

Park discusses obesity during FAPC Research Symposium

STILLWATER, Okla. – The Food & Agricultural Products Center and the Institute of Food Technologists-Oklahoma Section recently hosted a research symposium in conjunction with Oklahoma State University Research Week.

In addition to highlighting food and agricultural product research conducted by the FAPC and OSU, the symposium included a keynote address by John Park.

Park, associate professor and extension specialist in the Department of Agricultural Economics at Texas A&M University and director of the Texas Center for Cooperative Development, addressed the issue of increased obesity among Americans. His presentation was titled “Consumer Paradox: Understanding America’s Health-Conscious Obese.”

Since 1991, obesity among adults has increased 92 percent, Park said. Though the causes of childhood obesity are unclear, the causes of adult obesity are very clear.

“We eat what we like,” Park said. “It’s starting to become costly.”

Even though research has found that there is no correlation between fast food and obesity in children, education is the key.

“The place we really need to start is with our kids,” Park said.

Because consequences of poor food choices are not evident immediately after the choice is made, consumers tend to continue making poor choices, he said.

Here in “America the Bountiful,” the inexpensive abundance of food makes it a novelty and a chance to try something new rather than simply a source of nourishment.

“We spend less of our disposable income on food in this country—less than 10 percent,” Park said.

Changes in demographics also contribute to food choices, he said. An increase of women in the workplace prioritizes convenience as a factor in meal planning.

Increased household incomes allow families to spend half of their total food expenditures on food away from home with the majority being from fast-food restaurants.

“Hectic lifestyles don’t match up with our diets,” Park said. “We’re also overloaded with information with our hectic lifestyle.”

However, Park said consumers are health-aware, but they just make food choices that are unhealthy.

Peter Muriana, FAPC food microbiologist and chair of the symposium, said he was glad to have Park be a part of this year's research symposium.

"Dr. Park provided the participants with great information about obesity in America," Muriana said. "His presentation proved to be a great fit for the research symposium, as was shown by the interest of the OSU community.

Park said he has been associated with the FAPC for a while now.

"I have not seen a center do what this center does as well as the FAPC," Park said.

The FAPC/IFT-OK Research Symposium was sponsored by Advance Foods, Allied Custom Gypsum, Bar-S Foods, Chef's Requested Foods, Griffin Foods, Oklahoma Refrigerated Services, Redland Juice Company, The Schwan Food Company and Unitherm Food Systems.

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