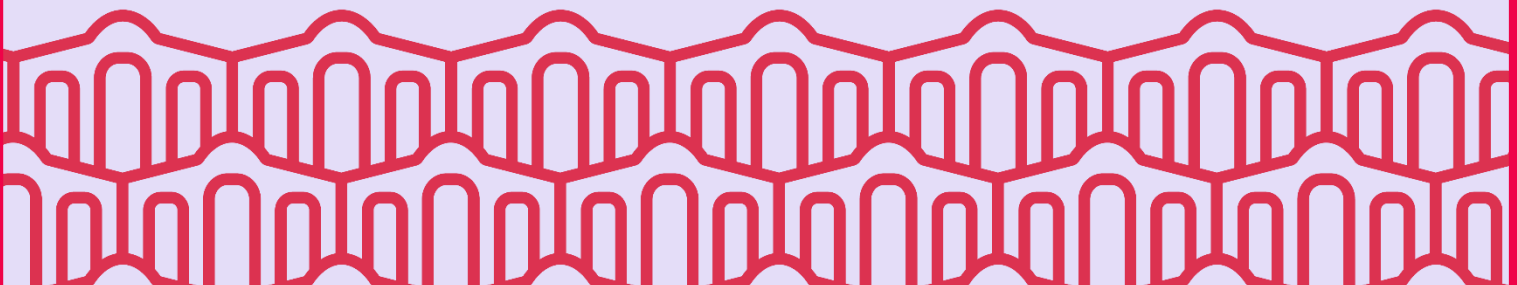


CONCEPTUAL NOTE



Caring, through healthy nutrition and food security, enabling all individuals to adopt healthy lifestyles and experience well-being.



Fundação Mendes Gonçalves

Fundação Mendes Gonçalves (Mendes Gonçalves Foundation) was established from the commitment of **Casa Mendes Gonçalves** and its founder, **Carlos Mendes Gonçalves**, to the mission of “caring for the present and contributing to the construction of a promising future and a more sustainable world with greater opportunities for all people.”

Building an equitable, healthy, sustainable future with well-being for everyone requires essential collaborative action: CARING. Caring for people and ecosystems. For what is born, grows, and regenerates. Caring means cultivating the potential of ideas, individuals, families, and the community. With **ethics, transparency, and integrity**, acknowledging that there is always more to learn, improve, and transform. With the inquisitiveness and curiosity that allow us to envision what is not yet but can become. With the **flexibility to adapt and innovate.**

Caring is a verb of the present and a verb of the future. We aim to **plant seeds of change and possibility** in our territory, Golegã, which will transform into roots of **new ways of educating, nurturing, and regenerating.** We aspire to leave a legacy, for the future of all.

Therefore, the Mendes Gonçalves Foundation proposes to develop three complementary programs:

- **EDUCATE:** Caring, through quality education, ensuring that all children have equitable opportunities to grow, learn, and flourish.
- **NURTURE:** Caring, through healthy nutrition and food security, enabling all individuals to adopt healthy lifestyles and experience well-being.
- **REGENERATE:** Caring, through the regeneration of soils and biodiversity, so that the planet and communities have a better future.

Each of these programs operates on the ground based on scientific evidence, co-creation, impact evaluation, proximity philanthropy, and ethical responsibility. **Together, their actions build an ecosystem of transformation, empowerment, and capacity-building,** rooted in community proximity and the establishment of partnerships, in science and in the possibility of knowledge transference, in the **commitment to communicate and advocate** for present and future generations. Collectively, these programs contribute to the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, with locally rooted solutions that have the potential to influence, inspire, and transform practices and public policies in Portugal and worldwide.

Caring for the future and transforming the world is a mission only possible with syntropy, inclusion, and collaboration from all—families, professionals, organizations, companies, and the community. **We count on everyone.**

PROGRAM NURTURE

EARTH | The Context

Healthy nutrition is a public good. It not only promotes the population's health but also equity and **social justice**, strengthens the **economy**, and supports environmental **sustainability**. It provides us with the necessary macro and micronutrients to produce energy, maintain healthy muscles and bones, and a robust immune system. It protects us against diseases, supports our mental health and development, improves learning and productivity, and is associated with **well-being** and **quality of life**.ⁱ It brings people together around the table, creating routines and celebrations of community connection and interdependence. Therefore, it is a cross-cutting theme to many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nations, namely the eradication of hunger, quality health and education, gender equality, reduction of inequalities, sustainable production and consumption, and climate action.

