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AARES Pre-conference Workshop
Evidence-based Farm and Food Policy in an Era of Fake News

ABSTRACTS

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The benefits of multiple-win technologies in agri-food systems

The global food system faces major global changes: rapid urbanization, changing diets, and climate change. While there have been significant advances in technology in and out of agriculture, technological regulation is a growing concern. It is critical to reinforce the discussion on the benefits of multiple-win technologies that can contribute to healthy and sustainable agri-food systems. Evidence has shown that many yield-enhancing technologies, nutrition-driven and nutrition-sensitive technologies, and new multiple-win innovations can contribute to food security and nutrition in a sustainable manner. These technologies will be imperative to go beyond business as usual, but will require investments and effective regulations to support them.

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Should public opinion be considered in public policies such as GM labeling?

In the ongoing debates about GM labeling, analysis has often focused on the economics of mandatory versus voluntary labeling and the potential negative public responses to signaling the use of unpopular farm technologies. However, the public demand for labeling has been strong enough that market opportunities were created for the generation of Non-GMO certification (labeling) systems. As with any 'free-from' label, if a product satisfies the definition and a fee is paid, any product can be labeled (eg. Non GMO salt or gluten free spring water). The Non-GMO labeling system covers thousands of different products (https://www.nongmoproject.org/find-non-gmo/verified-products/product-categories/). In addition, an information campaign has been set up by the American dairy industry (https://peelbackthelabel.org/about/) to provide information about potentially misleading Non-GMO labels. Each of these efforts carry their own costs, many of which will be passed on to consumers, including those not interested in the information. At what point (if at all) might these secondary costs influence policy decisions about the benefits or costs of mandatory labeling?

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How social and commercial media affect consumer perception

Abstract in process.

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Economic reasoning and evidence for policy linking food to farms and resources

Economists are learning to better appreciate the vital role for agriculture of policies governing use of resources, such as land, water and climate, and those governing food, such as access restrictions based on farm practices. Informed food and resource policy uses evidence on economic relationships together with basic data from relevant sciences. For example, effective regulation (or mandatory labeling) of foods tied to farm methane emissions needs both science and economic evidence on potential farm and consumer substitution. In complex settings it is easy for policy solutions to be "clear, simple and wrong." Hence there is much scope for careful economics articulately explained to improve policy outcomes.

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Rational ignorance, bad news and food policy

This presentation discusses how the structure of mass media, information, and consumer preferences are affecting the supply of information, how new developments in social media and "fake news" are changing these relationships, and how this is affecting consumer choice and political decisions on food policy and regulation.

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How misinformation about agriculture threatens sustainability and innovation

Plant and animal breeders have been acting as glorified matchmakers for centuries, artificially pairing the best males and females based on a predictive matrix that calculates the expected superiority of their offspring. Unbeknownst to many, they have been continuously employing new breeding methods and reproductive technologies such as radiation mutagenesis, genomic selection and artificial insemination in breeding programs to accelerate the rate of genetic improvement of our food species. While most are unaware of these developments and may have an instinctive negative gut reaction when made aware of them, these technologies have a direct and tangible impact on issues consumers do care about, i.e. access to safe, nutritious food produced with a reduced environmental footprint. The public benefits that accrue from investment and technology adoption in crop and food animal breeding programs are substantive, and conversely the public has much to lose from underappreciating the adverse environmental impact of forestalled innovation in this field. It is hard to overemphasize the important role that genetic improvement plays on sustainability outcomes, and it is imperative that agricultural scientists and breeders inform and become visible participants in public conversations about the importance of innovation in agricultural breeding programs.