

Media Release

18 June 2008

The Humble Chicken just got Interesting

The hungry in the world are going to get hungrier. There are 800 million people who are living in absolute poverty already and their numbers are going to increase. The answer according to an Australian Professor of Nutrition and the Investment Bank Morgan Stanley lies with the humble chook.

The global trade in chicken meat will accelerate as beef and pork costs rise proportionally and consumers turn to this affordable, more economically and environmentally sustainable alternative.

In a paper to be presented at the World Poultry Congress in Brisbane in July, University of Queensland Professor David Farrell warns that current demographic and farming trends are leading to the emergence of a global food crisis.

"The global population is currently over 6.5 billion and is expected to increase by another 700 million by 2016. This means that there will be more mouths to feed over the next decade and there is unlikely to be sufficient arable land to sustain this projected expansion," Professor Farrell said.

Professor Farrell argues that the carrying capacity of planet earth has already been exceeded and that this is reflected in a global surge in world grain prices taking place against the backdrop of higher oil prices and a shift towards biofuels.

As population increases, the world will see an increased demand for protein, particularly in the developing world as affluence is a driving force of livestock production. As developing countries become wealthier, their people demand more animal products and grain demands rise proportionally. To make matters worse, land for food increasingly has to compete with land for fuel.

"The human race must either stop breeding, or change its eating habits, or find less land-intensive alternatives to biofuels because it cannot find sufficient land, labour and technology to raise grain supply for meat to levels that satisfy current and projected demand," Professor Farrell said.

A recent report by global investment bank Morgan Stanley supports Professor Farrell's conclusions and notes that increased chicken meat consumption is an economic and environmental inevitability because it is less grain and pollution intensive than beef or pork, partially due to a significantly higher food conversion efficiency in chickens.

The report also highlights major differences among different types of meat in the amount of pollution caused by differences in efficiencies of meat production. It cites a recent study that suggests that poultry are far less pollution intensive than beef and pork.

Assuming that NO extra grain is available for meat production over the next decade the report goes on to conclude that, if we are to avoid a food and environmental crisis, we must improve the efficiency of grain use for meat production or simply eat less of all types of meat.

In the grain efficiency scenario this can only be achieved if the overall share in chicken rises to about 57 per cent from current levels of 35 per cent in both the developed and developing world.

The eat less meat scenario requires dropping consumption to a uniform 131 grams of meat/day across the developed and developing world. This implies a drop of 43 per cent for industrial countries.

The Executive Director of the Australian Chicken Meat Federation, Dr Andreas Dubs, said, "The bottom line is that prices at the cash register and the industry's environmental sustainability will determine eating habits into the future. If we want to continue to consume meat protein, chicken is the most economical and environmentally sustainable option."

*****ends*****

For further information, please contact:

Symon Madry, Wilkinson Media: 02 8001 8888 or 0409 919 508

Dr Andreas Dubs, Executive Director, Australian Chicken Meat Federation: 0432 925 933