

## Farmer Health Conference

### Impacts of loss leading milk

LYNNE Strong is a dairy farmer doing well.

She co-owns and operates multi-award-winning Clover Hill Dairies on the NSW South Coast, which has grown to milk 500 cows and produces six million litres of milk each year – enough for 50,000 Australians daily.

But Jamberoo-based Strong, a keynote speaker at next month's National Centre for Farmer Health Conference, knows many dairy farmers are struggling.

"The dairy industry is in crisis and that is having a devastating emotional effect on dairy farmers," she said.

"I'm very aware of how people are suffering."

Ms Strong, critical of supermarkets' use of milk as a loss leader, believes connecting with urban Australia is essential to seeing better treatment of farmers.

"This is a people power issue," she said.

"We're farming families, they're families too – we all want to put food on our tables."

To help to create a platform for positive stories about farmers, Ms Strong founded Art4Agriculture,



for farmers, Ms Strong said it was "absolutely pivotal" that bodies such as the National Centre for Farmer Health stay open.

"At this time, organisations like that should be having their money doubled," she said.

## Experts plant

By MATTHEW RAGGATT

THEY may be perceived as the epitome of the healthy Australian worker, but in reality farmers have more health problems than most.

A farmer is more likely to be overweight, be disabled or die at work, and have hearing loss than the general population.

Next month, Hamilton will be visited by leading national and international academics, farmers and artists who are committed to understanding these health dangers, as part of the National Centre for Farmer Health's second biennial conference, 'Sowing the Seeds of Farmer Health'.

There will be 14 keynote speakers including National Farmers' Federation president Jock Laurie, and 260 delegates from throughout Australia, Africa, New Zealand, Nepal, Equatorial Guinea, Philippines, Thailand and the US attending the three-day event, held from September 17 to 19.

The centre's founding direc-

tor, Sue Brumby, said the goal of the conference was to build participation of farming families and agricultural workers – as well as academics, agribusiness and the medical, health and safety community – in their combined future.

"The information bank about how to equip people with the skills and confidence to function in parts of the country which do not have the support and services of metropolitan Australia is significant – but we still have to get the message out," Associate Clinical Professor Brumby said.

Keynote speakers will address varied topics including mental health, chronic disease and healthy lifestyles, agricultural hazards and safety, human and animal health and how to deal with ageing on farms.

The expert presenters include nurse practitioner Dr Lisa Schiller from the University of Wisconsin in the US, toxicologist Associate Professor John Edwards and National Institute for Rural and Regional Australia

### Impressive list of keynote speakers

Dr Anthony Hogan



DR HOGAN is director, National Institute for Rural and Regional Australia, located at the Australian National University.

He works on social issues impacting on rural Australia including the Basin Plan, drought policy and farmer suicide. He is currently conducting a number of studies on the well-being of farmers in the face of climate change, drought and drying in Australia.

Dr Hogan will deliver the final keynote address, on *Health, well-being and the adaptive capacity of*

Australian farmers, and will also take part in the Hypothetical biosecurity outbreak session.



Associate Professor John Edwards

ASSOCIATE Professor Edwards, is at the School of the Environment, Flinders University, Adelaide.

He has been a toxicologist since the early 1980s, with broad interests in the effects of occupational and environmental chemical exposures in human health. This has involved investigations of chemicals including pesticides, solvents, carcinogens, illegal drug laboratories and genetically modified foods.

Ass Prof Edwards will address the conference on *Farm Chemicals – Estimating Individual Risk*.


Cathy McGowan AO



CATHY McGowan AO, is a rural consultant, farmer and academic.

During the past 25 years, she has established and managed an international consulting and training company. Her expertise lies in gender in business, agriculture and research.

Ms McGowan has been chair of the Regional Women's Advisory Council, offering policy advice to the Deputy Prime Minister and his department, and president of the national organisation, Australian Women in Agriculture.



