



Sugar: a problem of developed countries

The contribution of sugar towards chronic disease is more relevant to developed countries than to the developing world (*Nature* **482**, 27–29; 2012). In Asia, for example, up to 10% of the population is obese and/or diabetic (see go.nature.com/qmmoha), even though the daily energy contribution from sugar is less than 837 kilojoules per person. It is more likely that a high consumption of starch-based foods is to blame for this statistic (see go.nature.com/2hoimi).

Overconsumption of foods that have a high glycaemic index (that trigger a rapid and sharp increase in blood glucose), such as wheat, potatoes and certain types of rice, also contributes to obesity and diabetes. Emphasis on sugar alone is therefore too narrow a basis for devising policies to curb these problems.

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Sugar: other 'toxic' factors play a part

Regulating products based on a scientific risk analysis is a worthy goal, but I contend that Robert Lustig and colleagues

oversimplify the “toxic” truth about refined carbohydrates (*Nature* **482**, 27–29; 2012). Rather than demonizing sugar, the authors would have better served public health with recommendations to manage a balanced diet with exercise.

The authors also downplay other complex factors that could contribute to non-communicable disease burdens. These include relatively recent changes in exercise patterns, and pollutants and additives that affect metabolic activity.

Putting sugars in a regulatory league with alcohol and tobacco is misleading. Sugars do not cause behavioural intoxication, nor do they have the second-hand proximity impact of tobacco smoking — key factors in their regulation.

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Australia: small steps to control invasives

We believe that there are more obvious and less destructive options for controlling gamba grass and other invasive weeds in Australia than introducing mega-herbivores such as elephants (*Nature* **482**, 30; 2012).

Biological control using carefully screened host-specific arthropods or pathogens, combined with quarantine and spread-prevention measures, is

a more balanced approach, and one with which Australia has considerable experience.

The world is littered with examples of generalist vertebrate species (cane toads, foxes, mynas, mosquito fish and so on) that were introduced in the misguided hope of controlling a pest species, only to have a substantial undesired impact on native biodiversity.

Credible solutions to these problems are more likely to come from small things done well, rather than through elephantine, rhinocerine, or even asinine fixes.

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Australia: better solutions to wildfires

Among David Bowman's more outlandish suggestions for dealing with Australia's massive problems of wildfires, feral animals and weeds, there are some workable ideas (*Nature* **482**, 30; 2012).

Some of these are already being implemented, such as the reinstatement of Aboriginal fire management in the north of the country. The Australian Wildlife Conservancy's prescribed-burn programme in the Kimberley region is having great success.

These innovations are radical,

but they are based on a sound ecological understanding.

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Australia: a case for Aboriginal rangers

David Bowman makes a strong case for employing Aboriginal people to manage their own land and to reinstate traditional fire practices in Australia (*Nature* **482**, 30; 2012). This strategy could form the basis of a coordinated, long-term conservation service.

It would also provide desperately needed employment for landowners, as well as supplying them with a reliable source of protein from hunting feral animals (N. Collier *et al.* *Hum. Ecol.* **39**, 155–164; 2011).

In addition, the Aboriginal people, who have a deep spiritual connection to land, would be able to remain on their traditional territories and so maintain close functional relationships with their ancestors.

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Australia: no price on cutting fire risk

David Bowman proposes that elephants should be introduced into Australia as a cost-effective way to control invasive gamba grass, a major source of wildfire fuel (*Nature* **482**, 30; 2012). But managing the elephants could be more expensive than, say, launching a fleet of harvesters every year to reduce fire risk. We should start by asking what is likely to work best, regardless of the cost.

To combat the problems caused by invasive aliens, we should implement ecologically sound control mechanisms that have a reasonable probability of success. We can worry about the bill later.

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