Changing Global Diets: Implications for Agriculture
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Agriculture can affect nutrition in several ways. To take a few examples, increasing the production of staple foods can promote consumption by increasing availability and affordability of energy (calories). Greater production of livestock, fruits, vegetables, and fortified crops can increase access to micronutrient-rich foods and improve the quality of diets. Income gained from working in agriculture can be used to purchase food and gain access to health and nutrition services. Empowered involvement by women in agricultural development strategies can create conditions conducive to improving the health and nutrition of their children as well as their own (Hawkes and Ruel, 2006b).

Since production and producers also respond to demand for food, food consumption patterns also affect the agricultural sector. These effects are becoming more significant as a result of the related processes of globalization and dietary change in the developing world. Since the 1980s, and especially since the 1990s, the global diet has been changing rapidly. Consumption of meat, dairy products, vegetable oils, sugars, and processed foods high in fats and sweeteners has increased, while consumption of staple foods has declined. During this period, undernutrition has declined, but rates of overweight–obesity have increased at alarmingly rapid rates. The causes are multiple: changing lifestyles, different employment patterns, more urban living, lower food prices, technological shifts, and increased use of advertising and promotion.

The increasing market-orientation of national and global economies (“globalization”) has been one of the major driving forces behind these changes. The process has increased the power of consumers to demand their food preferences in the marketplace. At the same time, the food-consuming industries (processors, retailers, food services) have become more powerful actors in the food supply chain relative to the agricultural sector. This