



GOOD FOOD

MAKES EVERYTHING BETTER

HUNGER & MALNUTRITION

IT'S OFTEN SAID that no-one with money goes hungry; but it's not fully recognised that, wherever they are in world today, many people who have money are malnourished.

Globally our edible food harvest produces 4,600 kcal per person - enough calories to provide healthy food to around 14 billion people.

But one third of that (enough to feed 600 million people) is wasted before it ever reaches our plates. Similarly, almost half of harvested food crops are used inappropriately and inefficiently - for instance, as animal feed or in the production of biofuels.

While some countries struggle to feed their people, others - particularly in the developed world - consume far too many calories but not nearly enough nutrients.

This phenomenon, known as mal-consumption, now joins under- and over-

consumption of food as a global problem. At all points on the spectrum, inadequate nutrition increases the burden of ill health.

THE PARADOX OF NUTRITION

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the number of hungry people in the world has been falling slowly since 2000. Even so, there are still 848 million undernourished people in the world.

Famines can and do still occur, but less frequently - and they are no longer simply a matter of draught, crop failure or some other natural occurrence. Instead it is politics, economics and human-created conflict that tips the balance over into famine.

Two thirds of the world's undernourished people live in seven countries - Bangladesh, China, Congo, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia and Pakistan. Two of these - China and India - are recognised as drivers and success stories of

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the modern global economy.

Elsewhere, largely in the developed West, obesity rates are rising; we may see as many as 1,120 million obese people by 2030.

The paradox of modern nutrition – the under-, over- and mal-consumption of food – exists in every country of the world – because of the deep links between development and the dominance of the high calorie Western diet, which is based largely around animal protein and highly processed foods.

FOOD SECURITY IN THE FREE WORLD

To understand why we are still failing to feed everyone well requires acknowledging different value judgements and world views about the role that calories, food and feed, trade and markets, and private and public sectors should play in development, economy and food security.

The perspective that has dominated the global food system in recent decades is the 1994 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). This created a narrow global trade framework which determined that calories are a raw material for industry and food is a commodity subject to market speculation.

Even today, issues such as public health, food security and social issues are primarily dealt with within this context.

A FAILURE OF GLOBAL TRADE

In the wake of GATT, developing countries were expected to rely on international markets to meet staple food demand, while specialising in the production and export of 'lucrative' cash crops.

Specialisation was accompanied by industrialised production and processing systems leading to deskilling, reduction in access to land, domestic food security and agricultural resilience; and increased damage to biodiversity and the environment.

The success of this "development strategy" is judged by increases in exports and domestic consumption of 'luxury' goods including the types of foods that make up the Western diet.

It's been clear for decades that the global trade-based food system has failed to tackle chronic undernourishment and hunger. Yet governments, aid agencies, researchers and politicians continue to push us down the road to more industrialisation, high technology

(such as hybrid seeds and genetic engineering) and superficial notions of efficiency – all of which were a part of the problem in the first place.

AN EQUITABLE APPROACH

It is not difficult to conclude that to solve the problem of hunger and malnutrition all countries need a new approach to diet – whole, fresh, consumed close to production and ecologically produced.

We need a new approach to the food chain – aimed at need and nourishment, not commodity markets, speculation, global trade and maximising short term profits. It should be locally based, with trade built on mutually beneficial and equitable relationships.

We also need a new approach to food and fibre production and land management – centred around sustainable and regenerative practices which build on local, traditional and culturally appropriate knowledge and skills.

The difficulty is not to envisage such

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systems but how to bring about what is nothing less than a paradigm and structural change in farming and food systems

RADICAL CHANGES REQUIRED

Some solutions are already known in today's political, policy, research and even business context, but need to be given more impetus and priority. These include waste reduction, dietary shifts, food as medicine and even an "ecological public health approach", lower in carbon emissions, and protecting and enriching soil and biodiversity.

More radical steps include stopping speculative trading on food and export and import swaps and trading primarily on need, reducing consumer choice in line with ecological limits, and where necessary using policy measures to address both over- and under-consumption.

These are big changes that require a realignment of private and public interests involving all stakeholders. It is exactly the same realignment that is necessary to combat climate change and it is just as urgent if we are to ensure every citizen of the world is healthy and well fed.



This leaflet is part of a series on sustainable food issues, produced by Beyond GM. References available online:

beyond-gm.org/good-food