

TALKING POINTS

Nutrition Month 2012

"Pagkain ng gulay ugaliin, araw-araw itong ihain!"

- 1. What is Nutrition Month?
- 2. What are the objectives of the 2012 NM celebration and what is its theme?
- 3. Why give importance to vegetables?
- 4. How much vegetables should be eaten in a day?
- 5. What are the nutrients found in vegetables?
- 6. What are the health benefits of eating vegetables?
- 7. What are ways of preparing vegetables?
- 8. How can one get the most nutrients from vegetables?
- 9. How can vegetables be included in a healthy diet?
- 10. What are answers to common questions about vegetables?
 - a. Are organically-grown vegetables better than traditionally-grown vegetables?
 - b. What is vegetarianism?
 - c. What are the ways to encourage children to eat vegetables?
 - d. Is tomato a fruit or a vegetable?
 - e. What is the origin of the term "vegetable"?
 - f. What are the most commonly eaten vegetables?
 - g. What are the lesser known (indigenous) vegetables?
 - h. Is taking supplements the same as eating real vegetables?
 - i. Are vegetables smoothies healthy?
- 11. How are vegetables washed?
- 12. Why grow your own vegetables?
- 13. What are some of the technologies in vegetable gardening?
- 14. What can be done to increase the consumption of vegetables of Filipinos?
- 15. What are the ways to celebrate Nutrition Month?

References

TALKING POINTS

1. What is Nutrition Month?

Presidential Decree 491 or the Nutrition Act of the Philippines appointed the National Nutrition Council (NNC) as the lead agency to coordinate the nationwide celebration of this annual event held every July, the Nutrition Month. Come this 38th year of Nutrition Month, NNC comes up with a theme to call the nation's attention and action on a particular issue.

2. What are objectives of the 2012 Nutrition Month celebration and what is its theme?

The 38th Nutrition Month celebration will focus on vegetables with the theme "*Pagkain ng gulay ugaliin, araw-araw itong ihain*!" The objectives of this year's celebration are to:

- a. increase vegetable consumption as part of a healthy diet to address micronutrient deficiencies and non-communicable diseases;
- b. promote vegetable gardening as a source of additional food and income; and
- c. increase demand for vegetables to help local vegetable farmers.

3. Why give importance to vegetables?

Nutrition Month focuses on vegetables for several reasons:

a. **Filipinos are eating less and less vegetables.** Based on food consumption surveys, Filipinos on average are eating less and less vegetables per day in the last three decades (Figure 1). From 145 grams per day of vegetables in 1978, consumption has decreased to 110 grams per day in 2008.

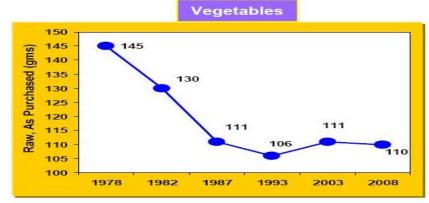


Figure 1. Trend in mean one-day per capita vegetable consumption: Phils., 1978-2008. DOST-FNRI.

Across regions, consumption varies as shown in Figure 2. CALABARZON and ARMM had the lowest consumption at 92 grams per person per day while CAR had the highest consumption at 169 grams.

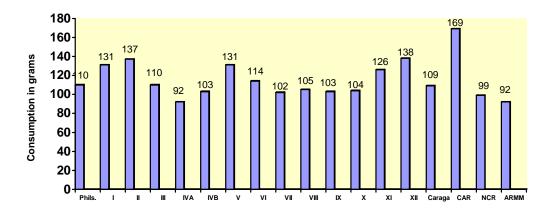


Figure 2. Mean one-day per capita vegetable consumption by region, 2008. DOST-FNRI.

