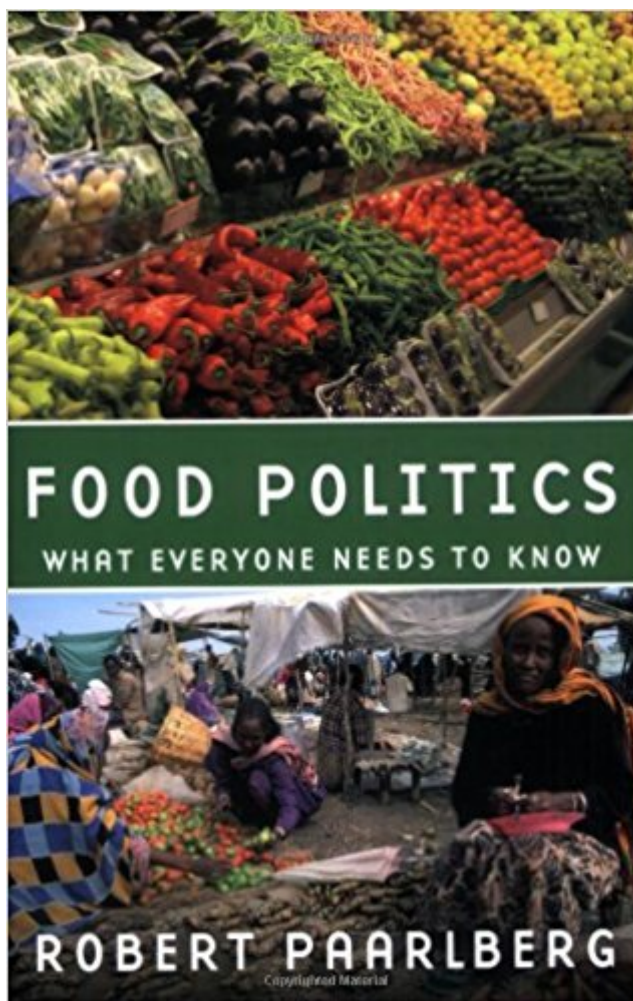


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Food Politics: What Everyone Needs To Know



Synopsis

The politics of food is changing fast. In rich countries, obesity is now a more serious problem than hunger. Consumers once satisfied with cheap and convenient food now want food that is also safe, nutritious, fresh, and grown by local farmers using fewer chemicals. Heavily subsidized and underregulated commercial farmers are facing stronger push back from environmentalists and consumer activists, and food companies are under the microscope. Meanwhile, agricultural success in Asia has spurred income growth and dietary enrichment, but agricultural failure in Africa has left one-third of all citizens undernourished - and the international markets that link these diverse regions together are subject to sudden disruption. Food Politics carefully examines and explains the most important issues on today's global food landscape, including international food prices, famines, chronic hunger, the Malthusian race between food production and population growth, international food aid, "green revolution" farming, obesity, farm subsidies and trade, agriculture and the environment, agribusiness, supermarkets, food safety, fast food, slow food, organic food, local food, and genetically engineered food. Politics in each of these areas has become polarized over the past decade by conflicting claims and accusations from advocates on all sides. Paarlberg's book maps this contested terrain, challenging myths and critiquing more than a few of today's fashionable beliefs about farming and food. For those ready to have their thinking about food politics informed and also challenged, this is the book to read.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW About This Series Who it's for: Busy people with diverse interests, ranging from college students to professionals, who wish to inform themselves in a succinct yet authoritative manner about a particular topic. What's inside: An incisive approach to a complex and timely issue, laid out in a straight-forward, question-and-answer format. Meet Our Authors Top experts in their given fields, ranging from an Economist correspondent to a director at the Council on Foreign Relations, you can trust our authors' expertise and guidance. Popular Topics in the "What Everyone Needs to Know" Series International Politics Environmental Policies World History Sciences & Math Religion & Spirituality

Political scientist Paarlberg calls on years of food-policy work and casts his net far and wide in highly opinionated discussions of food shortages and safety, organics, and obesity. He believes that the unsuccessful farm bill labors under the weight of Congressional and lobbyist interests who care only about profits, not good policy, while critics of the "green revolution" are more focused on idealism than science. Factory farming is essential, Paarlberg argues, and, by the way, international food aid is manipulated by everyone from the Department of Defense to the shipping lobby. The facts and figures he provides are dizzying, and the quick shifts in subject matter will likely leave readers wishing Paarlberg had chosen to focus his attention on a facet or two of this enormous subject. Ultimately Food Politics is best used as source book for those uncertain where to begin but desiring something more substantial than bland green guides. Consider it a cram course in how the world eats, and then use this knowledge to support further inquiry. Colleen Mondor

When I learned that the author was a bit biased in his opinions, it helped me understand what I was reading better. He is quite one-sided on the "how are we going to feed the world dilemma." I wasn't impressed with him, but I think it's an important read in order to get all the opinions.

