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Introduction: Agriculture, Trade, and the Global Governance of Food

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For most of human history, people consumed what they produced and produced what they consumed. The current era is notable, however, in that more people than ever before are no longer directly involved in the production of their own food. Instead, they are connected, usually through extensive and opaque webs, to disparate and distant production locales (Smith, 1998, p. 208).

Innovations in transportation, food preservation, and logistics are at least partly responsible for the emergence of long-distance trade relations that have fostered interdependence among food producers and consumers around the globe. Ironically, however, long-distance trade in food has proven unsettling to both producer and consumer communities (McMichael, 1998; Young, 2004). In producing communities, the globalization of food markets has disrupted traditional social arrangements, putting the environment and livelihoods at risk. Among consumers, particularly in the developed world, concerns over the origins and nutritional values of food products have spawned public interest, public outcry, and even a search for alternatives. Nearly every week, one finds articles in major newspapers and news magazines about different aspects of food systems, particularly when they are not functioning well. Several recent books have tried to help people understand the systems well enough to make informed choices about their own participation as consumers.¹

Food is not and never has been traded in a vacuum. A series of laws, norms, customs, and contracts decisively influence the myriad ways in which food is both produced and consumed (see, e.g., Thompson, 1971). As the distance between producers and consumers grows, however, the food regulatory apparatus not only expands geographically but diversifies in scope (Phillips, 2006). Some regulatory institutions are the products of

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¹See, for example, Brian Halweil's *Eat Here* (2004), Marion Nestle's *What to Eat* (2006), Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006) and *In Defense of Food* (2008), Peter Singer and Jim Mason's *The Ethics of What We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter* (2007), and even Kim Barnouian and Rory Freedman's *Skinny Bitch* (2005).

national and international policy: regional trade agreements, multilateral environmental treaties, individual aid conditions, and the like. Others are the outgrowth of private initiative, whether supply- or demand-driven. Examples include producer cooperatives, consumer movements, and more traditional arrangements like communal risk-sharing institutions.

This special issue examines the changing global governance of food. By ‘governance’ we mean ‘the institutionalized economic processes that organize and coordinate activity among a wide variety of economic actors’ (Campbell & Lindberg 1990, p. 636). These actors range from vulnerable peasants in West Africa to upwardly mobile professionals in Northeast Asia; from North American trade negotiators to Central American coffee growers; and from fishermen in the Pacific to families in the Pacific Palisades. They are united neither by class, nationality, nor culture. But they are united by something far more central to the human condition: the production and consumption of food.

Part 1 includes studies that address the complicated interconnections in the global food system and the inevitable feedback effects through which people and places tied to that system are buffeted by globalization. The ‘global complexity’ (Urry, 2003) that characterizes this system suggests that we should not be surprised by unintended outcomes including—but not necessarily limited to—powerful responses to processes like the opening up of new commercial opportunities, the unexpected emergence of new trade nodes, and sudden shifts in the volume and nature of traded products. This part of the collection also highlights a second, critical dimension of complexity theory: the importance of local actors in socially and geographically bounded communities who play a variety of different roles—i.e., gatekeeper, facilitator, or barrier—and thereby mediate the globalization of agriculture. Finally, Part 1 of this special issue suggests that the stakes are high in terms of managing global complexity on behalf of local livelihoods and the environment.

Given the intensity of local outcomes, many actors and institutions attempt to intervene in and respond to the complexity of global food markets. These efforts come in the form of both public and private governance mechanisms. In the second and third parts of this collection the authors address a mix of public and private interventions in the global food web. There are multiple government and intergovernmental efforts to ‘organize and coordinate’ the production and consumption of food in the current era of globalization. As the division of agricultural labor expands, food commerce intensifies, and traditional norms and customs fall by the wayside, public officials with a variety of often contradictory motives step in and attempt to fill the regulatory gap. Agencies and institutions like the World Bank, the United Nations, the General Treaty on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) loom large here but so do local policymakers who are forced to confront the changing global food regime head on—and thus find themselves in a juggling act with the fates of their communities, their careers, and their ecosystems in their hands.

There are also private alternatives to governmental and intergovernmental regulation including producer cooperatives, ethical trade initiatives, and environmental labeling. While nongovernmental organizations arguably take pride of place in the various accounts, they are by no means acting in isolation. They respond to—and at times compete or collaborate with

—social movements on the one hand and for-profit enterprises on the other. And in so doing they occasionally eke out a tentative victory for social and environmental justice.

