What a Successful Congress of the International Union of Food Science and Technology!

As I compose this Editorial, I am in Capetown South Africa attending the 15th Congress of the International Union of Food Science and Technology (IUFoST). The opening ceremony was colorful, graced by among others Prof Ejeta Gebisa (the 2009 World Food Prize Laureate).

What is exciting as one enters South Africa, through Johannesburg and Capetown, or even as one walks around, is the lingering aura of the World Cup. The residual effects are tremendous and I would imagine it is going to take a while before the mention of the 2010 World Cup highlights stop coming up in almost every conversation with a South African national. It left a good feeling. Even this time, when we were addressing a topic other than sports, we could not help associating ourselves with what clearly was a top world event, so excellently executed and pulled off by the people of South Africa. In this conference, there was plenty of good food and mention of it everywhere.

Like the soccer world cup, this too was the first time the IUFoST Congress was taking place on the mother continent. The IUFoST Congress was well organized, well attended especially by young African food scientists for whom the organizers secured funding to attend. Food company exhibitions were many and the impression I got this time was that everyone is conscious of production efficiency and is cognizant of global environmental concerns, including climate change. Processing food with nutrition in mind, and promoting consumption of antioxidants were obvious messages.

Food quality should be a concern of us all. We are all aware the baby food market is huge out there especially as mothers get more and more into the workplace. I see in Kenya a lot of formulations for young children in the supermarkets, made mostly from finger millets, groundnuts, and soybeans. Such products can only be sold in the supermarkets after they have been certified by the Kenya Bureau of Standards (the mark they carry being KEBS). A big challenge here of course is that small local companies rarely can find their way to such big international events. More important is the need to ensure the quality and safety of such formulations.

But then, how will the local industry grow if it is not supported by some of these multinational companies whose main market is in the developing world?

The issue of capacity building and training featured prominently at the conference.

It was appreciated that many young food scientists from Africa were supported to attend the Congress, with some making oral and poster presentations. We (professional leaders) would like to appeal to those with the means including our own governments to support human resource development to help assure and monitor national and regional food systems, and to curb food losses that continue to be reported across the continent.

The 16th Congress will be held in Brazil in 2012. Please watch this space for the announcement of the same. Let me end by applauding the organizers for a great and most successful 15th IUFoST Congress that saw attendance by nearly 2000 participants.

By
Ruth Oniang’o
Editor-in-Chief
AJFAND
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