Conversely, **poor nutrition and unhealthy eating habits** are **risk factors for non-communicable diseases** such as cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, obesity, certain types of cancer, and dyslipidemia (or high cholesterol).ⁱⁱ They are also associated with **mental health issues** like depression, anxiety, or irritability,ⁱⁱⁱ as well as **cognitive decline and dementia**.^{iv} They affect child development, particularly brain development, school performance, and immune functions.^{v vi} They also contribute to self-esteem problems, body image issues, and **difficulties in social interactions**, as well as a decrease in quality of life.^{viii ix} The **socioeconomic and environmental consequences** are equally harmful. For example, reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, higher health-related costs,^x increased greenhouse gas emissions,^{xi} and environmental degradation.^{xii}

In the Golegã region, in Portugal, and worldwide, we currently face **problems and challenges associated with eating habits**, including:

- **Low diet quality**, often characterized by excessive consumption of ultra-processed foods and low intake of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.^{xiii} In some European countries, including Portugal, **ultra-processed foods** account for up to 50% of daily caloric intake.^{xiv}
- **Malnutrition**, which includes undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight, and obesity.^{xv} According to the latest National Food and Physical Activity Survey,^{xvi} in Portugal, about 60% of adults are **overweight or obese**, with the problem being more prevalent among people with lower education and income levels. The average salt consumption is almost double the amount recommended by the WHO, and only 24% of adults consume the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables. Obesity rates among Portuguese children are also increasing, with Portugal having one of the highest rates ...

... in Western Europe: about 30% of children aged 6 to 8 are overweight, and 12% are obese.
xvii

- **Inequality in access to healthy food**, once food insecurity and poverty limit access to healthy food options. **Food insecurity** is not just about not having enough food but also about not being able to access healthy nutrition. Between 2020 and 2022, more than 12% of the Portuguese population experienced moderate or severe food insecurity.^{xviii} Cost is one of the main barriers to accessing healthy food^{xix}: it is estimated that a healthy diet costs 60% to 70% more than a diet rich in fat and refined carbohydrates.^{xx} In Portugal, children from low-income families are more likely to consume more ultra-processed products, skip meals, or rely on school meals.^{xxi} Despite improvements in school canteens, significant differences still exist between schools, and there is a high consumption of snacks, cakes, and soft drinks outside main meals, especially in schools without bar control. It is common for children to start consuming such foods even in preschool age.^{xxii xxiii}
- **Misinformation and lack of food literacy** – "food trends," untrained influencers, pseudoscience, and aggressive marketing of unhealthy foods (especially aimed at children) promote risky eating behaviors.^{xxiv} On the other hand, people with higher literacy have more knowledge about healthy eating, are more critical of food marketing, and make more informed food choices.^{xxv} Therefore, promoting literacy is a core axis in the National Program for the Promotion of Healthy Eating.^{xxvi} The social diagnosis of Golegã suggests investing in actions to promote healthy lifestyle habits, including eating.^{xxvii}
- **Emotional disconnection from food**, when in daily life there is no time and culinary skills to invest in meal preparation or pay attention to what we are eating, the symbolic and emotional value of food is lost. Home-cooked meals are being replaced by fast food, ready meals, and take-away;^{xxviii} there is less generational transmission of healthy eating habits and the cultural value of shared meals.^{xxix xxx}
- **Environmental impacts of eating patterns**, which require a global change in diets based on the sustainability of human and planetary health, particularly regarding the reduction of consumption of certain foods, commercial circulation, and food waste.^{xxxi}

These data make it evident that **promoting healthy nutrition is not just a health priority; it is an ethical, social, economic, and developmental imperative**. Healthy nutrition is the foundation of individual well-being, community resilience, economic productivity, and sustainability, so it should be a right, not a privilege. **Nurturing people is nurturing the future.**

ROOTS | The Foundations

Healthy nutrition and **food security** are inseparable. Food security exists when all people, always, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, nutritious, and quality food to meet their dietary needs and preferences within a healthy lifestyle. ^{xxxii}

In this sense, food security without healthy nutrition is incomplete, and healthy nutrition without food security is inaccessible. **Both are forms of nurturing, and it is necessary to promote both**, creating conditions for people to eat well consistently and with dignity, making informed and autonomous food consumption choices (instead of merely passive ones). When there is food security, we can maintain nutritional stability, choose and plan meals based on health criteria and not just price and availability, avoiding skipping meals, constantly resorting to ultra-processed foods, eating with little variety, or experiencing cycles of food restriction and/or overeating, harming the nutritional quality of our diet, as well as our mental health and well-being.

