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Current Activities

ERS Supports Pacific Economic Cooperation Council

Over a number of years, ERS has had an ongoing role in providing information and analytical support for the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC). When applicable to its mission, ERS strives to assist PECC in its program of work, which aims to enhance cooperation and policy coordination in areas including trade, investment, and all major industrial sectors in the Asia-Pacific region. Past ERS contributions have focused on food retailing, transportation infrastructure, urban population growth, and water scarcity. More recently, ERS economist Jean Buzby gave a presentation on private and public cooperation in raising food safety standards at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Food Safety Cooperation Seminar in Gyeongju, South Korea. The contribution of the private sector in improving food safety will become increasingly important given the trends towards stricter supply chain management, growth in international trade, and industry consolidation. Public and private sector cooperation in food safety can go a long way in strengthening food safety, encouraging harmonization with international food standards, and facilitating and promoting international food trade. **Jean Buzby, jbuzby@ers.usda.gov**

New Trade Model

Researchers from ERS and Pennsylvania State University have collaborated to develop a new trade model. The ERS-Pennsylvania State University Trade model is an applied partial-equilibrium, multiple-commodity, multiregion model of agricultural policy and trade. It is a gross trade model that accounts for exports and imports of each commodity in every identified region. Currently, there are 12 countries/regions and 35 commodities included in the framework. The model, called the Partial Equilibrium Agricultural Trade Simulator (PEATsim), is available for public use and comment at trade.aers.psu.edu. **Richard Stillman, stillman@ers.usda.gov**

Comstock

Forecasting Retail Food Prices in 2006

As part of the ongoing ERS research focus on retail food prices and the impact of energy, transportation, and other operating costs on retail price changes, ERS economists Ephraim Leibtag and David Torgerson participated in the Food Institute's first annual "What's Ahead for 2006" conference. The focus of the conference was to estimate the impact of recent cost increases on the food market system and to interact with food industry decisionmakers to develop solutions to deal with increasing production costs. ERS researchers discussed recent trends in retail food markets, projections of retail food price inflation for 2006, and the recent increase in energy prices and the impact of those changes on food manufacturers. **Ephraim Leibtag, eleibtag@ers.usda.gov**

Recent Meetings

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American Time Use Survey Early Results Conference

In December 2005, ERS, the University of Maryland, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services cosponsored the "American Time Use Survey Early Results Conference" in Bethesda, Maryland. The Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey (ATUS) collects information on how Americans use their time, and survey data show the range of detailed activities performed daily, including weekdays versus weekends, the amount of time spent on each activity, and the daily schedule of activities. Using ATUS data, researchers presented 15 papers and 27 posters on a variety of topics, including time spent on child care, elder care, travel, food preparation and consumption, sleeping, and exercising. ERS presented details about its Food & Eating Module questions, which were added to the ATUS in October 2005. These questions were designed to examine relationships between time use; food purchases, preparation, and consumption; and obesity. Conference papers are available at: www.atususers.umd.edu/papers/. **Karen Hamrick, khamrick@ers.usda.gov**

Roundtable on Food Safety Insurance and Risks

In December 2005, ERS and the Risk Management and Decision Processes Center, Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania conducted a roundtable on the role of private insurance and third-party certification in monitoring food safety performance and managing food safety risks. The ERS/Wharton roundtable brought together representatives from the insurance industry, third-party certifiers, food manufacturers and distributors, government regulators, as well as legal experts and economists to examine the evolution of third-party food safety certification in the U.S. **Fred Kuchler, fkuchler@ers.usda.gov**

European Union Food Regulations and Standards

In November 2005, ERS and Farm Foundation cosponsored a workshop, "European Union Food Regulations and the Emergence of Private Standards: Implications for International Trade." The new EU food regulations are increasingly complex, geared toward process verification and traceability, while private standards play an increasing role. These developments have significant cross-border implications, affecting both U.S. and global food trade. Speakers from Europe and the U.S., representing the food industry, regulatory experts, and academics, along with over 100 participants, gathered to explore the key challenges and opportunities for the U.S. food industry posed by the new EU food regulatory environment. Speakers' presentations are available at: www.farmfoundation.org/projects/06-19EUFoodRegs.htm. **Aziz Elbehri, aelbehri@ers.usda.gov**

New Releases

Research Program on Invasive Species

ERS recently released a report, *Program of Research on the Economics of Invasive Species Management: Fiscal 2003-2005 Activities* (available at: www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/invasivespecies/). The report provides an overview of ERS's initiative to improve the economic understanding of policy and decisionmaking related to invasive species problems, policies, and programs. The report summarizes the 26 extramural research projects funded through PREISM's competitive awards process, as well as ERS research on soybean rust and other invasive species issues over the past 3 years. The report also describes ERS's active outreach strategy for dissemination of PREISM research findings to key stakeholders. **Craig Osteen, costeen@ers.usda.gov,** and **Donna Roberts, droberts@ers.usda.gov**

The citations here and in the rest of this edition are just a sample of the latest releases from ERS. For a complete list of all new ERS releases, view the calendar on the ERS website: www.ers.usda.gov/calendar/

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New ERS Briefing Room on Farm Household Well-being

To understand farm household well-being, one must shift from the traditional focus on farm sector income to the total income received by the household. Today, farm business income is shared with contractors, landlords, and other investors, and farming is only one of several economic activities—including off-farm employment, nonfarm businesses, and other investment activities—in which farm households participate. For a more complete understanding of farm household well-being, it is important to consider farm household wealth, as well as total household income. A new briefing room on the ERS website, "Farm Household Economics and Well-being" (www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/wellbeing/), synthesizes the latest information from various data sources on farm household labor and demographic characteristics; farm household income; farm household assets, debt, and net worth; and composite measures of farm household well-being. **Ashok Mishra, amishra@ers.usda.gov**

Commodity Markets and Trade

ERS Outlook reports provide timely analysis of major commodity markets and trade, including special reports on hot topics. All reports are available electronically and can be found at www.ers.usda.gov/publications/outlook/, along with a calendar of future releases. **Joy Harwood, jharwood@ers.usda.gov**

Hispanics in Rural America

Rural Hispanics At A Glance (EIB-8), the latest in a series of ERS reports on conditions and trends in rural areas, is based primarily on data from the 2000 Census and provides recent demographic and socioeconomic indicators for Hispanics living in nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) areas. After nearly doubling in population from 1.4 million in 1980 to 2.7 million in 2000, Hispanics in rural and small-town America now represent the most rapidly growing segment of the population in nonmetro counties. This growth has helped to stem decades of small-town population decline and to revitalize many rural communities. This six-page brochure incorporates short analyses with colorful charts and maps on key indicators of the rural Hispanic population to inform and assist public officials, community organizations, rural development specialists, and others in their efforts to enhance the economic opportunities and quality of life for this rapidly growing population. **William Kandel, wkandel@ers.usda.gov**