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GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Date: 7/19/2011

GAIN Report Number: CI1023

Chile

Post: Santiago

Chile on a Fast Food Binge - Shifts from Fruit to Hamburgers

Report Categories:

Agriculture in the News

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Report Highlights:

World's biggest restaurant chains find a hungry market in Chile.

General Information:

Recent studies on Chile's eating habits reveal that more and more Chileans are forgoing home-cooked meals for fast food—namely hamburgers and hot dogs.

“Before people ate a lot of fruit, now that's not so common,” Luís Gando, a Santiago fruit vendor, said of the change in Chile's eating habits. “You give your kid a yogurt and that's it.”

The most recent study on the issue, conducted by the National Chamber of Commerce (CNC), found that in the past five years the amount of money spent on fast food has risen by 12 percent in Chile. The CNC explains the rise in part from the increasing number of people entering the workforce.

“People are busy,” Marco Antonio said of his success over the past two years selling completos—Chile's traditional hot dog with heaping portions of mayonnaise and other condiments. “They want food that is fast.”

According to the secretary general of the CNC, the correlation between a growing workforce and increased consumption of fast food is an international trend. In Chile, the rise in fast food consumption has made the nation a new focus for corporate restaurant chains like McDonalds. By 2014, officials predict the number McDonalds will increase its presence in Chile by 26 percent, making it the third-largest McDonalds producer in Latin America, surpassed only by Brazil and Colombia.

For Gando, who has seen the food industry ebb and flow during his two decades as a street vendor, the increase in fast food could affect the country's entire food culture.

“People used to live to eat, now they eat to live,” Gando said of the new tendency for Chileans to find the fastest, quickest meals. Lunch used to take hours, he said, now it's only 20 minutes. Antonio had similar sentiments, stating simply that, yes, the food culture has changed: “Completo are the new food culture.”

The CNC study is complemented by the recent results of the first-ever National Nutritional Intake Survey, which found Chileans are increasingly eliminating dinner and nutritional home-cooked meals in favor of bread and other unhealthy alternatives.