

Why do we let the food industry bloat us and GDP?

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I stayed overnight in Sheffield on Wednesday as my inaugural lecture (which went well) finished too late to allow for a comfortable return home.

On the way back yesterday I listened to an edition of the Desert Island Dishes (you read that right) podcast, featuring Stanley Tucci. I like Tucci, his work and his approach to food. The [podcast did not disappoint](#).

One thing stood out rather strongly. Tucci highlighted his enthusiasm for Italian cuisine. This, he stressed, was nothing like American Italian cuisine, which it would have been so very easy for him to have embraced instead.

As he put it, when Italian cuisine got to America, portions increased in size, the amount of meat increased considerably and sauces got laid on thick.

This is not how Italians do things. They eat human sized portions, designed to meet need and not greed. Meat is used, but never to excess, largely because that could not be afforded. And sauces were for flavouring, not bulk. I agree with all that, although I appear to be heading way from meat these days.

Why mention this? Because as the Guardian notes this morning in its daily newsletter:

In the last year, a little known drug originally prescribed to people with type 2 diabetes has shot into the headlines. Semaglutide, sold by Novo Nordisk as Ozempic, has taken social media and Hollywood by storm. Elon Musk credited his new body to Wegovy, another brand of the drug, and celebrities like the Kardashians are widely rumoured to be using it to shed the curvy figures that propelled them to fame in the early 2010s.

Fat was in. Fat is now, apparently, out again. Let the market profit from the change which, no doubt, it promoted in the first place. And never let it be mentioned that if only people ate sensible amounts of largely unprocessed food whilst taking enough exercise (largely in the form of low impact walking) diet would not be an issue for vast numbers of people.

But where would GDP be if we did something so sensible? It would fall, of course. Our well-being is inversely proportional to that which economics records in that case. And so what wins? As a result of the power of markets the wrong foodstuffs do, for which they must then supply antidotes, of course.

I am not decrying all markets. I think markets are of use. However, markets that exploit and generally demean those with whom they engage are serving no good purpose. Much of our food market appears dangerously close to this. Why can't we better regulate it?