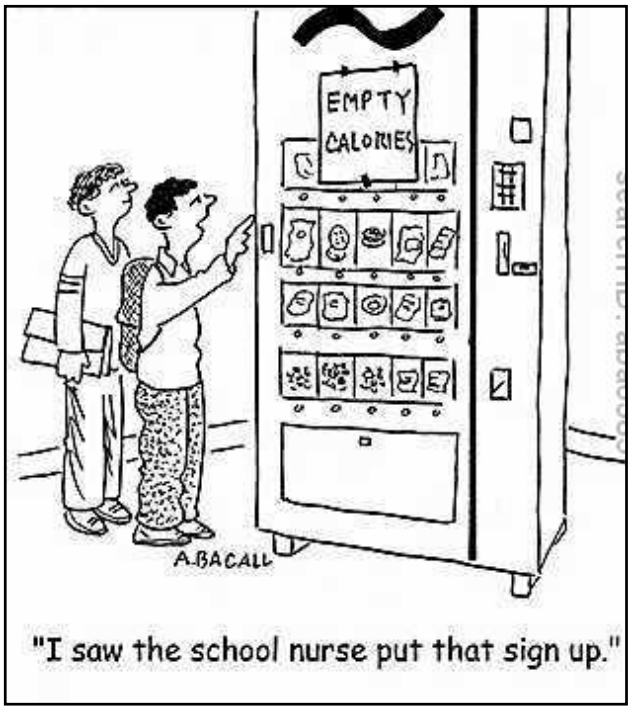
SASKATCHEWAN ELOCUTION AND DEBATE ASSOCIATION

ASSOCIATION D'ELOCUTION ET DES DEBATS DE LA SASKATCHEWAN

Food and Nutrition



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Research prepared by Janessa Weir
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www.saskdebate.com
This is a values resolution.

Impromptu debate – A quick how to

There will be three different resolutions, with ½ hour to prepare for each. Once you have received your resolution:

- □ Work out what the issue is/Figure out what your "precious thing" is/Or answer the question of "why we are having this debate."
- □ Brain storm for ideas independently.
- □ Discuss the possible case lines. Possible examples to substantiate the case.
- □ Define the topic. The definition must be reasonable. What would an average person on the street think that the topic means? Avoid unreasonable definitions.
- □ Develop a theme, an idea which will be underlining both speeches.
- □ Decide who will take each argument
- □ Work on individual speeches, developing arguments and adding examples from life around you
- □ Before the end of the preparation session, come together again and go over definition, theme and arguments so that everyone is comfortable with the case.
- □ If there is time, try to anticipate what the other team is going to bring up for issues/arguments.

When it comes to evidence and specific examples, the most common are examples are the ones that you find in your everyday life. In the high school levels, stay away from personal experiences; examples "My family does this" or "I know someone who does that." You can still use your experiences as a basis, but generalize it more. The best preparation is to regularly watch or read the news.

An almanac and a dictionary are allowed into preparation time. Do not make notes in these books...NOTHING ELSE is allowed. No notes, no electronic devices, no package! Just blank paper and writing tools.

(You may bring this check list in, as long as there is no other information on the page).

This is just a guiding package for students and there are many different examples that you can use. Not all of the topics will be in the debates.

During club practices, run time drills. Pick a topic and build a case in a half hour. Identify areas during the prep period that need more work. Just keep practicing on various topics. This is an excellent way to build a "case book" of common cases.

1
Genetically Modified Foods: Harmful or Helpful?
Deborah B. Whitman
http://www.dasc.vt.edu/faculty/jones/GeneticallyModifiedFoods.htm

What are genetically-modified foods?
The term GM foods or GMOs (genetically-modified organisms) is most commonly used to refer to crop plants created for human or animal consumption using the latest molecular biology techniques. These plants have been modified in the laboratory to enhance desired traits such as increased resistance to herbicides or improved nutritional content. The enhancement of desired traits has traditionally been undertaken through breeding, but conventional plant breeding methods can be very time consuming and are often not very accurate. Genetic engineering, on the other hand, can create plants with the exact desired trait very rapidly and with great accuracy. For example, plant geneticists can isolate a gene responsible for drought tolerance and insert that gene into a different plant. The new genetically-modified plant will gain drought tolerance as well. Not only can genes be transferred from one plant to another, but genes from non-plant organisms also can be used. The best known example of this is the use of B.t. genes in corn and other crops. B.t., or *Bacillus thuringiensis*, is a naturally occurring bacterium that produces crystal proteins that are lethal to insect larvae. B.t. crystal protein genes have been transferred into corn, enabling the corn to produce its own pesticides against insects such as the European corn borer. For two informative overviews of some of the techniques involved in creating GM foods, visit Biotech Basics (sponsored by Monsanto)

What are some of the advantages of GM foods?
The world population has topped 6 billion people and is predicted to double in the next 50 years. Ensuring an adequate food supply for this booming population is going to be a major challenge in the years to come. GM foods promise to meet this need in a number of ways:
• Pest resistance Crop losses from insect pests can be staggering, resulting in devastating financial loss for farmers and starvation in developing countries.
• Herbicide tolerance For some crops, it is not cost-effective to remove weeds by physical means such as tilling, so farmers will often spray large quantities of different herbicides (weed-killer) to destroy weeds, a time-consuming and expensive process, that requires care so that the herbicide doesn't harm the crop plant or the environment.
• Disease resistance There are many viruses, fungi and bacteria that cause plant diseases. Plant biologists are working to create plants with genetically-engineered resistance to these diseases.8,9
• Cold tolerance Unexpected frost can destroy sensitive seedlings. An antifreeze gene from cold water fish has been introduced into plants such as tobacco and potato. With this antifreeze gene, these plants are able to tolerate cold temperatures that normally would kill unmodified seedlings
• Drought tolerance/salinity tolerance As the world population grows and more land is utilized for housing instead of food production, farmers will need to grow crops in locations previously unsuited for plant cultivation.
• Nutrition Malnutrition is common in third world countries where impoverished peoples rely on a single crop such as rice for the main staple of their diet. However, rice does not contain adequate amounts of all necessary nutrients to prevent malnutrition.
If rice could be genetically engineered to contain additional vitamins and minerals, nutrient deficiencies could be alleviated.
How prevalent are GM crops? What plants are involved?

Thirteen countries grew genetically-engineered crops commercially in 2000, and of these, the U.S. produced the majority. In 2000, 68% of all GM crops were grown by U.S. farmers.
In comparison, Argentina, Canada and China produced only 23%, 7% and 1%, respectively. Other countries that grew commercial GM crops in 2000 are Australia, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Mexico, Romania, South Africa, Spain, and Uruguay.
Soybeans and corn are the top two most widely grown crops (82% of all GM crops harvested in 2000), with cotton, rapeseed (or canola) and potatoes trailing behind. 74% of these GM crops were modified for herbicide tolerance, 19% were modified for insect pest resistance, and 7% were modified for both herbicide tolerance and pest tolerance. Globally, acreage of GM crops has increased 25-fold in just 5 years, from

approximately 4.3 million acres in 1996 to 109 million acres in 2000 - almost twice the area of the United Kingdom. Approximately 99 million acres were devoted to GM crops in the U.S. and Argentina alone.

What are some of the criticisms against GM foods?

Environmental activists, religious organizations, public interest groups, professional associations and other scientists and government officials have all raised concerns about GM foods, and criticized agribusiness for pursuing profit without concern for potential hazards, and the government for failing to exercise adequate regulatory oversight. It seems that everyone has a strong opinion about GM foods. Even the Vatican19 and the Prince of Wales have expressed their opinions. Most concerns about GM foods fall into three categories: environmental hazards, human health risks, and economic concerns.

Environmental hazards

• Unintended harm to other organisms Last year a laboratory study was published in *Nature*21 showing that pollen from B.t. corn caused high mortality rates in monarch butterfly caterpillars. Monarch caterpillars consume milkweed plants, not corn, but the fear is that if pollen from B.t. corn is blown by the wind onto milkweed plants in neighboring fields, the caterpillars could eat the pollen and perish.

• Reduced effectiveness of pesticides Just as some populations of mosquitoes developed resistance to the now-banned pesticide DDT, many people are concerned that insects will become resistant to B.t. or other crops that have been geneticallymodified to produce their own pesticides.

• Gene transfer to non-target species Another concern is that crop plants engineered for herbicide tolerance and weeds will cross-breed, resulting in the transfer of the herbicide resistance genes from the crops into the weeds. These "superweeds" would then be herbicide tolerant as well. Other introduced genes may cross over into nonmodified crops planted next to GM crops. The possibility of interbreeding is shown by the defense of farmers against lawsuits filed by Monsanto.

Human health risks

• Allergenicity Many children in the US and Europe have developed life-threatening allergies to peanuts and other foods. There is a possibility that introducing a gene into a plant may create a new allergen or cause an allergic reaction in susceptible individuals.

A proposal to incorporate a gene from Brazil nuts into soybeans was abandoned because of the fear of causing unexpected allergic reactions.31 Extensive testing of GM foods may be required to avoid the possibility of harm to consumers with food allergies.

• Unknown effects on human health There is a growing concern that introducing foreign genes into food plants may have an unexpected and negative impact on human health. A recent article published in Lancet examined the effects of GM potatoes on the digestive tract in rats.

Economic concerns

Bringing a GM food to market is a lengthy and costly process, and of course agri-biotech companies wish to ensure a profitable return on their investment. Many new plant genetic engineering technologies and GM plants have been patented, and patent infringement is a big concern of agribusiness. Yet consumer advocates are worried that patenting these new plant varieties will raise the price of seeds so high that small farmers and third world countries will not be able to afford seeds for GM crops, thus widening the gap between the wealthy and the poor. It is hoped that in a humanitarian gesture, more companies and non-profits will follow the lead of the Rockefeller Foundation and offer their products at reduced cost to impoverished nations.

Patent enforcement may also be difficult, as the contention of the farmers that they involuntarily grew Monsanto-engineered strains when their crops were cross-pollinated shows.

One way to combat possible patent infringement is to introduce a "suicide gene" into GM plants. These plants would be viable for only one growing season and would produce sterile seeds that do not germinate. Farmers would need to buy a fresh supply of seeds each year. However, this would be financially disastrous for farmers in third world countries who cannot afford to buy seed each year and traditionally set aside a portion of their harvest to plant in the next growing season. In an open letter to the public, Monsanto has pledged to abandon all research using this suicide gene technology.35

Conclusion

Genetically-modified foods have the potential to solve many of the world's hunger and malnutrition problems, and to help protect and

preserve the environment by increasing yield and reducing reliance upon chemical pesticides and herbicides. Yet there are many challenges ahead for governments, especially in the areas of safety testing, regulation, international policy and food labeling. Many people feel that genetic engineering is the inevitable wave of the future and that we cannot afford to ignore a technology that has such enormous potential benefits. However, we must proceed with caution to avoid causing unintended harm to human health and the environment as a result of our enthusiasm for this powerful technology.

Tough love for fat people: Tax their food to pay for healthcare

July 27, 2009

http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/booster_shots/2009/07/tough-love-for-fatties-tax-their-food-pay-for-healthcare.html

When historians look back to identify the pivotal moments in the nation's struggle against obesity, they might point to the current period as the moment when those who influenced opinion and made public policy decided it was time to take the gloves off.

As evidence of this new "get-tough" strategy on obesity, they may well cite a study released today by the Urban Institute titled "Reducing Obesity: Policy Strategies From the Tobacco Wars."

In the debate over healthcare reform, the added cost of caring for patients with obesity-related diseases has become a common refrain: most recent is the cost-of-obesity study, also released today by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It finds that as obesity rates increased from 18.3% of Americans in 1998 to 25% in 2006, the cost of providing treatment for those patients' weight-driven problems increased healthcare spending by $40 billion a year.

If you happen to be the 1-in-3 Americans who is neither obese nor overweight (and, thus, considered at risk of becoming obese), you might well conclude that the habits of the remaining two-thirds of Americans are costing you, big time. U.S. life expectancies are expected to slide backward, after years of marching upward. (But that's their statistical problem: Yours is how to make them stop costing you all that extra money because they are presumably making poor choices in their food consumption.)

"Facing the serious consequences of an uncontrolled obesity epidemic, America's state and federal policy makers may need to consider interventions every bit as forceful as those that succeeded in cutting adult tobacco use by more than 50%," the Urban Institute report says. It took awhile -- almost 50 years from the first surgeon general's report on tobacco in 1964 -- to drive smoking down. But in many ways, the drumbeat of scientific evidence and the growing cultural stigma against obesity already are well underway -- as any parent who has tried to bring birthday cupcakes into her child's classroom certainly knows.

