

A Quality Agriculture Newsletter

A Call to Farms



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of fisheries and to promote solutions. More information can be found here -

<http://theoceanproject.org/wod/index.php>

Fishing for a Sustainable Way Forward

In the debates over the sustainability of natural resources - whether energy, forests, or food - fisheries are sometimes overlooked. Shifts toward more healthful diets have led to the popularity of the ubiquitous Chilean Sea Bass, Atlantic Salmon, and Thai or Vietnamese Tiger Shrimp. Unfortunately, too often, these products are being raised in a manner equivalent to the industrial production of beef, pork, and chicken with similar detrimental environmental effects.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization has estimated that more than 80% of the world's fish stocks are depleted, overfished, or being fished to their sustainable limits. This can increase the risk of situations like that recently reported by Australian researchers where jellyfish are starting to dominate in some waters and lead to further fish loss (www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2009/06/08/2592139.htm)

Much of this was highlighted at the first annual World Oceans Day which took place on 8 June 2009. This new UN sanctioned event was coordinated by The Ocean Project, an international network of aquariums and other ocean-focused institutes that is working to highlight the problems with the current state

Contributing to the problem are the still too large fishery fleets in many countries. These fleets are often subsidised which leads to unhealthy competition among the fisherman who adopt more and more aggressive fishing tactics. The Pew Environment Group, the environmental arm of the Pew Charitable Trusts (www.pewenvironment.eu/) has started a website to monitor subsidies in the EU (<http://fishsubsidy.org>) As part of World Ocean Day discussion, the World Trade Organization called for fundamental reforms of fishing fleet subsidies to help address some of the supply side issues -

<http://ictsd.net/i/news/bridgesweekly/48339/>

To return to where we started, however, demand is certainly part of the equation. This is where you have the ability to do your part. As discussed a couple of months ago in this space, eating is a political and an environmental act. One good source of information about which fish are more likely to have been raised sustainably can be found at www.fishonline.org a website from the Marine Conservation Society. This website includes a handy pocket guide of "fish to eat" and "fish to avoid" that you can print out and put in your wallet to have with you at hand (www.fishonline.org/information/MCSPocket_Good_Fish_Guide.pdf).

In addition, Greenpeace USA has produced a ranking of major food retailers based on the sustainability of their fish and seafood offerings (USD 16 billion of which is sold per year). For those who know the U.S. retail food market, it should be no surprise that Wegmans and Whole Foods markets made it into the "good" category. What is more surprising is that Ahold also qualified and that Trader Joes (which is often associated with healthy or quality food) was rated as "fails".

Also of surprise to me was that both Target and Walmart were in the "pass" category primarily it seems because of their efforts to develop specific sustainable seafood policies, their increased use of labelling, and the actual removal of several products from their supply chain due to concerns around sustainability. This highlights what I continue to believe – i.e. it is short-sighted to always characterize big as bad and that, given their market power, getting large retailers to focus on sustainability can have large scale effects. The full report, *Carting Away the Ocean*, which contains a large amount of detail on each store's practices, can be found here www.greenpeace.org/usa/press-center/reports4/carting-away-the-oceans

News

As noted previously, Michele Obama created a buzz among the quality food crowd when she planted an organic produce garden at the White House. Not to be outdone, Buckingham Palace in the UK now has its own bio garden as well (no comment on who had the idea first – while the U.S. is often the trend setter the Queen has a long history of such efforts dating back to the Dig for Victory Campaign in WW II so I call it a draw). More details on the latest effort can be found here - www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/jun/14/queen-allotment-organic-gardening

Speaking of the Obama's White House garden, some have accused it of being little more than "greenwash" aimed to generate some positive press. Overall, while there have been some positive signs from the Obama administration regarding support for quality agriculture, the results are frankly mixed. It is not clear if it is

a sin of commission or omission as clearly the economy, climate change, and health care have been higher priorities. The Civil Eats blog posted a letter sent to Obama outlining what it called the contradictions inherent in Obama's policies to date. The letter is here <http://civileats.com/2009/06/23/4118/>

Meanwhile, the Civil Eats blog has posted two statements by a food entrepreneur who is attempting to define what it means to be "pro food" and how that connects with "Slow Food." I agreed with many of the comments attached to the first post which noted the value of using positive definitions for these concepts to avoid the intellectual traps of those who define quality food in terms of what it is not. The second post helpfully introduces the concept of entrepreneurship to the discussion. Finding ways to support the creation of new food businesses is a topic that will no doubt be covered at the Slow Money Alliance meeting. Thus, these posts may give you some new ideas about how to describe what you mean when you speak about food topics.

