

# Meat monsters

Hong Kong has topped a study on the impact of meat eaters. High meat consumption means a higher health risk for citizens, rises in medical costs and could cause environmental contamination

HONG KONG people have won themselves the title of ‘meat incinerator’, with meat consumption peaking in 2011 at 150kg per capita, 38 percent more than Americans, who are perceived to be champion meat consumers, and double the figure of the European Union. Pork and poultry consumption have been the favourite meat for Hongkongers and remained the most consumed. As for beef, per capita consumption jumped from 15kg in 2007 to a record high of 32.3kg in 2011, placing it in the top 10 internationally.

What do these figures imply? On the one hand, a financial analyst would tell you a strong economy offers the population the nutrition it needs, and shows the importance of the poultry trade in Hong Kong. But from a public health and environmental resource point of view, massive meat consumption is very worrying.

## Health risk

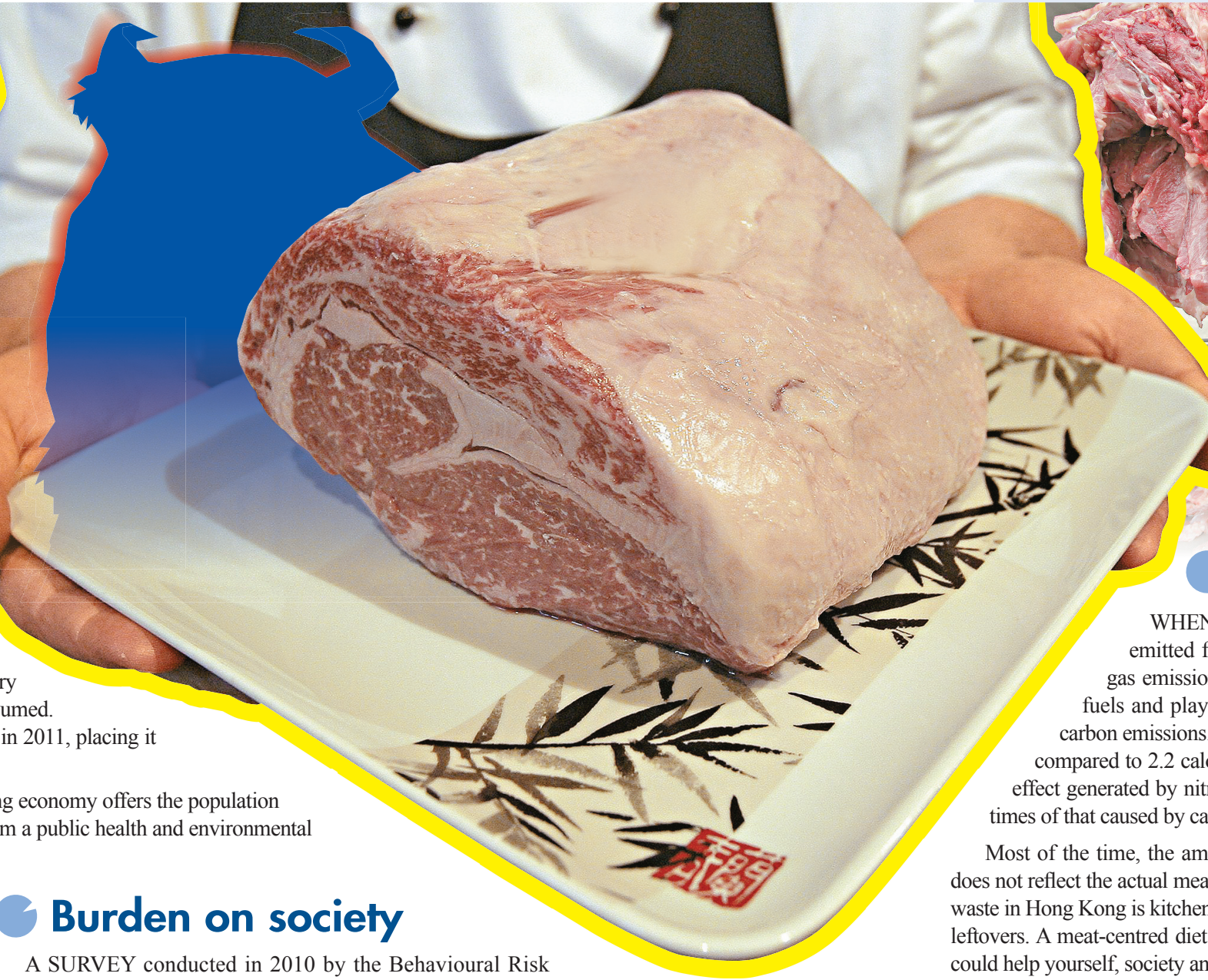
NOT only do Hongkongers over-consume meat, but also they under-consume fruit and vegetables. They favour approximately one pound of meat every day, when 0.3 to 0.5 pounds of meat is enough for an adult’s daily consumption. Forty percent of Hongkongers consume less than one fruit a day, and 80 percent fewer than the suggested five portions of fruit and vegetables per day. The World Health Organisation recommends a daily consumption of at least two portions of fruit with three portions of vegetables, amounting to two oranges and 1.5 bowls of cooked vegetables.

