

## US Study proves cheaper healthy food can save millions of lives

Researchers at Harvard and Tufts Universities have laid out concrete steps by linking food prices to health effects. Reducing prices of fruit and vegetables while raising prices for sodas and other sugary drinks could save millions of lives, according to a recent study released at the American Heart Association's epidemiology and lifestyle meeting in Phoenix, Arizona.

"A change in your diet can be challenging, but if achieved through personal choice or changes in the market place, it can have a profound effect on your cardiovascular health," Harvard professor Thomas Gaziano, the report's lead author, said in a statement.

A computer model that predicted a 10 % drop in the price of fruits and vegetables is developed by researchers which could reduce death from cardiovascular disease by 1.2 % within five years and nearly 2 % within 20 years. The measures could decrease heart attacks by 2.6 % and strokes by 4% over two decades.

It also found that deaths from cardiovascular diseases could decrease by nearly 0.1 % within five years of a price increase of 10 % on sugary drinks, and 0.12 % within 20 years.

## Poultry industry to practice anti-competitive activities

The Pakistan Poultry Association was fined by the Competition Commission of Pakistan recently for 'influencing pricing, production and sales of poultry products' and engaging in anti-competitive business activity.

This is the second time in the last six years that poultry industry has come under the CCP scrutiny. Last time, it was fined Rs50m in August 2010. This time, CCP has doubled the fine amount because the PPA has replicated its action in egg market as well.

The PPA placed advertisements in newspapers stating rates of live birds, chicken meat and eggs, which the CCP considered violation of anti-competitive laws.



PPA claims that chicken meat is being sold far below the cost of production for the last two years. Because of this falling profit, over 40% businesses have been closed down, and more may be on their way to closure. The PPA has been pleading for official survival package: freight subsidy on exports, concessional loans and rescheduling of debts.

The industry insists that it has, through newspaper advertisements, been conveying, not controlling, chicken meat and egg prices an explanation, which the CCP refuses to buy and calls it 'subjective interpretation'.

Through such advertisements, the PPA is telling the market that the advertised rates have its blessings and backing. This is violation of rules, the CCP decision says. The fine slapped on the PPA would certainly be challenged by the industry in the court as it did last time and a long-drawn legal battle would follow.

The PPA finds itself at the dead end because it never made serious efforts to look beyond domestic market for business expansion. The industry has the world's

best gene pool, modern farming practices and hungry Gulf markets. But perhaps domestic profits were too lucrative for it to allow it overseas journey.

## Food security legislation required to protect animal health

In spite of dire need for a 'National Sanitary and Phytosanitary Authority Act' to drive exports of agricultural products it is moving at a slow pace. The proposed SPS authority will work to ensure food safety and protect animal and plant health.

An official of the ministry dealing with the subject said the draft bill will be sent to the prime minister for approval before submission to the parliament for enactment.

It has been proposed that the federal authorities would be responsible for the overall design of the SPS control system, for international linkages, and for sampling and certification of all consignments.



The proposed authority will separate the development and control functions in animal and plant health services.

Current SPS-related regulations in Pakistan are based on the Plant Quarantine Act (1976), the Pakistan Animal Quarantine Act (1979), the IPPC, the OIE, Codex Alimentarius and the International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPM). These rules need to be upgraded and integrated.

The draft act, according to the official, will establish the governance mechanism and the principles on which it should operate. It would also define roles of the federal and provincial authorities and powers of inspectors, and adopt the principles set out within the SPS agreement.

### Sign of surplus Wheat for this year

Pakistan's food and agro-products exports touched \$500m last year compared to \$362.4m in 2012. Rice remains the leading food export item to the UAE and its sales jumped 11-fold to \$207.8m compared to the last two years. Meat and processed frozen food exports crossed the \$100m mark over the last three years. As for fruits and vegetables exports have almost doubled in three years.

The federal government is exploring the possibilities of selling surplus wheat to the Gulf countries. The target countries are Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar and Kuwait which import wheat mostly from the US and Canada. Since the Gulf countries do not produce wheat and other farm commodities and depend on imports, Pakistan could enter into bilateral agreements for export of staple food commodities possibly by offering competitive prices.

Pakistan has not been able to export its surplus wheat stocks because of high domestic prices and low international rates. Now the fresh crop will start arriving in the market this month. The wheat procurement target for this season has been fixed at 6.95m tonnes against 6.6m tonnes in the previous year. Unless the federal government decides to resume payment of (required) level of subsidy, the wheat exports are unlikely to pick up pace in order to reduce the glut.



