



Press kit
Annual theme 2017
**Food –
Vice or Virtue?**

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1. Press release

Vevey, 27 April 2017

Between Vice and Virtue, the Alimentarium is launching its first ever annual theme

After reopening in June 2016, the Alimentarium is launching its first ever annual theme: *Food – Vice or Virtue?* From the magical qualities attributed to certain nutrients, to the economic constraints of organic farming, and to food safety and nutritional concerns, the Alimentarium invites you to explore the concepts of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’, when applied to food and how it is produced. Traversing popular notions and current scientific discourse, this theme adds a new twist to the permanent exhibition. It will evolve throughout the year, with the addition of new content accessible in the Museum itself or 24/7 on its digital platform.

First annual theme since the Museum reopened

With *Food – Vice or Virtue?* the Alimentarium is launching its first annual theme since reopening in June 2016. This topic adds a sprinkle of seasoning to the three sectors of the permanent exhibition, *Food*, *Society* and the *Body*, as well as to the Museum’s digital content. The Alimentarium invites us to reflect on the notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’, in the context of food, whether in relation to industrialisation of production methods, aversion to food, the size of food portions or monitoring data from our body. This is a lively, progressive exploration of perceptions and current scientific discourse.

Natural or artificial?

Dedicated to the way food has been produced, processed and preserved throughout the ages, the *Food* sector addresses the question of ‘natural versus artificial’, from the intensive farming typical of the 20th century, to permaculture and methods used to process food to extend its shelf life. A ‘plant kebab’ greets visitors at the entrance to the Museum. Why’s that? It is a symbol of alternative cultivation techniques, to show how varieties of strawberry, lettuce or goji berry can grow in ‘aeroculture’, without soil or any connection to the ground.

Once shunned, now the stars of our diet

Whether we consider certain types of food palatable is subjective and reflects our social background. Every culture has its share of forbidden food, and what is good for one can be an absolute no-no in the eyes of another. The same goes for some plants, such as carrots or potatoes: Once shunned, they are now the stars of our diet, as are certain ‘miracle drinks’.

More and more?

Besides the social aspect of eating, the individual action has direct, observable effects on the body. In the era of the quantified self, there are a number of diet books available, nutritional advice abounds, and we consider a healthy, balanced diet as a measure of good health. Yet a large proportion of the population in the West is struggling to restrict its food intake and is consuming more and more, as shown in the new exhibits in the *Body* sector.

Discovering local products

To meet growing demand, from May onwards, the Alimentarium is turning its evening workshops into weekend workshops. Prepare a dish using local ingredients, attend a workshop all about meat or discover garden plants and herbs: This adults-only programme brimming with a thousand and one flavours is sure to bring out the chef in you.

The 'after work food tasting' sessions round off the programme nicely, with a chance to enjoy regional specialities prepared by local artisans. Delicacies such as ewe's milk cheese, craft beer, cider or sausages await you on the first Thursday of every month!

Food – Vice or Virtue?

From 28 April 2017 to April 2018

Find the full programme of new workshops at www.alimentarium.org/en/workshop

Contacts

Press office
trivial mass
François Germanier
T +41 21 323 04 10
M +41 79 761 72 34
francois@trivialmass.com

Alimentarium
Laurène Weguener
Marketing & Communication
T +41 21 924 14 78
M +41 79 579 76 32
laurene.weguener@alimentarium.org

2. Food – Vice or Virtue?

Following the success of the new permanent exhibition, which welcomed over 50 000 visitors in 2016, the Alimentarium is now launching its first annual theme: *Food – Vice or Virtue?* Organic food, GMOs, sugar, additives and ‘superfood’ fuel current debate. With the virtues we attribute to some foodstuffs and the vices we blame on others, it has become difficult to decipher the plethora of information available and understand how to eat without endangering our well-being or that of our planet.

The Alimentarium explores the notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’, when applied to food and how it is produced. From the magical qualities attributed to certain nutrients, to the economic constraints of organic farming, and to food safety and nutritional concerns, this theme carries through the *Food, Society and Body* sectors of the permanent exhibition. Fact sheets and magazine articles available online on the Museum’s digital platform develop the topic further. Not forgetting, the Alimentarium workshops, which add their touch of spice!

The theme will evolve with the addition of new content throughout the year, to provide a lively, progressive journey between popular notions and current scientific discourse.

The Food Sector

Nature 2.0

We alter nature to meet our dietary needs, by selecting and adapting species and varieties, setting up agricultural systems and selecting the food our bodies need based on its chemical composition. Approaches that appear to be natural and environmentally friendly help question well-established productivity. How do things stand and what are the consequences?

