

FAO Report Links Forest Conservation with Food Security and Nutrition

18 September 2026 | News

Countries are invited to place forests at the heart of food and nutrition policies



Forests and trees play a crucial role in providing nutritious food, and more than 5 billion people worldwide rely on them to some extent for their livelihoods. Yet their contribution to food security and nutrition remains largely overlooked in national statistics and policy frameworks.

A new global report published the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and developed jointly with the Landscape Alliance, highlights the importance of forests in reducing hunger and poverty and calls on countries to include them into agrifood system policies.

“By working together and fully integrating forests into national, regional and global strategies, we can build agrifood systems that are more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable. We must do so – because conserving and sustainably managing forests is fundamental to nourishing people, sustaining the planet and improving the well-being of present and future generations,” FAO Director-General QU Dongyu wrote in the report's Foreword.

The report, titled *Forests for food: Nourishing people, sustaining the planet*, comes at a critical moment. According to the latest UN report on the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, around 645 million people experienced chronic hunger in 2025.

At the same time, forests worldwide continue to face challenges. Over the last decade, the world lost an average of 10.9 million hectares of forest each year. Deforestation and forest degradation reduce biodiversity, weaken ecosystem services and can ultimately undermine agricultural productivity and access to nutritious food.

There are strong links between forest cover and dietary quality. For example, a study in Africa found that children living in areas with greater tree cover tend to have more diverse and nutritious diets.

Forests and trees support food security and nutrition (FSN) by providing fruits, nuts, tubers, mushrooms, edible insects and wild meat. More than 50,000 wild species are used for food, medicine and other purposes, including at least 10,000

species consumed directly as food. In some forest-dependent communities, forest foods can supply up to 80 percent of daily protein requirements.

Forest fruits are rich in minerals and vitamins, while seeds and nuts contribute calories, oil and protein to diets. Edible roots and tubers are sources of carbohydrates, and mushrooms provide important nutrients such as potassium, selenium and vitamins. Wild leaves are rich sources of protein and micronutrients, including vitamin A, calcium and iron, which are often lacking in the diets of nutritionally vulnerable communities.

Forests also contribute to health. More than 1 billion people worldwide rely on medicinal plants sourced from forests, including remedies for illnesses that can affect nutrient absorption and overall wellbeing.

Beyond food and health, forests provide fuel (around 1.8 billion people rely on wood fuel for cooking), income and employment, while supporting biodiversity, soil fertility, water resources and climate change mitigation.

Such benefits are complemented by forests' wider contributions to economic resilience and the ecosystem services that sustain communities, cities and productive landscapes: Forested watersheds provide freshwater to more than 85 per cent of major cities and support agriculture, livestock production and fisheries through critical ecosystem services, including water regulation, soil protection, nutrient cycling, pollination, pest control and biodiversity conservation. In many regions, forests also generate up to 20 per cent of rural household income and act as indispensable safety nets during periods of food insecurity and economic hardship.

The report highlights regional differences in the contribution of forest foods to FSN. In parts of Africa, some communities obtain up to 80 per cent of their daily protein from wild meat. In the Amazon, fish account for 44 per cent of total food consumed by weight, alongside wild meat, Brazil nuts and açai berries.