In terms of age groups, children 6 months to 5 years old consumed a little amount of vegetables only. Infants 6-11 months consumed only an average of 2 grams of vegetables per day, and among 1 year old children, this amount increased to only 8 grams. The amount of vegetables consumed increased with age. Five year olds consumed 25 grams while 12 year olds consumed 55 grams per day. Adolescents aged 13-19 consumed 69 grams, adults 20-59 years old consumed 91 grams. However, for older persons 60 years and over, consumption decreased to 87 grams only. Pregnant women consumed only 91 grams while lactating women ate 101 grams per day

In 2005, the NNC commissioned the Food and Nutrition Research Institute to determine the reasons why Filipinos eat very little vegetables. The study showed the following **reasons for the low consumption of vegetables**:

- Influence of family members who do not eat vegetables
- Dislike for vegetables because of taste and texture
- Preference for meat than vegetables
- Cultural beliefs about vegetables (e.g. eating squash can cause leprosy)
- Vegetables are expensive
- Fear of chemicals and pesticides
- Vegetables require more time to prepare
- Preference for fast foods and instant foods
- Lack of supply
- Lack of knowledge on nutritional and health benefits of vegetables.

b. Vegetables as part of a healthy diet can help prevent major non-communicable diseases. According to the World Health Organization, adequate consumption of fruit and vegetables reduces the risk for cardiovascular diseases, stomach cancer and colorectal cancer. There is convincing evidence that the consumption of high levels of high-energy foods, such as processed foods that are high in fats and sugars, promotes obesity compared to low-energy foods such as fruits and vegetables. Low fruit and vegetable intake is among the top 10 risk factors contributing to attributable mortality, according to evidence presented in the 2003 World Health Report.

The WHO also reported that:

- Approximately 1.7 million of deaths worldwide are attributable to low fruit and vegetable consumption.
- Low fruit and vegetable intake is among the top 10 selected risk factors for global mortality.
- Worldwide, insufficient intake of fruit and vegetables is estimated to cause around 14% of gastrointestinal cancer deaths, about 11% of ischemic heart disease deaths and about 9% of stroke deaths.
- c. Consumption of vegetables can help prevent micronutrient deficiencies.

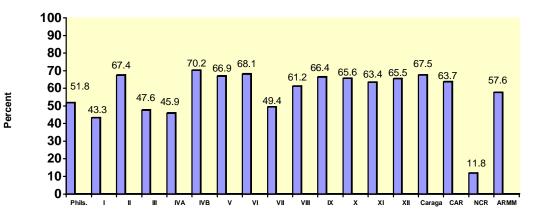
 Eating a variety of vegetables together with fruits ensures an adequate intake of most micronutrients, dietary fibers and a host of essential non-nutrient substances. Deficiencies in intakes of calcium, iron, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin and vitamins A and C can be improved through increased vegetable intake.

As noted previously, preschool children ate little vegetables which could somehow explain why the diet of preschoolers could not meet the recommended nutrient intakes for iron, vitamin A, calcium, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin and ascorbic acid. The same trend is observed for the other age groups except for niacin with more than 80% of the dietary food intake meting its RENI (Recommended Energy and Nutrient Intake.)

d. Having vegetable gardens in the households can increase supply and availability of vegetables for families. Only 67.7% or 7 out of every 10 households had vegetable gardens or fruit trees based on the 2008 National Nutrition Survey. The survey also revealed that most of the households or 79.1% used the produce from the gardens for their own consumption while only 17.6% both consumed and sold their produce. When it comes to participation in government's food production program such as the *Gulayan ng Masa* which promoted integrated backyard gardening, only 51.8% of households participated. Regions with high

participation include IV-B, 6 and CARAGA while there was low participation in NCR.

Figure 3. Percent participation of households in Food Production Program by region: Philippines, 2008.



Source: Philippine Nutrition Facts and Figures 2008. FNRI-DOST.

4. How much vegetables should be eaten in a day?

The World Health Organization recommends eating a minimum of 400 grams of vegetables and fruits per day which is equivalent to 5 servings per day with 3 servings of vegetables per day. The WHO recommends this amount for the prevention of non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and obesity, as well as for the prevention and alleviation of several micronutrient deficiencies, especially in less developed countries.