Key among the "interventions" the report weighs is that of imposing an excise or sales tax on fattening foods. That, says the report, could be expected to lower consumption of those foods. But it would also generate revenues that could be used to extend health insurance coverage to the uninsured and under-insured, and perhaps to fund campaigns intended to make healthy foods more widely available to, say, low-income Americans and to encourage exercise and healthy eating habits.

If anti-tobacco campaigns are to be the model, those sales taxes could be hefty: The World Health Organization has recommended that tobacco taxes should represent between two-thirds and three-quarters of the cost of, say, a package of cigarettes; a 2004 report prepared for the Department of Agriculture suggested that, for "sinful-food" taxes to change the way people eat, they may need to equal at least 10% to 30% of the cost of the food.

And although 40 U.S. states now impose modest extra sales taxes on soft drinks and a few snack items, the Urban Institute report suggests that a truly forceful "intervention" -- one that would drive down the consumption of fattening foods and, presumably, prevent or reverse obesity -- would have to target pretty much all the fattening and nutritionally empty stuff we eat: "With a more narrowly targeted tax, consumers could simply substitute one fattening food or beverage for another," the reports says.

Of course, the United States also would have to adopt extensive menu- and food-labeling changes that would make "good foods" easily distinguishable from the bad ones subject to added taxes. Not to worry though: Several European countries, most notably Great Britain, have led the way in this area.

And here's the payoff: Conservatively estimated, a 10% tax levied on foods that would be defined as "less healthy" by a national standard adopted recently in Great Britain could yield $240 billion in its first five years and $522 billion over 10 years of implementation -- if it were to begin in October 2010. If lawmakers instituted a program of tax subsidies to encourage the purchase of fresh and processed fruits and vegetables, the added revenue would still be $356 billion over 10 years.

That would pay for a lot of healthcare reform, which some have estimated will cost as much as $1 trillion to implement over the next ten years.

There can be little doubt that lobbyists for the food, restaurant and grocery industries would come out swinging on any of these proposals. But the report cites evidence of a turning political tide for proposals that would hold the obese and other consumers of nutritionally suspect food accountable for their choices. A recent national poll found that 53% of Americans said they favored an increased tax on sodas and sugary soft drinks to help pay for healthcare reform. And even among those who opposed such an idea, 63% switched and said they'd favor such a tax if it "would raise money for health-care reform while also tackling the problems that stem from being overweight."

ON LINE *opinion* -

Taxing fat does little but tax our intelligence

By Felicity McMahon
Posted Wednesday, 4 April 2007

http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=5674

So it turns out that after all this time of thinking that soy products are good for us and having spent the last decade replacing the milk in our lattes with soy milk, each small sip was a step closer to a cancerous ending for us all.

When the New South Wales Cancer Council declared recently (*Sydney Morning Herald*, January 14, 2007) that soy products may actually increase the likelihood of developing cancer, the news was less instructive for latte-sipping city slickers - like myself - and more instructive to our beloved bureaucrats intent on guiding our diet choices through taxing so-called fattening foods.

It turns out, that even science doesn't have the cancer-proof answer to our dieting questions to lay the stepping stones to a cancer-free healthy body and life. So why is it that politicians feel as though they do?

The interesting thing about the news released by the Cancer Institute is how forcefully it demonstrates our transient understanding of diet and nutrition, and how what's good for you today, might be marked as fatal tomorrow. This is an instructive lesson for any government to stay out of mandating food choices by using fiscal remedies such as a fat tax.

By taxing supposedly fatty foods all the government does is indirectly legitimise certain food choices therein denying our own individual ability to make choices for ourselves.

It's an absurdity that fails to realise that moderation is the answer to our food problems, not abolishing particular foods.

Any person, regardless of how vast their belt is, knows that eating particular foods to excess is unhealthy.

If Morgan Spurlock, the man who dared to "diet" merely on McDonalds meals (*Super Size Me*) taught us one thing - and I think that credits him far beyond what he deserves - it was that eating the same thing over and over is not only outrageously dumb, it's boring and unhealthy.

If this is something we already know then, how will adding a tax discourage our unhealthy food choices? The answer is, it simply won't, because we eat burgers, ice cream and hot chips because we like the taste, despite the fact that we know the next morning we'll appear more rotund than yesterday. A tax won't tell us anything we don't, or shouldn't already know.

But even if we were to entertain for a moment the idea of a fat tax, how effective would it be anyway?

If it were a tax slapped arbitrarily on, say, fast foods surely its effectiveness would be undercut by simply over-indulging on other fattening delicacies, such as fresh cream, or excessive amounts of bread or heaven forbid, cheese. Does it make sense at all that fast foods, such as, say, a McDonalds or KFC are smacked with a tax, yet an equally fattening, alternative, such as fresh cream, avoids the taxman's ambit?

The problem with a fat tax is that it is only effective when the tax is applied to an unhealthy quantity of consumption, rather than individual foods *per se*. But a fat tax, would presumably apply equally to your first Big Mac - which might be OK within a balanced diet - as well as on your 10th - which we already know is bad for you.

Consistently poor lifestyle choices cannot be solved by taxing individual foods that on the whole, most of us rarely eat, and where we do, eat in moderation. No fat tax can effectively tackle the core reason for our poor diets: our lack of self-discipline.

Moreover, the problem with a fat tax is that it doesn't create the right incentives. Making "bad food" more expensive will not discourage us from purchasing it. Anyone who's anyone knows that the reason we eat burgers or ice cream isn't because it costs a lot less - you could feed a family of four much more cheaply by ducking into the supermarket and picking up a BBQ chicken - rather it's because we like the taste. Taxing fatty foods wouldn't change how tasty a donor kebab is at 3am after an all-nighter at the pub. We all know we'd pay a premium for something we enjoy, especially after four or five beers.

Often the argument is made that a fat tax has a precedent: that we already tax a range of things that we think people should consume in moderation, such as alcohol and cigarettes, so taxing fattening food is merely an application of those taxes to fatty foods.

Well, wait just a minute. First of all, making that parallel assumes that the taxes on those products are appropriate. Putting that aside for just a moment, it also assumes that those taxes work to deter consumption. The consumption of cigarettes and alcohol is notoriously inelastic, that is, even large changes in the prices of those goods have little impact on our demand for them. They simply don't work to discourage consumption.

The taxes are just another way for a nanny state to tax the legitimate choices of members of society. Legitimate? Yes. Of course choosing to consume an alcoholic beverage or smoking a cigarette or eating a hamburger is a legitimate choice to be made.

Dangerous, you say? Sure, the link between smoking and a range of diseases has been proved, but does that give the government the right to mandate those choices for people? No. The fact that there is so much evidence to prove that there is a link between these so called horrible vices and a range of diseases, and in spite of that, people choose to smoke or drink, must mean that they just don't care. They place a higher value on smoking or drinking, than on a supposed healthier lifestyle. Smokers would prefer a cigarette than a longer life. Drinkers prefer to have a spot of wine with dinner and accept the risk of developing, say, heart disease. I prefer a portion of French fries than a slender belly. We accept the risks associated with a chosen course of action.

In a society that respects the freedom of individual choice, those are legitimate choices to make. When a government places a tax on those choices, it says that individuals are incapable of making these decisions themselves, even though that decision may well be a very well informed one. Just because popular opinion believes that being slim is better than being fat, is no justification for stopping people from living their lives as they see fit.

The ability to make these choices independently of the state for ourselves is a core feature of our liberal democracy. As John Stuart Mill said, "there is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence; and to find that limit, and maintain it against encroachment, is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs, as protection against political despotism." (*On Liberty*).

The only time where we can tolerate an interference with individual autonomy, with the choices that we make for ourselves, Mill argued, is to prevent harm to others. As Mill said, "His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise, or even right. These are good reasons for remonstrating with him, or reasoning with him, or persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him, or visiting him with any evil … Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign."

But even if you do accept that there should be a tax on alcohol and cigarettes, food is certainly in a different category of its own. No study could ever prove that occasionally eating fatty foods leads to any sort of disease. Absent any harm, government interference in the choices of individuals is completely unwarranted.

Ah, but of course, then comes the next argument: allowing people to make those choices means that they will become a burden on the state health system. For that argument to hold, there would need to be a tax on any risky activity, like sport, or sky diving, or driving a car.

Millions of accidents take place while playing sport, or undertaking adventure activities or even while driving a car. These accidents place a huge strain on the health system. We don't place a tax on playing sport or even on sky diving and bungee jumping.

Even if we were to accept this "burden on the state" argument, what sort of precedent does that set for a government's ability to tax us? Does it mean that any choice we make that may one day result in the development of diseases which cause us to burden the state's health system should be taxed? Perhaps then, we should tax women who choose not to have children, since an overwhelming body of medical evidence suggests that women who don't have children are more likely to develop ovarian, breast and cervical cancer? Why not?

Where does that leave us? People are fat and that's not nice for them? What a value-laden statement to make! So much for "it's what's inside that counts".

What is the solution? Let us control our own food choices. Don't use tax to try and create incentives. Leave it up to individuals. They know what's best, even if they find it difficult to walk past the ice cream shop without stopping for a cone and a scoop.

Tax on food is no solution to a lack of individual discipline.

Water Is a Human Right
How privatization gets water to the poor
Ronald Bailey | August 17, 2005

http://reason.com/archives/2005/08/17/water-is-a-human-right

Activists around the world chant the slogan that "water is a human right." Yet more than a billion poor people in the world today lack access to safe drinking water. Twelve million of them die each year from drinking disease-contaminated water.

Among things that would most benefit the world, safe, clean drinking water is clearly a high priority, as pointed out by the Copenhagen Consensus organized by skeptical environmentalist Bjorn Lomborg in 2004.

In 2003 the U.N.'s *World Water Development Report* estimated an annual shortfall of $110 billion to $180 billion in investments needed to provide access to safe water to the poor in the developing world. The U.N.'s Millennium Development Project has a target of reducing by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water by 2015. The economic benefits of halving the number of people without access to safe water-in terms of disease avoided, lives lengthened, and time wasted fetching it-add up to $300 billion to $400 billion annually.

Displaying a surprising lack of imagination, the summary of the Copenhagen Consensus paper on water adopted the conventional wisdom that "water service provision has generally been seen as a government responsibility. This is largely because water is regarded as a public good and its availability as a basic human right, best administered by the public sector." Given the fact that so many of the governments in developing countries have somehow failed to recognize their citizens' supposed right to water, perhaps there is a better way to go?

In his excellent new monograph, *Water for Sale: How Business and the Market Can Resolve the World's Water Crisis*, Swedish analyst Fredrik Segerfeldt makes the case that water privatization can go a long way toward quenching the thirst of the poor. Segerfeldt points out that public water systems in developing countries generally supply politically connected wealthy and middle class people, whereas the poor are not hooked up to municipal water mains. Segerfeldt cites one study of 15 countries that found that in the poorest quarters of their populations, 80 percent of the people were not hooked up to water mains. Of course, the poor don't just die of thirst; they just pay more-generally a lot more-for their water.

"Contractors often drive tankers to poor districts, selling water by the can, in which case the very poorest of the world's inhabitants are already exposed to market forces but on very unfair terms, because water obtained like this is on average twelve times more expensive than water from regular water mains, and often still more expensive than that," notes Segerfeldt. A survey of major cities in developing countries found that the poor in Lagos, Nigeria pay four to 10 times more for their water than people who are hooked up to water mains do; in Karachi, Pakistan they pay 28 to 83 times more; in Jakarta, Indonesia, four to 60 times; and in Lima, Peru, 17 times more. Essentially, the rich get cheap tap water while the poor pay the moral equivalent of Perrier prices.

So now some countries have turned to the private sector and multinational companies for help in providing their thirsty poor citizens with water. Privatization can mean selling entire water supply and treatment systems to private owners; long-term leases of water supply systems; or contracts to manage public water systems. In practical terms, the usual arrangement is a long-term lease. So far, only 3 percent of the poor in developing countries get their water from private-sector water systems. However, these initial projects have provoked an outcry by anti-privatization activists around the world against a "global water grab" by giant corporations.

