A food systems approach to addressing obesity

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Lancet commission on obesity

• ‘The Global Syndemic’ of obesity, undernutrition and climate change:
  – Co-exist
  – Interact with each other
  – Have common systematic drivers

• Underlying drivers exist within food and agriculture, transport, urban design and land use systems

• Systems level interventions could serve as double or triple duty solutions

(Swinburn et al, 2019, The Lancet)
What is a food system?

A food systems approach recognises all of the areas, people and linkages throughout the system, then actively seeks to maximise synergies and minimise trade-offs

(HLPE report on Nutrition and Food Systems, 2017)
Does Australian agricultural production meet our nutritional needs?

Vegetables

Grains

Meat

(Ridoutt et al, 2017, Food Security)
The RDC model

• Investment in agricultural R&D in Australia occurs largely via the Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDC) model
• 15 RDCs (5 statutory and 10 industry)
• Funding is via commodity levies with matched funding from Govt.

(DAWR, Report to Levies Stakeholders, 2018)
Levies invested in agricultural R&D* 2017-18

(DAWR, Report to Levies Stakeholders, 2018)

* 5.2% of these funds was spent on biosecurity and residue testing, though the breakdown of these by commodity is not available in the referenced report.
Key messages

• Clear need for a ‘systems approach’ to address obesity (not only a health issue)

• Agriculture and food systems are a key entry point
  – Specifically, the need to align agricultural production with foods needed for healthy diets

• A National Obesity Strategy offers an opportunity embrace a whole of system approach to address the interlinked challenges of obesity, poor diets and sustainability of food systems with multiple benefits
Thank you

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