The *Food* sector addresses the question of ‘natural versus artificial’ from three perspectives: the composition of food in terms of its molecules; production methods, ranging from 20th-century intensive farming to permaculture; and, finally, an overview of the methods used to process and preserve food to extend its shelf life. To illustrate alternative cultivation techniques, a ‘plant kebab’ is on display at the entrance to the Museum. It shows how varieties of strawberry, lettuce or goji berry are able to grow in ‘aeroculture’, without soil or any connection to the ground.

Food in all its forms

If eaten to excess, even healthy food may become injurious. If you take eggs for example, they provide proteins, but were shunned during the 1980s for their cholesterol content. All products, whether processed or acquired directly from nature, are assemblies of chemical molecules with specific properties our bodies may or may not need to live and regenerate, such as glucose, fructose or lactose, for example. Fats, proteins, sugars, water and other solvents, flavourings and minerals are an integral part of our food. Is it really natural?

Production: Small scale or large scale?

While ants have always cultivated the soil and reared other species, human beings harvested and hunted long before they became farmers. They then improved techniques, produced more than necessary and traded the surplus. Industrialisation led to the emergence of vast food production systems and our food now stems from all over the world. Producing more in order to ensure food security is a driving force in agriculture that is currently fuelling debate. If it becomes too intense, it may have a detrimental effect on the environment and on our health. Are there any alternatives? How can we put them in place?

Process or denature?

Most food undergoes some form of processing before we consume it. Manufacturing makes cereals edible for example. Preserving makes storage and transportation possible. The various stages of processing modify the properties of food; hence, the final product on our plates may be radically different from its natural counterpart! Such transformations may be physical or chemical, follow traditional methods or result from a more recent scientific approach, yet without doubt, they all denature the raw material. Is there a limit to denaturing food?

The Society Sector

“Food must not only be good to eat, but also good to think.”
Claude Lévi-Strauss

Why do we drape certain foodstuffs in vice or virtue? Eating is one of the most intimate acts we perform: When we eat, we make food our own. It goes on to become part of our own body. On a symbolic level, the qualities attributed to a foodstuff are said to become those of the person eating it. Rousseau believed that vegetarians were naturally peace loving, while meat eaters were more warrior-like. He declared, “Everything is good as it leaves the hands of Nature.” Today’s consumers feel they have lost control of what they eat. This is perhaps one of the reasons why they are drawn towards natural foodstuffs that inspire more confidence.

From a sociological point of view, eating influences our sense of belonging. Ingesting a product favoured by a particular social group enables us to belong to that group. The food of others can often be unsettling. As an example, quinoa, the main food source of the Incas, was grown until the Spanish invaded their territory in the 16th century and banned its cultivation. Today, to be ‘trendy’, we tend to set ourselves apart from others by eating goji berries and sipping on green tea.

The *Society* sector addresses various topics: food aversion, the phobia of eating animal flesh or new plants, and the benefits of ‘miracle drinks’ such as tea and coffee.

Eating means trusting

When we eat, we take in a foreign body that becomes part of us. Without realising it, we trust that the food will do us good and we appropriate its intrinsic qualities. However, besides the possible health hazards, we are wary food may also conceal symbolic risks. Accepting a culture and its beliefs also means coming to terms with its food and with our secret fears.

Yuck!

Whether we consider certain types of food palatable is subjective and reflects our social background. Every culture has its share of food deemed unsuitable for eating. Whether dog, insect or snake, animal flesh is top of the list, especially if it comes from a beloved pet. As for plants, it took hundreds of years for some of today’s favourites, such as carrots and potatoes, to feature on our plates.

Miracle drinks

Sophisticated aphrodisiac? Anti-carcinogenic pick-me-up? Elixir of longevity? The benefits and particularities of chocolate, coffee and tea caused a stir from the moment they were discovered. The seductive aura surrounding these beverages still lingers in the West. Marketing professionals make the most of this to promote them as magic potions!

The anthropophagus in us

Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who’ll be my dinner, of them all? Why is there such a strict prohibition on us eating our own species, while the animal kingdom is full of such examples that seem less shocking? Despite the taboo, eating human flesh lives on.

The Body Sector

The human body: Why do I eat?

The diversity of food we eat and the way it is prepared provide the nutrients that are essential for maintaining our body and enabling it to function. Eating is a social act, dependent on our cultural and ritual heritage, during which our five senses are aroused. The brain then creates its own fictitious image of the world around us from this stream of sensorial information. This subjective image is not necessarily an exact replica of reality, as various optical illusions and olfactory intuition remind us. Can this perception, however misleading, influence our food choices?