<http://civileats.com/2009/06/30/pro-food-is%E2%80%A6/>

<http://civileats.com/2009/07/08/pro-food-slow-food-with-an-entrepreneurial-twist/#more-4250>

Resources

Labelling is always a contentious issue. Whether it is the proliferation of labels focused on quality (something the EUs new proposals are hoping to clarify and simplify - http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/quality/policy/communication_en.htm) or health claims on food labels (a perpetual thorn in the side of the US Food and Drug Administration) the purpose and effect of labels on consumers can be debated. For some thoughts on labels and the reasons for country of origin labelling in the US see this summary of an exchange between a sustainable food advocate and a Monsanto public affairs representative captured on Civil Eats - <http://civileats.com/2009/06/17/cool-ing-down-monsanto/>

A recent paper from the Yale University Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity attempted to draw parallels between how the tobacco industry handled claims about the harm associated with smoking and how the manufactured food industry is handling criticisms that their products contribute to obesity. The paper is well worth reading as the authors note unless we learn from history we are doomed to repeat it - www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/industry/FoodTobacco.pdf

Trying to tie together food labelling, food safety, and food manufacturing, the following highlights the continued complexity of the issues when it comes to regulatory policy. No doubt consumers will be delighted by the thought of ice cream that is cheaper, does not melt, and has 50% less fat. Let's just hope the arctic fish who are contributing some DNA to the project are in agreement - <http://en.greenplanet.net/food/gmo/646-soon-in-europe-not-melting-lower-fat-ice-cream-but-is-it-gmo.html>

Discussions continue about food prices and the cause of their rise in 2006-8, their fall in 2008-9, and what may lay ahead for the future. The G8, at its July meeting in Italy, launched the *L'Aquila Food Security Initiative* (http://www.g8italia2009.it/G8/Home/Incontri/Ministeriali/G8-G8_Layout_locale-1199882116809_MinisterialeAgricoltura.htm). The Initiative includes up to USD 12 billion over the next three years to focus on long-term investment in agricultural production in emerging market countries. This is a significant shift away from food aid. While there are still debates around the role of bio fuels, financial speculators, and weather on food price increases, there is no doubt that additional investment is welcomed. The statement by the G8 Agricultural Ministers hits all the related topics (e.g. climate change, rural development, energy, water, food security) that link to food and agriculture.



([http://www.g8italia2009.it/static/G8_Allegato/FINAL_DECLARATION\[1\],0.pdf](http://www.g8italia2009.it/static/G8_Allegato/FINAL_DECLARATION[1],0.pdf)) While these types of statements are usually inspirational, just having a statement is of value particularly when there is also a commitment of money. But just in case the G8 does not succeed, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Oliver De Schutter (www.srfood.org/) made his own proposals at the same time as the G8 meeting <http://www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/F17042A353D3468AC12575EF003539A8?opendocument>

The website of the Financial Times newspaper (www.ft.com/foodprices) has a wealth of material and articles about the food prices increases. These provide a good start for anyone wishing to explore the issue in more depth. In July, the Economist newspaper had an article on the current state of knowledge around the causes and effects of food price increases particularly in emerging markets (www.economist.com/world/international/displaystory.cfm?story_id=13944900). The comments posted on the website in reaction to the article illustrate the range of views on the topic and the emotions that can be stirred up. This is certainly one area where more research would be extremely useful so that the discussions and policy decisions can be guided by factual analysis.

Upcoming Events

17 Sep: New Seed Advisors is holding a conference on Investing in Sustainable Agriculture. This is part of a growing trend of investment oriented activities and conferences. www.newseedadvisors.com/conference/

16 Oct: Every year on this date, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization sponsors World Food Day to raise awareness about food security issues. Last year's focus was on climate change and bio energy. This year it will be on the effects of the financial crisis - www.fao.org/getinvolved/worldfoodday/en/