Segerfeldt shows that even imperfect privatization efforts have already successfully connected millions of poor people to relatively inexpensive water where government-funded efforts have failed. For example, before privatization in 1989, only 20 percent of urban dwellers the African nation of Guinea had access to safe drinking water; by 2001 70 percent did. The price of piped water increased

from 15 cents per cubic meter to almost $1, but as Segerfeldt correctly notes, "before privatization the majority of Guineans had no access to mains water at all. They do now. And for these people, the cost of water has fallen drastically. The moral issue, then, is whether it was worth raising the price for the minority of people already connected before privatization in order to reach the 70 percent connected today." In Cartagena, Colombia privatization boosted the number of people receiving piped water by 27 percent. Even the conflicted privatization in Buenos Aires saw the number of households connected to piped water rise by 3 million and 85 percent of the new customers lived in the poor suburbs of the city. Segerfeldt cites other successful privatizations in Gabon, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Morocco.

But given the often corrupt governments with which corporations must deal, it's not surprising that privatization can be done very badly. Probably the most spectacular case of privatization gone wrong occurred in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Cochabamba is to anti-privatization activists what the Alamo is to Texans. Between 1989 and 1999, the proportion of households connected to the public water system fell from 70 percent to 60 percent. Water was only sporadically available. In the wealthier neighborhoods 99 percent of households were receiving the subsidized water, while in some poorer suburbs less than 4 percent were connected.

The activist myth is that the poor rose up when the evil multinational Bechtel raised the price of water by 43 percent to 60 percent, depending on the customer's income. While it is true that the lucky few of the poorest who were connected to municipal water supplies did see big increases in their water bills, the majority of the poor who stood to be connected for the first time would have paid much less than they were already paying to water vendors. Segerfeldt calculates that piped water prices were already so low that this would mean the poorest 5 percent of the population would be spending 5.4 percent of their incomes on water. Segerfeldt reports that the opposition to privatization was actually lead by middle class and industrial users who had been receiving subsidized water. Opponents also included local water vendors and small farmers who wrongly believed that they were forbidden to access well water.

Under pressure, Bechtel pulled out and Cochabamba's water supply system is once again being run by the old public utility. Segerfeldt claims that water is now available only four hours per day and that no new households at all have been connected to the network since 2000. Meanwhile, the poor are paying 10 times more for their water than are the rich households connected to the system. This is a victory for the poor?

Privatization is not a panacea, but Segerfeldt shows that, when properly done, it can play a huge role in bringing safe clean drinking water to the hundreds of millions of people who still lack it. In the meantime, Segerfeldt wonders, "why anti-privatization activists do not expend as much energy on accusing governments of violating the rights of 1.1 billion people who do not have access to water as they do on trying to stop its commercialization." Good question.

Stop privatizing water, NGOs tell developed countries.
by Jim Lobe

http://www.commondreams.org/headlines03/0527-05.htm

WASHINGTON - More than 100 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from around the world have issued an "Evian Water Challenge" to leaders of the Group of Eight (G8) major industrial nations that will meet next week in Evian, France, demanding that they stop pressuring developing countries to privatize their water resources.

The statement, coordinated by Amsterdam-based Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), is directed primarily at the European members of the G8--especially France, Germany, and Britain--which together dominate the global water market, a growth industry in many developing countries that have been urged by the World Bank and financial agencies to sell off rights to their water resources in order to replenish depleted treasuries and improve service.

But the NGOs, which hail from Europe, North America, Indonesia, Ghana, and Bolivia, insist

that water privatization has proved a bad deal for many countries and consumers.

"The record of water liberalization and privatization around the world has been a disaster," according to Clare Joy of the London-based World Development Movement (WMD). "Many developing countries and impoverished communities have rejected the idea of providing water for profit, yet the European members of the G8 are pushing them into a trade agreement, lobbied for by business and negotiated in secret, that will lock in liberalization regardless of the cost to the poor and vulnerable."

She was referring to the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) that is the subject of ongoing negotiations under the Geneva-based World Trade Organization (WTO). Launched in 2000, the accord would require countries to drop all barriers to private investment in a range of public services and utilities, from water systems to hospitals.

Such a provision would greatly benefit six major multinational companies, which between them account for virtually all private investment in water utilities in developing countries. They include the two largest, France's Suez and Vivendi Environment corporations; followed by Thames Water, owned by Germany's RWE AG; Saur, another French company; United Utilities of Britain, and Bechtel. Altogether private companies control about five percent of the global water sector.

Active in the water sector of only 12 countries in 1990, the six companies now operate in 56 countries and two territories. A World Bank report released at the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto in March predicted that global investment in water will have to double over the next 20 years to keep pace with demand, particularly if global targets for providing safe water supplies and sanitation to the two billion people living on less than US$2 a day are to achieved.

The European Union (EU) has been especially aggressive. They are demanding that 72 countries open their water sectors to foreign private investment in the GATS negotiations. The NGOs want the EU to withdraw those demands at the Evian summit, June 1-3.

In February, the Washington-based Center for Public Integrity and its Consortium of Investigative Journalists released a report that concluded that privatization had cut off millions of people from safe-water supplies, resulting, for example, in South Africa's worst-ever cholera outbreak, which killed nearly 300 people and infected more than 250,000.

The privatization of Bolivia's water system provoked major unrest in Cochabamba where skyrocketing rates threatened to cut off tens of thousands of people from their supply of safe water.

The companies themselves and the EU claim that private companies can generally supply water and sanitation more efficiently--and thus at cheaper rates over time--to consumers, including the poor, but activists insist that the record shows otherwise.

“The EU's push for water privatization in developing countries is covered in a layer of sustainable development rhetoric," according to CEO. "But the bottom line is to secure profitable markets for European water corporations."

Among the groups supporting the "Evian Challenge" are Britain's Save the Children and War on Want, Friends of the Earth Europe; the anti-globalization group Attac; Public Citizen of the U.S.; and Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida, a coalition which led a major campaign against a Bechtel subsidiary in Bolivia.

Teenagers and Cosmetic Surgery

Why are more and more young women opting for breast implants? Catherine Redfern offers an explanation.

http://www.thefword.org.uk/features/2001/04/teenagers_and_cosmetic_surgery

Cast your mind back to the start of 2001. The news was full of debates around cosmetic surgery, particularly breast enlargements. It was all sparked off by 15 year old Jenna Franklin, who was thrust into the spotlight when she decided to have breast implants for her 16th birthday. Her mother, who herself had had two breast operations, and who runs her own plastic surgery business, said she and her husband would happily pay the £3,250 for the operation.

Jenna was articulate, slim, and pretty, but explained her decision saying she was unhappy with her body and that a breast enlargement would give her more self-confidence and get rid of her hang-ups. She also asserted that you need big breasts to be successful in life, naming various celebrities such as Britney Spears and Pamela Anderson as proof.

There was a flurry of press comment and criticism. She's far too young, they said (i.e. if she was a bit older there'd be no problem); she probably hasn't finished growing, they said (i.e. if she waits a while, she might get bigger breasts, then she'll be okay); she's emotionally too young to cope with the repercussions, they said.

No-one seemed to question the fundamental assumptions behind it: that 'big' breasts are desirable; why breasts are such an issue; that if a woman thinks she has small breasts she should want to change them.

Soon after, Channel 4 showed a documentary called 'Perfect Breasts', investigating the apparently growing phenomenon of young women opting for cosmetic enhancement. The programme featured women and girls explaining how they were unhappy with their bodies, and how they 'just want to look normal.' Interesting. The bit I remember most is a scene of two sisters, both who'd had breast implants, eating dinner with their parents and discussing the possibility that they may never be able to breast feed a baby. The younger sister said it didn't bother her in the slightest, that the very idea of her breasts being used to nourish a baby was repulsive. "They're sex objects, to me" she explained with gusto, giggling, "Sex objects!" Her father mumbled nervously in protest. "Most natural thing you can do, breast feeding…" but he was soon drowned out by the chatter from the women. It struck me as humorous, strangely sad, and also telling about different attitudes to the humble breast.

Now, teenagers having cosmetic surgery is not new. It's been happening in the USA for years. In the richer American cultures for their 16th birthday, boys get a car, girls get a nose-job. Even over here the issue is old news. In 1998 the BBC investigated younger and younger girls having cosmetic surgery, and plastic surgeons willing to offer it to them. In 1999 they reported what women wanted; Emma Bunton's nose, Melinda Messenger's breasts, thighs of Naomi Campbell, etc. Recently WH Smith began stocking 'Cosmetic Surgery Magazine'.

It's not the specific issue of breast implants I am talking about really. Neither is it the young age of these girls: I've argued in another article that 16 years olds should be treated as young women and their opinions respected (only if they agree with me, of course! ;-)). The solution is not to ban 16 year olds from having plastic surgery, or ban it altogether. I'm all for the fundamental right of women to do what they want with their bodies and make their own decisions about their lives. BUT I believe there is a more fundamental issue here; that what's behind this are some unquestioned assumptions about womens bodies that our society subscribes to. These assumptions are:

1. Something is fundamentally wrong with the female body and it's natural to be unhappy with it.

It's not just natural teenage insecurity either. In our society, adult female bodies are treated like mistakes that continually need correcting. It's too smelly, it's too hairy, it's the wrong shape, it's the wrong colour. We're seen to be badly designed somehow, needing extra stuff to make them okay. Being unhappy about your body is often presented as one of the essential personality traits of women, if we believe what

society tells us. I've heard many times suggested, often humorously, that in the darkest ages of humankind, women were whining to their caveman mates, 'does my bum look big in this loincloth?' Silly yes, but there's also a subtext that says it's something women have always done and will always do. We just instinctively hate our bodies, and, we are brought up to believe, with good reason.

Take Bridget Jones and her ilk. Women who are obsessed with how they look, the size of their bum, and convinced they are the wrong shape are an absolute staple of women's fiction, and Bridget is hailed as representing 'everywoman'. Of course Bridget is humorous, and exagerrates the obsessiveness to comic effect; but the fact is there is something in all exagerrations that we are supposed to understand and relate to. They simultaneously take the piss out of such irrational concerns and enable us to sympathise with them, whilst stuffing us with the unsubtle morality: maybe you're not as fat as you think you are and maybe just maybe, looks don't matter that much. Well gee, thanks for pointing that one out!

How many times have you had to convince your friends that their bum is not as big as they think it is? I've heard this from the skinniest friends of mine, obsessing about parts of their bodies. It's come to something when the best way to comfort and reassure them is to act like you're jealous; 'Your bum's nonexistent, you bitch!' The TV fashion and beauty programme 'She's Gotta Have It', trailed their new series mentioning 'the hang ups we all have'. The hang ups we all have. Proves my point perfectly.

It's almost seen as an essential part of the female experience. If I was to say, if asked, that I'm completely happy with my body and wouldn't want to change it, I'd be viewed as an arrogant cow. Who does she think she is? What's the question female celebrities are usually asked in interviews? 'If you could change any part of your body, what would it be?' Surely we can come closer to a feminist critique of the beauty myth than letting celebrities and models admit that, guess what? They hate their bodies too.

2. If we're unhappy about our bodies, we should change it. And, women are changeable creatures. If you think there's something wrong with your body, change it. If your lips arn't the right shape, fake it. If your hair is the wrong colour, dye it. If your skin isn't matte enough or glossy enough or good enough, change it. If your eyelashes are too thin, change it. If your body isn't good enough, get something done.

Girls who've been brought up on the idea that our bodies can be altered at a whim by make-up and everything else, think of cosmetic surgery as the next logical step. People who attack cosmetic surgery but don't see the connection with other forms of women changing and camoflaging our bodies to fit the social norms are missing something deeper.

I'm not saying that if you wear lipstick you will eventually have a boob job. Of course not. But I think it's on the same spectrum; something you do to change yourself and make yourself acceptable. If you put on makeup every day to face the world, to correct and improve your face, you are falling for the same lie; the underlying idea that there is something unacceptable about you that needs to be corrected.

I'm aware I sound really radical here! I'm torn every day between my feminist ideals and the impulse to just - well, lighten up. I don't know where the dividing line is between adorning and decorating our bodies to add colour and fun to the world, and changing our bodies to present a false image to be acceptable. Where does one end and the other begin? It's a tricky one. On the one hand I refute the concept that there is an unchangable standard of beauty and it's only natural and right that women should try to attain it. But on the other, I'm not suggesting there is anything wrong with having a fashionable hair cut, being interested in trendy clothes, or being bright and colourful. And I can't deny the fact that makeovers are just - well - *fun!*
Nevertheless, I think that women are seen, far more than men, as changable creatures. As Richard Madely from 'This Morning' said, before a foreign young woman who'd never worn make-up before underwent a makeover; 'She's a real blank canvas'. As the Head and Shoulders ad with the Mona Lisa wannabe puts it; 'a work of art'. She literally is a blank canvas; painted by a man.

