, risk assessment and quality assurance, the emphasis is on assisting countries where food insecurity is rife. Thus, the work of FAO overlaps with that of the World Health Organization (WHO) in identifying those at risk of malnutrition and putting in place local policies to improve food security. However, FAO has special expertise in food production, animal and plant disease control, and trade.

The FAO facilitates a number of web-based portals where people can access food-related information from different countries, and the FAO statistical databases are a valuable and much used source of information when trends in food consumption are compared time-wise and between different countries. Other activities of FAO include the publication of food composition tables (e.g. for Asian and African foods) and working with WHO to publish scientific advice on food and nutrition (e.g.; requirements for energy and micronutrients). Finally, FAO is the home of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

For more information on FAO and the 2016 International Year of Pulses read EUFICs interview with Eleonora Dupouy here.