

Editorial: Problems in the meat and fish industries

SINCE THE LAST ISSUE, news has emerged of corruption in the food chain for processed beef products, with horsemeat substituted in Europe, donkey meat in Kenya, and donkey, water buffalo, and goat meat in South Africa. I have included short papers by seven authors, each of which offers a different perspective on the unfolding scandals and the implications for transparency and traceability in the meat food chain. These are of course infringements of labelling regulations and no one is yet suggesting that food safety has been compromised. But consumers, especially in Europe, have been astounded at the lack of detection or enforcement of the most basic food regulation (food should be of 'the nature, substance and quality' demanded by consumers). As a result, sales of processed meats including mince, burgers, meatballs, and lasagne have tumbled and, as Jeanette Longfield puts it in her article, retailers in Europe are now 'scrambling to apologize to their customers and pledge to clean up their supply chains' (and of course to rebuild their profits and their position as suppliers of wholesome foods). Meanwhile the regulatory authorities are attempting to untangle a complex web of subcontracting suppliers that so far involves abattoirs, agents, meat processors, and wholesalers in nine countries. The outcome of this, in the EU at least, is likely to be requirements for intensified screening and food testing, the cost of which is likely to fall on producers and processors. In addition, many retailers are now saying that they will source meat locally in future, so the combination of this and cost of screening may become an additional non-tariff barrier to small producers in developing countries. Surely, rather than yet more regulations, it is not too much to ask for the meat industry associations to impose some self-regulation: as Raghavan Sampathkumar points out, they have 'insider knowledge of the practices adopted by their members [and] can enforce compliance ... through peer pressure since a few outlaws will tarnish not only the image of the entire industry but a country's reputation also'.

It is not just the meat industry that has problems: for decades, the fishing industry has been beset with serious issues of over-exploitation and depletion of fish stocks; by-catches that are thrown overboard; falling incomes and reduced livelihoods of artisan fishers; and more generally a failure to deliver sustainable fisheries throughout the world. Not to mention the ongoing scandal (and tragedy) of millions of sharks having their fins cut off for shark-fin soup, before being thrown back alive to suffer a lingering death by starvation or by drowning because they are unable to swim to oxygenate their gills. Brian O'Riordan notes that Japan is the largest consumer of fishery products. Large-scale deep-water fishing boats, which are responsible for more than 40 per cent of discarded fish, have done enormous damage to the livelihoods of artisan fishers in developing countries. He makes the

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important point that industrial fishing has short links in the supply chain with a high degree of vertical and horizontal integration, whereas artisan fisheries have longer and more complex links that produce a more equitable distribution of the benefits from fishing. I agree with Brian's support for a recent FAO initiative to develop international guidelines for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries.

Venkatesh Salagrama reports on a detailed study of how a multitude of problems, some of which are likely to be connected to climate change, are affecting Indian artisan fishers and he describes the coping strategies that they now have to use to maintain their livelihoods. A fisheries theme in this issue continues with articles by Margaret Masette, who describes a Ugandan study of the value chain for processed sardines from Lake Victoria. In part, this has highlighted the mismanagement and malpractices in the supply chain and the need for harmonized policies between countries bordering the lake to improve fish quality, regulate the activities of traders, and improve the incomes and livelihoods of those who benefit least: the fishers and processors. But it is not all bad news: Richard Abila and co-workers report how mobile phones have helped Kenyan fishers around Lake Victoria to increase their access to market information and reduce exploitation by other players in the fish value chain. SMS texts can be used to obtain real-time market information, supplied automatically from a centralized database, 24 hours a day. These enable fishers to make instant decisions on sales of their catches and other benefits are expected to be more transparent pricing, improved fish prices, reduced marketing costs, and fewer post-harvest fish losses.

But this issue is not all about meat and fish. Sally Brooks discusses the issues surrounding the potential effectiveness and acceptance of biofortified foods (micro-nutrient-dense crops), using as an example the development of 'Golden Rice', a genetically engineered rice that contains high levels of β -carotene, which is intended to address vitamin A deficiency. Jessica Duncan analyses how the much-vaunted Indian dairy revolution of the last 50 years has affected pastoralists, in view of the push to promote similar programmes in African countries that have significant numbers of these itinerant herders. Finally, I have included the final part of my article on setting up a food-processing unit – this time looking at materials needed to construct equipment and processing buildings. The books reviewed in this issue are *Food and Development* by E.M. Young, reviewed by Rebecca Kent, and *Measuring and Improving Social, Environmental and Economic Productivity: Getting it Done* by Mike Dillon and John Heap, reviewed by Peter Fellows. As usual, I have included some of the food-related meetings and conferences that are planned for the next few months. I hope that you find the issue interesting and informative.

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