

Editorial

Two benefits of small-scale food processing are preservation of foods for extended periods to increase food security and maintain health, and the conversion of raw materials into saleable added-value products to earn an income. *Food Chain* aims to address each of these at all stages of the value chain 'from farm to fork' and this issue is firmly focused on the food security and health aspects.

Andrew Shepherd's paper on grain storage in Africa is timely in light of the current surge in international food prices, which has followed disastrous harvests in India and Europe due to too much rain, and also in Russia and the US resulting from too little rainfall. He argues that, historically, technically focused investments in improved grain storage, as well as government- and community-owned stores or grain banks, have been largely ineffective. Future interventions should take place within the context of prevailing marketing systems and the operation of the entire food chain. Cereal traders have long been ignored by development programmes, but Andrew cites evidence of their central and critical role in effective grain storage and distribution. He calls for future field research to be undertaken before decisions on grain storage are made, and the creation of an enabling environment for private investment in grain stores. Andrew also returns to the topic in his review of selected writings on grain reserves and the food price crisis, published by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. Tony Swetman provides a second book review of two new comprehensive guides to herbs and spices, edited by K.V. Peter, and each over 600 pages in length.

Nick Pasiecznik and his co-workers present a field report on under-utilized prosopis trees, which are widely regarded as invasive weeds that should be eradicated, but which could provide nutritious food to improve food security in famine-prone areas. They report a variety of uses for flour made from prosopis beans: a molasses-like syrup for sweet drinks, a gum that is similar to gum Arabic, and traditional medicinal uses for all parts of the tree. However, it is the production of charcoal from prosopis wood in Kenya that has had the greatest food security benefits, by enabling families in famine-prone areas to earn an income to buy food. The paper calls for governments and development organizations in areas where prosopis trees are in abundance to utilize the trees rather than eradicate them.

Continuing the theme of food security and health, I report the use of ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) for the treatment of severe

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acute malnutrition in famine-prone areas. This food was developed in France and is now being made locally in affected areas. Its use follows the development of the Community-based Therapeutic Care (CTC) concept, which uses outpatient treatment sites to provide a take-home ration of RUTF. In contrast to the use of therapeutic milks in feeding centres, CTC enables parents to remain in the home and care for other children as well as continuing to earn a living. It also builds a foundation to link relief and development interventions for long-term solutions to food insecurity.

In other papers in this issue, Denis Herbel and Nora Ourabah Haddad describe factors that enable successful collective action by small-scale producers to integrate food production into value chains. Analysing empirical case studies worldwide, they highlight the effective collective action that results from building two types of relationships: bonding or intra-group relationships among small producers in local organizations that enhance their individual and group capacities to make purposive choices; and bridging or inter-group relations between small-scale producer organizations to create 'apex' organizations. These apex organizations improve producers' ability to both exert influence on policy-making and increase their bargaining power in the markets in which they operate. However, there are two requirements for these benefits to be widely replicated: first, policy-makers should take into account the social dynamics of existing small-scale producers and build on the capabilities of existing organizations; and second, development practitioners should be responsive rather than directive, to change their role from implementers to facilitators.

Carole Sacca and co-authors report a study of the production, consumption, and quality attributes of Akpan, a traditional fermented cereal drink produced by small-scale processors in Benin and other West African countries. The study documented the socio-cultural characteristics of Akpan producers and consumers, and the raw materials, technology, and methods used for its production. It revealed differences in the perceived quality of Akpan between producers and consumers, which may be useful to re-engineer the process and upgrade product quality.

The technical report in this issue on the design and layout of food production units is the second of three articles on the decisions that face small-scale processors when starting a new business or expanding to larger facilities. Finally, I have included a selection of the food-related conferences and meetings that will take place worldwide over the next six months. I hope that you find this issue interesting and useful and I look forward to receiving your comments and your articles for future issues.

Peter Fellows, Editor