Overview
Issue: Obesity is on the rise with high social costs. Do federal agricultural policies contribute?

Study Objectives:
- Quantify the names and extent of the effects of selected agricultural policies on human nutrition and obesity
- Agricultural Policies of Primary Interest:
  - Commodity support
  - Income support
  - Trade policies
  - Public agricultural R&D
  - Food assistance programs (WIC, Food Stamps)

Some Proposed Policy Solutions:
- Eliminate commodity programs, tax fat and sweet foods, regulate food industry, change food programs

Issues in Today’s Markets
Increasing “disconnect” between commodity prices and food prices

Farm prices for commodities decline
Prices received by farmers for selected fruits and vegetables (Deflated, 1977-100)

General decline in real retail food prices

Conceptual Framework
Agricultural policies affect food consumption
- Direct effect on prices (up and down)
- Indirect effects on food characteristics and composition
- Food consumption and choices affect nutritional outcomes and obesity
- Affected by changes in income and food preferences
- Affected by food assistance programs

Research Program
1) Review changes in food consumption patterns, food prices, agricultural commodity prices, and other agricultural policies
2) Analyze the effects of alternative farm subsidy policies and agricultural R&D policies on commodity prices
3) Analyze the consequences of alternative agricultural policies for food prices and consumption patterns, and their implications for obesity

Case Study: Sweeteners
Per capita consumption of all sweeteners has increased and peaked in 1999. Today the composition of sweeteners consumed includes less sugar and more high-intensity sweeteners (HICOs).

Case Study: Sugar
Aggregate food prices have risen much faster than the price of carbonated drinks, slightly more than the price of sweets and have fallen relative to the price of baked goods.

Summary Findings:
- Historically the trade between agricultural policies and sweetener consumption was stronger than today. Until 1980, R&D led to cheaper inputs and food, and emergence of cheaper HBFS
- Falling farm price value at the retail level means using farm policy to influence food prices or ingredients inputs is a poorly targeted policy for sweeteners
- Non-price approaches limiting school access and food program regulations are likely to be more effective in reducing sweetener consumption.

Recent Research Products
- For Agricultural Policies Making Us Fat: Stark Checks Between Agricultural Policies and Obese Hypertension and Diabetes (HHS/USDA, February 2007)
- Food Stamps and the Food Environment (University of California, Davis, March 2009)

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For Further Information

Results: Commodity & Food Prices

Farm prices for commodities declined
Prices received by farmers for selected fruits and vegetables (Deflated, 1977-100)

General decline in real retail food prices

Mixed trends for fruits and vegetables prices

General decline in real retail food prices

For Further Information
- Obesity: Losing the Battle of the USDA. http://www.fedworld.gov/582458197928.pdf

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