Nothing demonstrates more clearly that women are seen as changeable creatures than the

makeover. The traditional before and after shots; the gasps when the 'new' woman is brought out 'you look amamzing!' the fact of how completely different they look surely says something about how femininity is a construction. Ever noticed that men who have makeovers don't look as different as the women tend to do? Does this mean that women are essentially, inherently, blank canvases to be filled in and altered by fashion stylists, make-up artists - or plastic surgeons? I'd like to think not.

There are many, many examples of the makeover factor, and of women being encouraged to change themselves to fit in with what other people think they should be.

At the end of the film *The Breakfast Club*, the coolest female character who dresses in black, sulks and peers out from under her duffle coat through thick black eyeliner, gets madeover and is instantly more attractive and acceptable to the other characters. She's forced into white, prissy clothes - an alice-band, for goodness sake - and gets to wear make-up, which instantly makes her look far better, of course, and allows her to get the guy. In *Grease*, Sandy only gets to be popular when she rejects her uncool look and fakes it as a raunchy leather-clad wild-child. As an uncool girl myself at school, it seemed like a surrender. Similarly, I remember watching *Neighbours* years ago, when plain Jane gets made-over for a prom and emerges sparkling into the living room and shocks her date, who had previously been grumpily expecting to have to go to the prom with the ugly girl. How many times have we seen *that* tired plot line?

Many times, in stories like *Cinderella* and *My Fair Lady*, updated for modern times by *Miss Congeniality*, in which Sandra Bullock plays an 'unladylike' FBI agent who gets to work undercover as a beauty queen. The trailers showed a male collegue shouting at her 'Don't worry - no-one thinks of ya that way.' Presumably, when she emerges swaying in a tight pink dress, hair gleaming, they darn well do.

So, breast surgery is just a type of makeover for girls who want to 'look normal'. Nevertheless, some women have claimed that getting a boob job is a feminist act. All the women who get breast enlargements will claim they are doing for themselves, not for anyone else; they're doing it to empower themselves. Of course they are doing it for themselves. Who else would they be doing it for? But the fact is, they're doing it so they'll be happy with their own body, in a breast obsessed society. I find it hard to believe that if they lived in a remote society and had never heard of cosmetic surgery, they'd somehow have an inherent, deep-seated unhappiness with the size of their breasts and want to make them bigger.

So, I think this is what's behind the breast implant boom. The underlying expectation that women hate their bodies, which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. And the idea that women are changeable, able to make ourselves over in a few hours, or by a team of make-up artists and hair-stylists, or indeed, by a few days spent having plastic surgery. Added to a culture obsessed with a part of the female body - the breast at the moment, there you have it. It's heartbreaking to see young women convinced there's something repulsive about their own bodies. But you can't condemn women for having breast implants if you think its normal to refuse to leave the house without make-up. It springs from the same root.

For further reading, I really recommend the excellent book *The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf.

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/pf/48519069.html

Scientific Pitfalls Complicate Cloning Debate

Ben Harder
For National Geographic News

May 31, 2002

In an awe-inspiring scene from *Episode II: Attack of the Clones,* a mass-produced legion of identical men appears to march off an assembly line like so many Ford Model T's. The cloned soldiers look, think, and act alike, and their performance in battle proves beyond a doubt that they are hearty and hale members of the human race.

But scientific theory and experience in the lab show that cloning—either people or animals—may not be as easy as science fiction makes it look. Scientists are still struggling to understand whether it's even feasible to reliably coax molecules of DNA extracted from a single cell to develop into a living genetic replica of an entire organism.

"Cloning is as much an art as it is a science," said Robert Lanza of Advanced Cell Technology in Worcester, Massachusetts.

So while politicians, ethicists, and voters grapple with the vexing questions that surround the morality of cloning, scientists are struggling with a biological rather than an ethical problem: Cloning people might not be safe.

Success—and Many Failures

After years of experiments involving frogs, salamanders, and simpler organisms, cloning hit the big time in February 1997. That month, scientists reported the first successful attempt to reproduce a large, adult mammal through cloning. Nicknamed Dolly, the cloned sheep became an instant media darling and a symbol of the scientific promise of cloning.

Since Dolly, cows, pigs, monkeys, an adorable kitten, and even rare and endangered animals have all been produced through cloning. Some of these have survived to be adults and even reproduced.

But other clones have experienced terrible health problems, and many cloned embryos don't even survive to birth. Not everyone realizes that Dolly was the final success story at the end of a string of unsuccessful attempts and spontaneous abortions. Scores of sheep embryos died before they had even developed to a stage at which scientists could insert them into a live female.

A Complex Process

Cloning an animal is a complex process that can go fatally wrong at any stage. The process, also called nuclear transfer, begins when a nucleus is removed from an egg cell. This DNA-containing packet is discarded.

Next, a nucleus with a complete set of DNA is meticulously extracted from a single cell, itself removed painlessly from the skin or body of the living organism that's to be cloned. That nucleus is transferred by a delicate operation into the nucleus-deprived egg.

The egg then needs to be tricked into behaving as though it has been fertilized, a process that is usually triggered when a sperm fuses with the egg during sexual reproduction.

The pseudo-fertilized egg, containing the DNA of the clone subject, begins to multiply. Once it has grown to a certain size, the tiny embryo must be implanted into the uterus of a female that can nourish it and carry it to term.

"All those steps are critically important," Lanza said. "It's not surprising that you can screw it up." Research teams that have practiced the technique numerous times can get a good success rate, Lanza said. But the process can and often does go disturbingly awry, and there are some situations where practice could be morally unacceptable.

Casualties of Cloning

In late November of last year, Lanza and his colleagues reported the first successful effort to coax a human egg containing DNA from another human cell into beginning the process of developing into an embryo. Eggs containing the inserted DNA began to replicate, but they died after growing to just four or six cells each.

(Several secretive groups of scientists claim to be close to cloning a live human baby, but they have released little information to the public, and their claims have not been verified.)

If animal cloning experiments are any guide, attempts to clone people may face a high rate of failure. Often many nuclei must be transferred from cell to egg for each one that succeeds in developing into an embryo. This so-called wastage is much higher in cloning than in other reproductive technologies, such as in vitro fertilization, said Don Wolf, a researcher working to clone rhesus monkeys at the Oregon Regional Primate Research Center.

Furthermore, Wolf said, "there are suggestions that animals produced by nuclear transfer may not be as healthy as we first expected."

Cloned animals have been subject to an array of health and developmental problems, including oxygen shortage in the womb, infections after birth, ill-formed lungs, and liver damage.

It isn't clear which of these problems are intrinsically tied to cloning, and which may have resulted from poor execution of relatively unpracticed techniques—or even sheer bad luck.

"Our lack of knowledge is grossly apparent, Wolf said. We really don't have much of a clue" about why cloning so often goes wrong, he said.

Fortunately, we do have some guesses. Cloning requires taking a nucleus from an adult cell that is developed for a particular function in a particular part of the body. To properly specialize, nuclei of adult cells turn off certain genes, or certain copies of genes, and turn on others.

But transferring that nucleus out of that cell and into an egg doesn't necessarily guarantee that it will forget its past and revert to the uncommited state of an embryo nucleus, Wolf said.

That inescapable nuclear memory could lead to activation of the wrong genes at the wrong times—and might therefore lie at the root of cellular programming problems that kill many clones.

A study in the journal *Nature Genetics,* published online on May 28, supports this idea. Jerry Yang of the University of Connecticut, Storrs, and his colleagues reported that cloned cows that die shortly after birth have unusual patterns of inactivated DNA on their X-chromosomes. Cloned cows that lived, on the other hand, have normal patterns of DNA inactivation.

Weighty Problems

Other studies have suggested that cloned mice are much more likely to become obese in middle age. Why this happens is unclear.

Clones can also be excessively large at birth. That might not necessarily be bad for the clone, but the process of giving birth could harm the mother. So-called "large-calf syndrome" affects cows and sheep in particular, Wolf said.

There are also problems with the structure that links the mother to her fetus, called the placenta, which provides the lifeline on which the growing organism depends.

Even when a cloned animal survives to birth and health problems aren't immediately evident, it may suffer developmental problems. Some could crop up years after their birth.

"There could be subtle differences that creep up later on," Lanza acknowledged. But, he said, many animals that survive the first few days of their lives appear to

develop normally and healthfully.

Lanza and his colleagues have reported that cloned cows do not typically develop abnormal body weight when they reach middle age. The mid-life obesity phenomenon could be a problem limited to specific breeds of mice, he suggested.

Not Immune?

Hoping to help rescue an endangered cow-like animal called a gaur from extinction, the researchers at Advanced Cell Technology recently cloned one and inserted the embryo into a cow. The cloned gaur survived birth, but the precious animal died from an infection three days later.

Whether the gaur's fatal susceptibility to the infection had anything to do with it being a clone is unknown, but there are some hints that cloned animals could have unnaturally weak immune systems.

One recent study of cloned mice found that the majority of them died within 800 days of birth, apparently of pneumonia. Just one in seven non-cloned mice died so prematurely under the same lab conditions.

Other cloned animals react abnormally to immunizations, perhaps because they don't acquire some of the immune antibodies that fetuses typically inherit from their mothers through the placenta.

Facing the Risk

No one knows whether the difficulties that plague animal cloning will render human cloning impossible or, at any rate, unacceptably risky. But if the only way to find out is to try, and perhaps to try again, the emotional and moral costs could be substantial.

"There's no reason to think biologically that humans would be any [more difficult] than other animals we've cloned," Lanza said. "But each species requires going up a learning curve." Producing Dolly, he noted, required scores of unsuccessful attempts.

When it comes to making copies of organisms, humans aren't experimental subjects on which most scientists are willing to try unreliable procedures. So regardless of how the ongoing ethical debate unfolds, science may hold off on trying to replicate people until it's entirely clear how the process of cloning works—and why it sometimes doesn't.

To put in the terms a certain wise old organism might have used: "Do, or do not. There is no try." But then again, Yoda was one of a kind.

Sunday, Jan. 05, 2003

Abducting The Cloning Debate

http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1004009,00.html

By Nancy Gibbs

We think of science as a clean and logical place where, with the right skills and instruments, you can see the world in a grain of sand. So what happens when you cross science with a circus full of clowns and tricks and gaudy lights, where everything is for sale and nothing is for real?

The science circus comes to town when a group like the Raelians claims to be cloning children, announcing one arrival just in time to fill the holiday news vacuum. The news came as a shock but not much of a surprise. It was only a matter of time before one of the teams racing to produce the first human clone either succeeded or just decided to claim it had. Chemist Brigitte Boisselier, president of the biotech company Clonaid, is a member of the Order of Angels of the Raelian religious cult, whose prophet Rael says 4-ft.-tall green space aliens visited him 30 years ago in a French volcano and revealed that all of us are descended from the clones they planted here 25,000 years ago. With her announcement of a miracle baby named Eve and the group's subsequent claim of a second cloned

birth, the most important debate in morals and medicine is delivered into such hands to mangle.

Activists who argue passionately over the ethics of cloning, and research on embryos in general, found themselves united in their disgust. When he saw the Raelians on TV, says Arthur Caplan, director of the Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania, he thought, "Preposterous announcement by kooks." But he also felt despair, as did many scientists who believe that the only way the most morally intricate research can proceed is by keeping it away from charlatans. "I knew they would have a very damaging impact on the cloning debate. First, they would just plain scare people," Caplan notes. "The Raelians are not the picture you want in people's minds when they write their Congressman about cloning."

And write they will, as Congress returns to wrestle with where to erect the guardrails around new reproductive technologies. There is a near consensus for outlawing what the Raelians claim to be doing — cloning one person's cells in order to grow a genetic replica — on the grounds that the risks are too great and the moral costs too high. But so far, no national ban has been passed because a fierce debate still surrounds other forms of research that borrow some of the same techniques. Supporters of "therapeutic cloning," in which embryos are cloned to harvest their stem cells but never grown into a baby, argue that these primitive cells, which can turn into any kind of cell in the body, may hold the secret to cures for Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and other diseases. "Of course, all society — from scientists to politicians — is against human reproductive cloning," asserts Dr. Robert Lanza, medical director of Advanced Cell Technology, a biotech firm in Worcester, Mass., that has led the way in cloning human embryos for stem-cell research. "No one wants to see 100 copies of Madonna or Michael Jordan. But it would be tragic if this outrage spills over into legitimate medical research that could cure millions of patients."

