



Globetrotting Food Will Travel Farther Than Ever This Thanksgiving

When far-flung families get together for Thanksgiving dinners next week, much of their food will have logged more miles than their relatives and friends around the table, finds a new study by the Worldwatch Institute, an environmental and social policy research organization based in Washington, D.C. In the United States, food now travels between 1,500 and 2,500 miles from farm to table, as much as 25 percent farther than two decades ago.

"The farther we ship food, the more vulnerable our food system becomes," says Worldwatch Research Associate Brian Halweil, author of *Home Grown: The Case for Local Food in a Global Market*. "Many major cities in the U.S. have a limited supply of food on hand. That makes those cities highly vulnerable to anything that suddenly restricts transportation, such as oil shortages or acts of terrorism."

This vulnerability is not limited to the United States. The tonnage of food shipped between countries has grown fourfold over the last four decades. In the United Kingdom, for example, food travels 50 percent farther than it did two decades ago.

This reliance on long-distance food damages rural economies, as farmers and small food businesses become the most marginal link in the sprawling food chain. This trend also creates numerous opportunities along the way for contamination, while contributing to global warming, because of the huge quantities of fuel used for transportation.

Source: Worldwatch Institute

More: www.worldwatch.org/press/prerelease/EWP163E.pdf

Fish Catch Leveling Off

The world fish catch in 2000, the last year for which global data are available, was reported at 94.8 million tons. After decades of steady growth, the oceanic fish catch has plateaued and since the late 1980s has fluctuated between 85 million and 95 million tons.

Some three fourths of oceanic fisheries are fished at or beyond their sustainable yields. In one third of these, stocks are declining. Get the full story:

<http://www.earth-policy.org/Indicators/indicator3.htm>

Source: Earth Policy Institute, Janet Larsen

Fuel Cell-Powered Cars Hitting The Road Ahead Of Schedule

On April 2, 2001, Ballard Power Systems, the world leader in fuel cell production, announced a sale of \$16 million of fuel cell modules and support services to the Honda Motor Company. In September and December, 2001, Ballard concluded two agreements with Ford Motor Company to provide \$66 million of the same fuel cells and services.

The fuel cell economy is developing much faster than expected, as the competition among companies intensifies. This momentum in developing clean sources of electricity for vehicles, as well as homes and businesses, holds the promise of a cleaner energy future, bringing us one step closer to an eco-economy.

Fuel cells use hydrogen to produce electricity and emit only water and heat. If used to power a vehicle, the fuel cells generate electricity to run the motor. Buildings powered by fuel cells use both the electricity and the heat they generate, increasing the fuel cells' efficiency. If the hydrogen fuel is derived from the electrolysis of water, using electricity obtained from wind turbines, solar cells, hydropower turbines, or geothermal generators, it is completely emission-free. Some fuel cells rely on hydrogen extracted from natural gas or gasoline; while not emission-free, this is still much cleaner than fossil fuel combustion. Fuel cell vehicles that derive hydrogen from fossil fuels are typically twice as fuel-efficient as vehicles with internal combustion engines.

Major automakers are on the verge of introducing fuel cell vehicles much sooner than anyone anticipated.

Source: Earth Policy Institute, Bernie Fischlowitz-Roberts

More: www.earth-policy.org/Updates/Update19.htm

Innovation Takes Off if Colleges, Businesses Link: Stanford Head

With the economy in dire need of a boost, an increasing number of Japan's universities have, with government support, started collaborating with the private sector to create new businesses to revamp the nation's industrial competitiveness.

This cooperative relationship between universities and business, according to Stanford University President John Hennessy, is particularly useful when promoting the transfer of new technologies from universities to industry.

Hennessy said universities should be actively involved in transferring technologies to industry, because such efforts not only contribute to society but to the further development of the technologies.

"Universities have an obligation to see if their research can be a service to the public," Hennessy said in a recent interview in Tokyo with The Japan Times. "But I think equally importantly, the way in which they interact with industry can affect how your research develops."

Source: *The Japan Times*, Eriko Arita

China's Deadly Blood Trade

From remote villages high in the mountains of Qinghai Province in China's far west to the nation's teeming coastal cities in the east, blood selling remains endemic despite repeated government pledges to stamp it out. The reason, simply put: supply and demand.

China's medical establishment, including the very institutions that warn against the spread of hepatitis and AIDS, can't survive without buying blood. Cultural taboos keep those who don't need the money from volunteering blood. Tight budgets constrain government spending in poorer areas for safer means of blood collection. And an entire economic underclass has become so dependent on money from selling blood that officials tolerate it.

The consequences for China – on the brink of an AIDS epidemic – and for the rest of the world may well be devastating. A recent report by a group advising the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency predicts that China could have between 10 and 15 million HIV/AIDS cases by 2010; the report specifically cites poor hygiene in blood sales as a critical factor in the virus's spread.

Source: *Wall St. Journal*, Leslie Chang

Fat America

Saddam Hussein isn't the only menace with weapons of mass destruction, said Derrick Z. Jackson in *The Boston Globe*. Frito-Lay, Coca-Cola, and Burger King have already laid waste to millions of Americans, leaving them swollen and gasping on couches and in hospital beds.

Who needs anthrax and nerve gas when you can destroy people with "stockpiles of sugar, salt, and fat?" A new government study tells the tale: Nearly two out of three Americans are now overweight. A third are clinically obese. In just 20 years, the number of fatties has doubled, and obesity is growing fastest among children. Steered toward junk by a barrage of advertising, today's kids shun fruit and vegetables, and subsist on sugar-coated cereal, chips, and soda. Many don't exercise.

Terrorism can't hold a candle to the casualties inflicted by our lethargy and our gluttony, which lead to

diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, and cancer. To protect American lives, we need a preemptive strike. President Bush should declare "a war on our sedentary ways."

Source: *The Week*

The World's 25 Largest Companies

In millions of U.S. dollars:

1. Generals Electric (U.S.) - \$245,254
2. Microsoft (U.S.) - \$235,266
3. Wal-Mart Stores (U.S.) - \$217,771
4. Exxon Mobil (U.S.) - \$215,562
5. Pfizer (U.S.) - \$179,624
6. Johnson & Johnson (U.S.) - \$160,906
7. BP (U.K.) - \$150,164
8. Citigroup (U.S.) - \$150,057
9. American Int'l. Group (U.S.) - \$142,805
10. Royal/Dutch Shell (Neth/U.K.) - \$142,151
11. Coca-Cola (U.S.) - \$119,052
12. GlaxoSmithKline (U.K.) - \$117,178
13. Procter & Gamble (U.S.) - \$116,215
14. Novartis (Switzerland) - \$111,371
15. Merck (U.S.) - \$102,828
16. Int'l. Business Machines (U.S.) - \$98,932
17. Berkshire Hathaway (U.S.) - \$97,350
18. Bank of America (U.S.) - \$95,868
19. HSBC Holdings (U.K.) - \$95,716
20. TotalFinaElf (France) - \$93,137
21. Intel (U.S.) - \$92,577
22. Toyota Motor (Japan) - \$92,413
23. Vodafone Group (U.K.) - \$87,346
24. Nestle (Switzerland) - \$86,319
25. NTT DoCoMo (Japan) - \$85,364

Source: *The Wall St. Journal*

Looking Forward to a Laugh? Good for You...

Laughter may be the best medicine, but even looking forward to having a good laugh can boost the immune system and reduce stress, U.S. researchers reported.

Just anticipating a happy, funny event can raise levels of endorphins and other pleasure and relaxation-inducing hormones and lower production of stress hormones, a team at the University of California Irvine said.

"This stuff is real," Lee Berk, an assistant professor of family medicine and researcher in complementary and alternative medicine who led the study, said in a telephone interview.

"This study shows that even knowing you will be involved in a positive humorous event days in advance reduces levels of stress hormones in the blood and increases levels of chemicals known to aid relaxation," he said.

Source: *Reuters*, Maggie Fox, Health and Science Correspondent

College Board Says Tuition, Fees Continue to Soar

College costs continue to rise faster than inflation and wages, but financial aid is rising as well, the College Board reported. "There's no better investment than a college education," said Gaston Caperton, president of the association of more than 4,000 educational institutions. The College Board reported these increases in annual tuition and fees between the 2001-02 and 2002-03 academic years:

- Four-year private colleges and universities, up \$1,001 or 5.8 percent to \$18,273.
- Two-year private colleges, up \$690, or 7.5 percent to \$9,890.
- Four-year public colleges and universities, up \$356, or 9.6 percent to \$4,081.
- Two-year public colleges, up \$127, or 7.9 percent to \$1,735.

That far outpaced increases of less than 2 percent in consumer prices and urban wages during the same period.

Source: Cox News Service

Upstart Texas Firm Makes Stir With Cheap Drugs From Canada

A small, Texas-based health-claims processor has opened a crucial new front in the war over whether Americans should be allowed to import cheap prescription drugs from Canada.

The outfit, SPC Global Technologies Ltd. of Temple, Texas, is offering a way for up to 20,000 people enrolled in health plans that are SPC clients to obtain medicines from Canada, where prices are much lower than they are in the U.S. While SPC is a relatively minor player in the national healthcare trade, its audacious strategy is certain to rattle the powerful pharmaceutical industry, both by setting a possible precedent and by reviving public debate over why brand-name drug prices are so much higher in the U.S. than they are in much of the rest of the world. The move comes shortly after insurer UnitedHealth Group, Inc. said it waived a requirement that prescription drugs be purchased in the U.S. in order to be covered.

The SPC approach could draw regulatory scrutiny because the importation of foreign-issued pharmaceuticals is technically illegal by anybody other than a drug maker or its affiliates. Even so, the Food and Drug Administration signaled that SPC may not be doing anything illegal. The FDA has warned patients they're taking a health risk in buying drugs from outside the U.S.

Source: *Wall St. Journal*, Sarah Lueck

Population-Explosion Politics

In the last 200 years, the world's population has grown six fold. Every second, two people die and five are born. We add approximately 1,538,000 people to our global population every week. While population growth has always been a controversial issue, it is now clear that we have begun to severely strain the Earth's finite resources.

Chaos is the increasingly real result of trying to support more than six billion people on this planet, spawning desperate mass migrations, wars over rights to fresh water, medical epidemics, bloody riots and crime waves nurtured in teeming shantytowns. Refugee camps and hopeless slums steadily churn out alienated, landless young men and women who are perfect cannon fodder for ambitious religious and political zealots.

At the 1994 U.N. population conference in Cairo, nations with different religious, social and political make-ups bravely acknowledged that the only proven way to slow the pace of the population explosion was to empower women by giving them reproductive rights, basic education and adequate health care so that they are capable of choosing a family size that offers them the best chance at being economically successful.

For much of human history a large brood of children was valued as a source of farm labor; the value of a woman was based on her reproductive capacity. Rural culture, fundamentalist religions, and nationalist politicians have been slow to adapt to the reality that more is no longer always better. It was such reactionary forces, led by a trio of odd bedfellows – the U.S. religious right, several repressive Muslim regimes, and the Vatican that put the kibosh on the final declaration of the U.N. conference, a carefully crafted pact supported by 179 nations.

Source: Robert Scheer, syndicated columnist

Amnesty International Says Children Caught in Mideast Clashes

Israel and the Palestinians have inadvertently put children in the line of fire in the past two years, Amnesty International reported. More than 250 Palestinian children and 72 Israeli youths had been killed through the end of August since the uprising began in Sept. 2000. Most of the deaths on the Palestinian side were caused by the Israeli army's recourse to "excessive and disproportionate use of force" in response to demonstrations and stone-throwing. Israeli children had been killed in "direct and indiscriminate attacks." The report blamed Israeli authorities, Palestinian armed groups, and the Palestinian Authority.

Source: USA Today

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