The studies in this special issue illuminate not only the proverbial food webs that connect most of the world's people but the various mechanisms that govern their growth, reproduction, and transformation. The authors explore key links in food chains through which consumers can learn where and how their food is produced and producers can begin to contextualize their condition. Where do farm products wind up? Who trades, transforms, and transports them along the way? And who wins and who loses in the process? Questions such as these are not only in the forefront of every study but have never been more salient. International treaties and institutions like the North American Free Trade Agreement, the European Union, and the Montreal Protocol are exercising ever-greater influence over the production and consumption of food products. And conflicts between producing and consuming nations threaten to undermine not only international organizations like the WTO but bilateral trade relations as well.

In addition to underscoring the political and economic complexity of the international food trade, however, our collection lends insight into the social origins and local impacts of a wide array of voluntary or private governance regimes that are no less central to the health and well-being of the world's people and ecosystems. Examples include ethical trade initiatives and corporate social responsibility campaigns that are adopted in response to consumer movements; informal migration networks that carry ideas as well as people and thereby foster the growth of innovative, if voluntary, institutions; and the more traditional labor and risk-pooling institutions they tend to complement or displace.

Informal institutions such as these can reproduce, amplify, counteract, or fall victim to the governmental and intergovernmental approaches and therefore demand study in their own right. By tracing linkages from points of production to points of consumption, and focusing upon an array of public and private governance mechanisms, therefore, this collection sets the stage for a new generation of scholarship that will encourage productive engagement among a wide audience of scholars, students, activists, practitioners, and of course the general public.

The food and agricultural trades are not only interesting and important in their own right but also lend insight into the broader processes of globalization that are impinging on all of our lives. In three different ways, at least, food provides a tangible, exciting, and grounded research site for understanding the mechanisms governing global transactions across the political, social, economic, ecological, and cultural landscape in the twenty-first century. First, food is intimately and fundamentally related to biological, ecological, and human well-being and the globalization of the world food order tends to threaten each of these values. As agricultural commerce intensifies, and not only producers and consumers but an array of anonymous brokers, agents, and service providers become increasingly dependent on each other, the complexity and vulnerability of the system as a whole grow in turn—as recent scandals over food safety and public health clearly illustrate. The study of food thus forces us to confront the issues of individual, social, and environmental sustainability simultaneously and in a mutually consistent manner (Khan, 1995).

Second, food is, in Karl Polanyi's felicitous phrasing, a 'fictitious commodity' (2001 [1944], cited in McMichael, 1992, p. 360, footnote 1)—that is, a good that is not originally produced for sale. Fictitious commodities are rarely privatized and commercialized without social and political struggle. And the moral and rhetorical appeal of a 'reasonable price' for food is no less powerful today than in the eighteenth century, when food riots that would eventually be studied by E. P. Thompson were 'triggered off by soaring prices, malpractices among dealers, or by hunger' (1971, pp. 78–79 as well as p. 135). As a result, the study of food illuminates the unavoidably *social*—and thus potentially malleable or even manageable—nature of globalization.

Third, agriculture is simultaneously place-bound and internationally integrated (McMichael, 1998). Efforts to trace the production, transformation, distribution, and consumption of food therefore demand research agendas that situate localities within global networks and facilitate our capacity to see the forest and the trees by zooming from the global to the local and back to the global. In short, our need for food is a constant; how we acquire food is a variable; and the production, commercialization, and consumption of food therefore offer an invaluable window onto the globalization of the world we inhabit.

This collection was originally commissioned and produced for an interdisciplinary conference sponsored by the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies, the Princeton Environment Institute, and the Woodrow Wilson School for Public and International Affairs entitled *Trading Morsels, Growing Hunger, Decimating Nature: Linking Food and Trade to Development and the Environment*. The current volume incorporates a selection of those papers and several thematically related additions that explicitly address the nature and consequences of food governance regimes.

The authors were asked to produce papers that concentrated on at least one food commodity, its governance regime, the place in which it is produced or consumed, and the consequences for human and ecological well-being. As a result, the contributions explore both the production and consumption of what we eat and drink, as well as their manifold interconnections. The collection as a whole provides a theoretically consistent analysis of the contemporary global food regime and its implications for sustainability and social justice.

