

## What is biodiversity? Why does it matter?

**BIODIVERSITY IS ...** a term describing all the varieties of life on earth; it's short for "biological diversity." It includes ecosystems, species, plant life, genetic diversity and cultural diversity. All of the ways these organisms and species interact to support life is encompassed by biodiversity.

**AGROBIODIVERSITY IS ...** the biodiversity found in agriculture. It is the different breeds of animals and varieties of plants raised by people to produce food. This genetic diversity is the result of natural selection, intentional cultivation, and innovation by farmers, shepherds, fishers and cooks over millennia. Agrobiodiversity includes insects, birds, edible wild plants, microbes that break down nutrients to create healthy soil, and all the life forms that make unique contributions to food production.

**THREATS TO BIODIVERSITY ...** are environmental, economic, and cultural. Sadly, agriculture is one of the primary threats to biodiversity. What today we call "industrial agriculture" is the result of a global change in farming practices that took place between the 1940's and late 1960's. New chemicals and mechanized practices were implemented to increase crop yields. Plant and animal species were selected for uniformity and suitability to industrialized farming and long-term storage, so that the global food system now relies on only a handful of species. 75% of edible plant varieties in the world have gone extinct. In the USA, that number is 95%. (Source: *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*)

**IF WE LOSE BIODIVERSITY ...** we lose the ability to withstand disease and to adapt to our changing environment. The side effect of using chemicals and mechanized farming practices is the destruction of agricultural and wild biodiversity. When foods disappear, they take with them the traditional knowledge and cultural memory that are linked to their production. Extinction is a complex loss. Think of biodiversity like an intricate carpet. Pulling out one thread may go unnoticed... or it may unravel the beautiful fabric entirely.

**HUMANITY AND BIODIVERSITY ...** can be allies. By seeking out and promoting the foods that thrive outside of the industrial agricultural model, we can increase agrobiodiversity. The benefit is not only environmental. Explore these foods and you will discover beautiful shapes and colors, surprising flavors, and fascinating stories.

**SLOW FOOD PROTECTS BIODIVERSITY ...** at every level. Across the USA, Slow Food members foster biodiversity in gardens, schools, farms, ranches and waterways. We draw attention to endangered foods by cataloguing them in the Ark of Taste. Chapters support producers and educate their community through tastings, dinners and celebrations. Groups of producers organize to form Presidia around at-risk foods. Internationally, the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity runs a variety of programs to safeguard and increase biodiversity in the global food system.

**Biodiversity is Slow Food's most vital resource.**

**It is the foundation for a world where everyone can eat food that is good, clean, and fair.**

**Learn more at [www.slowfoodusa.org/biodiversity](http://www.slowfoodusa.org/biodiversity)**