We consider that **NURTURE:**

... is a matter of dignity, ethics, and justice. All people have the right to healthy, safe, sufficient, and economically accessible nutrition. Denying this right – for economic, geographic, or social reasons – is a violation of human dignity. Nurturing is an ethical commitment to social justice and equality.

...is a key piece of the planet's sustainability. Changing eating habits is one of the most effective ways to reduce our ecological footprint and preserve natural resources. Healthy nutrition helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions, water and fossil fuel consumption, as well as biodiversity loss. Nurturing allows us to feed everyone without harming the environment and future generations.

... is not just a biological need; it is a social ritual of sharing that, in moments of family, school, community, or religious gatherings, reinforces our sense of cultural belonging, connection, and trust. It is around the table that children learn socio-cultural norms or emotional self-regulation skills, where intergenerational dialogue happens. In times of crisis, food distribution is often one of the first movements of collective care. Nurturing reinforces social cohesion. ^{xxxiii}

... influences personal and cultural identity. What we eat, how we cook, and how we gather to eat reflect our history, values, geography, and affections. Nurturing preserves the memory, diversity, and traditions of communities.

... **is an act of care, a language of love and responsibility**, among families, neighbors, institutions, and communities. Parents and caregivers express love through the careful preparation of meals; community kitchens express social solidarity as do public policies that support school meals. Nurturing is an act of self and other care and a political act.

Nurturing is not just about what we eat; it's also about how, with whom, and why. It's not just about our body; it's about well-being and how our behaviors are affected by our habits, emotions, and knowledge. For example, many of our food choices are automatic, guided by habits and routines, rather than conscious and deliberate decisions (therefore, environments with easy access to ultra-processed foods reinforce unhealthy eating behaviors).^{xxxiv} We eat when we are sad, stressed, anxious, or bored – and not always because we are hungry. This "emotional eating" often involves foods high in sugar and fat.^{xxxv} We also eat differently depending on the social context: what others eat, what they expect from us, how we feel in that environment. But if eating habits are socially learned, they can also be unlearned and restructured with appropriate support.^{xxxvi}

Thus, **changing low-quality and unhealthy nutritional choices** is about changing routines, managing emotions, building skills and food literacy, creating environments that facilitate the adoption of healthy lifestyles and appropriate, diverse, balanced, culturally significant, and sustainable eating patterns.

Promoting food security and a healthy eating style requires a multi-level strategy, in which we highlight the following actions:

- **Increase Food Literacy.** It's essential to know how to read and understand food labels; cook simple and healthy meals; set a budget and plan a healthy diet; develop critical thinking about food marketing and misinformation, promoting food literacy in school, work, health, and community contexts.
- **Invest in Childhood (especially in the early years of life).** It's essential to feed and educate children, from birth, for healthy nutrition, involving families, educators, childhood professionals, and teachers, and integrating children themselves in the design of food literacy campaigns. Especially because when healthy food preferences and behaviors are established early, we increase the likelihood of them being maintained into adulthood. In this context, the school environment plays a central role, acting as a food provider (ensuring nutritious and attractive school meals), an education platform (integrating food literacy into school learning and experience), a social space (where cultural norms about food are also formed), and as a social equalizer (reducing inequalities in access to healthy nutrition and food security).

- **Promote healthy food choices in Workplaces.** It's strategic to focus on work contexts to promote healthy nutrition among the adult population. It's during work hours that many daily meals and snacks are consumed, so it's important to make healthy food choices the easiest and most accessible (for example, ensuring that canteens, cafeterias, and vending machines offer fresh fruit and vegetables); promote actions and campaigns that encourage healthy eating habits (for example, inviting workers to participate in challenges like "fruit of the week" or "meatless Mondays"); offer nutritional education (for example, conducting "cooking for busy people" workshops or providing access to nutrition consultations); and integrate nutrition into a broader strategy to promote well-being within organizations.
- **Develop and Apply Research.** It's crucial to base healthy nutrition practices on scientific evidence. Research allows us to continue learning and innovating in food products, systems, and technologies; define and adapt nutritional guidelines based on the evolution of individual, social, and environmental needs and different contexts; build informed and effective public policies; cement the population's trust in nutritional guidelines, combating food misinformation. Nurturing is also about generating and applying knowledge.
- **Valuing Culinary Culture and Shared Meals.** It is important to promote knowledge and respect for traditional and local foods and dishes; to encourage families, schools, and communities to cook and share meals together, as well as to grow food in home and community gardens; and to value the physical spaces of public institutions where meals are held, creating welcoming, comfortable, and peaceful environments that enhance the pleasure of eating, focus on the meal, and allow the act of eating to become a moment of sharing and socialization.