One serving of vegetables is equivalent to:

- 1 cup raw leafy vegetables or 25 grams
- ½ cup raw non-leafy vegetables or 40 grams
- ½ cup cooked leafy or non-leafy vegetable or 45 grams.

5. What are the nutrients found in vegetables?

Vegetables are packed with nutrients. Below are some of the nutrients found in vegetables and examples of vegetables that are rich in these nutrients.

Dietary Fiber			
helps reduce blood cholesterol levels	peanuts, abitsuwelas, green peas,		
 lowers the risk of heart disease 	mungbean, garbanzos, eggplant,		
 prevents constipation, hemorrhoids and 	malunggay, turnips, broccoli,		
diverticulosis	patani		
adds satiety value (helps one feel full)			

Vit	amin A				
•	keeps skin and eyes healthy	squash, carrots, spinach, red			
•	strengthens the immune system	pepper, Chinese cabbage,			
•	needed for the normal growth and	alugbati, sitsaro, leaves of			
	development of children	ampalaya, camote, gabi,			
	·	kangkong, saluyot, petsay			
Vit	amin B				
•	essential for growth and development	Whole grains, kidney beans,			
•	important in turning food into energy and	mushroom, dried beans, peas,			
	other substances	nuts, kangkong, cabbage, string			
•	normal functioning of nerves	beans, ampalaya, alugbati,			
•	helps maintain healthy hair, skin and nails	malunggay, sili leaves, saluyot,			
		ampalaya leaves			
Vit	amin C				
•	helps keep teeth and gums healthy	broccoli, red and green bell			
•	aids in wound healing	peppers, cauliflower, mustard,			
•	helps in absorption of iron	tomato juice, cabbage, turnip			
Vit	amin E				
•	helps in the formation and functioning of red	taro, spinach, labong, bell			
	blood cells, muscles and other tissues	pepper, broccoli			
Po	tassium				
•	helps to maintain healthy blood pressure	tomatoes, spinach, cucumber,			
		lima beans, carrots, eggplant			
Fo	ic acid				
•	helps the body produce red blood cells and	beans and legumes, spinach,			
	prevent anemia	asparagus, spinach, cabbage,			
•	reduces the risk of brain and spinal cord	broccoli			
	defects of the unborn baby				
Iro	Iron				
•	component of hemoglobin which carries	alugbati, kangkong, saluyot,			
	oxygen in the blood	petsay, kamote tops, dried beans			
•	prevents anemia	ampalaya, squash, string beans,			
		malunggay			
Calcium					
•	develops strong bones and teeth	Kangkong, kamote, malunggay,			
•	is needed for proper blood clotting and	saluyot, string beans, ampalaya,			
	functioning of the nervous system	kamote tops, alugbati, okra			

6. What are the health benefits of eating vegetables?

- may help decrease bone loss as vegetables decrease the amount of calcium excreted in the urine
- may help in lowering calorie intake and thus, help in maintaining healthy weight because vegetables are low in calories
- vegetables do not contain cholesterol
- contain antioxidants and protectants such as carotenoids, lycopene and phytochemicals which can help strengthen the immune system, reduce the risk of diseases, and contribute to well-being.

7. What are ways of preparing vegetables?

Most people do not eat vegetables because they do not know how to prepare them. Some vegetables can be eaten fresh. There are various ways of preparing, cooking or presenting vegetables.