It is harder for the biotech companies to argue for compromise in a world where the worst-case scenario is getting all the attention. The Raelians are to the labs of America what Enron was to the boardrooms, a rebuke to the premise that science can be self-policing. "If you allow embryo cloning in research labs because of its supposed great potential," argues Representative Dave Weldon, Republican from Florida who did research in molecular genetics in graduate school, "you're going to have all these labs with all these embryos, and it will be that much easier for people like the Raelians to try to do reproductive cloning." Last session Congress passed a bill banning all cloning, but it died in the Senate, where lawmakers still hoped to write rules that will allow some embryonic research to proceed. Thanks to the Baby Eve announcement, supporters of a total ban feel that their chances are now much improved: "I think that gave it more of a sense of a clear and present danger," says Kansas Senator Sam Brownback, who plans to reintroduce his bill quickly. His legislation would make it illegal even to import products derived from cloning done overseas — which some say raises the possibility that if scientists in Britain find a cure for Alzheimer's, American patients will be barred from getting it.

Indeed, some scientists argue that a total cloning ban would impel top U.S. scientists to move overseas, where there is more public support. Britain banned reproductive cloning but is allowing therapeutic research to move forward. "Blanket bans on technology are almost always a mistake," argues Tim Caulfield, research director of the Health Law Institute at the University of Alberta. "You don't ban fertilizer because you can use it to make bombs. Don't ban cloning because it may be abused. What we should do is regulate the activities that may be abused, like human reproductive cloning."

No one doubts there's a demand for human cloning. On its website, Clonaid estimates it will charge $200,000 for its reproductive service, but Boisselier insisted to TIME that so far she has not charged the first guinea pigs. Clonaid also sells human eggs for about $5,000 each and offers "banks" in which to store cells in case a family wants to clone a loved one in the future. Boisselier also has a pet-cloning service called Clonapet, which she says has also received great interest. "The media only want to talk about possible birth defects, that the baby will be a monster, but the e-mails I get from people tell us we're brave, that we should go ahead," says Boisselier.

Still, there was ample reason to challenge her claims of success, even before she began backing off her promise of providing proof. No one has

yet succeeded in cloning a primate despite thousands of tries; efforts at a dog have so far failed as well. Even among other mammals, more than 90% of the embryos never implant or die before or soon after birth. Among those most dismissive of her entire operation are the other researchers rushing to beat it, such as Italian fertility specialist Severino Antinori. He missed his own deadline, having announced last spring that he had a clone due in November. But he is quite certain Boisselier, who has yet to produce Baby Eve, hasn't succeeded either. "It's a great bluff," he barked into his cell phone. "I'm amazed the media believe this."

The damage is done whether Clonaid's claims are a hoax or not. The Raelians can be assured that all the free advertising has worked, and inquiries from prospective parents will rise with each new headline. This desperation leads some lawmakers, ethicists and scientists themselves to argue that it is time to take a broader look at the rules that govern reproductive science. According to a new survey by Johns Hopkins University, two-thirds of Americans approve of using genetic screening to help parents have a baby free of a serious genetic disorder. But more than 70% are against using such techniques to design children to be smarter or more attractive, and 76% are against working on ways to clone humans.

So what should be permissible and what should not? Does the promise of a new technology outweigh the risks that it could be misused? The challenges are too important to address in a climate of fear or ignorance or to be distorted by the greed or vainglory of renegade scientists with an alien agenda.

Menu Bill Would Order Nutritional Information

By Mariana Minaya
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, August 1, 2007

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/31/AR2007073101638.html

Menus in Montgomery County's chain restaurants would have to list nutritional information such as calories, sodium and fat content under a proposal submitted yesterday to the County Council.

"I know people don't want to be nagged," said council member George L. Leventhal (D-At Large), the bill's sponsor. "I just think what we want to try to do is provide consumers with more information. What they do with that information is up to them."

The proposal would require restaurants with at least 10 national locations to prominently publish the information for standard menu items. Restaurants with menu boards would be allowed to post only calorie counts as long as they could readily provide the other information.

Two other U.S. jurisdictions have such requirements: New York City and King County, Washington. The D.C. Council is considering a similar proposal.

Montgomery restaurants that already include nutritional information on menus would be required to publish the information by Aug. 1, 2008, while other locations would have an additional year to comply.

Restaurant representatives said the bill unfairly singles out their industry to blame for the nation's obesity problem. And the requirement is impractical, given the limited space on menus, they said.

"The more space we have to devote to nutritional information, the less space we have to describe the ingredients -- the kind of information that helps customers choose what they want to eat," said Melvin Thompson, vice president of government relations for the Restaurant Association of Maryland.

This is not the first time Montgomery has taken a lead on health issues. In May, the council passed a ban on trans fats in foods in restaurants, supermarket bakeries and delis, effective next year. Four years ago, smoking in county restaurants and bars was prohibited.

This bill is a good follow-up to other issues the county has tackled, said council member Duchy Trachtenberg (D-At Large), who co-sponsored the bill. "I think this is another important step to take to protect public health," she said.

The bill is meant to abate what appears to be the growing role of the food industry in obesity rates. U.S. residents consume about a third of their calories from eating out, according to a USDA Agriculture Information Bulletin cited in a county report. Food from restaurants and other establishments contains more calories than food prepared in the home and can contribute to obesity, the report said.

Thompson said the restaurant industry will lobby the council to find a compromise that is less onerous for its businesses.

He said restaurants prefer to list nutritional information that goes beyond the three indicators chosen by the council on Web sites or signs rather than on menus.

"We're not sure whether simply providing this information will encourage customers to change their behavior," he said. "We've seen nutritional information on food packaging since the early 1990s, yet during that time our obesity rates in the country have doubled."

The council has set a public hearing on the proposal for 7:30 p.m. Sept. 18.

www.eatlocal.net

10 Reasons to Eat Local Food

Eating local means more for the local economy. According to a study by the New Economics Foundation in London, a dollar spent locally generates twice as much income for the local economy. When businesses are not owned locally, money leaves the community at every transaction.

Locally grown produce is fresher. While produce that is purchased in the supermarket or a big-box store has been in transit or cold-stored for days or weeks, produce that you purchase at your local farmer's market has often been picked within 24 hours of your purchase. This freshness not only affects the taste of your food, but the nutritional value which declines with time.

Local food just plain tastes better. Ever tried a tomato that was picked within 24 hours? 'Nuff said.

Locally grown fruits and vegetables have longer to ripen. Because the produce will be handled less, locally grown fruit does not have to be "rugged" or to stand up to the rigors of shipping. This means that you are going to be getting peaches so ripe that they fall apart as you eat them, figs that would have been smashed to bits if they were sold using traditional methods, and melons that were allowed to ripen until the last possible minute on the vine.

Eating local is better for air quality and pollution than eating organic. In a March 2005 study by the journal Food Policy, it was found that the miles that organic food often travels to our plate creates environmental damage that outweighs the benefit of buying organic.

Buying local food keeps us in touch with the seasons. By eating with the seasons, we are eating foods when they are at their peak taste, are the most abundant, and the least expensive.

Buying locally grown food is fodder for a wonderful story. Whether it's the farmer who brings apples to market or the baker who makes bread, knowing part of the story about your food is such a powerful part of enjoying a meal.

Eating local protects us from bioterrorism. Food with less distance to travel from farm to plate has less susceptibility to harmful contamination.

Local food translates to more variety. When a farmer is producing food that will not travel a long distance, will have a shorter shelf life, and does not have a high-yield demand, the farmer is free to try small crops of various fruits and vegetables that would probably never make it to a large supermarket. Supermarkets are interested in selling "Name brand" fruit: Romaine Lettuce, Red Delicious Apples, Russet Potatoes. Local producers often play with their crops from year to year, trying out Little Gem Lettuce, Senshu Apples, and Chieftain Potatoes.

Supporting local providers supports responsible land development. When you buy local, you give those with local open space - farms and pastures - an economic reason to stay open and undeveloped.

Friday, Mar. 02, 2007

Eating Better Than Organic

http://www.locavorenetwork.com/content/time-magazine-article-eating-better-organic

By John Cloud

Not long ago I had an apple problem. Wavering in the produce section of a Manhattan grocery store, I was unable to decide between an organic apple and a nonorganic apple (which was labeled conventional, since that sounds better than "sprayed with pesticides that might kill you"). It shouldn't have been a tough choice--who wants to eat pesticide residue?--but the organic apples had been grown in California. The conventional ones were from right here in New York State. I know I've been listening to too much npr because I started wondering: How much Middle Eastern oil did it take to get that California apple to me? Which farmer should I support--the one who rejected pesticides in California or the one who was, in some romantic sense, a neighbor? Most important, didn't the apple's taste suffer after the fruit was crated and refrigerated and jostled for thousands of miles?

In the end I bought both apples. (They were both good, although the California one had a mealy bit, possibly from its journey.) It's only recently

that I had noticed more locally grown products in the supermarket, but when I got home I discovered that the organic-vs.-local debate has become one of the liveliest in the food world. Last year Wal-Mart began offering more organic products--those grown without pesticides, antibiotics, irradiation and so on--and the big company's expansion into a once alternative food culture has been a source of deep concern, and predictable backlash, among early organic adopters.

Nearly a quarter of American shoppers now buy organic products once a week, up from 17% in 2000. But for food purists, "local" is the new "organic," the new ideal that promises healthier bodies and a healthier planet. Many chefs, food writers and politically minded eaters are outraged that "Big Organic" firms now use the same industrial-size farming and long-distance-shipping methods as conventional agribusiness. "Should I assume that I have a God-given right to access the entire earth's bounty, however far away some of its produce is grown?" asks ethnobotanist Gary Paul Nabhan in his 2002 memoir, Coming Home to Eat: The Pleasures and Politics of Local Foods. Nabhan predicted my apple problem when he vacillated over some organic pumpkin canned hundreds of miles from his Arizona home. "If you send it halfway around the world before it is eaten," he mused, "an organic food still may be 'good' for the consumer, but is it 'good' for the food system?"

I had never really thought about how my food purchases might affect "the food system." Even now I don't share the pessimism and asceticism of the local-eating set. In her 2001 memoir, This Organic Life, Columbia University nutritionist Joan Dye Gussow writes that her commitment to eating locally "is probably driven by three things. The first is the taste of live food; the second is my relation to frugality; the third is my deep concern about the state of the planet." I don't have much relation to frugality, and, perhaps foolishly, I'm more optimistic than Gussow about our ability to develop alternative energy sources.

But I care deeply about how my food tastes, and it makes sense that a snow pea grown by a local farmer and never refrigerated will retain more of its delicate leguminous flavor than one shipped in a frigid plane from Guatemala. And I realized that if more consumers didn't become part of the local-food market, it could disappear and all our peas would be those tasteless little pods from far away.

Still, the fact that not all locally grown products are organic had me worried. Even if most Americans wanted to buy locally grown organics, they wouldn't be able to find many. In a few not-too-dry, not-too-wet, not-too-warm regions--central California is one--it is possible to find abundant organic produce grown locally. But if you live in a humid climate, say, the moisture that encourages bacteria and fungi means that growing without pesticides is much more risky, expensive and rare. Consequently, in the Hudson Valley of New York, near me, it's very difficult to find fruit that hasn't been sprayed with chemicals at least once. In other regions, like the upper Midwest, most big farms don't grow any vegetables for local markets, conventional or organic. Instead, they produce commodity crops like corn and soybeans for sale to food processors. At a large Hugo's grocery store in Jamestown, N.D., last summer, I noticed only one local product: flour, which is milled in-state from local wheat. But there were organic apples and oranges from out of state.

Farmers' markets often feature organic produce from nearby farms, but not everyone lives near a farmers' market--and most products at the markets aren't organic. "I've been to farmers' markets, and there's people hauling stuff from the truck that they got at a wholesaler," says Joseph Mendelson III, legal director of the Center for Food Safety, a liberal Washington group that supports strong organic standards. Mendelson prefers the "gold standard" of locally grown organics, but he is rather frightening on the subject of nonorganic food, whatever its origin. When I asked him whether I should favor local products, he replied, "I don't know what local means. Do they use local pesticides? Does that mean the food is better because they produce local cancers?"

All of which further tangles my original question: The organic apple or the conventionally grown local one?

It turns out to be a frustratingly layered choice, one that implicates many other questions: What's the most efficient way to grow food for all? Should farms be big or small, family- or corporate-run? How do your choices affect the

planet? What tastes better? And then there's that little matter of cancer.

Let's get that one out of the way at the start. If scientists could conclusively prove that agricultural chemicals are harmful, we would all go organic. But it's not clear, for instance, that the low levels of pesticide typically found on conventional produce cause cancer. The risks of long-term exposure to those residues are still undetermined.