I thought the author presented the facts and arguments pretty well - and certainly free of some of the hype (from both sides) that some of the other reviews cry about it lacking. The book presents fact based positions from both sides of several issues like hunger, organically grown food, and gmo's that people coming into the discussion need as a foundation....before choosing a side and drinking their kool-aid.

Not enough balance, no citations to back up his statements. More Robert's opinion than anything else.

This book is a balanced and well thought-through analysis of a topic that is most often discussed with antidotes, half-truths and political motives. A wonderful read for anyone who cares about the subject and wants a fact-based resource. Get this book!

Great information and perspective on the sustainability of food chains in America, and their interactions and implications on global political issues and economies. Absolutely recommend reading this book.

"This fundamental question of what an ideal farming system should look like explains a great deal of the modern politics of food and agriculture." Page 58. It is this 'fundamental question' which author Robert Paarlberg tries to address in his ambitious 189 page long book "Food Politics". It is an incredibly complex topic involving many of the World's governments and many of its largest international corporations. Something that should be simple, like food aid to starving people, actually sits at the confluence of political, military and economic policy for the G8 nations. Some reviewers seem to think Professor Paarlberg's views are too liberal (he does not demonize GMO's for example), while others feel he is a corporate mouthpiece (he does not condemn government policy to increase biofuel production from corn as the reason for food price spikes in 2008). As a moderate employed in the agriculture industry, I am open to the ideas Professor Paarlberg puts forth and privy to some of the driving forces that really shape the decision making. And, with all due respect to Professor Paarlberg's education and extensive international experience, I gave his book four stars out of five because I think he still does not know, or does not do a good job of really explaining, the real, simple driving forces behind some of the price spikes and production decisions at the base of the food pyramid. Some examples: cabbage prices were good last year (2010) because Kentucky Fried Chicken decided to introduce a new product by offering free coupons. This led to an increase in demand for coleslaw which led to an increase in demand for cabbage since they are the largest single purchaser of cabbage in the US. When McDonald's decided to make the Angus Burgers a permanent item on their menus after the introductory test marketing, this led to an increase in demand for red onion slices (a product they did not use prior to the Angus burgers). Red onions make up a minority of the 100,000 acres of onions grown in the US annually (on average). Growers cannot respond in the middle of a 5-8 month growing cycle, they have to wait for the next planting

window. But, onion seed production requires a 2-4 year production cycle, thus red onions will remain "in demand" until this lag phase passes. Very, very simple decisions.....that ripple through the market for years. Many farmers are comfortable with growing the same things they have in the past, because they have gained some agronomic expertise in those crops, because local infrastructure must be in place to pack or process the crop (for example-you cannot decide to grow sunflowers for oil one year because the market was good last year if the nearest crush plant is 1000 miles away. Even if sunflowers would grow very well on your farm the cost of shipping would cancel out all but the most spectacular of yield advantages), because they already have specialized planting and harvest equipment for a specific crop that they need to pay off. Thus, you often get this response to the question, "What are you going to plant next year?", "Little more of the same as this year (to take advantage of economies of scale and force out smaller competitors) then pray for a disaster somewhere so the market gets good." Given the broad range of topics Professor Paarlberg is trying to cover in 189 pages, one cannot expect an in depth science review of GMO's ("Mendel in the Kitchen" is a better choice for that), a hard hitting exposé into the food industry ("Fast Food Nation" and "Omnivore's Dilemma" have that covered), or even a dive into the deep pool of food politics in the US (Marion Nestle's version of "Food Politics" has that covered). What the reader does get is some very good vignettes into various facets of the global food industry and food policy making which, I believe, are delivered with very little bias or hyperbole.

Mr. Paarlberg's book Food Politics gives heavily biased views as to why we have no choice, but accept the fate of the industrial food system. He fails to give unbiased and critical analysis of the politics and legitimate controversy surrounding industrial food systems. I would urge caution to any open minded person that this book is heavily biased. I also had the opportunity to participate in a lecture given by Mr. Paarlberg when I was a graduate student at Harvard University and his lecture was even more opinionated than his book! This book is clearly not an academic piece of scholarly writing because no sources are given for his conclusions which rely solely on his personal opinions.

I have worked in the field of agricultural and environmental policy for over a decade and found Paarlberg's book to be one of the best overviews of food and ag politics out there! The author does a terrific job of explaining the political issues surrounding food and agricultural policy and is able to present the perspective of environmentalists and the ag industry alike. I know just how hard it is to try to bridge these two worlds. With books like this one, the job gets easier!

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