The Future Of Food: What Will We Eat In 2030?

Dietary scientists say you only need approximately one pound of meat per week to be ‘sustainable.’ The World Economic Forum (WEF) will gladly proscribe your exact and entire feeding regimen, and all you have to do is eat what they say. — TN Editor

The future of food is a contested space, with multiple competing ideas about how the future will evolve. The growing human population, with a significantly increasing global middle class, will be the engine of increasing global demand. Historically, increasing wealth has led to changing consumption patterns, particularly more meat and other resource-intensive foods like cheese and eggs. The question is the extent to which historical trends will play out in future.

This is for two prime reasons. First, on a global basis more people are now of an unhealthy weight than a healthy weight. At the same time, the historical “hunger challenge” is slowly receding, while malnourishment is increasingly associated with excessive weight and obesity, creating a
new challenge for food systems. This is creating a new policy interest in “food for health” which has the potential to help shape diets and thus food systems.

Second, the Paris climate agreement pledges to keep climate change to well-below 2 degrees C. Given that food systems – growing food and feed, making and transporting food, cooking, eating and throwing food away – accounts for just under a third of greenhouse gas emissions, food alone has the potential to use up the entire Paris agreement’s carbon budget. As many people have written, the most potent way to “decarbonise” the food system is to reduce the amount of greenhouse-intensive food we produce – notably meat.

Dietary advice suggests 500g per person per week is healthy meat consumption = 26 kg per year; as can be seen, on average we exceed this globally, particularly in the rich world

Thus, on the one hand, projections of demand are growing, but on the other hand, important policy drivers that may constrain demand growth – or increase demand for “sustainable nutrition” – are also also growing.

It is undoubtedly true that some areas of the world need access to radically more food, but equally, other areas of the world are suffering from eating too much of the wrong sort of food, and filling landfills with discarded food waste. Many commentators agree we are likely to need a “contract and converge” model, or as Tim Lang, a Professor of Food Policy at City University in London, has eloquently put it: “the rich need to eat less, and differently, so the poor can eat more and differently”.

As well as uncertainty over how global demand will evolve, there is uncertainty about how production will evolve. Since the green revolution, the global focus has been to produce a relatively small handful of commodity crops – maize, wheat, rice, soy, palm oil – in ever larger quantities and ever greater technical efficiencies. This means that “large scale” agriculture can produce calories very cheaply.

For many, food is cheaper than it has ever been (relative to income) and this allows us both to eat a lot and waste a lot. But, however efficient “big ag” is, it creates significant environmental costs – particularly in
eroding soil health, water quality and reducing biodiversity. It also supports few livelihoods, with capital investment increasing, and labour requirements falling.

Read full story here...