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**Is obesity America's most influential export?** The Week. 9/8/13. http://theweek.com/article/index/249256/is-obesity-americas-most-influential-export

Thanks to the U.S., loads of countries are hooked on fattening food. *The global supersize.* *Photo: Sean Gallup/Getty Images*

Anti-obesity campaigners, with First Lady Michelle Obama as their standard-bearer, might finally be making some headway. Recent studies suggest that rising U.S. obesity rates have started leveling off, as a growing number of American adults get out and exercise more.

Populations in many other countries are continuing to grow fatter at an alarming rate, however, and many nutrition experts say the U.S. is fueling the "globesity" epidemic by exporting the worst of its eating and exercise habits to once-healthy foreign cultures.

Mexico is the nearest — and one of the most glaring — recent examples. Mexico recently overtook its northern neighbor to become the world's fattest country with a population of more than 100 million. Nutrition experts there put much of the blame on high consumption of sugary sodas, although soft-drink executives object, saying their product can be part of a healthy diet. Public-health advocates have launched an ad campaign asking Mexicans, "Would you eat 12 spoonfuls of sugar? Why do you drink soda?"

Mexicans have the world's highest rate of soda consumption, at 43 gallons per capita annually. And U.S. agricultural polices have been a big factor in fueling their addiction, says John Norris at *Foreign Policy*. America's high tariffs on sugar, coupled with its subsidies for U.S. corn farmers, created a boom in the use of cheaper, high-fructose corn syrup in everything from soft drinks to spaghetti sauce, and that coincided with a spike in U.S. obesity (research has found that rats fed corn syrup gained more weight than those eating sugar). Then, he says, we started pushing the stuff south of the border.

It is no accident that Mexico's weight gain has coincided with increased soft-drink guzzling... The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, a Minnesota-based think tank, has shown that the country's sharp spike in obesity and soda consumption correlates with the 1994 passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which opened Mexico to a flood of cheap junk food and soda pop: After the agreement took effect, there was a more than 1,200 percent increase in high-fructose corn syrup exports from the United States to Mexico between 1996 and 2012, according to the U.S. Agriculture Department.

Washington's trade policies are also being blamed for giving American Samoa the highest obesity rate in the world (75 percent). After World War II, the U.S. started dumping an unwanted product — turkey tails, which are up to 40 percent fat — on the Pacific island chain. Samoans now consume 44 pounds of the turkey butts annually, Norris says, and local officials even tried to ban further imports in 2007, until Washington strong-armed them into backing down.

But American Samoa's weight problem, and the heart disease, diabetes, and other health problems that go with it, also stem from two other imports from its "mainland powerhouse" — high-calorie fast foods and a sedentary lifestyle, says Helen Collis at Britain's *Daily Mail*. Most of the islands' food is imported, and chain restaurants offer a reliable low-cost alternative that has decreased consumption of leaner traditional staples, such as seafood.

Globalization has spread fast-food culture all over the globe. Health experts say the result has been obesity epidemics sprouting up everywhere from China to Qatar. That oil-rich nation's tiny native population of 250,000 has been experiencing skyrocketing obesity rates — expected to shoot from 45 percent now to nearly 70 percent in five years — as cars have made the population more sedentary and fast food and home deliveries have replaced home cooking.

"As fast as we get rid of all our traditional vectors of disease — infections, little microbes, bugs," Bruce Neal, professor at George Institute for Global Health in Sydney, Australia, tells the Indo-Asian News Service, "we are replacing them with the new vectors of disease, which are massive transnational, national, multinational corporations selling vast amounts of salt, fat and sugar."