

The price of corn and obesity



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The portions of food that Americans eat have grown at a disturbing rate over the last twenty years.

And to parallel the growth in portions, the size of the Americans eating those portions has increased as well. Obesity has clearly become one of the most prevalent health conditions affecting the population. At most fast food restaurants, consumers have the option to increase the size (or supersize) their order for only a small fee. The inexpensiveness of large portions of unhealthy food has had a significant role in the obesity epidemic that is striking America. Increased substitution of sugar additives for cheaper corn based products has been linked to the rise in obesity. The ease with which corn is produced and the natural properties of corn that allow it to grow readily in North America has caused corn to become the staple crop of the United States. Not only does corn cover most of the Midwest but there is so much of a surplus that it has become part of almost every food in a supermarket (Pollan 23-26). Corn producers will alter the corn so it can suit every need possible.

Corn can be made into a pesticide or fed to cows or even made into wax and magazines shine (Pollan 15-17). But the main way corn has become heavily involved in our diet is the substitution of High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS) for sugar. Because of the surplus of corn, High Fructose Corn Syrup is a cheap and available sweetener that is currently used in a vast majority of food products.

In his book *The Omnivores Dilemma*, Michael Pollan states, "?? since 1977 an American??™s average daily intake of calories has jumped by more than

10%??? (Pollan 102). At face value it seems as though we can make a direct link between the rise in HFCS production and the increased calorie intake and blame the weight gain solely on the unhealthiness of HFCS. But this is not completely true as HFCS is not that much healthier than sugar. In fact a Time CNN article states that, ??? The American Medical Association recently announced at its annual policy-making meeting in Chicago that high-fructose corn syrup does not contribute more to obesity than sugar or other caloric sweeteners.??? However, because HFCS is so readily available and so cheap, manufacturers have been able to produce a greater quantity of product for a lower price (USDA Economic Research Service). This does not only affect items such as soda and other foods one would assume has High Fructose Corn Syrup concentration, but HFCS can be found in condiments, jelly, even bread. As a result there is less expensive food for the consumer, but more of it as well.

Any smart consumer would buy more products for less money and who could blame them Because the food is so cheap the quantity becomes the norm of the household. When a larger amount of food becomes the norm, people get fatter. And this is the situation we are presented with today. It is true that a consumer eating a supersized meal does not create an immediate danger to him or his surroundings. However, facts from *The Omnivore's Dilemma* prove that it is not an immediate danger that is the issue:??? Three of every five Americans are overweight; one of every five is obese. The disease formerly known as adult onset diabetes has had to be renamed Type II diabetes since it now occurs so frequently in children. A recent study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* predicts that a child born in

2000 has a one-in-three chance of developing diabetes.???(Pollan, 102)Currently over 60% of Americans are either overweight or obese.

There are more and more health risks and diseases being associated with obesity each day (The Obesity Society). Pollan states in his book that obesity is creating such a problem that it is ??????costing the health care system an estimated \$90 billion a year.??? (Pollan, 102) The \$90 billion spent one year turns into far more over time. And with the obesity situation getting worse, the debt is sure to get worse as well.

From a financial perspective the government should find a way to relieve itself of the \$90 billion it is paying, a relief that can be created while helping curb obesity. As in the case of cigarettes and tobacco, it might make sense for the government to place a tax on HFCS and therefore reduce the amount of unhealthy consumed by Americans. The cheap prices of food as a result of High Fructose Corn Syrup have led to decreased prices of food and therefore higher quantities sold. While producers have been spending less on the production of products using HFCS as opposed to sugar, the health industry has been suffering. If HFCS was more expensive, rather than charge more for a drink, distributors would most probably reduce portion size and sell for the same price. This solution could possibly set forth a framework necessary to solve the pressing issue of obesity in America. Haley, Stephen L.

US and World Sugar and HFCS Production Costs. 26 Jan. 2009 " Is High-Fructose Corn Syrup Really Good for You" Breaking News, Analysis, Politics, Blogs, News Photos, Video, Tech Reviews - TIME. com. 29 Jan. 2009 The Obesity Society.

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28 Jan. 2009 Pollan, Michael. *The Omnivores Dilemma : A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin (Non-Classics), 2007.