Part 1 elaborates the concept of global complexity in the world food system and illustrates examples of local dynamics where global connections originate or touch down. It begins with Sara Curran and Abigail Cooke's historical study of cassava production in Thailand. Their case illustrates a major limitation of the trade policies enshrined in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and more recently the WTO: these regulatory initiatives do not consider how global trade systems might interact with other social systems. The surprising surge in Thai cassava production and its equally surprising continuity (and continued impacts on the Thai environment and growing inequality) point to the importance of looking at actors and institutions outside official trade governance mechanisms. The intense local effects of this booming trade in both the producing and consuming countries indicates the importance of digging into places to understand how they influence and are changed by global connections.

Judith Carney's analysis of rice policies in the Gambia also illustrates the intense local impacts of global complexities, with particular attention to the results of multiple policy shifts and their historical residues. Over the past four decades, she argues, international agencies have emphasized rice production, import-substitution ('food security'), and cheap imports ('comparative advantage') in rapid succession at enormous social, environmental, and human cost in West Africa. Current efforts to raise production are more hopeful in that they focus on New Rice for Africa (*Nerica*), an unpatented cross between Asian and African rice that can be grown without fertilizers. But they are unlikely to overcome the legacy of years of mismanagement and abuse—at least not in short order.

Andrew Schrank's analysis of the latent conflict between political imperatives at home and geopolitical objectives overseas underscores the complexity of US agricultural and trade policies—and the limits to a purely sectoral account of their evolution. While American policy-makers agreed to defend the prices of domestically grown sugars and sweeteners in the 1980s, and thereby deprived the Caribbean Basin of a vital source of employment and foreign exchange earnings, they simultaneously agreed to compensate their vulnerable neighbors with aid and trade preferences, and thereby engendered an unanticipated process of export diversification. One cannot understand the growth of nontraditional exports from the Caribbean Basin, he therefore concludes, without first understanding the protection of traditional producers and farm products in the US at a time of intense geopolitical rivalry.

Sjur Kasa looks at recent dietary changes in Northeast Asia. Kasa traces the growth of beef consumption in Japan and Korea to the efforts of US-based, but globally powerful agricultural trade associations and their lobbyists. He shows that both bilateral and global trade policies tend to 'favor strong producer interests at the expense of wider concerns for environmental sustainability.'

Together these papers highlight the myriad connections and often unexpected dynamics of complex food systems. These dynamics are global in scale but local in impact. They inevitably generate distinct consequences—some beneficial, others detrimental—for people and the environments of specific places. The very intensity of these local impacts, whether they are good, bad, or a mixture of both, hints at the high stakes involved in integration into global food webs. These high stakes mean not only that the consequences of insertion into a global web are worthy of investigation, but also that we should pay attention to how local actors have responded to the challenges and opportunities of international integration and thereby mediated its consequences.

Part 2 turns to the branding and certification efforts that have emerged, at least in part, as a response to global complexity. Susana Aparicio, Sutti Ortiz, and Nidia Tadeo explore the intersection of trade policies and industry norms as new standards and accompanying certification requirements are foisted upon growers of lemons and sweet citrus in Argentina. They challenge the assumption that the high costs of compliance with the quality standards imposed by northern governments and the certification procedures demanded by northern vendors adversely affect the earnings of farm laborers. In Argentina, field hands can profit from both good agricultural practices and the more orderly managerial practices demanded by certifying authorities. For growers, compliance raises the transaction costs entailed in the

use of cheap labor. By the same token, however, Aparicio and her colleagues note that growers offered wage increases only after the unionized workers threatened to strike and that the improved wages did not pull laborers out of poverty, since in counter-seasonal horticultural export industries the period of employment is usually short.

Rebecca Goldberg provides an overview of global networks in the fisheries trade, including a summary of trends in the types and amounts of trade over the last decade. Her discussion of certifying efforts and also scientific research and innovation offers potentially fruitful, if necessarily limited, interventions. Her discussion reveals global complexity, highlighting a hidden trade of wild fish used as feed for aquaculture. She cautions against an overly simplistic idea of direct value chains involving only harvesting in one area and consumption in another; the linkages and dynamic effects are decidedly more complicated and thus threaten both the ecological and economic sustainability of fisheries.

