Wenjie Zhan

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The latest version

RESEARCH INTERESTS
Food, Nurtition, and Health Economics
Agricultural Policy and Agribusiness

EDUCATION
Ph.D. Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of California, Davis, 2025 (Expected)
M.Sc. Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Tokyo, 2020
B.Mgmt. Financial Management, Sun Yat-sen University, 2018
Semester Abroad, Seoul National University, 2017

REFERENCE

Timothy K.M. Beatty *(Chair)*
Professor
Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics
University of California, Davis
tbeatty@ucdavis.edu

Marianne P. Bitler
Professor
Department of Economics
University of California, Davis
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Richard J. Sexton
Distinguished Professor
Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics
University of California, Davis
rich@primal.ucdavis.edu

Stephen A. Vosti
Adjunct Professor Emeritus
Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Institute for Global Nutrition
University of California, Davis
savosti@ucdavis.edu

WORKING PAPERS

"Long Run Effects of Folic Acid Fortification,"
Job Market Paper, 2025
Scheduled to be presented at AEA Health Policy Lightning Session at ASSA 2025; presented at AAEA 2024.

Policy makers are increasingly concerned about the effectiveness of existing nutritional interventions, which are often limited by the challenge of changing consumer behavior. Food fortification offers a promising alternative by enhancing the nutritional content of widely consumed foods without requiring changes in consumer habits. This is particularly relevant in addressing micronutrient deficiencies, where fortification can serve as a scalable and low-cost solution. This paper studies the most recent food fortification effort in the U.S.—the folic acid fortification of enriched grain products in the late 1990s. This policy substantially increased folate intake and reduced the incidence of birth defects. By comparing cohorts exposed and unexposed to the fortification across regions with varying baseline folate deficiency levels, I find that (1) in the short term, fortification increased the proportion of births among disadvantaged mothers, likely due to improved fetal survival rates; and (2) in the long term, in-utero exposure to folic acid fortification raises the likelihood of post-secondary enrollment for young adults by 0.69 to 1.17 percentage points. It also reduces the likelihood of working full-time among 19-to-22-year-olds by 0.79 to

1.54 percentage points but has no impact on the labor supply of individuals over 22. Finally, my back-of-the-envelope calculation indicates that folic acid fortification provides long-term human capital benefits comparable to those of food stamps but at a significantly lower cost.

"The Impact of Electronic Benefit Transfer on WIC Participation: Evidence from Natality Data,"
with Charlotte Ambrozek, and Timothy K.M. Beatty
Submitted to WIC Paper Session at MEA 2025.

Policymakers have an interest in ensuring participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) – WIC has been shown to increase birthweight for participating mothers and improve long-run outcomes for children who participate in the first years of life. Between 2002 and 2022, WIC transitioned from paper vouchers to electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards. This payment reform was expected to encourage WIC participation by streamlining benefit redemption and thereby reducing welfare stigma. Empirical studies of the effects of WIC EBT on participation have found mixed results, with studies often limited to one or a few states. Without detailed WIC participation data on a large scale, results are not generalizable. In this paper, we evaluate the impact of WIC EBT implementation on WIC participation nationwide by linking the WIC EBT roll-out schedule to Vital Statistics Natality Data across virtually all counties in the U.S. We document a significant increase in WIC participation among mothers more likely to be WIC-eligible following the implementation of WIC EBT. Additionally, we find that WIC EBT reduces adverse birth outcomes for infants born to these mothers. Our findings suggest that facilitating the delivery of public benefits can improve program uptake and well-being of participants in need.

In Progress

"Does Food Distribution Still Work? Evidence from Commodity Supplemental Food Program."

"Consumer Welfare and Dietary Impacts of Food Price Inflation,"
with Julian M. Alston, Timothy K.M. Beatty, and Abigail M. Okrent
Invited for submission to Applied Economics Perspectives and Policy Special Issue on Food Prices and Forecasting.

"Does Electronic Benefit Transfer Reduce Fraud? Evidence from SNAP and WIC,"
with Charlotte Ambrozek, and Timothy K.M. Beatty

"Designing Large-scale Food Fortification Programs: Theory and Application,"
with Stephen A. Vosti

"Arsenic in Drinking Water and Infant Health,"
Scheduled to be presented at ASHEcon Health Economics Paper Session at ASSA 2025.

Extension

"Mexican Tomatoes are Winning the American Market,"
with Yuhan Wang, *Ag Data News*, November 24, 2021.
Media: **The Washington Post**

Other Publications

"Input-Output Efficiency Evaluation of Technological Innovation Funds in the Universities, Scientific Research Institutions, and Enterprises in China,"
with Weiguo Qiao, *Science & Technology Progress and Policy*, 2022. (in Chinese, CSSCI)

"Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2020: Towards Sustainable Economies,"
with United Nations ESCAP, *United Nations ESCAP Flagship Publication*, 2020.

"Is Governmental Appropriation the Best Way to Finance Top Universities? Lessons from the U.S.,"
with Weiguo Qiao, and Juan Zhou, *Study & Exploration*, 2019. (in Chinese, CSSCI)

Presentations

2025 AEA/ASHEcon/ASSA Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA (scheduled)

2024 UC Davis-University of Gottingen Joint Research Symposium, Davis, CA; Giannini ARE Student Conference, Berkeley, CA; AAEA Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA

2023 Giannini ARE Student Conference, Davis, CA

Research Experience

Graduate Student Researcher, University of California, Davis, Davis, CA
for Timothy K.M. Beatty, 06/2023-
for Julian M. Alston, 01/2024- 12/2024
for Stephen A. Vosti, 04/2022-12/2022

Research and Policy Engagement Intern, Resources for the Future, Washington, DC, 2022
Intern in Economic Affairs, United Nations ESCAP, Bangkok, Thailand, 2019
Research Assistant, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China, 2017-2018

Teaching Experience

Instructor
Introduction to Mathematics in Economics, UC Davis, Summer 2023

Teaching Assistant
ARE 173 Capital Markets, UC Davis, Spring 2023
ARE 107 Econometrics for Business Decision, UC Davis, Winter 2023
ARE 171 Principles of Finance, UC Davis, Winter 2022
ARE 176 Environmental Economics, UC Davis, Fall 2021
ARE 155 Operation Research & Management Science, UC Davis, Winter 2021

Honors and Awards

Summer Research Fellowship, UC Davis, 2024
Travel Grant for Behavioral Obesity Research Workshop, Indiana University Bloomington, 2023
Tuition Supplemental Fellowship, UC Davis, 2020
Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) Honor Scholarship, JASSO, 2018 – 2019
Yamamoto Foundation Allowance, University of Tokyo, 2018
Hong Kong Ho's Foundation Scholarship, Sun Yat-sen University, 2018

Services and Leadership

Coordinator, Student Café, Diversity and Inclusion in Research, Education, and Career Program (DIRECT), UC Davis, 2022
Coordinator, Development Workshop, UC Davis, 2021 – 2022
Coordinator, Development Tea, UC Davis, 2021 – 2022
Secretary of Academic Affairs, Student Union, Sun Yat-sen University, 2015 – 2018

Languages

English (Fluent), Mandarin (Native), Cantonese (Fluent), Japanese (Intermediate)