Indications are that the country will harvest a bumper wheat crop of over 25m tonnes this season. The crop will arrive in Sindh after March 10 and in Punjab after April 15. Bumper wheat crops in the three consecutive seasons have contributed to the glut.

The ministries of food security and commerce have urged the finance ministry to extend the subsidy for wheat exports but the latter declined. The Sindh food department also approached the federation seeking continuation of the subsidy but to avail.

The federal government has been considering different options to dispose of the unsold wheat stocks before the arrival of the new crop but could not reach a viable solution. The PFMA recently asked the Sindh government to bring down wheat prices to enable lower-class consumers to buy more flour, but its plea was ignored.

### Need for collecting data on shark fisheries

In order to have an improved management of shark fisheries experts at a workshop emphasized that data on shark landing needs to be collected. The workshop was organized by the World Wide Fund for Nature-Pakistan (WWF-P) in collaboration with the ministry of climate change.

The speakers, which included officials of the marine fisheries department, National Institute of Oceanography, fisheries departments of both Sindh and Balochistan and the International Union

for Conservation of Nature, recommended declaring three ecologically significant and endangered Chondrichthyan species (sawfishes, whale sharks and mobulids) as 'Iconic Species'. The status would help create awareness of these marine animals.

Most participants agreed with the key features of the national action plan presented during the workshop by the WWF-P for shark conservation. Mr. Rab Nawaz represent WWF-P said, "The action plan highlights the areas of concern that need special and immediate attention for short and long-term goals. It also draws a road map for having an improved management system for shark fishery."

Director of biodiversity programme, climate change division, Naeem Ashraf Raja said that there were about 500 gill-net vessels and around 800 trawlers associated with fishing. However, data on landings was not available especially regarding sharks and rays as they were caught as a by-catch.

Pakistan, he pointed out, exported shark fins to countries like the Philippines, Thailand and Taiwan where they were in high demand. Shark meat was sold to local vendors while its skin was dried and used in poultry feed.

Director of Balochistan Coastal Development Authority Ahmed Nadeem shared local perspective on sharks and told the audience that traditional fishermen were well aware of sharks, the allied species and their role in the marine ecosystem.

## Sindh to upgrade date processing methods

The Sindh government in partnership with a private company is setting up a state of the art dehydration plant for sorting, grading and washing of the fruit in Khairpur. The facility includes a cold storage as well.

The firm has been provided four acres by the Sindh government with a subsidy on interest on debt acquired for the project. The plant, to be set up at an estimated cost of 250m, is targeted to start operations by the next season. While the plant's operative capacity may vary between 4,000-5,000 tonnes per annum, officials say that it would have great demonstrating effect on date growers.

After harvesting in July-August, dates are dried under the open sky and exposed to all kinds of weather and unhygienic conditions. Dates are put in a huge heated cauldron for half an hour under conventional fruit processing mode that turns freshly plucked dates into chuhara. Rest of the crop is sold as fresh dates which are dried on raw mats under the sunlight for around eight days.

"If climatic conditions are favourable, each tree can produce 100-120kg of dates (aseel and karblain variety). That includes 45kg of soft dates if there are no rains. The entire quantity is otherwise processed as chuhara," says a grower.

But for the initiative to set up a dehydration plant, the date palm sector, by and large, faces the same old problems including lack of modernisation techniques and missing better varieties of dates. The annual dates production in the country is estimated at around 535,000 tonnes of which only 86,000 tonnes are exported and the rest are either consumed locally or perish.

Dates export could be raised to \$200m from the current \$28m with proper processing and packaging.

The provincial agriculture department data show that Sindh has more than one third share (38.3%) to the country's overall area under dates and more than half (53.8%) in terms of its production. Again, it is Khairpur district that produces 85% of Sindh's total output.

## Introducing cost effective varieties of Hybrid seeds

Maize is the third most important cereal crop of Pakistan covering more than 1.2m hectares annually and the national average yield is about four tonnes per hectare. Maize productivity has increased by 75% from its levels in the early 1990s. This can be accredited to the adoption and expansion of hybrid maize varieties particularly in the spring season.

Pakistan meets 85% demand for hybrid maize seeds through imports cost-

ing the national exchequer about \$60m every year. The central and southern Punjab areas are the main 'maize belt'. However, the crop has the potential to be satisfactorily cultivated in all provinces.

