**Embargoed: 4am, 6 February 2024**

*Please contact* *Cathy Reade* *0413 575 934 to arrange interviews.*

*All media materials are posted* [*here*](https://www.aares.org.au/AARES2024) *or available on request.*

*Media are welcome to attend – please contact Cathy to register.*

*The short program is available*[*here*](https://www.aares.org.au/Events/AARES-2024/program/) *and the detailed conference program*[*here*](https://virtual.oxfordabstracts.com/#/event/4802/program)*.*

*The abstract book is* [*here.*](http://www.aares.org.au/files/aares_conference_2024/Abstract_book_2024_01_31.pdf)

**MOVING AWAY FROM ‘FOOD AT ANY COST’ TO RESTORE OUR FOOD SYSTEM BALANCE**

For every dollar spent on food, there is a cost of between one and three dollars in negative impacts. If we want healthier people and environments, governments should use true cost accounting to shape food policies, rather than ‘food at any cost’. Brave, bold policies are needed that can withstand the tide of criticism and produce an environment where the true costs of food reflect the value of natural resources extracted.

Shifting the food system towards a more sustainable foundation will be the focus of Professor Jonathan Rushton from the Institute of Infection, Veterinary and Ecological Sciences, Global Burden of Animal Diseases programme at the University of Liverpool in his keynote at the Australasian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society (AARES) Conference, being held from 6-9 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 *Grand Challenges at the Frontier of Applied Economics.*

“The food system has never been so successful in terms of providing food at a reasonable price for a rapidly growing population. Yet the underlying mantra of this success has been “food at any cost”, creating both environmental problems and a rising number of obese consumers,” said Professor Rushton, who is renowned for his work in the economics of animal health and food systems.

“We are in a pickle with our food systems. Of the 8 billion people in the world, around one billion are chronically hungry with lifelong impairments, while around two billion are overweight and obese with related diseases burdening our health systems. For example, they cost the Australian health system $11.8 billion of direct and indirect costs in 2018 alone.”

“Agricultural systems are also responsible for environmental problems including soil changes and losses, and greenhouse gas emissions. While these food systems are economically efficient, they are also wasteful with a quarter to a third of food being thrown away,” he said.

A global challenge will be to reshape agriculture and food systems policies towards a One Health approach that recognises the need for agriculture practices founded on ecology and regeneration, with food environments that promote healthy eating, explained Professor Rushton.

“True Cost Accounting (TCA) for food captures the major negative impacts on public health and the environment. Recent studies indicate that for every dollar spent on food between one and three dollars of negative externalities are generated,” he said.

“This may seem a lofty ambition, countered by argu­ments of food cost and availability. It will not be easy. However, the alternative business as usual will not address the worsening negative impacts on the environment and public health. There is the very real potential of the eventual collapse of the food system. We need to seek public support and political will to generate food that is truly safe and healthy,” he concluded.