Food Safety and Food Technology

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Institutional Affiliations

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 Obesity is one of the most significant risk factors for several diseases such as heart diseases, cancer, kidney diseases, stroke, and diabetes. It is estimated that by the next year, 35% of the American population will be at the risk of developing obesity. In the past five to six decades, obesity has emerged as an epidemic and a cause of the majority of chronic diseases. Currently, one-third of the populace is obese, while the other one-third is overweight. Researchers have estimated that by the year 2030, about 52% of the Americans will be obese. The government spends $150 to 300 USD annually on the health implications related to obesity (*The Weight of the Nation*, 2012). Healthcare cost for obesity-related diseases in America is increasing each year. It has also cost billions of dollars in productivity, businesses, and lost industrial workdays.

 Research has established that the onset of obesity is observed early in life. The concept of overeating is also linked with psychology and needs a change in the eating behavior of the public. The changing patterns of obesity are due to the change in production and consumption of food. Human physiology, psychology, and social behavior are all responsive to food scarcity.

Food conditioning is indispensable for survival and thus, our eating habits are designed accordingly. The major shift in the diet of Americans came with the development of the agricultural production and industrialization of food. The government started subsidizing farmers and spent a lot of money on research. The food industry built a food economy with excessive but cheap food products. However, another reason is that human activities also changed with time. There was reduced or almost no physical activity to burn off calories. It is to be noted that genetics has not changed this fast in the past few decades, but the synthetic environment has.

 The pattern and prevalence of obesity are different among various communities. It is abundant in lower-income communities because of the unavailability of healthy foods at affordable prices. It is important to understand the disparities, as it would in turn, help in understanding the obesity epidemic. There is a huge difference in the profit margin for fresh fruits and junk foods and beverages in the market. The marketing, pricing, and proliferation of fast-food restaurants is directly proportional to obesity. The production of corn, soy, and other commodity crops, receive billions in budget. The cost of unhealthy food is subsidized. The food and agricultural corporations have economic motivations, and show resistance to change. However, there is no subsidizing for the production of fresh vegetables and fruits. Some small family farms with local collaboration are starting to produce on their own. The sales of local fruits and vegetables are only 2% of the total agricultural sales. The production of fresh food is not enough to meet the dietary requirements of the country. Agricultural farms produce less than 3% of fresh food. The government needs to initiate programs to make fresh food production economically viable (*The Weight of the Nation*, 2012). Less money is being spent on the food, while billions are being spent on health care costs.

 It is necessary to spend money on making the cities environment-friendly for its citizens by providing bike lanes, sidewalks, and parks. The public also needs to participate with the public health care leaders to utilize the facilities that the government provides for them. People should start engaging in exercise and active lifestyles and go for timely assessment of high cholesterol, diabetes, overweightness and obesity. Special and innovative programs should be introduced to low-income communities to reduce the incidence of this health hazard. The best solution to reduce obesity in society is indulging the citizens in growing vegetables and fruits, using school grounds as sports grounds in the evenings, mobile green shops, walking to schools and workplaces, and increasing the trend of farmer's markets. Government and public health policymakers should initiate awareness and prevention programs. A clear vision, collective will, and environment-friendly lifestyle choices can help in improving the public health.

**References**

*The Weight of the Nation: Part 3 - Challenges (HBO Docs)*. (2012). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmcZRgWBdwQ&list=PLVVILW-m7zH1gAQyHHgaeHy4WnmPm7g0N&index=4