

## How best to use the momentum of EXPO to improve our food environment? A story to be explained to our children!

In the past 6 months ( May - October 2015 ) EXPO challenged us with the exposition “ Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life”. The Zero Pavilion, the UN Pavilion, located at the exposition entrance, impressed its visitors with huge piles of food waste.

FAO tells us that every year, worldwide, one third of the food produced for human consumption gets lost or is wasted. Food waste provides a powerful stimulus towards making us (citizens) frustrated, angry, and willing and anxious to reform the whole food economy.



UN EXPO Pavilion (Pavilion Zero). “New rules are needed for global agricultural governance” is one of the key messages passing on the giant screen of a reproduced global food stock exchange.

Unfortunately, as Zero Pavillon has demonstrated, food waste is not the only negative component within the overall pattern of food production: in Figure 1 we witness the operation of a reproduced global food stock exchange, where, every single day, food items are sold as commodities.

Food prices, production subsidies, and the current rules for food production in general, make us (researchers in nutrition and public health) even more frustrated, and determined to struggle for fundamental food system changes.

Why? Because if we had access to food that is produced in a more sustainable way, this would benefit both our health and our environment, and we could at the same time reduce food waste.

So let us focus on health: often we hear the world “food security”, but in the European Union (and, in general, within the industrialised world) we should be more concerned with “**nutrition security**”; thanks to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), established in the aftermath of World War Two,

we do not experience lack of access to food: we are food secure. Instead, we suffer from an over-consumption of calories and of saturated fat: in the EU 20% of people are obese, and one in three European children is overweight or obese. These data demonstrate clearly that our nutrition environment is unsecure: indeed, it promotes poor health.

Consequently, we need to make sure that the food coming to our tables is secure from a nutritional viewpoint; why is this so difficult to achieve?

Glad you asked! The CAP was once needed for food security, but, as it is currently organised, it damages our nutrition security. This is because current food policies subsidise dairy and meat production, making their products really cheap. Of course the food industry relishes these cheap prices, because they mean cheap inputs for processed food.

The removal of unhealthy subsidies, and the introduction of healthy subsidy programmes (such as for more subsidy for production of fruit and vegetables), have, for some time now, been called for by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the UN specialised agency on health: the WHO states that it is essential to manipulate prices if health behaviours are to be influenced positively.

But this is a complex issue: while regulatory strategies have been agreed and implemented for tobacco (Framework Convention on Tobacco Control), there is still a lot to do to achieve anything similar for nutrition.

Meanwhile, we should work to promote health literacy: we must seek to make citizens and consumers more health-conscious, providing them with important and relevant information. Are we succeeding?

Unfortunately, the world as currently organised makes it harder than you might think, especially because of the power of vested interests; for example, back in 2010, at the European Parliament, the food and drink industry was active in blocking a proposal for EU-wide “traffic lights” nutrition labelling system, spending over €1 billion on lobbying to this end, as according to Corporate Europe Observatory.

What should we do then?

In our opinion, we (citizens) should try to make informed decisions, so that we choose food and drink items that are good for our health (choices which happen to be good for the environment as well!): e.g. more protein of vegetable origin, and less meat and dairy. Meanwhile, we (researchers) should try to provide clear, science-based and unbiased information to our communities.

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