- a. Boiling is one of the most common ways of cooking vegetables such as in *nilaga* and *sinigang*. Preferably, simmer vegetables in a minimum amount of water because soluble nutrients in vegetables such as vitamin C and B-complex will be lost in cooking with water.
- b. Steaming is the best way to cook vegetables. Not only does it avoid using any type of fats in the cooking process, but it also protects the nutrients in the vegetables because none of the vitamins are lost to the water and drained away. Steaming also preserves the color and nutritional value of vegetables to a very high degree. Vegetables can also be cooked by putting on top of rice in the last stages of cooking.
- c. Stir-frying is a cooking method that can preserve the good flavor and color of vegetables. It is a method of cooking where sliced vegetables and meat are quickly fried in a large pan over very high heat while constantly and briskly stirring them. The cooking technique requires a minimum amount of fat and results in a food that is crisp and tender.
- d. Broiling is a method of cooking by exposing food to direct heat, either on a grill over live coals or a gas burner or electric coil. Broiling differs from roasting and baking, because in broiling, the food is turned during the process so as to cook one side at a time. Vegetables that can be broiled include squash, corn, red and green bell pepper, asparagus and even mushroom. Choose the vegetables that are firm and fresh. Sprinkle both sides with salt, pepper and any desired spice such as ginger or garlic or any spice desired.
- e. Microwaving preserves the color and texture of most vegetables better than other conventional cooking. Microwaving requires only little water or no water thus more nutrients are retained.

8. How can one get the most nutrients from vegetables?

Vegetables contain valuable and protective nutrients which may be destroyed during handling, storing, cooking and even serving. Knowing the kinds of nutrients found in vegetables and how these are usually lost are important to get the nutrients needed. Vegetables must be cooked carefully to preserve and enhance their flavor, texture, color and more importantly, the nutrients. There are simple rules when cooking vegetables:

- a. Vegetable fiber gives vegetables shape and firmness. Fiber is affected by many things in the cooking process. They are toughened by acids such as lemon juice, vinegar and tomato products. On the other hand, alkali and heat soften fibers. To serve crisp, fresh-tasting vegetables, learn to control these factors.
- b. Always keep vegetables slightly firm to the bite; do not overcook.
- c. Cook mild flavored vegetables in the least amount of water possible.
- d. To cook vegetables quickly and reduce flavor loss, start cooking them in boiling water. Add iodized salt to the cooking liquid to reduce the loss of flavor.
- e. Cook strong flavored vegetables, such as onion, cabbage, garlic, leeks, cauliflower, broccoli, turnips and radish in an uncovered container to allow the strong flavors to evaporate.
- f. Vegetables that are grown below ground should be cooked starting with cold water because of their high starch content. Vegetables grown above ground should be cooked starting in boiling water to reduce cooking time.

9. How can vegetables be included in a healthy diet?

Some people may think that eating vegetables already ensures that their diet is healthy. While vegetables are very healthy, it is important that these should be consumed as part of a diet that includes the three basic food groups, i.e. the GO, GROW and GLOW foods. Have a diet that includes a variety of whole grains (rice, corn, cereals), lean meats, fish and poultry, nuts and legumes, fruits, dairy, plenty of water and liquids and at the same time, limits high fat, high sugar and salty foods.

Vegetables can be included in the diet in several ways.

- a. Buy fresh vegetables in season, because they cost less, are of very high in quality and nutrients.
- b. Use a variety of vegetables to keep the meal interesting.
- c. Try crunchy vegetables like carrots, lettuce, and cucumber, raw or slightly steamed.
- d. Plan meals around a vegetable dish. For instance, for "pinakbet" and then add other foods to complement it, like fish.
- e. Use pureed, cooked vegetables such as potatoes to thicken stews, soups and gravies.
- f. Prepare vegetables in different ways by boiling, stir-frying, steaming, grilling and baking.
- g. Eat vegetables like carrots, cucumber, tomatoes, celery with a dip or low-fat dressing.

h. Add shredded vegetables such *malunggay*, *kangkong*, chopped onion leaves and carrots to instant noodles to improve nutrititive values.

10. What are answers to common questions about vegetables?

a. Are organically-grown vegetables better than non-organically-grown vegetables?

Studies show that in terms of nutritional benefits, there is no difference between organically-grown and traditionally grown vegetables. Organically-grown vegetables may contain fewer pesticide residues than the regular produce although the use of organic method is not an absolute guarantee.