This ‘more meat less veg’ diet has long been regarded as the enemy of health and a friend of obesity. It invites dangerous diseases such as type II diabetes, heart diseases and colorectal cancer. Male meat eaters have a heart attack risk of 50 percent while male vegetarians have 14 percent risk. Female daily meat eaters’ breast cancer risk is 3.8 times higher than that of those who consume meat less than once every week. According to a study conducted by the Hong Kong Association for the Study of



Obesity burdens healthcare.

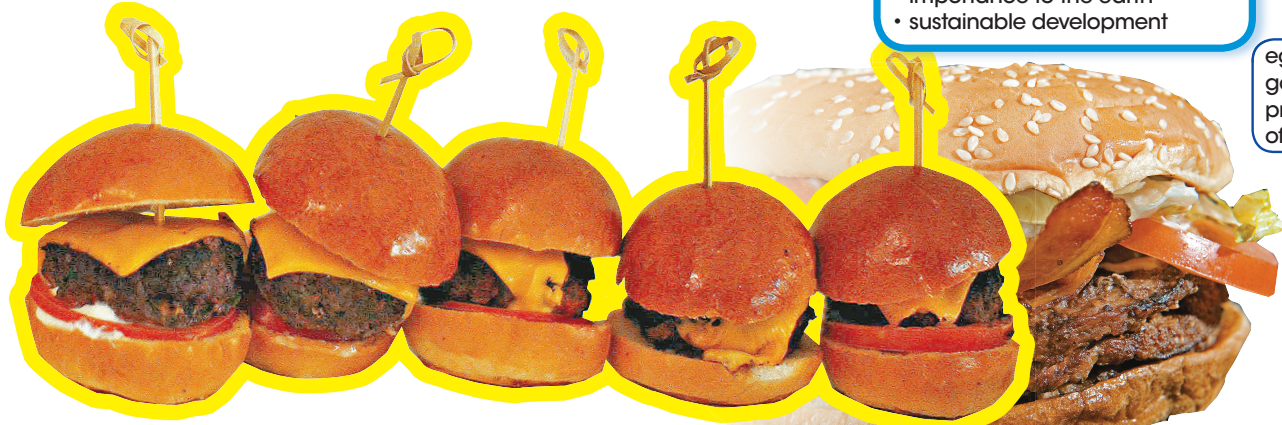
Obesity (HKASO), 80 percent of obese participants have at least one chronic condition, with diabetes, hyperlipemia, cardiovascular diseases being most popular, doubling or tripling the risk of that of normal-weight people. The risk of diabetes, obstructive sleep apnoea and gallbladder disease is even three times higher.



## Burden on society

A SURVEY conducted in 2010 by the Behavioural Risk Factor Surveillance System under the Department of Health reveals that around 39.2 percent of the sampled adults have Body Mass Index (BMI) equal or over 23.0 (categorised as ‘overweight’ or ‘obese’); 21 percent have a BMI equal or over 25.0 (categorised as ‘obese’); the number of overweight or obese men (48.3 percent) exceeds that of women (31.4 percent). Those aged 45-54 have the highest rate of obesity than any other age group.