FRUITS AND SEEDS | The Proposal for the Future

Food is the core business of Casa Mendes Gonçalves, which has been investing in the reformulation of its products to meet healthy diet standards and in regenerative practices, stimulating the local production of raw materials to establish a more resilient and environmentally sustainable value chain. ^{xxxvii}

The Mendes Gonçalves Foundation renews this legacy and takes it further by investing in the promotion of healthy lifestyles, with a special focus on healthy eating habits and food security, through the *Program Nurture*.

As with the other programs, *Nurture* seeks to function both as an **anchor and a catalyst—locally and globally**—acting locally while inspiring globally, through **proximity philanthropy**, ...

syntropy, strategic partnerships, and alliances.

Nurture seeks to create spaces for **co-creation, teaching and learning, research and action, literacy promotion, and knowledge transference** for **lasting social transformation**.

The program addresses a gap in this field, also evidenced by the fact that no other foundations are currently dedicated to this issue. It aligns with the principles and proposals of the National Program for the Promotion of Healthy Eating. ^{xxxviii} It adopts an integrated view of health and well-being: not only promoting healthy foods, but healthy lifestyles that include **emotionally meaningful eating, rooted in community, and respectful of cultural diversity**. It goes beyond nutrients to foster a **culture of care that supports the whole person** — in their physical, emotional, social, and cultural dimensions — **and all people**.

Program NURTURE aims to “plant” an ecosystem:

... that stimulates not only healthy eating, but a healthy lifestyle — the experience of being nourished physically, emotionally, socially, and culturally. That ensures food is more than just energy: it is dignity, identity, care, connection, and well-being.

... that promotes food security and equitable access to healthy and culturally meaningful nutrition for all, especially those in vulnerable situations.

... that empowers people throughout life and across different life contexts, viewing food literacy as a lifelong process of building knowledge, skills, confidence, and autonomy, from childhood to adulthood.

... that is grounded in shared social responsibility, contributing to the demographic, economic, and sociocultural vitality of the local and global community. That supports both individual and structural choices and changes; that connects families, schools, workplaces, producers, and communities — as co-creators of change and living spaces where people eat, produce, buy food, cook, and share meals. That forms partnerships (with the social and business sectors, policymakers, and society at large) to promote collective well-being and the common good.

... that promotes positive impacts on the sustainability of both people and the planet, by encouraging the quality of the food we eat in terms of taste, nutritional value, and production methods, and by fostering the adoption of healthy lifestyles through the implementation and dissemination of healthy, educational, and regenerative food practices.

... that is research-based and context-responsive, creating, adopting, monitoring, and evaluating practices grounded in scientific evidence — and generating that evidence. That collects quantitative data but also listens to people, so that, from the lessons learned through...

... local change, it becomes possible to transfer, replicate, and scale up knowledge globally, applying it in the dissemination of best practices and in the development of public policies.

***Program Nurture* wants to “sow” hope and resilience, functioning as a “living laboratory,” where healthy, high-quality food, care, and community come together to build a future for all – both locally and globally – that is fairer, more sustainable, and centered on well-being.**

From Golegã to the World | Model for Change

Program Nurture

Model for Change to Promote the Adoption of Healthy Lifestyles through Healthy Nutrition and Food Security, Centered on People and Driven by the Community

Program Mission

To CARE for children, families, and the community through healthy and safe nutrition, enabling the REGENERATION of sustainable, resilient, and equitable futures.

Context

Despite growing recognition of the importance of healthy nutrition and food security, the local reality in Golegã reflects both national and global challenges. These include poor diet quality, malnutrition, unequal access to healthy food, misinformation and low food literacy, emotional disconnection from food, and the negative environmental impacts of current dietary patterns.

