



Press Release

UAE Hosts Second Annual Meeting of Food Forever Initiative

Abu Dhabi-UAE: 9 December, 2019 – The UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment (MOCCA) is hosting the second annual meeting of the Food Forever Initiative in conjunction with SIAL Middle East, the fastest-growing food, beverage, and hospitality event in the region.

Taking place on December 9 and 10 at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre, the meeting brings together some of the initiative's champions and partner organizations to take stock of the progress made so far on supporting SDG Target 2.5, related to maintaining the genetic diversity of plant and animal food sources by 2020.

The Food Forever Initiative is a global partnership initiated and supported by the Crop Trust, an international organization working to safeguard crop diversity and raise awareness about the urgency of conserving agricultural biodiversity.

On day one, the meeting featured the Food Forever Experience, a unique culinary challenge and experiential tasting which showcased what we might be eating in the future if we embrace more diverse foods.

During the Experience, five notable chefs, including Ali Manhdry (Kenya), Manal al-Alem (Jordan), Manjit Singh (India), Aylin Yazıcıoğlu (Turkey) and the first female national chef of the UAE, Khulood Atiq prepared inspiring dishes using a range of curious ingredients. Along with the more traditional camel milk and meat, livestock products which are crucial for nutrition and farmers' livelihoods in the desert areas of the Middle East, participants tasted crops such as bladder dock, a nutritious, perennial herb widely consumed in the Emirati Eastern Coast; Figa'a, a starchy tuber resembling a potato which is noted for its high content of antioxidants, mainly Vitamin B, and its rich flavor; a wide variety of dates and more.

His Excellency Dr Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, UAE Minister of Climate Change and Environment, Her Excellency Mercedes Aráoz, Vice President of Peru and Chair of the Food Forever Initiative, and Marie Haga, Executive Director of Crop Trust, also joined the participants in the food-tasting experience.

His Excellency Dr Al Zeyoudi said: "One of the key takeaways from this event is the importance of responsible consumption habits and of eliminating food waste where possible. MOCCA also believes this experience goes a long way in encouraging people to diversify what they eat through experimenting with underutilized and often ignored foods that can make their meals more nutritious as well as delicious. Let's celebrate the world's rich crop diversity! With 30,000 edible plants out there, why limit ourselves to just a few?"

Following the Experience, His Excellency Dr Al Zeyoudi and Her Excellency Mercedes Aráoz inaugurated the internal working meeting of the Food Forever Initiative.



In his keynote speech at the inauguration ceremony, the UAE Minister of Climate Change and Environment said: “As the deadline for target 2.5 is fast approaching, and crop and livestock diversity continue to diminish, the urgency of this mission has gone up several notches. The challenge is further amplified by climate change that wreaks havoc on global biodiversity and causes habitat degradation.”

He added: “The UAE has long committed to protecting crop and livestock diversity through relying heavily on innovation and modern technologies. Earlier this year, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, approved a series of incentive packages valued at AED1 billion to boost the UAE’s AgTech sector. This complements a wide host of existing government- and private sector-led initiatives.”

For her part, Her Excellency Mercedes Aráoz said: “A sustainable, nutritious and affordable food system cannot be achieved unless we go back to building blocks of agriculture – the diversity of our foods – one of the most important global common goods in the world but one which we speak about the least.”

Marie Haga, Executive Director of Crop Trust and Food Forever Champion said: “We’re currently facing a lack of biodiversity in our food systems, meaning that the valuable environmental traits found within these untapped varieties go uncared for and eventually face extinction. This not only robs farmers of valuable options for ensuring livelihoods but also eaters of delicious, nutrient-dense foods and flavours. Chefs can be instrumental in bringing biodiversity higher on the international agenda and in the minds and hearts of their consumers. That’s why it’s wonderful to see so many amazing chefs and dedicated partners here today, committed to advocating for these important ingredients and having a bit of fun along the way.”

The meeting saw seasoned experts explore topics such as the challenges and opportunities around safeguarding crop diversity; the future of conservation, the Future 50 Foods Project, and how chefs can be part of the solution.

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About the UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment

The Ministry of Climate Change and Environment (MOCCA) was established in February 2006 as the Ministry of Environment and Water. Under its redefined scope, the ministry has taken on a dual mandate. On the national level, it aims to strengthen the UAE's efforts in preserving the environment and promoting food diversity in accordance with the nation's aspiration to emerge as a key benchmark for sustainable development. On the global level, MOCCA joins international stakeholders in combating climate change and profiles the UAE's path-breaking achievements in the sector at thought leadership platforms worldwide.

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