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# Producing Markets, Producing People

Local Food, Financial Prosperity and Health in Samoa

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## Abstract

In the context of Samoa, the obesity epidemic has become a public health concern. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that the “obesity epidemic” has increased significantly in Samoa, with 70% of the population being overweight or obese. Public health officials have identified several factors (factors) contributing to the obesity epidemic, including a lack of physical activity, a diet high in fat and sugar, and a policy environment that does not support healthy eating and physical activity. Samoa has implemented the “obesity prevention strategy” to address the “obesity epidemic” and promote a healthier environment for all. The strategy focuses on the food environment, physical activity, and mental health and well-being. The strategy also focuses on the global food system and the role of food actors in the food system. The strategy has focused on local production as a way to provide Samoans with financial

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prosperity, which in turn would provide opportunities for healthier consumption. This article is based on qualitative interviews with food actors and an ethnography of food, public health and development in Samoa.

Keywords: [local food](#) [health](#) [Samoa](#) [agricultural development](#) [obesity](#)

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## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes

1. The rapid increase in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) is often referred to as the “NCD crisis”. We find that the concept of NCDs is often used to reify a binary between “healthy” and “unhealthy” foods. Ferzacca (2014) argues that NCDs are not discrete disorders that reflect a clear boundary between “healthy” and “unhealthy” foods (see Singer 2014; W



2. Across the Pacific, starchy crops are “considered satisfying (like a Western “meal”) only if ... served with one of a number of accompanying dishes” (Pollock [1992](#): 29). These complementary foods are the main meal of the day in the evening, although “leftover” starchy foods are often eaten for lunch. Other food items, while considered edible, including fruits, fruit soups and, today, sandwiches, processed snack foods and instant noodles, can be eaten anytime but are not essential to mealtimes nor are they considered “real” food (Pollock [1985](#)).

3. The food actors also focused on the geopolitical position of Samoa in exacerbating issues of price and supply. Samoa is a small, geographically distant market with a highly price-sensitive economy. The food actors felt at the mercy of the global food system. Shipping and transportation costs, import duties, as well as trade relations of larger industrialized markets were all cited as common challenges for supplying Samoa with affordable healthy foods. Samoa’s participation in the global market was portrayed as constraining the local Samoan market in unhealthy ways by creating trade barriers, while unhealthy foods were dumped on its shores. Representing this global market, they felt, was “a large contingent of Chinese” shop owners, who were seen as intent on “using and abusing society.” Embedded in this view is a much deeper racialized sentiment against the Chinese “Other foreigner” in Samoa, specifically the recent influx of new Chinese migrants who have begun to move into the local business scene. These new entrepreneurs were often portrayed as shrewd capitalists neglecting “the Pacific way” and taking over the Samoan market. In this milieu, Chinese merchants have come to symbolize the exploitive uncontrollable specter of the unhealthy global market.

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