Balance and moderation: Become your own doctor?

After arousing all our senses, the food we eat is broken down in the digestive tube. In the era of the quantified self, books about weight loss have proliferated, dietary advice abounds all around us, and a healthy, balanced diet is a measure of good health. There was a time when we usually turned to the medical profession to assess our state of health, collect physiological parameters and autobiographical data, make a diagnosis and give advice. It is now possible to measure and track data ourselves, at any time of day: physical activity, rest, weight, body fat, blood pressure, calories consumed, blood sugar levels... Does having this information at hand really help us make the right choices?

Sizing up servings: More and more?

Always wanting more, anytime, anywhere? Why limit ourselves if we can eat more? Over the past forty years, we have been eating bigger portions. Learning or revising the basics of a varied and balanced diet requires adjusting the portions we eat. How can we do this? Counting calories and nutrients is an essential step for nutritionists, but is not easy to do in everyday life. Health organisations give simple examples, 'ideal plates' or suggested servings. Other tips include following the recommendations shown on packaging, making vegetables and fruit the default choice and using small plates and tall glasses.

3. New activities in 2017

Weekend workshops

The workshops previously held on Wednesday and Thursday evenings now take place on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. They are suitable for individuals and take place in the *FoodAcademy* area.

From 16 years old, Saturdays from 15:00 to 18:00, CHF 80.00 per person

- **The world of meat** (first and third Saturdays of the month)

A unique workshop where you will learn all about meat, the issues it raises and the latest technology.

Watch as our Chef joints a piece of meat, explaining each stage of the process. You then use some of the cuts to create a dish to sample together at the end of the workshop. Mouth-watering!

- **Local produce, gastronomic delights** (second and fourth Saturdays of the month)

Set off with one of our chefs/activity leaders to meet local producers. Butchers, greengrocers and cheesemakers will enthuse you as they present their profession and suggest quality products. After choosing the menu and carefully selecting the ingredients together, you then return to the Alimentarium kitchen to prepare a delicious dish full of local, seasonal produce. At the end of the workshop, participants can enjoy the opportunity to sample the meal they have created.

From 12 years old, Sundays from 15:00 to 17:00, CHF 60.00 per person

- **Seasonal recipe** (first and third Sundays of the month)

Transform your Sunday afternoon into a gourmet experience! Find your inner Chef with the help of local, seasonal produce. Parents, children, grandparents, individuals, professionals or amateurs: You are all invited to give free rein to your culinary creativity!

- **Garden plot to gourmet palate** (second and fourth Sundays of the month)

Discover plants and herbs from our Garden in the company of a professional chef. This is the perfect opportunity to find out more about their flavours and culinary properties. After scenting flowers and nibbling on leaves, roots and vegetables, it is time for a cookery demonstration followed by a copious sampling of several dishes, with ingredients varying according to the season.

In addition to this selection of workshops, the Alimentarium also offers 'à la carte' classes, such as 'Sculpting food'.

After work food tasting: Local artisanship in the limelight!

Beginning in May, every first Thursday of the month, from 18:30 to 20:30, one of the region's artisan food producers showcases their products. A short presentation, a little history and succulent samples of fine food make this 'after work' event a unique, convivial opportunity to learn more about local products and producers. The first food tasting, which is already sold out, is on the theme of ewe's milk cheese and cider, while the second will throw the spotlight on sausages and beer.

From 16 years of age, CHF 25.00 per person

4. Press visuals

Available on

<https://we.tl/gF8sap09Db>

5. The Alimentarium

A real centre of competence for all issues relating to food and nutrition, the Alimentarium has been exploring the many aspects of the human diet from a historic, scientific and cultural point of view for over 30 years.

Its new permanent exhibition *Food – The essence of life* is a fun-filled, interactive journey through the world of food. Its culinary workshops encourage practical experimentation by inviting both the young and the not so young to don their aprons and get involved. Meanwhile, its digital ecosystem favours a cutting-edge approach, with new methods of learning, sharing and teaching.

Now so much more than just a museum, the Alimentarium provides access to all its knowledge through this digital platform and offers unique content aimed at children, professionals and the general public.

www.alimentarium.org

6. Contact details

Press Office

trivial mass

François Germanier

T. +41 (0)21 323 04 10

M. +41 (0)79 761 72 34

presse@trivialmass.com

Alimentarium

Laurène Weguener

Marketing & Communication

T. +41 (0)21 924 14 78

M. +41 (0)79 579 76 32

laurene.weguener@alimentarium.org