Earlier this month, the USAID-funded Agriculture Innovation Programme (AIP) launched two of its bio-fortified maize hybrids identified and produced by National Agricultural Research Centre (Narc). These hybrids are two times more protein rich than the normal maize cultivars.

The USAID programme is a four-year \$30m initiative designed to increase productivity and incomes of the farmers through the promotion and dissemination of modern production practices for wheat, maize, rice, livestock, fruits, and vegetables. The varieties of maize distributed are stated to resist drought and heat stresses and have enhanced nutritional quality.

"We are seeing valuable and precious contributions from the maize programme of AIP which will help to lessen the import dependency on hybrid maize seeds," according to Dr Mohammad Azeem Khan, Director-General, Narc.

The two bio-fortified hybrids, better known as Quality Protein Maize (QPM) can offer about 90% of the nutritional value of skim milk and many clinical studies also proved that malnourished children recovered by consuming QPM as the only source of protein.

The hybrids will serve as a cheap source of protein feed particularly for the poultry industry. The registration of these two hybrids, originally sourced from CIMMYT's Latin America breeding hub (CIMMYT Columbia), is now under process with Federal Seed Certification and Registration Department (FSCRD).

After a thorough evaluation of maize germ-plasms in the past two years, local partners identified 36 hybrids and 13 open pollinated varieties (OPVs) suitable to grow in the diverse ecologies of Pakistan. These selected maize germ-plasms have an early maturity, enhanced nutritional quality and 'stay green' and farmers can use them as food and feed.



## Import of fresh fruit from Afghanistan jumps 46%

Pakistan's import of fresh fruits from Afghanistan via Torkham and Kuram Agency has substantially increased during the 8MFY16 amounting to 245,000 tons. Duties and taxes on the import of fresh fruit have also jumped from PKR 643 Mn to PKR 1.8Bn during the current fiscal year, reflecting an increase of 182% over the last year. Whereas, the export of fresh fruit from Pakistan to Afghanistan via Torkham has increased from 73,000 tons to 196,000 tons in the period under review.

## Commercialization of GM corn seeds allowed without field trials

The federal govt. has granted permission to multinational companies for commercialization of genetically modified (GM) corn seeds in Pakistan. In this regard, the Ministry of Climate Change has awarded licenses to different companies including Monsanto and DuPont/Pioneer. However, two federal ministers Khurram Dastgir and Sikandar Hayat Khan categorically defined that the govt. had given license to any multinational company for commercial trial of GM corn seeds in the country.

## Sugar exports: extension in validity with rebate sought

Pakistan sugar millers have sought a three-month extension until Jun. 30, 2016 in the validity of sugar exports with a



rebate due to expire on Mar. 31, 2016 as exports remain unattractive except to Afghanistan, despite a rebate of PKR 13/kg. the Economic Co-ordination Committee (ECC) had approved 0.5Mn tons of sugar exports until Mar. 31, 2016, of which contracts of only 253,000 tons have so far been registered with the State Bank of Pakistan. Currently, sugar is only being exported to Afghanistan where the market is limited therefore, the sanctioned export quantity could not be entirely exported within the stipulated period.

## Vegetables worth \$ 126Mn exported in eight months

Vegetable exports from the country during 8MFY16 witnessed 4.72% increase as compared to the exports of

corresponding period of 2015. According to the PBS, about 430,995 metric ton of fresh vegetables worth \$ 126.78Mn were exported in 8MFY16 as compared to 417,995 metric tons valuing of \$ 121.06Mn in same period of last year.

## Dar for investigating rise in poultry prices

Finance Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar has directed National Food Security and Research Minister to investigate rise in prices of chicken and poultry products during recent days. The minister said that govt. has already given concessions to the poultry industry such as withdrawal of additional sales tax and exemption of withholding tax to reduce the prices of poultry products.

## Meat exports surge 17% in the three quarters

The exports of meat and meat preparations increased by 16.76% during 9MFY16, compared to the corresponding period of last year. Exports of meat and preparation were recorded at \$ 212.79Mn as compared to the exports of \$ 182.25Mn during same period last year, according to the PBS. However, on y-0-y basis, the meat exports from the country decreased by 4.29% to \$ 24.44Mn Mar;16 as compared to \$ 25.53Mn in Mar;15. ♦