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# seeds of farmer health

director Dr Anthony Hogan, who has studied the well-being of farmers in the face of climate change and drought.

They will be joined by Matthew Johnstone, author, illustrator and public speaker on depression, and Art4Agriculture director and award-winning NSW dairy farmer Lynne Strong, among others.

*ABC Radio Country Hour* presenter Libby Price will be the Master of Ceremonies.

In addition to a further 47 concurrent speakers, this year will involve a Geoffrey Robertson-style Hypothetical discussion, which will see a diverse panel – including a farmer, academic, health professional, media/marketing representative and politician – address the scenario of a major sheep disease outbreak that brings Victoria to its knees.

The conference will also announce the winners of the national photographic competition, *In Focus - Celebrating Farm Life*, which has seen 675 entrants submitting photos which will be displayed in the Hamilton Art Gallery from August 29 to October 14.

Centre event co-ordinator Felicity Little said the photo display sought to change the image of farm life. "The common portrayal of farming and agriculture in recent years has been one of drama or gloom," she said. "For those that have experienced aspects of country life, we know there is still much to celebrate, and the photography exhibition hopes to exemplify this."

The conference has plenty of health concerns to discuss.

While the numbers of deaths on-farm has declined in the past 20 years, Farmsafe Australia Inc said 60 people died from non-intentional injuries on farms in 2011.

A comprehensive study of farm-injury deaths found they cost the nation \$651 million during the four-year period analysed.

In Victoria, the agricultural sector accounts for about five per cent of the State's workforce, yet farm accidents make up at least a quarter of its work-related deaths, WorkSafe said.

WorkSafe workers compensation claims show there are also at least 500 serious injuries each year on Victorian farms alone.

The Centre for Farmer Health said abdominal obesity is 28.7 per cent higher in farm men and women than the general population, psychological distress is 28.9pc more common in farmers, and about two-thirds of farmers have measurable hearing loss.

People in rural areas are also more likely to suffer depression and less likely to seek help because of a lack of services, according to a beyondblue spokesperson.

The National Centre for Farmer Health was established in Hamilton in 2008 as a partnership between Deakin University and Western District Health Service.

Funding came from the Brumby Government and the Helen and Geoff Handbury Trust.

Achievements include the delivery of the health and safety-focused Sustainable Farm Families program to 2400 families nationwide, the

establishment of Agri-safe clinics, an integrated occupational health and safety program targeted to farmers and ag workers, and the running of a Graduate Certificate of Agricultural Health and Medicine, undertaken by 77 students.

This year, the Victorian Government budget did not provide funding for the centre, putting pressure on the Federal Government to intervene.

While negotiations between State and Federal health ministers on investments in farmer health continue, Sue Brumby, sister of the former premier, confirmed to the ABC last week the centre had ceased operation, with funding remaining only for the sustainable farm families program.

Tasmanian farmers Rob and Kathy Henry will be joint keynote speakers, and will focus on their experiences in setting up a detailed occupational health and safety plan for their mixed farming business.

Tragically, the Henrys had been working on the plan for 18 months when their 19-year-old son was electrocuted as he held an aluminium irrigation pipe upright and an electrical current "jumped" from a nearby power source.

Ten years later, the Henrys' OHS plan has been used as a template and business services provider ProAdvice is looking to pick it up.

Mr Henry said farmers had differing attitudes towards OHS.

"Some farmers are blasé, but (I also understand) the complexity of employing people and looking after their health," he said.

## Run the black dog out

"THERE'S always going to be pressure in farming," says National Farmers' Federation president Jock Laurie (pictured), who knows many farmers have done it tough for a long-time.

"In some place profitability in the industry in the last decade has probably been the worst it has been in the history of farming," he said.

The effects of the drought and other challenges have also been seen in the mental health of many farmers, Mr Laurie said.

"The impact of the issue can't be underestimated."

Mr Laurie, who runs a fine wool, cross-bred lamb and cattle property near Walcha in north-east NSW, will focus on mental health in his keynote address on the second day of the National Centre for Farmer Health Conference.

