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RIDDING THE WORLD OF NUTRITIONAL POVERTY

Even before the price hikes brought on by the pandemic, about 3 billion people could not afford even the cheapest options that nutritionists say is a healthy diet. For wealthy countries like Australia where the majority can afford healthy meals, the reasons for choosing surprisingly unhealthy items include cooking time and difficulty, as well as advertising and marketing. Public policy change is needed to make healthy and sustainable choices the easy default option everywhere in the world.

This is the central message to be presented by Professor William A. Masters, Professor of Food Economics and Policy, Friedman School of Nutrition, Tufts University in his keynote address to the Australasian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society (AARES) Conference, being held from 7-11 February. AARES is the pre-eminent society promoting research relevant to Australasia in agricultural, environmental, food, and resource economics and agribusiness. The conference theme is *Resilience in a Time of Uncertainty*.

“The cost to ‘eat healthy’ is too much for the poor, but less than what most of the world’s people already spend on food,” explained Professor Masters, the Lead Investigator of the *Food Prices for Nutrition* project, a four-year, \$3 million effort to inform agricultural and food systems interventions. The project is part-funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

“Reaching nutritional recommendations would cost more than about 3 billion people (38% of the world population) can afford, but the remaining >60% of people could buy those foods but often don’t, for other reasons,” reported Professor Masters.

“Whether it’s wealthy countries like Australia or your poorer neighbours, our work reflects a shift in thinking about hunger and malnutrition, moving on from calories and food insecurity towards the feasibility of meeting long-term nutritional goals,” he said.

“In the rich world, eating healthy is a luxury, but not because the ingredients are expensive. The luxury is in having enough time and attention to choose carefully, to tune out the marketing and bypass all the super tasty and convenient offerings around us. It takes effort and skill to sustain an island of healthy in a swamp of sugar-coated temptation,” he said.

“Low-income people in Africa and Asia cannot afford these items.”

“Most people alive today could eventually see a world without nutritional poverty, where healthy foods are the norm for everyone,” he said.

“I hope that eventually we’ll have public policies that make healthy and sustainable choices the easy default option everywhere in the world, convenient and attractive at affordable prices, with room for dessert and all sorts of treats on occasion,” he concluded.

In addition to distinguished [keynote speakers](#), there are over 120 contributed papers across a broad range of energy, agriculture, development and environment issues. The full contributed paper program is available [here](#).