



| Country Profile: Philippines

Introduction

The Philippine food system is centered on the production of commodities, supported by policies that encourage high productivity and technical advancement. These policies are focused on empowering people, farming families, and agrarian communities, in order to provide a surplus of basic commodities. This surplus is controlled in an effort to ensure domestic self-sufficiency, while the policies also place a priority on responsible production and consumption of nutritious foods.

A community-based food system, also known as a local food system, is a collaborative and integrated network that focuses on local production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a particular place.

Across the country, there are a number of community food production (CFP) initiatives that can vary significantly across regions, provinces, and municipalities, both in urban and rural areas. CFP projects can range from small-scale community gardens, urban farms, and backyard food production, through to larger cooperative efforts involving multiple communities. A notable initiative is the Integrated Community Food Production (ICFP), a program reducing hunger and increasing food security of low income families through home and community gardening.^{1,2} Another program, “KADIWA”, seeks to strengthen the farm-to-market supply chain by connecting local producers directly with consumers. This eliminates the need for middlemen, benefiting both producers and consumers.³

Diet

A typical Filipino diet is composed of a combination of rice, vegetables, and fish, with rice contributing the largest portion and being consumed at all major meals. According to the Expanded National Nutrition Survey, conducted in 2018 to 2019, Filipino diets do not include sufficient consumption




Population
115 million people
52% rural


Land use
42.5% agricultural land


Aquaculture and Fisheries
Municipal capture fisheries contributes 28.6% to the total fisheries production

Top aquaculture products: Seaweed, Milkfish, Tilapia, Shrimp and Shellfish


Farming
Staple food crops: Rice, Corn, Banana, Coconut


Livestock
Pigs and Chicken, most consumed

of fruits and vegetables (based on the WHO recommendation of 5 servings, 80g per serving, per day). Snacking between meals is also common.^{4,5}

Food Source

The Philippines is an agricultural country, with a substantial portion of the population living in rural areas and relying on agricultural sectors such as farming, fishing, and livestock.

The production of rice available for local consumption is decreasing and this is resulting in increased import dependency for this staple. This import dependency is also emerging across other commodities, such as garlic, meat, and fish.^{2,4,5}

The Value of Rice

Rice is truly the center of the Filipino diet. It serves as the primary source of carbohydrates for the population. Rice farming is also a crucial sector of the economy, employing millions of farmers.^{6,7} But aside from its nutritional and economic significance, rice holds a deeply ingrained cultural significance. Its centrality can be seen in the literal sense - Filipinos' often place rice in a big platter in the middle of the table surrounded by other dishes. This placement also symbolises abundance, hospitality, and communal sharing.^{4,5,8}

Even with healthier and cheaper alternatives available, nothing can replace rice for most Filipinos. An example of this is on Siargao Island during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹ The locality resorted to root crops and other non-rice foods. However, these substitutes were only considered emergency foods and were found to be unacceptable as staple foods. The availability of rice is a key factor in locals' perceptions of food security.^{10,11}

Health concerns

Diet Pattern	Health risk
Meat and Sweetened Beverage 	High probability of: • overweight • diabetes • high total cholesterol • low HDL-cholesterol • high LDL-cholesterol • high triglycerides
Rice and Fish 	Less likelihood of: • diabetes High probability of: • overweight/obesity • high LDL-cholesterol
Fruits, Vegetables and Snacks 	Lower probability of: • overweight/obesity • diabetes • high triglycerides • hypertension

The Expanded National Nutrition Survey 2018-2019 found a high prevalence of vitamin A, C, B1, B2, iron, and calcium deficiency in Filipinos across all ages. High prevalence of iron deficiency anaemia is notable in infants (40.1%), pregnant women (24.6%), elderly males (23%), females (19.1%), and lactating women (16.7%). Additionally, data from the 2018 Maternal Health and Nutrition Survey revealed that one in five pregnant Filipino women are at-risk of delivering low birth weight infants and other pregnancy complications due to their diets. This risk was more pronounced among teenage pregnant women.^{4,5}

Three major dietary patterns were identified in evaluating the relationship between dietary quality and food patterns of Filipino adults and the rising prevalence of selected diet-based non-communicable disease (NCD) risk factors. These patterns are characterised by: 1) meat and sweetened beverages; 2) rice and fish; and 3) fruit, vegetables, and snacks. Poor diet quality was found in the general population mainly due to high consumption of refined carbohydrates, low intake of fruits and vegetables, and high consumption of processed food.¹²

Present Initiative

Recognizing the multifaceted nature of the food and nutrition challenges in the Philippines, several collaborative efforts involving government agencies, NGOs, international funding agencies, and local communities are being carried out. Contributing to this is the Global Community Food for Human Nutrition and Planetary Health in Small Islands (Global CFaH) Project. Global CFaH responds to the nutrition, health, social, and economic well-being issues of small island states by applying approaches that develop healthy, resilient, and environmentally sustainable community-based food production.

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