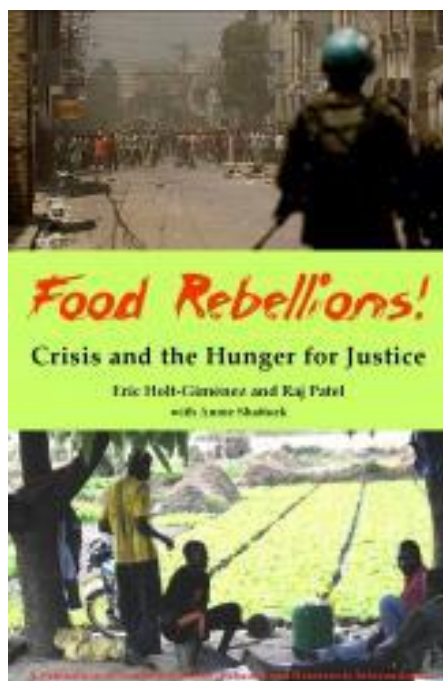




Food Rebellions!: Forging Food Sovereignty to Solve the Global Food Crisis

Eric Holt-Gimenez , Raj Patel

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Food Rebellions! takes a deep look at the world food crisis and its impact on the global South and underserved communities in the industrial North. Eric Holt-Gimenez and Raj Patel unpack the planet's environmentally and economically vulnerable food systems to reveal the root causes of the crisis. They shows us how the steady erosion of local and national control over their food systems has made nations dependent on a volatile global market and subject to the short-term interests of a handful of transnational agri-food monopolies. Food Rebellions! is a powerful handbook for those seeking to understand the causes and potential solutions to the current food crisis now affecting nearly half of the world's people. Why are food riots occurring around the world in a time of record harvests? What are the real impacts of agrofuels and genetically engineered crops? Food Rebellions! suggests that to solve the food crisis, we must change the global food system-from the bottom up and from the top down. The book frames the current food crisis as unique opportunity to develop productive local food systems that are engines for sustainable economic development. Hunger and poverty, the authors insist, can be eliminated by democratising food systems and respecting people's right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources-in short, by advancing food sovereignty.

Food Rebellions!: Forging Food Sovereignty to Solve the Global Food Crisis Details

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From Reader Review Food Rebellions!: Forging Food Sovereignty to Solve the Global Food Crisis for online ebook

Adam says

I got this at "A Novel Idea" in Posta in September, 2012.

Food Rebellions read like an NGO report, reminiscent of Wealth Inequality Reader, with the peculiar cross between academic writing and activist pleas. It essentially makes the argument that food shortages are economically, rather than agriculturally, rooted, and that to the extent that production needs to be increased in bulk, this should be done through sustainable and locally appropriate techniques. More specifically, the authors explain how the Green Revolution has increased production at the expense of the planet, seed diversity, and local farmers; how structural adjustment programs reduced institutional capacity in the third world and broke local production markets with cheap imports, which together with food aid (which seems to be directed to aiding the exporter - 60% of aid budgets are spent on transaction costs and aid rises when grain prices fall and vice versa, opposite to need) prices local farmers out of business, causing rapid urbanization; biofuels compete for arable land and raise prices; etc.

They have some particularly nice commentary on the human right to food and how it works. They point out that it's not the right to receive food, but rather the right to be able to procure it with dignity. So the duty of governments is to prosecute those who interfere with someone's ability to grow their own food and to facilitate access to/production of good food in areas where that's limited (food deserts; agrarian land reform of plantations, etc). They also point out that agricultural reform can't happen in a vacuum - it needs to address race and class issues that prevent people from being able to afford decent food, increasing the minimum wage, reforming the safety net to favor healthy food choices, etc.

The portions about agricultural production itself were not detailed enough to really satisfy me. They gave some superficial nods to traditional knowledge and seed varieties, agroecology, modern organic techniques and research dedicated to tropical contexts (like the System of Rice Intensification). And they detail some of the reasons that the Green Revolution has not been ultimately successful in eliminating hunger and how it has damaged ecosystem services that agriculture will eventually rely on more fully. After the original GR, the number of hungry people increased 11%. After yields stagnated in the 1990s, the number of hungry people was up 800 million. People weren't able to afford the new surplus food. The GR favored large farmers who could afford the inputs required - high-yielding seeds were expensive, and the irrigation, pesticides and fertilizers to get those yields were even more so. Analyses carried out before the GR by Carl Sauer said that farmers were "excellent" in terms of agricultural and nutritional knowledge and capacity, but needed access to credit and markets.

Overall, a good primer but kind of unsatisfying in the way that ideologically driven works that present themselves as academic writing always are. It's unclear how much Holt-Gimenez and Patel are telling the full story and how much they're presenting evidence to favor their point of view.

Emily Teel says

A dense read with a distinct political spin, but a great primer for understanding global issues around food sovereignty that the mainstream media is certainly not going to teach you.

Tinea says

Incredibly dense, in that each sentence is a stand-in for an essay, or a book, or a semester-long course. This book, less than 200 pages + appendixes, tries to record the history of the global food system, everything that is wrong with it, and everything that people around the world are currently doing to create food sovereignty in its stead. In that aim, Holt-Giménez and Patel both win and lose-- it's all there, but reading it is an exercise in concentration, because you can't let your mind wander for a second if you want to get everything that is presented here. And they present *so much*.

Holt-Giménez is the prolific researcher and activist director of Food First!, a global food sovereignty NGO based in Oakland, CA. I consider Food First the closest rich country ally of La Via Campesina, the global south's incredible movement of agro-ecological and activist smallholder farmers, original coiners of the "food sovereignty" concept. Patel, the second author, is a fairly big name "systems" thinker, whose writing builds holistic pictures of agricultural, economic, and nutritional aspects of the global food system.