Even if conventional foods don't turn out to be as dangerous as organic advocates claim, several recent studies have suggested that organic foods contain higher levels of vitamins than their conventionally grown counterparts. In a paper published in October in the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry, a team from the University of California, Davis, demonstrates that organically grown tomatoes have significantly more vitamin C than conventional tomatoes. Even so, the same study shows no significant differences between conventional and organic bell peppers.

"We're just beginning to understand these relationships," says U.C. Davis food chemist Alyson Mitchell, one of the paper's authors. "We understand, and have understood for a long time, that there is some relation between soil health and plant quality, but we still don't have a solid scientific database to link this to nutrition."

Organic adherents take it on faith that the way food is grown affects its nutritional quality. But advocates of local eating are now making another leap, saying what happens after harvest--how food is shipped and handled--is perhaps even more important than how it was grown. Locavores.com a site popular among local purists, asserts that "because locally grown produce is freshest, it is more nutritionally complete." But Mitchell says she knows of no studies that prove this.

In short, science can't tell you what to eat for dinner. Many of us end up relying on the government to keep food safe, or we just don't think about it. For those who do start to think--nervous new parents, say, or McDonald's burnouts--there are more alternative grocers than ever. There are online purveyors of gourmet health foods (pricey), the old food co-ops (too political for me), and of course those farmers' markets, which--in spite of basic limitations like not being open every day--have grown larger and more sophisticated. (According to Samuel Fromartz's valuable 2006 history Organic Inc.: Natural Foods and How They Grew, there were 3,706 U.S. farmers' markets in 2004, double the number there were a decade earlier.)

But for the past few years, the easiest answer for food-baffled Americans has been a single company: Whole Foods Market.

Whole Foods now has 190 locations from Tigard, Ore., to Notting Hill in London. In fiscal 2006 the chain's sales grew 19% (to $5.6 billion), a bit lower than 2005's 22% growth. Fretful about increasing competition from mainstream grocers who are offering more organic products, investors have punished Whole Foods in the past year; its stock price has fallen more than a third since February 2006.

Still, Whole Foods is expanding rapidly. It recently said it would acquire Wild Oats Markets Inc.; the merger would give Whole Foods an additional 112 locations in North America. Already, many Americans have come to see Whole Foods as the repository of both their dietary hopes and fears--the place we can buy not only organic arugula but a decadent chocolate bar too. I have shopped at Whole Foods off and on since 1990, when I had a summer job in Austin, Texas, where Whole Foods began in 1980. If I was going to decide whether to buy organic or buy local, I figured Whole Foods' ceo, John Mackey, could help me. After all, he is vegan, and his politics lean libertarian, so he thinks hard about different paths. And he has made a great fortune by joining two previously antagonistic alimentary impulses--health and excess.

When we spoke last fall, Mackey was at first diplomatic about the organic-local choice. He told me that when he can't get locally grown organics--and even he can't reliably get them--he decides on the basis of taste. "I would probably purchase a local nonorganic tomato before I would purchase an organic one that was shipped from California," he said. He called the two tomatoes "an environmental wash," since the California one had petroleum miles on it while the nonorganic one was grown with pesticides. "But the local tomato from outside Austin will be fresher, will just taste better," he said.

However, he also noted that products like hard squash that can last months in storage don't taste so different for being shipped. In that case, he said, "I might purchase the organic version from California." Mackey acknowledged that organic agriculture is "flawed"; he criticized organic-milk farms where cows are pumped with feed in factory settings just like conventional-milk cows. But he also bristled at criticism from local activists. He noted that just because a farm is near your home doesn't mean it practices sustainable farming. "There's an assumption that small is beautiful and big is industrial, and that's not necessarily the case," he said. Whole Foods could not keep growing without supplies from large international farms, which is one reason the organic-vs.-local debate is a delicate issue for Mackey.

At least at my Whole Foods--the one in Manhattan's Union Square, where I shop once or twice a month--most of the available produce comes from California or some other distant land, even during the local growing season. Like all other Whole Foods locations, the store began to push local products more aggressively last summer. A placard was posted above the escalator exhorting customers to BUY LOCAL, and all the cash registers were changed to show photos of area farmers.

These days, in the final weeks of winter, it would be unfair to ask Whole Foods to sell predominantly local produce at my store, because so little can be grown in the Northeast right now. But even during verdant summertime, the vast majority of products sold at my Whole Foods (fresh or otherwise) aren't from the Northeast. Actually, it would be more accurate to say that the packages in which most Whole Foods groceries are sold say nothing about the food's origin. For instance, in the freezer section you can find Whole Foods' Whole Kitchen brand Breaded Eggplant Slices with Italian Herbs. The box tells you a wealth of information about the eggplant slices--that they contain wheat, dextrose and annatto (a dye); that they can be fried, baked or microwaved; that they have no trans fat; that they are "flavorful" and "versatile." But you don't learn where the eggplant comes from.

A Whole Foods spokeswoman told me the eggplant was grown in Florida, which is too bad because eggplant grows easily in the Northeast. But in the company's defense, very few customers care whether their food is local. Most who do, shop at farmers' markets. Also, there's not even a standard definition of what local means. To Nabhan, who inspired many local activists with Coming Home to Eat, it means eating within a 250-mile radius of his Arizona home. Many who blog at a site called eatlocalchallenge.com aim for a stricter "100-mile diet."

My favorite definition of local comes from Columbia's Gussow, a reporter for Time in the 1950s who went on to become a local-eating pioneer. For 25 years, Gussow has lectured on the environmental (and culinary) disadvantages of relying on a global food supply. Her most oft-quoted statistic is that shipping a strawberry from California to New York requires 435 calories of fossil fuel but provides the eater with only 5 calories of nutrition. In her memoir, Gussow offers this rather poetic meaning of local: "Within a day's leisurely drive of our homes. [This] distance is entirely arbitrary. But then, so was the decision made by others long ago that we ought to have produce from all around the world."

On his blog, Whole Foods' Mackey has used a radius of 200 miles to mean local. Measuring from my home, that includes not only much of New York State, New Jersey and Connecticut but also parts of seven other Northeastern states. Such a large food shed produces a great variety of fruits and vegetables, and Whole Foods has said it wants to increase its percentage of local produce. (Of the roughly $1 billion in produce the company sold last year, 16.4% came from local sources, up from 14.9% in 2005.) Last year Mackey announced a $10 million loan program for local farmers.

But Mackey also knows that most Americans will never eat a purely local diet. "One of the challenges of being a retailer is you don't want to offend people," Mackey told me. "Some customers want to eat apples year-round, and they're willing to pay more for a New Zealand apple." Finally, he offered a defense of the global food economy: "When I was a little boy--I'm 53 years old--being able to get oranges from Florida or produce from another state was a very big deal because the local-produce availability where I lived in Houston wasn't great. People back then didn't have nearly as diverse a diet as we do now,

and you might also point out their life spans weren't as long."

That made me wonder if purely local eating was even possible--or healthy. Could I get everything I needed from the Northeast? What would I have to give up? For gustatory reasons, I long ago stopped eating out of season--I have no interest in those hard Canadian tomatoes my Whole Foods was selling in February. But would I have to forgo coffee? What would replace my breakfast cereal? How much would all this cost? I wasn't sure. So like everyone else, I went to Google.

I mean, I literally went to Google, to the company's Mountain View, Calif., campus.

I had read that one of Google's new cafeterias, Café 150, served only food originating within a 150-mile radius of Mountain View. I knew this radius included a glorious fund of farms, ranches and fisheries, the Salinas Valley food shed that Steinbeck made famous in East of Eden. I also knew that as one of the most successful companies of the era, Google could afford not only to pursue such a whimsical culinary ideal as total locality but also to do so in the form of a fine-dining restaurant. (Café 150 is one of 11 employee eateries on the Google campus, all of which famously charge nothing.)

Still, I wanted to see how Café 150's founding chef, Nate Keller, managed to serve more than 400 purely local meals a day. Most chefs simply place orders with suppliers. Good cooks understand that quality and origin are related because of the toll extracted by transportation, but in the end, if Emeril Lagasse wants to serve wild salmon one night, he can just order it from Alaska. Keller, who recently became the chef at another Google restaurant, couldn't do that. Although just a freckly 30-year-old, he had to plan his menus the way preindustrial cooks did, according to whatever local vendors offered that day.

"These guys have to be so flexible with their menus, it's unreal," said Café 150's fishmonger, Tim Zamborelli of Today's Catch in San Jose, Calif. "We have to find out what's coming in on that particular day and let them know so they can change." Café 150, which opened a year ago, can serve no shrimp or scallops, since they can't be found in the area, and tuna was available only from August through October, when currents brought bluefins into the radius. The day I visited, Keller hadn't learned what vegetable he would be serving until the night before. (He got baby red chard.)

It's a radically new way of thinking about cooking because it's so very old. But I was surprised to learn that Café 150 was the brainchild not of some anticorporate artisan but of John Dickman, 51, Google's food-service manager. Dickman not only worked for 14 years at the food giant Marriott--he even trained flight attendants to cook plane food. I was curious how he had created such a radical restaurant.

Dickman says he was inspired by chef Ann Cooper, whose 2000 book, Bitter Harvest, is well described by its subtitle: A Chef's Perspective on the Hidden Dangers in the Foods We Eat and What You Can Do About It. Cooper, who now runs the acclaimed meal program of the Berkeley, Calif., public schools, writes passionately against industrialized farms that "inhabit a flattened landscape dotted not with trees, farmhouses [and] animals ... but with huge motorized vehicles." After meeting her, Dickman began to go to farmers' markets.

When Dickman arrived at Google in 2004, he says, "organic was the cool thing," and the company's chefs were buying organic whenever they could--even if that meant flying in Chilean nectarines. Dickman worked with the team to write new standards that place local before organic for all Google eateries. "You're using X amount of jet fuel to get it here, and that doesn't make sense," he says. "So forget the nectarines. Buy something local. Get some plums." Of course, this doesn't work in, say, Dublin, where Dickman also helped set up a Google café. ("Everything is flown in there," he said.) When I asked if he thought a restaurant as strictly local as Café 150 would be possible anywhere outside central California, he answered, glumly, "Probably not."

But others are trying. Restaurants from Cinque Terre in Portland, Maine, to Mozza in Los Angeles are run by cooks who strive always to find local products first. Some chefs are not only buying locally but actually growing the food. The two Blue Hill restaurants in New York--one in Manhattan and the other in Pocantico Hills--buy less than 20% of their ingredients from

outside the New York region, according to chef Dan Barber. Much of both restaurants' food (including all the chicken and pork) is raised on about 20 acres next to the Pocantico Hills location. In the 31/2 years since the farm was launched, Barber has become one of the nation's most eloquent pro-local spokesmen, not least because he makes local eating profitable (and delicious--his restaurants win raves). But his commitment to locality means that Barber can't always serve beef, since the quality and availability of steers in the Northeast are uneven.

Café 150 has access to local beef from Bassian Farms in San Jose, Calif., but the restaurant can't obtain everything it needs from the valley. Take salt. "There are salt flats a quarter-mile that way," said Keller, pointing to the horizon, "but they're for industrial purposes." So he buys salt "off the truck," from a food-service deliverer.

Still, apart from such staples, Café 150 is living up to its name. It never serves tropical fruits, and it has planted lemon and lime trees just outside to ensure local citrus. The restaurant grows many of its own herbs and makes its own ketchup. And last fall Café 150 jarred tomatoes and fruit so that even though it's March, Googlers can get a taste of the local harvest every day. Imagine that: a company as ostentatiously hip as Google canning fruit in its kitchens.

Could I do this? Could I operate my own "kitchen 150"?

Following Café 150's lead, I decided to keep basic dry goods like coffee, chocolate and spices. But since I have no interest in gardening (and no yard, for that matter--I live in an apartment), I needed a source of produce. I find farmers' markets inconvenient, if only because you have to pay each farmer separately for items, which can mean a lot of waiting in the cold. Then I heard about the farm shares run by Community Supported Agriculture (csa) programs.

They sounded a little lefty to me at first, but it turns out csas are a wonderfully market-driven idea: you join with others in your community to invest in a local farm. At the beginning of the season, members pay the farmer a lump sum. Each week, or perhaps once a month in the winter, the farm delivers fresh vegetables (and, for more money, items like fruit, eggs and flowers) to a central location. Prices vary widely depending on where you live. The csa in the Mott Haven neighborhood of the Bronx costs just $220 for five months for those with a low income (food stamps accepted). The csa run by Angelic Organics in Caledonia, Ill., starts at $600 for 20 weeks of vegetables and goes north of $1,000 when you add fruit.