Here are some tips to ensure that pesticides residues and other contaminants are washed off during vegetable preparation:

- Buy vegetables that are in season as these do not usually need much pesticide, waxes and anti-spoilage chemicals as imported vegetables.
- Do not buy vegetables with an obvious strange smell.
- Trim the tips and outer leaves from celery, lettuce and other leafy vegetables as these contain most contaminants.
- Blanch in boiling water and pour away the water used for blanching as it may contain dissolved pesticides.

b. What is vegetarianism?

Vegetarianism is the practice of following plant-based diets and excluding meats. Most people become vegetarian because of their ethnicity, health, religious convictions, or avoidance to eat meats. Vegetarianism has become widely accepted by people. A vegetarian diet consists of a variety of whole grains, legumes, nuts, vegetables, fruits, and for some, eggs and dairy products. However, vegetarian diets may be low in vitamin B12, vitamin D and calcium.

- c. What are ways to encourage children to eat vegetables?
 - When a baby reaches 6 months of age, green, leafy and yellow vegetables may be given already. Vegetables that are mashed, strained, chopped or cut into tiny pieces should be added to the baby's complementary food. This will not only improve the nutritive value of the baby's food but will also develop the baby's varied tastes.
 - Parents or caregivers must set the good example for children by eating vegetables themselves. Parents need to monitor their own

- eating behavior so that their children will develop and keep healthy eating behavior for life.
- Make sure that vegetables are always part of the family meals.
 They must be available when and where children want to eat. They must be easy to eat and taste good.
- Offer a new vegetable at the beginning of the meal when small children are the hungriest.
- Make vegetables more appealing and exciting by cutting them in different shapes.
- Mix vegetables with other foods that children like to eat.
- Use a little fat, sugar and iodized salt to make vegetable dishes taste good to children.
- Involve children in preparing vegetable dishes. Children can help in selecting and buying vegetables.
- Include vegetables in your child's "baon" or snack in school. Add lettuce, tomato or cabbage in your child's sandwiches. You may also include cut-up vegetables as snack like slices of carrots.
- Prepare new vegetable dishes or prepare them in different ways.
 Encourage children to sample or take a bite. Just keep serving the vegetable dish in different shapes and ways until they develop a liking for it.
- Do not force children to eat vegetables. Children are more likely to continue to try eating vegetables when they are not forced to do
- When all else fails, hide the vegetables in the dish. Shred or blend the vegetables in other dishes such as soups and sauces or even use it as added ingredients to burgers, "lumpia" and even desserts like "yema", leche flan and halaya. Be creative.
- Grow a family kitchen garden and involve children in gardening.
 Children appreciate the food served if they know how these vegetables were grown and prepared.

d. Is tomato a fruit or vegetable?

Tomato is a fruit but it is used as a vegetable in cooking. Fruits are developed from the ovary in the base of the flower and contain seeds. In the culinary world, some are fruits, such as tomatoes, may be called 'vegetables' because they are used in savory rather than sweet cookery. Occasionally, the term 'fruit' in culinary may be used to refer to a part of a plant which is not a fruit, but which is used in sweet cooking.

e. What is the origin of the term "vegetable"?

In the 15th century, the English word 'vegetable' that was used for every plant was recorded. The term 'vegetable' came from the Latin word 'vegetare' which means enliven, 'vegetabilis' in Late Latin which means animating or enlivening, and, in Medieval Latin means growing or flourishing.

f. What are the most commonly eaten vegetables?

The following is a list of commonly eaten vegetables by Filipinos and their English name.

