

## Food Consumption in Urban and Rural China: Quantity vs. Quality

Nutrition adequacy has been a concern in the developing world. In China, the survey indicates that the differences in diet and nutrition intakes between urban and rural areas are dramatic. Our study shows that urban China needs to improve food quality by consuming food with more protein and less cholesterol and more fibers and less fat, whereas, rural China still needs to work on quantity to increase protein and fat intakes in order to overcome their insufficiency.

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China is a big country with 1.2 billion people and thus, has attracted much attention in the global economy. Lester Brown's book on "Who Will Feed China?" in 1995 caused worldwide debates on global food safety. Will China cause food shortage in the world? It is still a myth. However, since 1978 under the economic reforms, the changes in market structure have improved the living standard and welfare among the Chinese people. The per capita income increased from \$685 Yuan in 1985 to \$3,900 Yuan in 1995. The food consumption also has changed dramatically due to the income effect.

The Third National Nutrition Survey in China in 1992 provides much information on this subject. The database covers dietary intakes, anthropometry measurements, hemoglobin assay and household income, etc. The survey shows that the average energy intake in China was slightly lower than the RDA (Recommendation Daily Allowance) level (2,400 Kcal). It was 99.8% and 95.7% of the Chinese RDA in urban and rural regions, respectively. That means, the deficiency in energy is not really a problem in China. In addition, the analysis of the sufficiency in nutrient intakes in urban region indicates that the average diet of urban inhabitants is reasonable, except in calcium and Vitamin B group. Rural inhabitants have the same problem as their urban counterparts. Besides, the dietary quality and quantity of rural inhabitants remain inadequate, especially that of protein (86% of RDA) and calcium (47% of RDA). Therefore, the food consumption in urban and rural China faces different problems.

The differences between urban and rural China are dramatic. Adjustments to a proper diet in food consumption patterns should be different. In urban China, deficiency in main nutrient intakes is not really a problem whereas, in rural China, protein and fat intakes are not sufficient. In addition, calcium intake is extremely lower than the RDA level in both regions. Preference and consumption pattern might be the most crucial reasons. To solve this problem, education and promotion of milk consumption will be the key issue. On the other hand, the concerns of increasing chronic diseases associated with increasing income call for dietary adjustment and improvement. For urban inhabitants, dietary quality should be improved by consuming food with more protein and less cholesterol and more fibers and less fat, whereas for rural ones, dietary quantity still needs improvement by increasing protein and fat intakes to overcome insufficiency. In conclusion, more education and information about health and nutrition will lead Chinese to a more proper diet without the cost of over-adjustment. The econometric models of the demand for nutrients and foods in both rural and urban China are currently being developed.

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### References

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### Endnotes

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