

OIL FOR FOOD: THE GLOBAL STORY OF EDIBLE LIPIDS

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the issue of the globalization of food production and consumption in the last half-century through the medium of fats and oils, or lipids. The dual traits of being essential for human life and signifying a diverse range of regional styles of consumption make lipids an ideal bulk commodity to study international differences in food. FAOSTAT food balance sheet data on fats and oils from 1961 and 2003 are interrogated using correspondence analysis, which provides a means of displaying the principal trends in large tables of data. The analyses reveal evidence for a global convergence in lipid availability from 1961 to 2003 (from animal fats to vegetable oils), in addition to a trends towards an increased disparity which at the extremes is between the wealthiest, as importers of diversity, and least affluent regions, as the most resistant areas to homogenizing trends.