

Discussion

The Economics of Food, Health Nutrition

Richard Gray

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Very interesting papers

- Jay Bhattacharya
 - Who pays for obesity? a research agenda
- Boyd Swinburn
 - Need to move onto policy evaluation
 - Quality of life issue from childhood
 - Food, psychology, physiology
- Jacqueline Crowle
 - Intervention Rational (need to understand these) with a sound policy improvement process

Very interesting papers

- Julian Alston
 - made a distinction between food and obesity and different consumers – good ideas to keep in mind
 - He and his student developed pretty detailed food model to assess the impacts of taxes on consumption
 - If obesity comes from calories then calories is the best component of food to tax
- Joanna Parks
 - Examines if BMI a good measure of obesity?
 - Very aptly shows that if we are trying to predict health outcome, type-2 diabetes there are better measures of obesity than BMI.

Very interesting papers

- Iain Frazer
 - Labeling affects choice- UK TLS
 - How labels are read matters- eye tracking is interesting
- Jane Harris
 - Side effects of informed choice legislation
 - often leads to extra unforeseen costs (side effects)
- Rudy Nayga
 - Challenging data/estimation issues
 - Labeling has no observable impacts on BMI
 - Do dieters read labels?

Key messages

- Is intervention warranted?- maybe
 - Who pays is critical question
- Obesity is a big ticket item but taxes are very blunt instrument
- Are there better measures of obesity/health relationships?
- What are best policy instruments?
- Is labeling an effective policy?

We don't understand the arrows!

Policies → Behaviour → Health Outcomes → Social Welfare

Research
labelling
Education
Taxes
Subsidies
Regulations

Food consumption
Physical activity
Induced policy
Private sector S&D
Families

CHD
Diabetes
Joints
Arthritis

Income
Health care costs
Worker
productivity
Well being

Evaluation
Costs/Benefits

Unintended consequences of farm policy

- The US ethanol program combined with a lack of research has driven the price of all food up ...a lot
- This is even biased against high calorie foods

“Goodbye Metabo”- Will it work?

- Measure waistlines as part of medical check-ups
- Launch a awareness campaign
- Overweight individuals with a diagnosed fat related disease, must lose weight over 3 month period or go to nutrition education
- Firms and HMO's must reduce “thick” participants by 10% by 2012 and 25% by 2020
- Firms and communities have an incentive to create an environment for their employees to reduce waist size
- Communities have also got into the act.

Should complex problems controlled by atomistic decision makers be solved quickly?

- Obesity is a complex dynamic personal resource management issue with lots of unknown “on-site” and “off-site” impacts, with consumers making the decisions
- Reminds me soil erosion/salinity problems that have been addressed. Knowledge and education played huge role and initial progress was very slow but eventually problem solved through the development and adoption of zero tillage farming systems.
 - Do you think we have similar dynamics at play?
 - Will small instruments have big impacts in the long run?
 - Do we really need the big stick?

More Questions for the Panel

- How do we fund the creation and extension of obesity management knowledge?
- How can we create incentives for communities/work places to provide the common pool resources that will help individuals combat obesity?
- Does policy change more than incentives? Does it changes perceptions about norms and social desirability? Are we under-estimating long run policy impacts?

An observation:

