

Embargo: 6am Tuesday, 12 February 2019

NUDGING OR EMOTION FOR BETTER FOOD AND ENVIRONMENT DECISIONS?

Media are welcome to register and attend and press releases are available on request. The [program](#) is online. Please contact [Cathy Reade](#) 0413 575 934 for releases or to arrange attendance or interviews.

Changing human behaviour is central to addressing some of the key challenges the world currently faces in relation to human health and environmental sustainability. What happens when psychology meets economics to guide our choices and government policy around food and the environment?

Two leading behavioural economists will be addressing this issue at at the 63rd Annual Conference of the Australasian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society (AARES) from 12-15 February at Melbourne's Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Dr David Just, the Susan Eckert Lynch Professor of Science and Business in the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management at Cornell University and director of the Institute for Behavioral Economics and Consumer Choice will be sharing his experience about 'nudging' children and adults to good food choices.

"Whether we intend it or not, food impacts us at an emotional level and can often lead to unexpected outcomes. This means whether we are trying to feed the hungry or encourage better nutrition, it is important to keep a close eye on how food consumers respond."

"It often comes down to something as simple as people not liking being told what to do. Reactance, or an emotional and often irrational response to being told what you should do, is often the root of bad food decisions."

"Food policies can often lead to unexpected results. For example, nutrition labels tend to have little impact on consumption. Intuitively we may believe the policy will have an impact, but the shopping and eating environments are noisy and chaotic. It can be hard for the nutrition signal to cut through the noise," said Dr Just, who has received awards for his work around child nutrition programs.

Dr Gigi Foster, Professor and Director of Education at the School of Economics, University of NSW Business School will draw on research and real-world Australian policy debates to explore how unseen factors drive our decisions that impact the environment.

"Altruism, self-esteem, honour, shame, and other unseen psychological factors need to be better included in economists' accounting of what drives human decision-making."

"Decisions about whether to throw litter in the street, whether to support Australia's fresh-fruit quarantine policy, or whether to be honest in one's income tax return are all driven to a large extent by unseen motivators," said Prof Foster, who carries out economic research that takes into account concepts such as loyalty and social norms, including one recent paper estimating a large real welfare cost of Australia's policy not to import overseas-grown bananas - a policy often supported on ideological rather than real welfare grounds.

"Economists can do much better in helping policy-makers understand the hidden motivations behind our decisions about important actions that impact the environment," she concluded.

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