There are some lefty aspects: You don't choose what the farmer grows. He does. You might get lettuce one week and then--if, say, a hailstorm hits the lettuce patch--none for several weeks after. Also, you're locked into a fixed amount of food each week, so if you don't feel like cooking for a couple nights in a row, you feel guilty. A farmer sweated over these beautiful ears of corn, and I'm going to throw them out so I can pick up riblets at Applebee's?

The benefit is that the food is affordable--for $40 a month at my csa, I get (to take February as an example) four bunches of winter greens, a head of red cabbage, 5 lbs. of apples, and about 2 lbs. each of beets, onions, carrots, turnips and Yukon Gold potatoes. The stuff is phenomenally fresh. I once discovered a nine-day-old head of lettuce from my CSA farm at the back of the refrigerator. Because it had come to me just 24 hours after being picked, it was still crisp.

But how local was my CSA farm? And was it organic?

Windflower Farm is in Valley Falls, N.Y., 185 miles northeast of my apartment. Mapquest calls it a 3 1/2-hr. drive, but if you leave on a weekday at 5:30 p.m., as Windflower's Ted Blomgren and I did, it can take closer to five hours. That meets Gussow's definition of local--"within a day's leisurely drive"--although our drive through Manhattan wasn't leisurely.

Blomgren runs Windflower with his wife Jan. He is 46, and on the day we rode to the farm, he wore sandals and glasses. Ted, who has a degree from Cornell, is balding and studious, and might pass for a professor if he didn't have so much dirt under his toenails. Ted and Jan--who has lovely bright blue eyes perpetually fixed in a startled expression--have operated Windflower for eight years with their sons Nathaniel, 14, and Jacob, 11. On the day I visited last summer, I watched a barefoot Nathaniel walk to the henhouse to collect eggs in an old white bucket, as he did every day. I had been eating those eggs most

days--that's how I had replaced cereal. Seeing Nate carry that bucket into the smelly humidity of the chicken coop, I realized I had never before felt so connected to my food. I had not only seen the chickens that produced my eggs but had also met the person who gathered them.

That's a core goal of CSAS--to remind you that your food originates in some place other than a grocery store. There are now some 1,200 csa farms in the U.S., according to the Robyn Van En Center at Wilson College in Pennsylvania. Van En helped start the first American csa at her Massachusetts farm in 1985 after hearing about the idea of farm shares from a Swiss friend. (You can find a csa near you at sites like localharvest.org.

So I was finally eating local, and it tasted great. Ted's yellow wax beans last year were so crisp and oniony sweet you could eat them directly from the field. During the winter months, Ted has delivered sturdy vegetables from his cold storage that look as good as anything at Whole Foods and seem to taste better, if only because they remind me of a warm day on the farm. And yet I do worry that the Blomgrens aren't certified by the Federal Government as organic growers. They say they don't use synthetic pesticides or fertilizers, and Ted's policy is that any csa member can come to his farm to check his growing practices. "I couldn't show up at my local Agway and buy a jug of herbicide without it getting told to everybody," he said. Like many small farmers I met, Ted felt that organic certification would be too costly and time consuming.

Having met Ted, Jan and their sons--and having spent the night in their barn--I trust they don't use chemicals. But the Blomgrens don't grow fruit for the CSA. They buy it from other local growers, and most of them use sprays because of the humidity. Ted's hens were free-range--they strutted around eating the grass behind his house. But pastured chickens still require some grain feed, and the grain Ted bought was mostly conventionally grown, industrially processed corn.

I was deflated to hear that I had ingested chemicals with my fruit and eggs. But at this point I threw up my hands. If I wanted total purity, the only option was to grow my own food. Forget it. Farming is dirt-under-the-toenails hard work, and the Blomgrens are by no means making a vast fortune.

But I had arrived at an answer to my question: I prefer local to organic, even with the concessions local farmers must make. I realize there's something romantic about the desire to know exactly where your food is from. Among true agrarians, that desire carries a reactionary strain, a suspicion of modernity. "Instead of relying on the accumulated wisdom of a cuisine, or even on the wisdom of our senses, we rely on expert opinion," journalist Michael Pollan wrote in last year's acclaimed book The Omnivore's Dilemma. "We place our faith in science to sort out what culture once did." But science should trump culture on matters of nutrition. The problem is that science offers no clear guidelines yet on how beneficial organic food is.

When asked years ago whether she preferred butter or margarine, Gussow famously remarked, "I trust cows more than chemists." For my part, I do not. I will still go to Whole Foods to buy the mass-produced Organic Food Bars I eat for breakfast when I don't have time for eggs. I am happy that food scientists are finding ways to produce everyday products like cereal with organic ingredients. (How about organic Froot Loops? I have a weakness for Froot Loops late at night.) But when it comes to my basic ingredients--literally, my "whole" foods rather than my convenience foods--I would still rather know the person who collects my eggs or grows my lettuce or picks my apples than buy 100% organic eggs or lettuce or apples from an anonymous megafarm at the supermarket. Choosing local when I can makes me feel more rooted, and (in part because of that feeling, no doubt) local food tastes better.

Eating locally also seems safer. Ted's neighbors and customers can see how he farms. That transparency doesn't exist with, say, spinach bagged by a distant agribusiness. I help keep Ted in business, and he helps keep me fed--and the elegance and sustainability of that exchange make more sense to me than gambling on faceless producers who stamp organic on a package thousands of miles from my home. I'm not a purist about these choices--I ate a Filet-O-Fish at McDonald's on the way to Ted's farm. But in general, I have decided that you are where you eat.

Ban unhealthy school vending machines - doctors

http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2005/jun/22/schools.politics

- Society Guardian, Wednesday 22 June 2005 14.46 BST
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Doctors today urged the government to ban school vending machines that sell unhealthy fizzy drinks and snacks and introduce mandatory nutrition guidelines for all school meals.

The British Medical Association (BMA) called for urgent action to tackle the UK's child obesity epidemic.

School inspections by the independent regulator, Ofsted, should also scrutinise the nutritional content of school meals as part of their programme of school inspections, it recommended.

The BMA called for a ban on all advertising of unhealthy food aimed at schoolchildren and urged manufacturers to reduce salt, sugar and fat in pre-packaged meals.

The recommendations in its report Preventing Childhood Obesity came as doctors warned that 20% of boys and 33% of girls in the UK will be officially classified as obese by 2020 unless steps are taken now to tackle the crisis.

Launching the report, the BMA's head of science and ethics, Dr Vivienne Nathanson, said this morning: "It is madness that at a time when children are being told to eat less and do more exercise they go into school and are sold fizzy drinks and doughnuts and do less than two hours' timetabled exercise a week.

"Children and parents are surrounded by the marketing of unhealthy cereals, snacks and processed meals. This has to stop."

Doctors estimate that there are now around 1 million obese children under the age of 16, a situation they say has led to an increase in the number of cases of young people with type two diabetes.

Childhood obesity also increases the risk of heart disease, cancer and osteoarthritis later in life.

The cost of obesity-related illness and poor diet to the NHS is about £2bn a year and rising, the report warned.

Dr Nathanson said: "It is essential that the government listens to what doctors are saying."

The doctors urged the government to launch a sustained, consistent public education campaign promoting healthy eating and exercise, and called on ministers to establish a national obesity institute or council to help get the message across.

The government should subsidise the cost of fruit and vegetables, and more money should be spent on school sports facilities, they recommended.

The BMA report came on the same day as Mary Creagh, MP for Wakefield, reintroduced her private member's bill on children's food, which echoes many of the BMA's recommendations, including banning school vending machines, introducing nutritional standards for school dinners and outlawing junk food advertising.

Earlier today the chef Gordon Ramsay added his voice to the childhood obesity campaign when he helped launch the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts' Focus on Food week, which is endorsed by the government's Food Standards Agency. The campaign, which runs from June 27 until July 1, is aimed at improving the food education available in schools.

The increased focus on the role schools can play in the fight against childhood obesity puts increased pressure on the government and follows the success of the campaign for better school meals earlier this year by the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver.

For the past couple of years I've been campaigning to ban the junk served in school canteens and get the kids to eat fresh, tasty, nutritious food instead. Without your support for the Feed Me Better campaign Tony Blair wouldn't have committed to new school meal standards and to spending £280 million for

sorting out the problem. In my new TV programme, Return to School Dinners, we show that parents are a key factor, and that without cooking skills, kitchen facilities and political support on the ground it's going to be very hard to make lasting improvements. During the course of filming I spoke to the Prime Minister and he promised more and longer term funding for school food. I don't want to sound ungrateful, but the amounts are tiny when you divide it up by all the schools in the country—Nora, for example, only gets £2,000.

Local and national government need to come up with a ten-year strategy and some real money to re-educate people about proper eating habits. This is what I think needs to happen now:

1. IN SCHOOLS: Make cooking and life skills classes compulsory for ALL kids so they learn about food and good eating habits while they're young.
2. FOR TEACHERS: Recruit and train new cookery teachers, otherwise the new right that kids have to cookery lessons just isn't going to happen.
3. FOR HEADS: Empower heads to make every school a junk food free zone.
4. FOR PARENTS: Educate parents and help them to understand the basics of family cooking and responsible nutrition.
5. FOR DINNER LADIES: Invest in dinner ladies with proper training and enough paid hours to cook their food with fresh ingredients.
6. Commit to a ten-year strategic plan and fund a long-term public campaign to get people back on to a proper diet and empower/persuade (and possibly scare if needed) the public to make better choices. With obesity costing the NHS more than smoking, it seems logical that a similar campaign should be appropriate. Let me talk a little more about each point above.

my manifesto for school dinners

Make cooking and learning life skills compulsory for
ALL kids so they can survive when they leave school.

The basic stuff.

It's great that kids are going to be taught how to cook at school, but it needs to made a compulsory part of education, not just a voluntary entitlement. This will require a complete rewrite of the school syllabus to make it appropriate to today's needs, so our kids will learn to understand food, and to cook and shop on a budget—essential life skills.

There's a whole generation of parents out there who were never taught the ease of cooking. This is why the government needs to step in and bolster the school environment, as it's the only place where the kids are going to learn.

Why doesn't the new entitlement cover primary schools too? Kids need to be learning about food right from day one, so they get basic recognition and aren't afraid of what food looks, smells and tastes like and where it comes from.

Currently, you can pass a food technology course without having to cook. This is totally bonkers! We need to make sure this new syllabus doesn't get lost in the curriculum and that every teenager leaves school able to cook at least ten healthy dishes as a basis for feeding themselves.

A simple menu of nutritious dishes will give kids the range of basic skills they need to prepare and cook with fresh ingredients, instead of getting their meal from a packet with all of the extra cost, unnecessary processing additives and packaging that goes with it.

Qualified cookery teachers are urgently required. There's a national shortage of properly qualified cookery teachers. How are schools going to deliver this new entitlement? If the government is going to put cooking back on the curriculum, it needs to:

• Sort out a recruitment programme for new cookery teachers now.
• Set up specialist training colleges to train up more cookery teachers.
• Ensure that all teacher-training courses include the basics of food and cookery.

schools school dinners teachers

Make every school a junk food free zone.

Schools will no longer be able to sell or serve junk food to our kids at school—fantastic news. But the government needs to go one step further and make sure they can't bring it in from outside either. I held a junk food amnesty in Greenwich, asking all kids to hand in the food they brought into school, and the result was pretty worrying. If school heads and governors aren't empowered to ban kids from bringing in rubbish food in their lunchboxes or school bags, how on earth are they going to be able to get them to switch over to eating proper food instead?

The Healthy Schools policy, which all schools are expected to adopt, needs to include a total ban of junk food on school premises.

Heads need to take responsibility and find out how much of this stuff their pupils are bringing in on a daily basis. They need to get support from governors and parents to introduce a school policy that makes their school a junk food free zone.