He will also chair a session entitled *Mental Health* –



Wagging the black dog's tail.

Mr Laurie said exercise can be one step to better mental health.

"Physical exercise is a great thing to help deal with stress – farmers (need to be) getting a balanced lifestyle," he said.

Mr Laurie said the NFF had supported the establishment of the Mental Health Network, designed to create a more integrated system.

## beyondblue help line

If you would like to talk to someone about mental health issues, call beyondblue – the national depression initiative info line, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on 1300 22 4636.

Ms McGowan's keynote address is entitled, *Bloom where you're planted*. She will also chair a session entitled *Chronic disease and healthy lifestyles – feast or famine*, and participate in the Hypothetical panel.

### Rob and Kathy Henry



ROB and Kathy Henry are from Woodrising Farms, Cressy, Tasmania.

In addition to their wool and prime lamb flock and Coopworth stud, the Henrys' diverse family-owned 431-hectare farm includes opium poppies, peas, grass seeds, onions and hybrid cabbage seed.

Several farming accidents in the local community prompted Woodrising Farm to develop and implement a comprehensive Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) management system.

Together Mr and Mrs Henry will present on *Implementing OHS Models on the Farm*,

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### Clinical Associate Professor Susan Brumby

As the founding director, Ms Brumby leads the implementation of five key strategies to improve the health, well-being and safety of farm men and women.

These include the farmer health website (see [www.farmerhealth.org.au](http://www.farmerhealth.org.au)).

Her practical experience includes managing the family property of performance recorded beef cattle and a self replacing fine wool flock for 12 years.

She will open the conference with a keynote address entitled *A decade in Farmer Health*.

The Commonwealth and States are progressively enacting new nationally uniform OHS regulations under the Work Health & Safety Act 2011 "WHSA".

The introduction of these new regulations will result in a number of key changes to the way we think about occupational health and safety. The changes will significantly affect the way in which businesses operate with mobile and remote workforces. WHS regulations require employers to take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure the safety and

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# Farmer Health Conference



# Biosecurity disaster

## - are we at risk?

**T**HE threat of a disease outbreak in flocks that had the potential to spread to humans is a hypothetical scenario that will be explored by the nation's foremost agricultural and health identities during the National Centre for Farmer Health conference at Hamilton next month.

The session - a frightening "what if" scenario of a disease hitting sheep and spilling over to humans - is a new and exciting addition to the conference program this year, taking place on Monday, September 17, the first day of the three-day event.

The centre's director, Associate Clinical Professor Susan Brumby, says the hypothetical has been introduced to present an entertaining, lively and informed discussion on a serious but hypothetical issue affecting the health, wellbeing and safety of the farming community.

"While the scenario is purely hypothetical, its panellists will be responding by drawing on their extensive industry knowledge and expertise," she said.

"They will also take into account social, environmental, financial and political factors facing the general community, with the host shaping the hypothetical discussion forum and directing questions to individual panel members.

"Biosecurity is fast becoming the major issue for the agricultural industry as our long-held quarantine barriers are freed up despite objections and increasing international travel continues to grow."

Forum host Jamie Fisher was born and bred on a soldier-settlement block outside Geelong.

He went on to become a partner at Harwood Andrews - one of Melbourne's



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Esther Price  
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Scott Kitchener  
Medical Practitioner



Cathy McGowan  
Agri-consultant



Anthony Hogan  
Social Epidemiologist

... answering the big questions

When a scourge confronts humankind, where will you be?

What are the health implications of this unknown outbreak?

What are the implications for the farming community and sheep industry?

What does a biosecurity outbreak mean to humans in a health context?

Will there be enough lamb cutlets available for our Australia Day BBQ's?

