

David Yawson Healthy food or healthy profit? The dilemma of integrating health and food systems

“Eat thy food as thy medicine, otherwise eat your medicine as thy food” is a popular, time-tested adage. The main essential elements in the human body correspond to core elements in the Earth crust or soil. Through food, these elements are transferred to the human body for maintenance and healthy life. This makes food an integral component of a major, complex system or cycle that links human health to nature. Food production and consumption have therefore served as primary pillars of human health for ages. However, through the instrument of food commodification and industrial production, the pursuit of profit has become the primary goal of food production to the extent that human health is sometimes endangered or totally neglected. The consequence is proliferation of diseases (such as diabetes, hypertension, Alzheimer’s) that have roots in food consumption but justify profit-oriented medical interventions and management. Advancement in science and medicine suggests an imperative to tightly couple food and health systems to effectively enhance human health and wellbeing. Why is this not the case? This paper examines this question by analysing some issues in the nexus of food production and consumption in relation to human health to rationalize the grounds for integrating the health and food systems. The paper argues that the pursuit of profit in both the food and health systems remains a binding constraint to this possibility of integration, and that profit generation in the food system is currently in a reinforcing relationship with profit generation in the health system.