Educate parents on the importance of a healthy balanced meal for their kids.
I think many parents are unaware of how much junk their kids are actually eating and drinking. Many don't quite understand that if chocolate bars, fizzy drinks and bags of crisps are part of their kids' daily diet, then they aren't getting the right kind of nutrition for proper growth and could be facing a load of serious health problems from early adulthood onwards.
As well as the frightening rise in obesity there's a growing number of kids, no matter what shape or size that simply aren't getting fed enough nutrients like iron calcium and vitamins. It's having a huge effect on their brainpower, behaviour and ability to concentrate and learn at school.
Take iron: half of the country's teenage girls don't get enough, which affects IQ and probably means they're not doing as well at school as they could be.
Currently, the government is spending £75 million to get us to stop smoking. We need the same kind of massive campaign to educate families—maybe even scare them a little—on how important a good diet is to their kids' growth, health and future. If we don't get it right now, pretty soon we're going to be a nation of overweight underachievers.
Skills training for the nation's school cooks.
Many dinner ladies still don't seem to get money filtered down to them to pay for any extra hours they need to cook proper meals with fresh ingredients from scratch.
They're also not getting any proper training yet. In the summer, the Prime Minister asked me what was still needed to train up our dinner ladies and get them motivated again. Here's what I asked for:
• Set up a network of training kitchens by next autumn and get all head cooks trained up as quickly as possible.
• Teach the girls how to cook. Refresh their skills and revive their confidence in the kitchen. Teach them about the new standards so they're equipped to deliver them.
• Make sure the course becomes a recognised qualification and that at least one person in every kitchen has been on it. Use it as a foundation course for further career training, like an NVQ.
• Set up a network of mentors to follow up and help the girls put the new standards into practice.
• Ensure there's a national training centre to train the trainers.
• Train other people, like heads, governors, teachers and catering managers too.
• Find £2 million to fund all this.
Commit to a ten-year plan
It's not clear from this week's announcement how much new funding the government has actually committed to but what we need is a strategic, ten-year funding plan.
This plan should get all the ministers—health education, farming, sport—working together to get the nation's health back in shape and to get people cooking for themselves and eating properly again. This plan should get priority funding from the £1 billion obesity budget.
Local government also needs to get involved. By the time the government money gets divided down to a school level, it's a tiny amount. How many councillors know what's happening about school food in their area?
What are they doing to make it a health and education priority for the children in their care?
More money is still needed to:
• Get basic cooking equipment into schools so they can start teaching kids how to cook.
• Run a recruitment and training drive for more cookery teachers.
• Fund more hours for dinner ladies so they get paid for doing their jobs and feeding our kids better.
• Fund a massive and sustained national campaign to re-educate people about proper eating.
7 September 2006

Does society overly value skinniness in its models to the detriment of health? Do size zero models influence eating disorders in girls? Can eating disorders be altered based on the removal of certain images in the media? Can behavior be legislated? Should government protect its citizens from eating disorders? To the point, should there be a minimum weight limit for models?

YES
* BMI Fair. The Body Mass Index is a measure based on a ratio of weight and height. "The World Health Organization defines a BMI below 18.5 as underweight" and Madrid's Cibeles show "bans models with a body mass index (BMI) of less than 18,"[1] and has been doing so since 2006.

* Legislate Progress. A spokesman for the Eating Disorders Association said, " We do think legislation is needed. The industry will not act voluntarily because the fashion world is so competitive and no one wants to be the first to do

anything in case they lose out."[2]

* Profitable Change. Dove launched an advertising campaign in 2005 called "real women" in which women ranging "from size 4 to size 12"[3] were used to advertise lotions and creams for the company. The ad campaign was a success as women finally saw more realistic images.

NO
* Legislate Discrimination? Setting up a minimum weight limit would be discrimination against smaller women. Most governments have moved beyond passing laws that discriminate against any segment of its citizenry.

* Only Images. A study in 1999 found that "only those [girls] with existing body image problems are significantly affected by the images [of skinny models]."[4] We can't quarantine skinny people away from those with body image problems so why should we halt skinny models from working?

* Media Manipulation. Fashion companies are already altering skinny models to look fatter. "Where models are looking particularly gaunt, magazines are saying, 'We can't have that - fill out their chests,'" said a retouching expert Belinda Coleman.[5]

Junk food ban in B.C. schools trims funding sources: official

Last Updated: Monday, June 2, 2008 | 6:58 AM PT http://www.cbc.ca/canada/british-columbia/story/2008/06/01/bc-school-junk-food.html

Some secondary schools in British Columbia are taking a big financial hit as a result of the no junk-food policy brought in by the provincial government earlier this year, a school board chair says.

Ken Denike, chair of the Vancouver Board of School Trustees, said the new policy has cut down one huge source of "flexible funding" schools have had for sports and music events.

"In some situation, the revenues are down 50 per cent," he told CBC News Friday. "So if it was a large high school raising $70,000 to $80,000 a year they're now raising $30,000 to $35,000 a year."

High-sugar and high-fat foods such as cookies, muffins and fries have been banned since January in elementary schools. Middle and secondary schools will follow in September.

Some secondary schools have already switched over their vending machines to offer milk, granola bars and other healthier choices, Denike said.

Connie Denesiuk, president of the B.C. School Trustees Association, said it's too early to say how schools will be affected because many won't convert to the new rules until September.

A few schools are actually reporting a small increase in revenue, she said.

"What we're looking at is [that] probably the parents along with the staff will come up with some type of plan to meet any shortfall that might be realized," she told CBC News on Friday.

Denesiuk said schools will eventually find ways to adjust to a policy that everyone knew had to be put in place for a healthy lifestyle.

School vending machines to get healthy

http://www.canada.com/vancouversun/story.html?id=65cfeb5d-554b-4b1e-b911-a205474a11dd&k=52959

By 2009 high school vending will replace junk food with such healthy snacks as yogurt, cheese sticks, cottage cheese, cut-up apples and vegetables, fruit bars, trail mix, water, milk, 100-per-cent juice and buffalo jerky.

Those old vending machines found in school hallways full of chocolate bars, giant cookies, candy and pop will be a thing of the past by

2009.
By then, dispensing machines will look more like those in the lobby of North Vancouver's Carson Graham High School, where junk food has been replaced with such healthy snacks as yogurt, cheese sticks, cottage cheese, cut-up apples and vegetables, fruit bars, trail mix, water, milk, 100-per-cent juice and buffalo jerky.
The only pop available at Carson Graham is caffeine-free Diet Pepsi. And for those finding it hard to make the transition to carrot sticks and water, there are Old Dutch Salt and Vinegar chips buried among the various brands of healthy chip snacks.
Carson Graham was the first school in B.C. to supply students with healthy snacks.
The B.C. Healthy Living Alliance chose the North Vancouver school today to announce a $1-million program to help schools throughout the province comply with Ministry of Education guidelines aimed at having all school vending machines dispense only healthy snacks by 2009.
"It's a huge difference from what was offered in the old vending machines," said Kathy Romses, a community dietitian with Vancouver Coastal Health who is overseeing the program in North Vancouver schools.
"Those machines would offer 90 per cent of food choices that are not recommended — chocolate bars, candies, or pop that is mostly sugar and water with no nutrient value," she said.
The new machines rank snacks as first, second and third most healthy choices. Fifty per cent of the snacks offered have to be first choice, 40 per cent second choice, with the third-choice snacks being allowed only 10 per cent of available space.
"The choose-most snacks are fresh apples and vegetables dips, plain milk, yogurt, water, the choose-less would be such things as 100-per-cent fruit juice [and] some of the chips, while the least recommended would be the caffeine-free Diet Pepsi and things like the Miss Vickie's Chips," she said.
Romses said she had found some of the schools in the district carrying 100 per cent non-recommended food and beverages in their dispensing machines.
"In my daughter's school I had to ask them to put fruit juice in the machines. I talked to some of the athletes and told them that for peak performance they should be drinking milk, not pop, and eating cheese and yogurt," she said.
Janice Macdonald, regional executive director of the Dietitians of Canada, said her organization will be working with schools across the province to implement the provincial food and beverage guidelines.
"The provincial government mandated the guidelines in November 2005. Community nutritionists across the province have been working with schools to help them implement the guidelines. Some schools are not sure which foods are healthy and what to include in their cafeteria or vending machines and we'll be providing them with that kind of information to make their job a little bit easier," she said.
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This is science?

Excessive gaming can make kids fat. In other news, so can doughnuts.
July 6, 2004: 2:20 PM EDT

http://money.cnn.com/2004/07/06/commentary/game_over/column_gaming/index.htm

NEW YORK (CNN/Money) – Back in the ninth grade, I wanted to be a scientist. It fascinated me how brilliant men and women could look objectively at issues that had baffled mankind for years and find answers.

I'm beginning to suspect, though, that we might be running out of mysteries.

Researchers from The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and University Hospital Zurich say they've discovered a strong correlation "between playing electronic video games and childhood obesity in school-aged Swiss children."

It gets better. The study, which was covered in the June issue of Obesity Research, said its "findings suggest that the use of electronic games should be limited to prevent childhood obesity."

Well, duh.

Basically, these researchers found if you sit on the couch all day, moving little but your thumbs, you won't get the proper amount of exercise. I ask you: Did it really take a three M.D.s to figure this out?

Now, granted, it's possible I'm being a bit harsh here. After all, as Nicolas Stettler, a pediatric specialist at the Children's Hospital of

Philadelphia who worked on the study, points out "the point of science is to challenge common sense and assumptions to see if they are true."

And Stettler did note that it's not just video games that are contributing to the obesity problem.

"There's an entire environmental context that favors sedentary entertainment," he said. "In more and more suburbs, including Switzerland, everything is built around the car. Children have less physical activity than they did 30 or 40 years ago, so they stay at home and participate in sedentary entertainment."

The researchers found that Swiss children who do not play video games had only a 6 percent chance of being overweight. Those who played an hour of games per day saw their chances rise to 9 percent. Two hours a day bumped that to 17 percent. And three hours of gaming per day resulted in a 23 percent chance the child would be overweight.

The study was conducted in 1999 and (it's worth noting) was rejected by one journal before finding a home at Obesity Research. Four years is an eternity in the gaming industry, though, which doomed this study to semi-obsolescence from the start. Back then, Konami's "Dance Dance Revolution" was just starting to ping radars. Today, there are entire weight loss programs that revolve around the game. And games using the EyeToy peripheral on the PlayStation 2 get the blood pumping as well

Stettler said his group plans to repeat the study to see if the results it found are limited to Switzerland. The trio also wants to expand the focus, he said, to determine if it's games making kids fat or if fat kids are simply more likely to play games.

Granted, there's value in confirming what people believe to be true, but at what point does common sense come into play? Blaming video games for obesity is nearly as ludicrous as blaming fast food restaurants. In either case, the solution to the problem is moderation.

Basically, it comes down to this: Notice junior is getting a bit pudgy? Take away his copy of "Madden," give him a real pigskin and head out to the backyard. It ain't rocket science, folks.

Thursday, April 09, 2009

http://www.weightymatters.ca/2009/04/should-we-tax-sugar-sweetened-beverages.html

Should we tax sugar sweetened beverages?

In this week's edition of the New England Journal of Medicine is an editorial written by public health crusaders Drs. Kelly Brownell and Thomas Frieden exploring the idea of taxing sugar sweetened beverages.

Unlike putting calories on menus, this would no longer simply be about passing on more information it would be about charging more money.

Basically there are two ways to approach this: Incentive taxation whereby a nominal tax would be applied with the proceeds then going to public health/obesity related initiatives or disincentive taxation whereby you put enough of a tax on the drinks so as to discourage their consumption (or of course a combination of the two).

This wouldn't be an entirely new plan. You may be surprised to know that 40 American States already have small taxes on sugared beverages and snack food and that in Canada there are many different tiers of food taxation.

The argument for taxation is simple. Sugar-sweetened beverages are strongly linked to the obesity epidemic and some argue that they are in fact the single biggest driver of societal weight. They're marketed extensively to children and in the mid 1990s their intake in children surpassed that of milk. Shockingly calories consumed from beverages now account for 10-15% of all the calories consumed by children and adolescents and for every glass consumed per day the likelihood of a child becoming obese increases by 60%. That's one hell of a big gulp.

The authors report that with regards to disincentive taxation, for every 10% increase in

price, consumption decreases by 7.8% and estimate that a penny per ounce excise tax would reduce consumption by 13% or two servings per person per week. In turn the tax would generate literally billions of dollars ($1.2 billion in New York State alone) which if used to promote health and better dietary options could have further impact on health and obesity.

Opponents state that food taxes are regressive and unlike tobacco, we need food to live therefore taxation would be unfair, especially when singling out a single food.

Well I've got news for them - we don't in fact need sugar sweetened beverages to live.

As I keep hammering home, to put a dent in rising rates of obesity requires action on a societal level, not an individual one. We need to change the toxic environment itself and taxing one of the main drivers of the epidemic is one way to do that.

This is a war. Sometimes war calls for tough decisions and personally I think this would be a good one.

SEDA

The Saskatchewan Elocution and Debate Association (SEDA) is a non-profit organization that promotes speech and debate activities in English and French. The Association is active throughout the province from grade 5 through grade 12, and at the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan. The Association co-ordinates an annual program of speech and debate tournaments and other special activities, including a model legislature.

SEDA's staff, along with printed and audio-visual materials, are available to assist any individual or group interested in elocution and debate.

SEDA is a registered charitable organization. Charitable No. 11914 0077 RR0001.

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