Foundations

Science shows that promoting healthy nutrition and food security helps prevent or delay the onset of chronic, non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and obesity.^{xxxix} It reduces the risk of anxiety, depression, and cognitive decline;^{xi} lowers healthcare costs and increases productivity;^{xii} improves children's behavior and academic performance,^{xiii} as well as brain and immune development;^{xliii} mitigates health and social inequalities, especially for vulnerable populations;^{xliiv} and encourages the adoption of other healthy lifestyle behaviors, such as quitting smoking, reducing alcohol consumption, and engaging in physical activity.^{xliv}

Investments

- Financial resources and infrastructure.
- Specialized human resources.
- Local, national, and international partnerships.
- Research and technical support for the production and transference of knowledge.
- Impact assessment strategies focused on continuous improvement.

Proposal

To create an ecosystem that nourishes people physically, emotionally, socially, and culturally — ensuring dignity, care, connection, and well-being through healthy nutrition and food security. To promote innovative, inclusive, and evidence-based practices in a territory that cares, learns, and grows together.

Outcomes

- Development of projects promoting healthy lifestyles, especially healthy nutrition, in partnership with other foundations and organizations.
- Production and dissemination of quality and innovative food literacy resources, applicable across different contexts (family, school, workplace, community).
- Development of Best Practices for Healthy Nutrition and Food Security — evidence-based and informative of science, locally and globally.
- Actions for promotion of healthy lifestyles and food literacy among families, schools, workplaces, producers, and communities.
- Creation of healthy nutrition hubs at the Educational Centre, schools, and workplaces in Golegã, offering healthy and affordable meals sourced from local food production.
- Implementation of a “from garden to cafeteria” system at the Educational Centre.
- Integration of food literacy into educational practices at the Educational Centre, involving children, families, educators, and early childhood professionals.
- Provision of community services to promote well-being.
- Creation of spaces and activities to celebrate culinary culture, encourage shared meals, and strengthen intergenerational bonds.
- Establishment of community and intergenerational partnerships to build food support systems.
- Organization of community events (e.g., a Healthy Nutrition Festival) that involves the community in preparing and sharing meals, distributing healthy food, delivering nutrition education, and providing food support to families experiencing vulnerability and food insecurity.
- Mapping food insecurity through screenings in schools, workplaces, and the community.
- Development of advocacy initiatives and resources for Healthy Nutrition and Food Security based on scientific evidence.
- Influence on public policy and local strategies to promote healthy lifestyles and well-being.
- Support for local food systems to ensure sustainable access to fresh, nutritious food.
- Support for projects and initiatives led by other organizations aligned with the principles and goals of well-being, Healthy Nutrition, and Food Security.

Impacts

On Health, Well-Being, and Quality of Life

- Reduction in the prevalence of non-communicable diseases linked to poor nutrition (% of population with obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases).
- Increased adoption of healthier and more sustainable lifestyles, particularly in nutrition (% of people reporting daily consumption of fruits/vegetables; % reporting reduced intake of ultra-processed foods).
- Increased food literacy (pre- and post-program literacy levels; number of food literacy promotion actions in schools, workplaces, and community spaces; number of educational resources published).
- Improved perception of well-being, mental health, and quality of life (measuring energy levels, sleep quality, emotional regulation, self-esteem, self-care, symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression before and after program implementation).

On Equity and Social Justice

- Improved access to healthy nutrition (number of schools with implemented healthy nutrition policies; % of students eating fruits/vegetables in school meals; % of workplaces with cafeterias or vending machines offering healthy options).
- Reduction in families experiencing food insecurity (% of families reporting food insecurity before and after program implementation)

On Community and Sustainability

- Strengthened social cohesion and cultural belonging through food (number of community gardens and kitchens created or supported; number of local and global partnerships established).
- Increased consumption of homemade and shared meals (family feedback on frequency of shared meals at home or in community settings).
- Number of projects promoting healthy nutrition supported or developed in partnership with other foundations and organizations.
- Number of public policies influenced by evidence generated by the program.
- Number of research articles/results applied with local impact.
- Number of media mentions and social media citations (social visibility).

By 2035, we aim to improve well-being, healthy nutrition, and food security indicators. We **contribute directly to achieving SDGs 2** (Zero Hunger) **and 3** (Good Health and Well-Being), **and indirectly to SDGs 4** (Quality Education), **10** (Reduced Inequalities), **11** (Sustainable Cities and Communities), **12** (Responsible Consumption and Production), and **13** (Climate Action).

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