	Filipino Name		English Name
1.	Kangkong	1.	Swamp cabbage
2.	Talong	2.	Eggplant
3.	Kalabasa	3.	Squash
4.	Karot	4.	Carrot
5.	Ampalaya	5.	Bitter melon
6.	Upo	6.	Bottle gourd
7.	Malunggay	7.	Horseradish
8.	Sitaw	8.	String beans or yard-long beans
9.	Repolyo	9.	Cabbage
10.	Labanos	10.	Radish
11.	Kamatis	11.	Tomato
12.	Patatas	12.	Potato
13.	Sigarilyas	13.	Winged bean
14.	Bataw	14.	Hyacinth bean
15.	Patani	15.	Lima bean
16.	Kundol	16.	Wax gourd
17.	Patola	17.	Sponge gourd
18.	Mustasa	18.	Mustard
19.	Singkamas	19.	Turnip
20.	Sibuyas	20.	Onion
21.	Bawang	21.	Garlic
22.	Luya	22.	Ginger
23.	Linga	23.	Sesame

g. What are the less known (indigenous) vegetables?

According to the World Vegetable Center, indigenous vegetables are underutilized species from specific locations that may be native to the area. It includes species that are naturalized or varieties that have evolved from materials introduced to the region from another geographical area over a long period of time. These vegetables are easier to grow, resistant to pests, have high nutrient content and health benefits.

Some samples of indigenous vegetables in the Philippines are:

Filipi	ipino Name English Name	
1.	Alugbati	1. Malabar spinach/Basella
2.	Labong	2. Bamboo shoot
3.	Pako	3. Fern
4.	Saluyot	4. Jute mallow
5.	Katuray	5. Sesbania
6.	Batao/ Lablab	6. Hyacinth bean
7.	Patani	7. Lima bean
8.	Patola	8. Sponge gourd
9.	Tapilan	9. Rice bean
10.	Samsamping	10. Clitoria
11.	Pakupis	11. Snake gourd
12.	Kundol	12. Wax gourd
13.	Himbabao/ Alokon	13. Birch flower
14.	Kulitis	14. Philippine Spinach
15.	Talinum	15. Fameflower/Flameflower
16.	Tindora	16. Ivy gourd

h. Is taking supplements the same as eating real vegetables?

No. Supplements are not meant to nor can provide the benefits derived from eating real vegetables. Vegetables have other compounds that enhance and aid in the absorption of nutrients. Eating real vegetables are more beneficial than taking supplements.

i. Are vegetable smoothies healthy?

One of the ways to add vegetable to your diet is by blending. A vegetable smoothie provides an alternative to some people who do not like the taste of vegetables when cooked. Smoothies have the same quality and contain more nutrients than cooked vegetables. Eating raw vegetables (make sure it is clean) or drinking its juice right away retains intact vitamins and minerals that are easily absorbed by the body. Preparing smoothies is a good way to get the fibers, phytochemicals, and other complex compounds found in vegetables that are lost during preparation. In addition to the nutrients, vegetable smoothies contain more water and provide variety of texture and taste of vegetables.

11. How are vegetables washed?

Rinse vegetables thoroughly. Rinse only before eating or preparing to prevent spoilage. When washing vegetables, follow these steps:

- Clean all surfaces and utensils with soap and hot water, including cutting boards, peelers, counter tops, and knives that will touch fresh produce.
 Wash hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling fresh vegetables.
- b. Rinse those fresh vegetables with skins and rinds that are not eaten, under clean running water and avoid using detergents or bleach. Remove the outer leaves of leafy vegetables such as lettuce and cabbage before washing. Produce with firm skin, such as potatoes, may require rubbing with a vegetable brush while rinsing under clean running water to remove all soil.

12. Why grow your own vegetables?

- Saves money that would have otherwise been used to buy vegetables.
- Ensures adequate supply of quality and safe food. Food cost is also reduced.
- Keeps health of the family safe and ensures a varied diet.
- Builds stronger family ties, especially if each family member shares part of the responsibility in caring for home gardens.
- Ensures food security in the community and help to fight climate change.
- Provides enjoyment and a way to relieve stress
- Provides exercise to the body to prevent obesity

13. What are some of the technologies in vegetable gardening?

a. FAITH (Food Always In The Home) Gardening is an intensified organic backyard gardening system designed to empower a family of four to six persons to produce, on a 150 square meter lot, 50-80% of their daily nutritional needs the whole year round. The surplus can be sold as an added income for the family. At least 24 kinds of vegetables, small fruit trees, fish, poultry, eggs and medicinal herbs can all be grown and varied for the entire year in this small space. It requires just an hour of maintenance work in the morning and another in the afternoon.

