

# Editorial

FEEDBACK ON THE FIRST ISSUE of *Food Chain* indicates that it has been very well received; thank you for this. In this second issue, *Food Chain* continues to provide an exchange of information and ideas between academics and field-based practitioners who are working with producers, processors, retailers, and distributors throughout the food chain. Two themes that emerge in this issue are the need for collaboration between small-scale producers and larger-scale operations and the need to carefully manage interventions to ensure that all participants – not just the obvious ones – are fully represented.

Alexis Morcrette and Sharad Rai describe in detail the efforts made in Nepal, using participatory market mapping, to improve the dairy sector. In addition to involving representatives of marginalized dairy farmers, they ensured that veterinary and livestock officers, agro-veterinary retailers, artificial insemination providers, banks, the Dairy Development Corporation, large-scale milk processors, representatives of milk cooperatives, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and local milk sellers were all able to contribute. The success of the programme required clear incentives for each market player to attend mapping workshops and careful facilitation to explore constraints, so that the workshops were seen as business opportunities rather than just 'talking shops'. By drawing on multiple subjective perceptions of the different participants, they were able to build an objective picture of the market that showed increased opportunities for each party to benefit.

Peggy Oti-Boateng and her co-workers in Ghana report a similar need to involve multiple agencies in the development of a model for innovation and transfer of soybean technology to informal soybean farmers and processors. These included research institutes, government nutrition and agricultural extension agents, rural banks, and the Ministry of Food and Agriculture's Women in Agricultural Development Department – all coordinated by the Technology Consultancy Centre at Kwame Nkrumah University. This is an example of higher education and research institutions becoming involved in meaningful development, rather than the 'ivory tower' mentality that I criticized in the last issue. The programme transformed subsistence microenterprises to small- and medium-scale enterprises and the transfer of knowledge acquired during development and manufacture of prototype machinery also created opportunities for establishment

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of small-scale manufacturing industries. The improved technological capability and capacity building raised product quality and allowed access to international competitive markets.

Lucia Wegner and Gine Zwart assess the debate over the relative benefits and problems of smallholder and large-scale farming. They describe how low external investment farming is associated with sustainable production methods whereas high external investment farming is characterized by high capital investment and intensive agriculture – although neither approach is necessarily characteristic of the scale of operation. This is particularly pertinent in view of the large areas of land in developing countries that are currently being acquired by foreign investors. However, they believe that the debate polarizes opinion and obscures the potential to build complementarities between the two approaches. This requires support to smallholder farmers, to enable them to commercialize their operations, and changes to large-scale farming to make it more ‘pro-poor’. In particular, the authors highlight the opportunities for collaboration between large-scale investors and smallholders in a diverse range of contract farming schemes that bring smallholders into food value chains.

In the Taking Stock article, Dave Harcourt offers his views on the unacceptable levels of wastage in the food chain, identifying that in wealthier industrialized countries wastage tends to be concentrated at the consumption end of the food chain whereas in poorer countries more wastage arises in the production, transport and processing stages. He notes the lack of data on this important subject and how the distinction between wastage in rich and poor countries is becoming less clear as some developing countries industrialize. He calls on food scientists to support food processors to reduce waste by creating and supplying information and by undertaking research to find solutions within the developing world environment.

Caryn Abrahams questions the focus that some development agencies have on integrating farmers into supermarket value chains. As part of her research, she found that some supermarket managers in Africa have neither the interest nor the ability to act in a developmental role and she suggests that much more emphasis needs to be placed on improving traditional markets, where most people buy their foods.

Two field reports in this issue are by Franklin Murphy and Happiness Mchomvu. Franklin describes research into reducing the effects of calcium oxalate crystals in taro, which are potent irritants that can puncture the skin and cause intense itching. When eaten, they cause swelling of the throat and mouth, and difficulty in swallowing and breathing. Happiness reports on the work of the Women Entrepreneurship Development Programme in Tanzania (WED), which had achieved great success in training, advising, and

supporting subsistence food processors since 1993. Over 8,000 micro- and small-scale entrepreneurs have been trained in tailored courses as well as 340 trainers who now offer training and monitoring services throughout Tanzania. WED was also instrumental in setting up the Tanzania Food Processors Association and its lobbying efforts have enabled members to get reduced certification and product testing fees. It also initiated the Tanzania Women's Chamber of Commerce, an umbrella organization that includes over 2,000 women operating in different food processing sectors. To me, an important innovation took place when WED established a shop for processors with limited finance to buy packaging materials, production equipment, and quality control instruments. Happiness has identified the challenge of sourcing packaging materials and lack of technical knowledge on packaging as the next area for WED to develop.

The two technical reports in this issue are an article by Edwin Willemsen on low-oxygen storage of crops and my contribution on low-cost methods of measuring the moisture content of foods. Finally, I have included book reviews by Andrew Shepherd and Ben Bennett and a selection of the very large number of food-related conferences and meetings that will take place worldwide over the next six months. I hope that you find the mix of topics interesting and informative and that you will show this copy of *Food Chain* to your co-workers or send them the link to [www.practicalactionpublishing.org/foodchain](http://www.practicalactionpublishing.org/foodchain) so that they can take out a subscription. I look forward to receiving your comments and also your articles for future issues.

*Peter Fellows, Editor*