Keynote speaker, Dr. JB Prajapati, the Chairperson, Verghese Kurien Centre of Excellence Institute of Rural Management

Professor Terrance Madujith, Deputy Vice-Chancellor

Deans of Faculties

Professor, Janaka Ekanayake, Director/University Research Committee

Professor Neil Alles, Director/International Research Office

Acting Registrar,

Bursar,

Local Organizing committee members, sponsors, Paper presenters

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good evening to all of you.

It gives me a great pleasure to be here today in this Morning, to address the 10th International Conference on Fermented Foods, Health Status, and Social Well-Being. Being the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Peradeniya, I am grateful to grace this inaugural session of the 1st international conference hosted by the Peradeniya University Research Council.

At the outset, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Director/URC, Director/InRO and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the Conference Chair; for making every effort to continue this annual session despite the global pandemic with collaboration of Swedish South Asian Network of Fermented Foods, SASNET-Land University-Sweden, Kathmandu University and various Food related associations in India, Copenhagen University- Denmark and University of Sri Jayawardenepura.

The conference's theme, "Nutritional, Fundamental, and Immunological Aspects of Fermented Foods," is highly topical. As stated in the World Declaration on Nutrition, the nutritional well-being of all people is a pre-condition for the development of societies and should be a key objective of progress in human development. It must be at the center of our socio-economic development plans and strategies.

Fermented foods have been an integral part of the human diet since ancient times. Humans have been eating fermented foods for over 9000 years and it was a useful way to preserve food without refrigeration back in the day. Although initially, the process of food fermentation was used as a food preservation technique, more recently these foods are recognized for their numerous health benefits. Fermented foods are rich in probiotics and prebiotics and exert a positive effect on gut microbiota. As we know, our gut contains billions of microbes which are essential for human health. Disruption of these gut microbiota can lead to a range of ill effects from digestive problems to mood disorders. Also, we know that gut microbiota are linked to numerous non-communicable diseases such as obesity and cardiovascular disease. In the hospital setting, disruption of gut microbiota during antibiotic therapy and critical illness are causes of excess morbidity and mortality. We are also aware of the increasing problem of antibiotic resistance. Modulation of gut microbiota by prebiotics and probiotics is proposed as a therapeutic target for improving all these health problems. Since fermented foods are a natural way of providing these pre and probiotics, much research is needed in this area to explore the potential of using fermented foods as a treatment for these conditions.

In addition to the probiotic effects, fermented foods are an important source of essential nutrients such as Vitamin B12, especially in individuals who are vegetarian or vegan. The process of fermentation also helps digestion of certain foods like dairy products. Lactose intolerance is quite common among individuals of Asian origin, and these individuals tolerate fermented dairy products much better. Moving forward, we also need to identify novel bioactive compounds in these fermented foods which may exert health benefits so that we will not only prevent illnesses, but also promote wellness.

In Sri Lanka, we consume a variety of fermented foods ranging from dairy products such as curd and yoghurt, cereals such as ‘diya bath’, pulses such as fermented mung beans and fish products like ‘Jaadi’. Although there are claims of numerous health benefits of these Sri Lankan fermented foods, we need more research on these foods to identify their exact benefits.

From a food science perspective, it is also important that we help the food industry in the proper selection of microorganisms and raw materials and the precise control of fermentation processes to ensure the nutrient value and safety of these foods. Knowledge gaps and challenges in fermented food production and marketing as well as consumer awareness need also to be addressed.

Therefore, it is also important to establish a proper regulatory framework specifically for fermentation-enabled wellness foods.

All this needs a multidisciplinary effort and a forum such as this would be an ideal platform to share new knowledge and build collaborations to achieve these goals.

The University of Peradeniya looks forward to receiving your contribution and hopes to demonstrate that you have plenty of research outputs to offer value in this pandemic battle in a sustained, holistic, and collaborative manner.

I wish you a fruitful and inspiring conference.

Thank you