**Monday 17<sup>th</sup> September, Hamilton PAC - Tickets \$50**

Conference Opening from 2:30pm, Hypothetical from 4:30pm

Ticket includes conference opening, hypothetical, cocktail party and photo exhibition 'celebrating farm life', Hamilton Art Gallery, 6:30pm

**Register Now!**

[www.farmerhealth.org.au](http://www.farmerhealth.org.au)  
or phone (03) 5551 8533



**Biosecurity is fast becoming the major issue for the agricultural industry as our long-held quarantine barriers are freed up despite the objections and increasing international travel continues to grow.**

- SUSAN BRUMBY, NCFH

most prestigious law firms - before returning to the land in NSW.

Like all farmers, he struggled through years of drought, and returned to bush town law to keep his property afloat.

For him, the risk of a biosecurity threat is all too real.

"When a scourge confronts humankind, where will you be?" he said.

"When humankind is threatened, is the measure of an advanced western society determined by how it governs itself effectively, or how it sticks to its principles and dies?"

"Are you an Australian who can stare oblivion in the eye and fight, or stare it in the eye and crumple?"

"Is oblivion a better choice than a failure of integrity, and is saving yourself not also a measure of integrity?"

"These are the big questions and we will be raising them to get the answers."

The panel will include National Farmers Federation president Jock Laurie; National Institute for Rural and Regional Australia (Australian National University) director Dr Anthony

Hogan; Queensland Rural Medical Education medical director Professor Scott Kitchener; rural media and communications guru Esther Price; high-profile Tasmanian diverse farmer Rob Henry and agri-professional consultant Cathy McGowan AO.

Conference co-ordinator Felicity Little said registrations were rolling in.

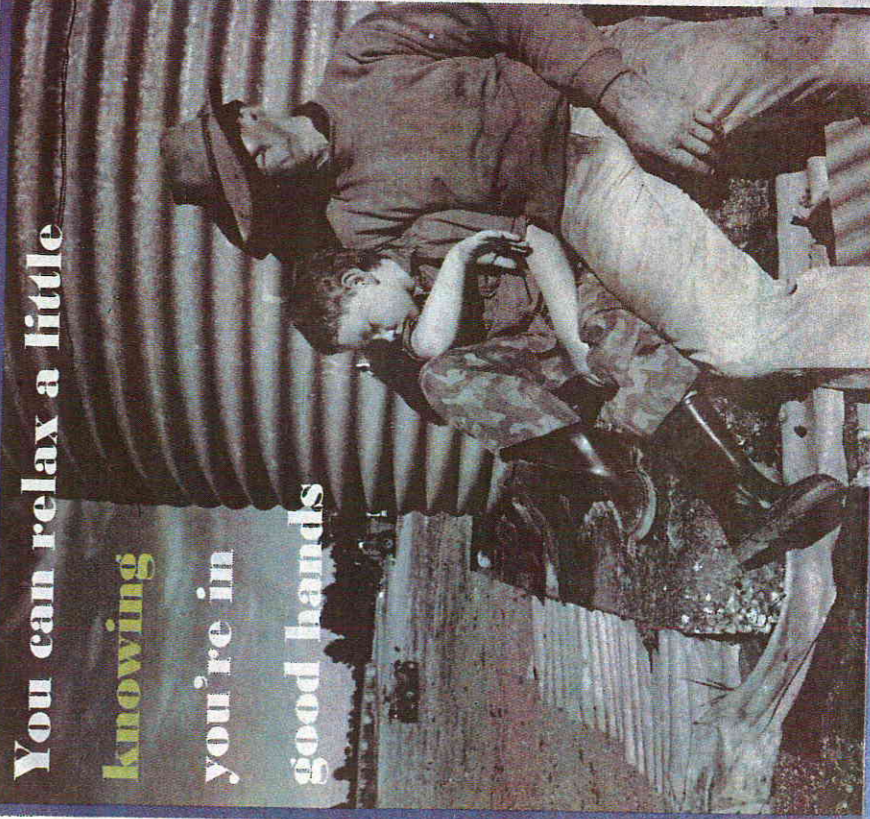
"We have fantastic representation on the hypothetical panel and we welcome farmers, agri-professionals, health experts and the general community to come to Hamilton to be entertained and inspired by experts in the field," she said.

