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UNCONVENTIONAL FOOD PLANTS AND SOME OF THEIR PARTICULARITIES

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The term Unconventional Food Plants (UFPs) came about in 2008. Before these plants were commonly called alternative food plants, neglected edible parts and various other names. The UFPs have a very comprehensive characterization, from edible plants that are not consumed daily, conventional plant parts that would be discarded, vegetables that are typical in one region and unknown or ignored in others. Even with an immense variety of plant species, only about 103 species make up the planet's food base, with 20 to 30 being the most common. One of the causes is that the predominant production system encourages high yields from a minority of plant species and varieties. UFPs do not require as much care in cultural treatments as conventional plants and have excellent nutritional composition. They are sources of minerals, proteins, and bioactive compounds. Consumers, several researchers, and haute cuisine have shown interest in these plants. Diversity in food provides the organism with all the necessary nutrients. For example, the use of sweet potato leaves, carrot and beet leaves and stalks can greatly enrich meals. But the consumption of some UFPs must be conscious and careful, before ingesting an unknown plant it is necessary to know if there is any toxic substance or anti-nutritional factor and how to prepare it. For example, the meristematic tissues of bamboo have an excellent nutritional composition and are widely used in human food, but they must undergo adequate preparation to eliminate cyanogenic glycosides.

Some UFPs can also be used to produce flour to complement the diet of people with gluten intolerance, such as peach palm flour, which has the potential to be used for the manufacture of breads and cakes. More knowledge and dissemination of what the UFPs represent is needed, be it socially, ecologically and nutritionally.

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