Despite these choice authors, worth listening to, this book is surprisingly inaccessible. It feels rushed to print, with a no-name publisher (I could only get my hands on this through the third university library I tried... thank goodness for living with students!) and cramped chapters interrupted by boxes of statistics and anecdotes reading like an extended factsheet and not a book. What gives? This final product is a tome of useful information that should have been written as a delicately woven story, massively advertised and thrust into the hands of the general public.

As for content, I'll have to repeat myself to assure you that it is all here. The book opens with a history of the creation of this global food system, from colonial dismantling of Third World agriculture to urban-led liberation movements and rich country "aid" structures that supported US and Europe overproduction, dumping excess and depressing prices in the South, and finally to the neoliberal structural adjustments that further undermined peasant farmer safety nets and autonomy, linking the most rural farmers to global financial speculation... leading to the ongoing Food Crisis that hit in 2008. From there we learn about the incomprehensible state of the rural farmer in much of the world today: growing food to sell, left without enough to eat. If you have no idea what I'm talking about, pay attention: this shit is it. This is the crucial overarching issue that's missing from all the Occupy talk about inequality and finance and war. Food.

Then the authors get into movements for alternative agriculture and food distribution. They name the familiar faces: agro-ecology (and all its variants: permaculture, sustainable, organic, nutrient recycling, etc etc); urban agriculture; bioregional/local food; land reform; ag workers' rights; getting finance out of food commodities; water conservation and biodiversity; rejection of the Green Revolution, GMOs, and biofuels... all of the things that have been identified and attempted for years by the food justice movement and peasant rights movements around the world but which the world itself is still just *not getting*, not implementing, not acting on despite the urgency, the connections to everything else that sucks on the planet, despite the food system being the basic building block upon which human life prospers or eats itself.

Yeah, important, worth the work of finding and reading.

*An easier, more accessible read that covers the same ground is
Agriculture and Food in Crisis: Conflict, Resistance, and Renewal*

Laura says

First, the nitty stuff that drives me crazy: the text is interrupted with “box” information that sometimes detracts from the book instead of enhancing it. It also doesn’t help that the grammar is poor and punctuation sparse. Several times, I was confused and had to re-read something to figure out what I was supposed to be understanding. But, those are mainly the things that bother word nerds like myself. If you can get over that, this is a worthwhile read.

The authors of Food Rebellions made me laugh when I read, “according to [the industrial food titans], a world without Yara, Cargill, ADM, Monsanto, Tyson, TESCO, and Wal-Mart is a world doomed to starvation” (85). I laughed and thought, oh that’s funny. But it’s so true! One of the major topics in all of the sustainable food books is the misguided idea of reliance on the industrial food system to cure poverty and hunger. It’s been eating at me (pun intended) because it’s so contrary to common sense and the history of mankind’s relationship with agriculture. The authors say it well, summing up my own opinion on the matter, “In overall output, the small, diversified farm produces much more food” (p.116).

The idea of urban food gardens (as provided as an example solution, p.166) is something we’ve seen in movies (Dirt!, The Power of Community, and Fresh, among others, all discuss this concept), and I’ve personally noticed it more when reading magazines like Sunset and Better Homes and Gardens.

Even if we frequent our local farmers markets, grow our own food when possible, get our consumer message to the powers that be... there still needs to be a change to the overall system, the infrastructure, the taxes and the policies and the international programs that simply perpetuate the wrongness of the current system. “Decades of failed summits and portentous declarations show that all the technology, financing, and good intentions in the world cannot solve the food crisis unless they lead to the transformation of the food system” (p.178).

Finally, I came to Appendix 8: Declaration for Healthy Food and Agriculture... and I love it! If these two pages were the last two pages of reading I ever do on the food industry, then there could be no more suitable an ending. It summarizes all the major points: community; social justice and access to nutritious, affordable food; animal welfare; farmer dignity; education; ecological impacts; diversity; and economical challenges. Above all, these two pages are written concisely and effectively, compelling the reader to care. The ease in which the reader absorbs this call to action is unavoidable: even someone with little or no knowledge of these issues would agree from a commonsensical perspective that these are indeed important factors of our food supply. I went to the website (fooddeclaration.org) and trolled the pages, finding myself high on the message. This is a movement that I can get behind.

In the Declaration, I am personally empowered to effect change myself. The Declaration tells me I personally have a “duty to respect and honor the laborers of the land.” The Declaration tells me that the “pursuit of healthy food and agriculture unites us as people and as communities” and I really like that idea. The thought that people all over the world are similarly passionate about this movement, and that by merely feeling this way I am connected to them, that is powerful indeed. A network of that size and strength will be tough to battle against when the lines in the sand are eventually drawn.

I’ll forget some of what was in this book. But the idea that the food system needs to change will remain with me, and I’ll happily join in a conversation that revolves around it. I’ll point them to the Declaration for Healthy Food and Agriculture and ask them if they’ve read that thing that asks us to “pledge our votes, our purchases, our creativity, and our energies to this urgent cause.”

I believe the mission of this book is to motivate you to think differently about where your food comes from and what you can personally do to make an impact. For me, that goal was successful.

Angela says

Fantastic. Must-read.

Ian Trupin says

This is a great resource and snapshot of agriculture and food policy in and leading up to 2008. It starts of with a really strong, clear analysis of the factors leading into the food price crisis, but does not keep the same analytical clarity in the last chapters, which become rather repetitive. These chapters list misguided neoliberal policies and alternatives from below, but without providing the same unifying thesis about possible futures.