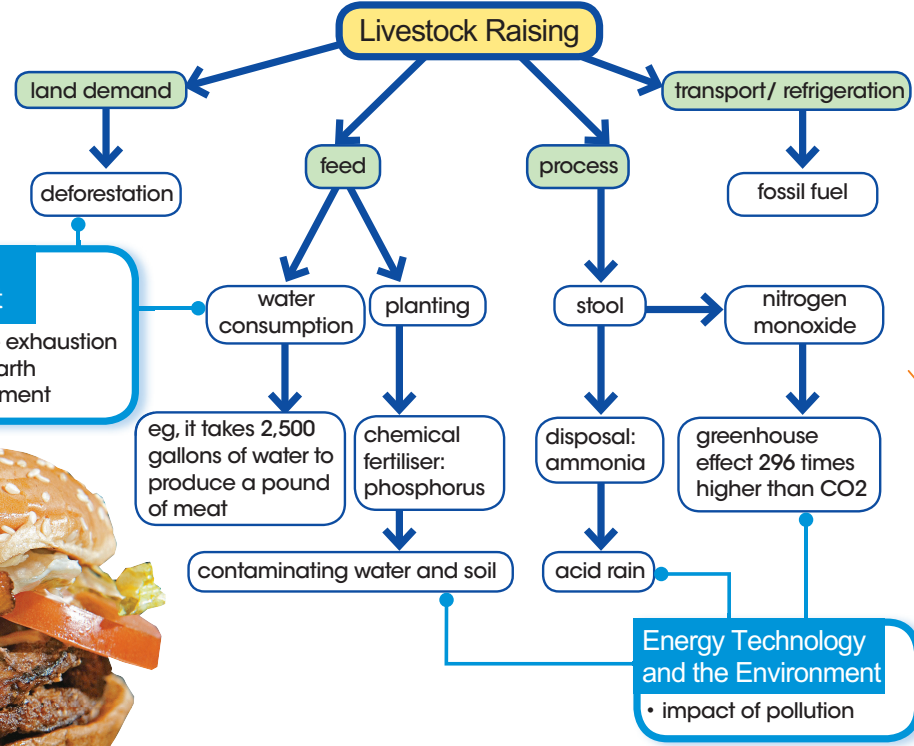
Over-consumption of meat harms more than the health of individuals. It places a huge burden on public healthcare services when health problems arise from the overeating of meat. Medical expenditure for 2012-2013 has increased by a total of 40 percent compared to five years before, and make up 17 percent of the government’s total running costs.



## Contamination

WHEN too much meat is consumed, nature pays the price too – greenhouse gases emitted from the production of meat amounts to 25 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Rearing livestock packaging, refrigerating and logistics all burn fossil fuels and play a part in exhausting resources and contaminating the environment with carbon emissions. About 40 calories of fossil fuel energy go into every calorie of feedlot beef, compared to 2.2 calories needed to produce one calorie of plant-based protein. The greenhouse effect generated by nitrogen monoxide released from an animal stool is 296 times of that caused by carbon dioxide.

Most of the time, the amount of meat produced for local consumption does not reflect the actual meat intake. Sadly, 3,600 out of 9,100 tons of urban waste in Hong Kong is kitchen waste, made up of food residue or unconsumed leftovers. A meat-centred diet has many negative effects. Adjusting your diet could help yourself, society and the planet.



## Discussion

It is estimated that if we ate two fewer bites of meat (approx. 20g beef and 20g pork) every day, we could save up to 600,000 tons of food and 600 million tons of water. Would you care to help achieve this?



## Behavioural risk factors

THE Behavioural Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) was set up by the Surveillance and Epidemiology Branch, Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health. It contains information on health-related behaviour of the Hong Kong adult population collected through a series of systematic and periodical telephone surveys. The information may be useful for monitoring trends, which is important for identifying emerging health issues and for planning, supporting and evaluating health promotion and disease prevention programmes.