

# Editorial

FIRST OF ALL, WELCOME to the first edition of the re-launched *Food Chain*. On behalf of the Editorial Board and staff involved in the production of the journal at Practical Action Publishing, I hope you find the mix of articles informative, useful and above all interesting. I would welcome your views and opinions on any aspect of the new journal – both positive and negative – so that we can continue to make it as relevant as possible to your work.

*Food Chain* first ran biannually from 1990 to 2003 as a magazine for small-scale food processors, published by the then Intermediate Technology Development Group, and many back issues are available at [http://practicalaction.org/agroprocessing/food\\_chain](http://practicalaction.org/agroprocessing/food_chain). For the new journal, we have introduced peer reviews of all articles that are submitted and I have to thank the highly experienced and authoritative members of the new Editorial Board and others both for reviewing the articles and more generally for guiding the development and content of the new journal. They are able to represent most areas of the world and all aspects that make up the food chain, including production, distribution, processing, marketing and economics.

The re-launch of *Food Chain* is set against a backdrop of rapidly increasing global food prices that are already beginning to affect food supplies throughout the world. Traded food commodities are making significant amounts of money for speculators, but the price rises are seriously damaging the food security of many millions of others. This is coupled with financial, energy, water and climate crises that are also hitting hard those affected by global food price increases. At the same time, expansion of transnational food manufacturing and retailing has accelerated, following deregulation of markets and international trade since the 1980s and 1990s. This is having profound effects, both positive and negative, on the opportunities and access to markets for small-scale food producers and processors in all countries. To address these changes, we have broadened the remit of *Food Chain* to include all aspects of food production 'from farm to fork', while keeping the focus on small-scale operations. This 'bigger picture' is reflected in the current issue by articles from Patrick Mulvany and Jonathan Ensor, who also note the juxtaposition of millions of hungry people living in some parts of the world with millions of obese people in others.

Although *Food Chain* does not cover agriculture per se, procuring high-quality raw materials is fundamental for all types of food processing and the fresh food sector. Patrick and Jonathan's paper

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describes the multiple threats to small-scale food production and the developments coordinated by the UN towards a new model of 'food sovereignty'. They describe how policy and institutional failures have allowed concentration of power in the food chain and speculation on food commodities, which they argue is the fundamental underlying reason why people are malnourished, small-scale producers and processors are poor, and the price of food is rising. In particular, unfair trade agreements are identified as causes of current economic problems facing many small-scale food producers, and they call for decentralization and a move away from the control exercised by large-scale companies in the current global value chains. Of course, there are different views of the way forward, and Marcos Fava Neves calls for greater investment and consolidation of existing food chains to meet the growing world food shortages and high prices. He describes the increasing pressures on farmland to supply 13 different types of requirement, from food and fuels to tourism, the main macro-environmental factors that have caused disequilibria in food chains and food price increases, and he concludes with a 10-point agenda for change.

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Small-scale food producers have not been as involved in value chains as anticipated

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Value chains have for many years been the focus of much research as well as commercial and institutional development of the concept. Not surprisingly, they feature strongly in a number of articles in this issue: Matteo Borzoni and Nigel Poole examine in detail the different strategies that are used by both small-scale and larger coffee roasters to source their beans, the trader-roaster linkages and governance of transactions when importing crops from producers in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Girja Sharan and colleagues describe improvements to the supply chain for fresh vegetables in India. However, the involvement of small-scale food producers in value chains has not taken place to the extent that was once anticipated: there has been much research into the possible causes, but to date little concrete action. My article attempts to explore some of the reasons for this lack of inclusion and suggests ways in which greater support from universities and research institutes should be made available to processors in least developed countries that do not benefit from foreign direct investment. Action is also needed by food scientists and policy makers in all countries to reduce wastage and enable more of the food that is produced to be actually eaten. Patrick and Jonathan's paper calls for opening up of decision-making bodies and governance structures of R&D organizations to allow greater transparency, equity and accountability in budget allocation and decisions on R&D priorities. There is a need for much wider representation in these institutions to set the agenda for the design of policies and technologies that are developed, why, how and for whom. They believe that the governance of science

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There should be wider representation in R&D institutions

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and technological R&D is presently largely dominated by people who are increasingly distant from rural realities.

