

Food and Health Challenges

Thank you for including in your Journal scientific articles that so clearly illustrate the inherent linkage between food and health challenges. National leaders need to see that public policy must be informed by scholarship in order to effectively serve their constituents. The Ebola epidemic is another critical problem that deserves similar scholarly attention, and the University of Missouri is poised to contribute to that problem in new ways.

The Ebola epidemic now centered in three West African countries, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, is not only a life threatening disease, but it also significantly threatens the food security of the region. The U.S. Agency for International Development is leading our government's response, aligned with the CDC and the Department of Defense and many UN Agencies such as the World Health Organization, and Non-Governmental Organizations that have large presence on the ground in those countries. These workers deserve our praise for the risks they face daily as they undertake essential service to the global society. The current strategy is to eliminate Ebola in humans and enable economy recovery as quickly as possible. The latter cannot be achieved, however, unless the former is successful. Ebola must be contained in order for public policy to effectively support production and marketing systems.

This is where the University comes in, because so much new knowledge is required on all fronts. The Deaton Institute became deeply involved in the discussion last October at the World Food Conference where dire predictions of 30-40 percent losses of food availability raised concern across the food and health communities. Reports of land abandonment, loss of trust and disruptions of labor in key processing and transportation facilities, in the financial and economic support systems of those already fragile societies, and genuine human empathy for the many victims of the epidemic, all contributed to an unease among observers here and abroad. Members of the university community felt a deep need to contribute.

It was recognized that emergency food aid will address short term food availability, but guiding the transition to a sustainable system of food security and strength in the agricultural economy is quite another challenge. The Institute was asked to take leadership in formulating a recovery strategy in coordination with the Global Health Response and Resilience Alliance, and a multidisciplinary team of faculty, students and staff stepped forward to contribute. The team incorporates faculty from medicine, public health, plant and animal science, biology, nutrition,

agricultural economics, anthropology, sociology, and behavioral sciences from across the diverse programs of the University of Missouri. We recognize the vast strengths of our University community that is exceptional among America's higher education landscape. Even more exceptional is the creativity and dedication they bring.

In many ways, responding to Ebola takes us into new territory, but being a "frontier university", the first public university west of the Mississippi, inspires both dedication and creativity. The efforts of such esteemed colleagues, with no guarantees of success, also deserve commendation. I am honored to be involved with my colleagues in this process and look forward to providing you with a progress report in the future.

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Genetically Modified Organisms Crops In Agriculture? Food For Thought

I would like to comment on the article, "Why We Need GMO Crops in Agriculture," by Melvin J. Oliver, PhD (November/December 2014). My contention is that not only do we not need GMOs in agriculture, but we should eliminate GMOs from our food supply (including indirectly in our animals) because of the abundance of evidence that they are likely dangerous. In a 1998 lawsuit by public interest attorney Steven M. Drucker, 44,000 pages of the FDA's internal documents proved that the consensus of their own scientists was that GMOs could not be presumed safe; that they were different and dangerous; could lead to diseases and needed long-term safety studies. ("How the U.S. Food and Drug Administration Approved Genetically Engineered Foods Despite the Deaths They Had Caused and the Warnings of its Own Scientists About Their Unique Risks" executive summary, by Steven M. Drucker). Their warnings were ignored and GMOs got "fast-tracked." It may help to know that our current "Food Czar," Michael Taylor, was previously a Monsanto attorney. In the first nine years since introduction of GM crops in 1996, the incidence of people with three or more chronic diseases nearly doubled from 7% to 13%. (Kathryn Anne Paez, et al, "Rising Out-Of-Pocket Spending For Chronic Conditions: A Ten Year Trend," Health Affairs 2009;28(1):15-25). Causation? Maybe, we don't know because the GMOs haven't been tested sufficiently. Over 93 scientists have signed a statement that there is no consensus on the safety of GMOs. ("No scientific consensus on GMO safety" ENSSER October 21,