In addition, no harmful chemical fertilizer or pesticide/herbicides are used since F.A.I.T.H. Gardening is an organic system that uses natural methods in controlling pests and ensuring plant growth for a guaranteed bountiful harvest.

- b. <u>Urban gardening</u>. Uses any type of container such as used baskets, drums, gallons, cans, plastic bags, hanging baskets, old tires or wooden boxes.
- c. <u>Fence gardens</u>. The fence is a good frame and support for shade-loving plants. One can also build a practical fence garden. Use malunggay as fence.
- d. <u>Garden in water-logged areas</u>. In places where drainage is a problem, make a "floating garden".
- e. <u>Natural canning</u>. Involves planting seeds in cans for eventual use as seedlings.
- f. Magic square garden. A one square meter lot area can be planted to MACK-P or malunggay, alugbati, camote, kangkong, and petsay. One may also plant KPMS kadyos, papaya, malunggay and sigarilyas (kalamismis) or winged bean. Experts recommend these vegetables because they are easy to grow and retains nutrients such as protein in the soil. In addition, these vegetables are rich sources of vitamins A, B and C, and iron.
- g. <u>Hydroponics</u>. A method of growing plants without soil because it uses mineral nutrient solutions (water containing fertilizers) instead of soil. Home gardeners have used hydroponics on a smaller scale to grow fresh vegetables year round and to grow plants in smaller spaces, such as an apartment or balcony.

14. What can be done to increase the consumption of vegetables of Filipinos?

- a. Increase supply of vegetables
 - Establish vegetable gardens in homes, schools, workplaces, communities and other places with vacant spaces. For urban areas, use urban gardening technologies.
 - Support vegetable farmers by adding value to their produce
 - Help small-scale growers of vegetables find niche markets
- b. Promote the consumption of vegetables as part of a healthy diet
 - Conduct promotional activities about vegetables. Use the syllabus developed by the National Nutrition Council for promoting vegetables in the community and in schools.
 - Know more about vegetables to correct existing misconceptions and fallacies.
 - Teach children the value of vegetables, their nutritional benefits as well as vegetable gardening.
 - Refrain from using camote or kalabasa to refer to being stupid or dull. This will help in promoting a culture where vegetables are held in high regard.
 - Integrate consumption of vegetables in the school curriculum. Use vegetable gardening as a venue to imbibe positive eating habits among school children.

- c. Make vegetable dishes accessible to consumers
 - Food establishments including cafeterias, school canteens, carinderias are encouraged to serve more vegetable dishes and dishes with vegetables for consumers to have healthier food options.
 - Institutions such as hospitals, military camps, prisons can offer more dishes with vegetables. Kitchen vegetable gardens can be set-up to provide regular supply of vegetables and reduce food expenditures.
 - For events, meetings and other fora, make sure that vegetables are served not just as garnish but as main dishes, appetizers, desserts and snacks.
 - Patronize indigenous vegetables.
 - In feeding programs, always include vegetables in the menu; serve using recommended amounts per serving.
 - Food manufacturers can develop new vegetable-based food products that preserve nutritional quality and ensure safety.

15. What are the ways to celebrate Nutrition Month?

- a. On 2 July, have simultaneous vegetable gardening activity in your community, school, workplace and other places. Distribute vegetable seeds, seedlings and planting materials and gardening tools.
- b. Conduct lectures, seminars and demonstrations on vegetable production, processing and cooking.
- c. Organize a vegetable trade fair to showcase various vegetables in the locality.
- d. Conduct poster-making contests on the importance of vegetables on the diet.
- e. Conduct parades or motorcades.
- f. Conduct vegetable cooking contests.

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