

WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING

The gist of what you may have missed.



Scandals regarding mislabeled food have erupted in Europe and the United States. **British food inspectors found horse meat and phenylbutazone—a powerful anti-inflammatory drug normally used for pain treatment—in frozen precooked meals, and a survey conducted by Oceana, a nonprofit ocean protection group, discovered mass mislabeling of fish in 12 US cities nationwide.** The first horse meat discovery was made in Findus Group's frozen beef lasagna, and UK government data showed that just over 1 percent of declared beef products were horse meat. The Oceana study found that about one-third of the 1,1215 fish samples bought between 2010 and 2012 were mislabeled. Data revealed consumers were most likely to be misled at sushi bars and least likely at grocery stores—restaurants fell somewhere in the middle. The horse meat scandal also reveals lingering effects of the 2008 global economic crisis—four years of mass horse slaughters increased supply and lowered the price to half that of beef. Certain “mislabels” are within FDA regulations, such as marketing Patagonian toothfish as Chilean sea bass, and the study did not declare a fish mislabeled if they adhered to federal guidelines. However, retail outlets often mislabeled under more consumer-friendly names—for example, almost two-thirds of “wild” salmon samples were actually farmed Atlantic salmon.

Source: *New York Times*

The number of American households with guns has declined over the past four decades. According to data from the General Social Survey—a public opinion survey conducted every two years—gun ownership rate has dropped across a broad cross section of households. In the 1970s, 50 percent of households owned guns, as opposed to 34 percent in 2012. No overarching national survey is conducted, so detailed data is scarce with various recent national polls reporting that between 35 and 52 percent of households own guns. As far as geographic patterns, household ownership in the South and the mountain region dropped to 40 percent from 65 percent in the 1970s, and dropped from 29 to 22 percent in the Northeast. Among Americans under the age of 30, gun ownership fell from 30 to 23 percent. From a political perspective, there was a sharp decrease in household gun ownership among Democrats and independents since 1970, while there was only a slight decline among Republicans—whose gun ownership is up nearly 3 percent since 2006. Research shows that urbanization has helped the decline, because rural areas are where gun ownership is highest. Another possible contributor is that more women—whose ownership rate hovers around 10 percent, or one-third the rate of males—are heading households without men. The survey does not ask whether or not the guns are legal, but Aaron Karp—a gun policy expert at Small Arms Survey in Geneva and Old Dominion University—said he estimates the total number of guns in the US ranges from 280 to 320 million.

Sources: *New York Times*, *Real Clear World*

Doctors in Mississippi have reportedly cured a HIV-infected child. Dr. Hannah Gay, who cared for the patient at the University of Mississippi's medical center, said the case is the first “functional cure” of an HIV-infected child. The patient—now two-and-a-half—doesn't need medication, has a normal life expectancy, and is highly unlikely to be infectious to others. The child, born infected with HIV, was treated aggressively with antiretroviral drugs 30 hours after being born. After a month of therapy, the HIV levels had fallen so low that lab tests failed to detect it. The medical team believes the swift and potent treatment stopped the virus from replicating in short-lived, active immune cells, and also blocked the infection of CD4—long-lived white blood cells, where HIV can lie dormant for years. This specific treatment would not work in adults and older children, because their CD4 cells are already infected.

Source: *Guardian (UK)*

Private-sector job growth in the Hudson Valley for the decade ending in 2011 rose at a rate of .14 percent, which was less than the statewide rate of .32 percent, according to a report from the Marist College Bureau of Research. The decline in manufacturing and government jobs—combined with slow growth in the sectors that did expand—set the overall pace. Throughout the decade, Hudson Valley private-sector wage growth was at an annualized rate of 2.84 percent versus the statewide average—including New York City—of 3.32 percent. In terms of the regional economy, the sectors of education and health services; trade, transportation, and utilities; and professional and business services became even more important, because they accounted for 61.8 percent of Hudson Valley jobs, compared to 58.2 percent in 2002.

Source: *Poughkeepsie Journal*

In early March, the Dow Jones climbed above 14,000—just 75 points shy of a record high. Due to the rising stock market, the number of millionaires in the United States increased by 300,000 in 2012. There are currently 8.99 million households with net worths—not including residential properties—totaling \$1 million or more, according to data from Spectrem Group, a Chicago-based wealth research firm. The 2012 total falls between 2011's 8.6 million millionaire households and the US's all-time record high of 9.2 million millionaire households in 2006. However, these stock surges have created a wage gap between the wealthy and “affluent,” those worth \$500,000 or more. Currently the top 10 percent of Americans own over 80 percent of all stocks, according to research from Edward Wolff of New York University. While the number of households worth \$1 million or more is near the US record high, the number of affluent households is significantly lower today (14.3 million) compared to 2007 (15.7 million). However, despite thriving stock markets, economic growth is crawling and unemployment is still hovering under 8 percent. Companies face little pressure to raise salaries and productivity gains allowed them to increase sales without hiring new workers. While these earnings are rewarded by investors and make American companies stronger global competitors, they haven't created US jobs. Combined with the \$85 billion in automatic government-spending cuts taking effect between early March and September 30, some experts believe economic growth could be reduced by nearly half a percentage point, which could cost the country about 700,000 jobs.

Sources: *CNBC*, *New York Times*

On March 12, Google was fined \$7 million dollars for violating people's privacy during their Street View mapping project. With the use of special vehicles meant to photograph residential and commercial properties, the search company collected personal information—including e-mails, passwords, and financial records—from millions of unencrypted wireless networks. Australian Regulator Stephen Conroy said Google's actions were “probably the single greatest breach in the history of privacy.” In order to settle the case brought by 38 states, Google had to agree to police their employees on privacy issues, as well as partaking in educational public outreach. These provisions include an annual employee privacy week, refresher training for lawyers overseeing new products, creating a YouTube video about encryption and running a daily online ad promoting it for two years, and running an educational ad in the biggest newspapers in those 38 states. Despite the minuscule fine for a company whose daily net income is \$32 million, some believe the real victory is the company's admission. George Jepsen, the Connecticut attorney general who led the states' investigation, said, “What mattered was Google admitted they weren't just taking pictures.”

Source: *New York Times*

—Compiled by Carolyn Quimby