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## Farmer Health Conference



# Don't let 'lepto', in

■ Beef producer Rod Manning routinely vaccinates his Angus cows against leptospirosis, after contracting the disease himself many years ago. He said the vaccinations made economic and husbandry sense to reduce the losses and pain associated with these diseases but they also help protect humans from contracting leptospirosis as well.

### Leptospirosis

- ◆ The leptospirosis bacterium is spread through urine and bodily fluids, and can survive in stagnant water for several weeks.
- ◆ Infected cattle may present with fever, abortions or the birth of weak or stillborn calves.
- ◆ Vaccines are available.

**F**ORMER vet and large-scale beef producer Rod Manning routinely vaccinates his Angus cows against leptospirosis – a disease he contracted himself many years ago.

He operates Davilak Pastoral Company – a 1500-head cow herd near Mansfield – where heifers are given 2-in-1 vaccinations to protect them against leptospirosis and the major clostridial diseases before joining. All the cows receive an annual booster shot.

Mr Manning says the vaccinations make economic and husbandry sense to reduce the losses and pain associated with these diseases but they also help protect humans from contracting leptospirosis as well.

No vaccination against the disease is available for humans.

"Lepto" is spread in urine so workers on dairy farms who are in close proximity to cows during milking are at high risk of infection.

Mr Manning says "lepto" made him "very crook" and, if left untreated, could lead to other life-threatening illnesses.

His views are supported by Rob Bonanno, past president of Australian Cattle Veterinarians – a special interest group of the Australian Veterinary Association.

He says farmers should take measures to protect their cattle against disease outbreaks following the recent widespread heavy rains and floods, which aid the spread of the leptospirosis bacteria.

Farmers should also be concerned for the health of their staff, themselves and others in contact with cattle, he said.

The disease in humans is a moderate to severe illness with flu-like symptoms which can later develop into more serious conditions including meningitis.

Dr Bonanno, who recently contracted leptospirosis himself, said the current moist and humid conditions in many areas are ideal for the spread of life-threatening livestock diseases.

Dr Bonanno said two weeks after contracting the disease (which was still undiagnosed at the time) he felt as though he had been hit by a bus and after several months of lethargy, muscle pain, joint swelling and lymph node swelling he realised something was seriously wrong. A return visit to the doctor and blood tests discovered the problem – "lepto".

"Diseases like leptospirosis can spread through contaminated water and can have serious consequences for livestock including reduced reproductive performance," Dr Bonanno said.

Control is all about prevention.

"Vaccination is the safest and most cost-effective way of protecting livestock against this disease, particularly during this post-flood recovery period," he said.

Good hygiene and use of personal protective equipment is important when working around cattle, in stagnant water or in areas affected by flooding.

## rma Supporting Rural Health

A dark issue often avoided and little discussed, the effects of anxiety and depression are very real for many of us. rma is proud of its partnership with beyondblue and to assist the cause in 2012 the rma beyondblue Charity Auction raised \$12,000 last month to be donated to the mental health organisation.

After hearing from a passionate beyondblue Director and Ambassador, Dr Michael Bonning, five items including sporting memorabilia, holidays and a fine woollen cloth went under the hammer as a part of the rma Annual Gala Dinner, showcasing the natural auctioneering talent the association fosters and the keen generosity of members to support a worthwhile cause. This year's result is double that of \$6,080 raised in 2011.

In the past 12 months rma, in conjunction with beyondblue facilitators, conducted Rural Frontline Training Sessions over three states with more than 150 agents attending; and was also keenly involved in the Movember campaign, raising \$4,500 towards men's health issues and awareness; bringing the total raised for beyondblue to more than \$22,500.