While writing this Editorial, I came across a viewpoint that reinforces this in a discussion of a project to eradicate screw worm in cattle in the US:

...to put this type of project together, you need really good field staff *in charge of things*. But today the abstract thinkers are in charge, and they get locked into abstract debates and arguments that are not based in reality. They get bogged down in permanent bickering when they've lost touch with what's actually happening in the real world. The only way anything gets done is when there's an emergency (Grandin, T. and Johnson, C. (2006) *Animals in Translation*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London).

We are rapidly approaching an emergency in the world's food supply and *Food Chain* aims to report *practical* ways that people working in public institutions, NGOs and the private sector have found to address the problems that they face. Girja Sharan and colleagues show how positive practical support and action by their research institute has improved the supply of fresh vegetables, and they conclude that to be successful it is necessary to have close cooperation between public sector institutions, the private sector, and the farmers or processors themselves, with each group having an equal input into both design and implementation of the development assistance. This is a point that is reinforced by Drew Tulchin and colleagues, who describe the benefits of 'food hubs' and the involvement of local communities and farmers to both improve farm incomes and the quality and availability of locally grown foods in the USA, leading to increased incomes and greater food security for poor communities.

However, not everyone agrees on the nature of the problems, let alone the solutions, and another intention of *Food Chain* is to promote debates on contentious issues that are relevant to the livelihoods of small-scale producers and others involved in the food chain. This will be a regular 'Crossfire' feature in each issue, where two leading figures debate a topical issue of concern. In this first issue, Mike Dillon and Thomas Reardon debate the effects of supermarket growth in developing countries on the success of small-scale producers. I also aim to have an occasional 'Taking Stock' feature, in which people who have long experience and a deep understanding of a particular aspect of the food chain present their personal views. In this issue, Adam Brett describes his 20-year experience of operating a fair trade business and offers his views on the development and current position of fair-traded foods.

A further rationale for *Food Chain* is to offer practical advice and information on approaches, techniques and equipment that have

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There needs to be closer cooperation between public sector institutions, the private sector, and the farmers or processors

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20 years' experience of operating a fair trade business are reflected upon

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been shown to work in practice. These are included as 'Field Reports' and in this issue there are a number of articles: in addition to those by Girja Sharan et al. and Drew Tulchin et al., Simon Gorman highlights the benefits of lacto-fermented vegetables in achieving improved food security and income generation for small-scale processors and vegetable producers. There are also going to be short 'Technical Reports' that highlight solutions that have been found to particular technical problems. In this issue I describe simple techniques for disinfecting food grains, and we will be pleased to receive short reports from field workers and academic researchers on techniques that have been found to work in practice and that are likely to benefit large numbers of small-scale food producers.

*Food Chain* also aims to provide information on new publications and other sources of information, including DVDs and websites that are of interest to readers, and in this issue we have reviews of the *WTO negotiations on agriculture and developing countries*, *Case studies in food policy for developing countries*, and the *Opportunities in Food Processing series*. We have also included a link to a website that has video clips of simple equipment used for small-scale pie and pasty making. There is also a summary of upcoming meetings, conferences and exhibitions that are taking place over the next six months. We aim to include this in each issue, so if you are planning a food-related event between November 2011 and May 2012, please send us the details.

In summary, I intend *Food Chain* to provide an exchange of information and ideas between, on the one hand, academics and policy makers who are working on all aspects of post-harvest food supplies, and on the other, field-based practitioners who are working with small-scale food producers, processors, retailers and distributors on a daily basis. The extent to which we can achieve this depends on the contributions from you and your colleagues. Please show this copy of *Food Chain* to your co-workers or send them the link ([www.practicalactionpublishing.org/foodchain](http://www.practicalactionpublishing.org/foodchain)) and take out a subscription. I look forward to receiving both your comments and feedback on this the first issue and your contributions for future issues.

*Peter Fellows, Editor*

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