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Diabetes awareness could save children's lives

Diabetes is a disease that affects the way the body converts sugar into usable energy.

It is divided into two types: Type 1 is an autoimmune disease whereby the body produces too little or no insulin, which is needed to convert sugar into energy. Type 1 diabetes cannot be prevented and is the most common type in children.

Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body cannot use the insulin it produces. It has been reported in children as young as 8. Studies have shown that individuals who lose 7-10 per cent of their body weight and exercise can stave off the onset of the disease.

Zurich University compiled figures from 1991-1999 on Type 1 diabetes, which is genetic and cannot be prevented. In 1991, around eight out of 100,000 children aged 14 years old and younger developed that form. The rate peaked in 1996, when nearly 12 youths per 100,000 developed Type 1 diabetes. Increasingly it is seen in children - even toddlers and babies.

Raising awareness about the disease is key, as early treatment can mean the difference between the life and death of a child.

The warning signs that a child could have diabetes include frequent bed-wetting or excessive urination and thirst. Increased hunger, weight loss, lethargy, poor concentration and blurred vision can all be signs. Often vomiting and stomach pain - two additional symptoms - can be mistaken for the flu.

In the past few years some children aged two or three years were diagnosed with diabetes very late and had to be placed in intensive care.

It's important to remember that even a small child can develop diabetes.

from swissinfo

Investment urged for Swiss mountain farms

Investing in mountain farms is crucial to stem the steady flow of people packing their bags and leaving high-alpine regions, warns Swiss Mountain Aid. Last year it funded over 500 livelihood projects in the Swiss Alps to the tune of SFr20 million to help people carve out an existence in the tough alpine environment.

An estimated 60,000 people live in high-alpine regions in Switzerland, of whom around 7,500 work as farmers. But the overall number continues to fall by 1.5 per cent a year as people leave for towns and cities in the valleys. Mountain farmers may receive a share of the SFr2.5 billion in direct payments or state subsidies every year, but they still struggle. Many survive only because they have taken up a second occupation.

Despite all this, the foundation is convinced mountain farming has a future in Switzerland. Agriculture is anchored in the Swiss constitution and is strongly linked to tourism. If mountain farmers abandoned their farms, in the space of one generation the land would turn into forest, and when that happens tourists won't bother coming; this would be a considerable economic loss for Switzerland.

The foundation has devised a multi-pronged strategy to try to slow the exodus from the mountains: rationalising and regrouping farm workers, specialist products, regional farming approaches and collaborating with other sectors, like the tourist industry.

At Rona in canton Graubünden the agency is currently supporting a project to merge three farms and farmland and build a joint cheese farm to lower production costs. A similar top-end cheese project was completed last year at a Robiei farm in canton Ticino. *from swissinfo*

Outside funds raise bar at top university

High-flying students will be awarded grants covering their cost of living as Zurich's Federal Institute of Technology seeks to attract the best international talent. The initiative will be funded by private donations, which are playing an increasingly important role in plans to compete with the world's premier seats of learning.



The Institute piloted the Excellence and Opportunities Scholarships with 13 top grade students receiving SFr 21'000 in 2007 and 20 more were awarded the grant in 2008. Funds have now been allocated for more than double this number of Masters students in future years. The scholarships - along with plans to introduce 80 new professors in the next ten years and the construction of 1'000 affordable housing units at the Science City research complex - are part of an expansion drive at the Institute.

State funding still makes up the lion's share of the total budget, but a minimal increase last year has forced the Institute to look elsewhere for money to implement its plans. Last year, funding from external sources accounted for nearly 17 per cent of the budget, compared with 12 per cent in 2001.

Donations from companies, individuals and other bodies to the Institute's fundraising Foundation have been steadily rising.

The Foundation plans to raise enough money to provide a steady stream of income through interest payments. *from swissinfo*