"The total from the auction this year is a great result. Anxiety and depression are difficult issues to talk about, particularly among men, and in our rural communities help can be difficult to access. The training sessions provided rma agents with knowledge on the disorders and where to find assistance, and we'll continue to support the cause by providing information and fundraising using the rma network and the skill it holds," Michael O'Brien.

The 140 rma head and branch offices are also local access points for beyondblue information throughout rural and regional Australia and can provide free copies of the hand book Taking Care of Yourself and Your Family, as well as fact sheets and phone numbers for assistance.

A cheque presentation will be made to beyondblue later this month.



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## Farmer Health Conference

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# Misguided over milk

By **MATTHEW CAWOOD**

**A**USTRALIA'S obsession with low-fat dairy products has not prevented it from growing into one of the fastest nations on earth.

A new study may give a hint as to why – there appears to be no relationship between full-fat dairy products and weight gain. In fact, the authors of a paper recently published in the *European Journal of Nutrition* found evidence that consuming full-fat dairy products may protect against weight gain and the metabolic diseases that accompany it.

The three authors reviewed more than 16 studies in which researchers physically observed the relationship between dairy fat, obesity, and cardiovascular disease.

One of the study's authors, University of Washington scientist Dr Stephan Guyenet, summarised the main findings on his Whole Health Source blog:

- High-fat dairy consumption is not associated with obesity. In fact, 11 out of 16 studies found that higher dairy fat intake is associated with lower body fat and/or less fat gain over time.

None of the papers identified a link between high-fat dairy consumption and fat gain – although some did find an association between low-fat dairy consumption and fat gain.

- High-fat dairy consumption is not associated with poorer metabolic health. Six of 11 studies found that higher high-fat dairy consumption is associated with better metabolic health, while only one unusually designed study found that it was associated with one marker of poorer metabolic health.

- The association between high-fat dairy intake and diabetes risk is inconsistent. Zero of eight studies found that high-fat dairy consumption is associated with diabetes risk, and

three found that it was protective.

However, three studies also found those consuming low-fat dairy had less risk of diabetes – although Dr Guyenet noted some “confounding factors”.

The researchers went a step further, questioning the changing mix of fatty acids in modern dairy products.

The push for low-fat dairy has been largely based on concern about a small group of saturated fatty acids and the intention to reduce dairy's energy density.

However, the researchers point out dairy fat is a rare source of certain fatty acids such as butyrate and trans palmitic acid.

“...the shift to high-yielding breeds with a lower milk fat content; the removal of fat from many dairy products, and novel feeding practices has likely led to a substantial reduction in the overall consumption of these fatty acids in many individuals,” the authors wrote.

With evidence that these fatty acids affect how the body expends energy, lays down fat and manages insulin and glucose, “it seems prudent to reconsider the common recommendation to consume milk and dairy products in their fat-reduced form”.

“Further, well-controlled intervention studies on the health effects of milk produced by traditional pasture-based versus grain-based husbandry practices should be an important research priority in this area.”

■ Details: **Stephan Guyenet's Whole Health Source blog**, [www.wholehealthsource.com](http://www.wholehealthsource.com), [blogs.pot.com.au](http://blogs.pot.com.au) and 'The relationship between high-fat dairy and obesity, cardiovascular, and metabolic disease', **Kratz, Baars & Guyenet**, *European Journal of Nutrition* <http://goo.gl/RmWc2>

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## Farmer Health Conference

# We are what we eat

By **MATTHEW CAWOOD**

**T**HE largest research investment ever made by Sydney University aims to find out why we eat what we eat – or more particularly, why people are increasingly eating in ways that makes us ill. The job of co-ordinating the \$500 million investment in the Charles Perkins Centre – a research hub investigating obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease – has fallen to Steve Simpson, a nutrition researcher with an international reputation.

This trio of metabolic diseases is not new, Professor Simpson said. What is new is they are being diagnosed from infancy. Not too many decades ago, they seldom occurred before middle age, and much less frequently.

