
The Blue/Orange Ratio Indicates Excess Fat per Person

This graphic from the Economist shows the amount of excess biomass due to obesity and overall population. As the chart shows, obese North Americans are carrying around an extra 263 million kilograms of fat — or just about 290 thousand tons of fat. That's a daunting thought.

That's a pattern that definitely isn't going to be replicable globally. The article's conclusion is stark:

> If the populations of other countries adopted the pattern of weight distribution found in the United States, the world's [human] biomass would rise by 20%—roughly equivalent to adding an extra 1 billion average-sized people. This would create all kinds of strains, not least on the world's food supply.

Or perhaps more relevantly for this blog, the environmental impact would also be dire, given the amount of land, water, fertilizer, and pesticides that would be needed to produce that amount of food.

Even without regulatory interventions, there may be a limit to how much food the world can grow, making all due allowances for technological improvements (and disregarding use of crop lands for other purposes such as growing tobacco or biofuels.) Economic growth may increase demand, especially for previously hard to obtain foods like meat, faster than supply can rise. If so, that would limit some of the harmful health and environmental harms from over-eating — but it would also impose great hardship on the world's poor.

The obesity epidemic is already a major public health problem in the U.S. We need to get it under control, and we need to avoid replicating it elsewhere.