It was a problem galloping out of control, he said, because these diseases were not just acquired from the habits of a single lifetime. They could also be encoded into children by their parents' lifestyles.

The metabolic disorders that change how genes express themselves in one generation are often genetically embedded in the next generation – along with the cultural habits that initially created the problem. As the programming for ill health passes down the generations, the magnitude of the problem in society is amplified.

Prof Simpson said just telling people to change would not work.

"If you're born with a particular physiology because of what happened in the previous couple of generations, that sets you up with a series of problems that have lifelong consequences," he said.

## Demand is key to change

THE food industry needs to be transformed by consumer preferences, not the other way around, nutrition researcher Steve Simpson (pictured) says – with exceptions.

"I'm optimistic that educating people and empowering them can change the world," said the head of the new Charles Perkins Centre research hub on metabolic disease.

"By helping people to acquire a more holistic understanding, we can change the way people behave and what they expect of food suppliers and producers, of politicians and planners – that's how things will get changed."

He is wary of blaming the food industry for the epidemic of diet-related health issues.

"I don't think you can say the industry has set out to subvert our biological predispositions and as a result, create health problems.

"Those companies succeed that produce things that people buy."

On the other hand, Prof Simpson thinks the food market can not be determined by natural selection alone. Where titillating consumers' less helpful desires has adverse consequences, he thinks the industry needs to take responsibility.

ied everything from slime moulds to locusts, fish, birds, mammals and humans – have an appetite for protein that's separate to fats and carbohydrate.

"Our bodies will defend our intake of protein, so if you dilute protein in the diet by adding extra fat and carbs, we end up eating more calories in total to sustain our intake of protein.

"The worst thing you can do is to dilute protein with fat and carbs because you'll remain hungry until you get to your protein target. That gets us a long way towards understanding the changes over the past 40-50 years in total caloric intake.

"All the research is showing it is rising energy intake that is the main cause of obesity, rather than lowered exercise.

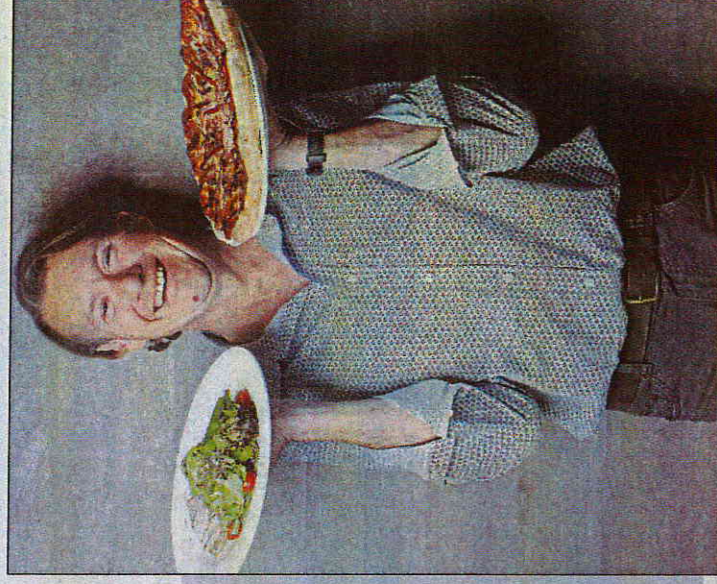
"Both are important, but eating too much seems to be the key problem.

"What's happened is protein has been diluted in our diet – not by much, about 1-2 per cent – but that dilution has required us to overeat fat and carbohydrate to get the amount of protein we need."

A person who dilutes protein in favour of fats and carbs can become insulin-resistant and obese, and the body starts to burn its own protein to make up the deficit it perceives – which increases the protein deficit, and prompts the person to eat even more.

Savory snacks temporarily distract from the body's desire for protein, without ultimately satisfying it.

Animal protein tends to be naturally well balanced in the 20 amino acids the body needs. Vegetarians can achieve their protein targets by eating widely across protein-rich plant foods.



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