Michael Morrissey offers a more optimistic account of interventions in coastal fisheries in the US Pacific Northwest. His analysis reveals that collaborations between government, trade associations, and environmental groups have resulted in successful quality, branding, and marketing initiatives in wild salmon and troll-caught albacore fisheries. And he thus underscores the need for collaboration and public-private partnerships—especially among small and mid-sized fishing enterprises that might otherwise succumb to international competitive pressure.

Like the studies in Part 1 and Goldberg's contribution, Louis Lebel, Phimphakan Lebel, Po Garden, Dao Huy Giap, Supaporn Khrutmuang, and Sachiko Nakayama's study of shrimp aquaculture in Thailand reveals the variety of actors with a stake in the global shrimp market and the corresponding complexity of their connections. Actors and organizations like farmers, agri-businesses, input and service providers, and retail outlets compete with each other for control of value-added activities using a variety of tools including, but not limited to, certification schemes. Lebel and his colleagues examine the success of these efforts and the effects of these efforts on several Thai villages with farms, revealing, again, the intense impacts of global complexity, and also the role of existing institutions in mediating the dynamic impacts on the various localities.

Part 3 examines a different set of approaches or responses to global complexity, focusing on ethical trade initiatives. Fair Trade is perhaps the most widely known ethical trade standard and all of the cases in this section address it. There are other initiatives and approaches, often pursued in conjunction with Fair Trade, to attempt to mitigate the challenges to small producers and their local environments as they are swept up in global markets. April Linton's analysis of sustainable coffee initiatives offers a somewhat hopeful outlook by showing how, in the midst of a world-wide coffee crisis in which prices fell to levels that cannot support small-scale production for families or living wages for their workers, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and specialty coffee companies have promoted transparent and sustainable exchanges between producers and buyers. Though they have very different approaches to development, both business- and Fair Trade-oriented NGOs that work directly with small farmers are achieving similar sustainability outcomes.

Thomas V. Dietsch and Stacy Philpott explore the link between science and eco-friendly certifications in the coffee industry. They argue that meaningful certifications that protect habitat and ensure a fair wage to coffee producers can best be achieved through greater cooperation among various certification projects and academic scientists from different disciplines studying globalization processes. There are significant opportunities for social and natural scientists to work together, and for more collaboration between non-profit organizations that promote certifications.

Christopher Bacon, V. Ernesto Méndez, María Eugenia Flores Gómez, Douglas Stuart, and Sandro Raúl Díaz Flores' analysis of Fair Trade coffee looks at on-the-ground results for Nicaraguan smallholder coffee farmers who are part of Fair Trade networks. Bacon and his colleagues evaluate the degree to which selling in Fair Trade markets benefits these farmers, using the UN Millennium Development Goals as the standard for progress. They document several positive outcomes for Fair Trade producers and their families, including greater household savings and higher rates of school enrollment. But they also recognize that *all* small-scale coffee producers face severe livelihood insecurities, including food insecurity, and that to promote real sustainability Fair Trade must factor in the true cost of coffee production in the places where it is being produced.

So far, Part 3 focuses on trade in goods to the exclusion of other aspects of globalization. Jessa Lewis and David Runsten raise another issue: is Fair Trade coffee production sustainable given the intensity and growth of international migration from coffee-producing communities in Mexico? Their findings are consistent with the basic tenets of sociological theories of migration: For families, participation in Fair Trade networks is not an alternative to migration; it is an added source of income and risk diversification. Lewis and Runsten's research suggests that when members of coffee-growing families migrate to the United States, they do so at least in part to provide operating capital for their coffee farms. This in turn raises coffee labor costs and undermines the sustainability of coffee production.

William Moseley examines three initiatives to improve the lot of black South Africans who are part of the country's wine industry: Fair Trade wine, worker-produced wine, and black-owned wineries. His study explores the potential of these arrangements to create real change in labor conditions and the welfare of historically disadvantaged farm workers. In comparison to other agricultural sectors in South Africa, the wine industry is an especially interesting case because of its economic importance, growing export potential and history of white dominance.

The final study in this special issue, by Catherine Dolan, offers a necessary critique of Fair Trade initiatives in Kenyan tea production. She notes that the initiatives in question grew out of consumer concerns over the conditions under which tea was cultivated and imposed standards over the heads—rather than with the collaboration—of local growers. She also illuminates how the structure of the Kenyan tea market impedes Fair Trade goals. Understanding how unequal power relationships have shaped Fair Trade and how these standards are exercised reveals the localized particularities and contradictions of neoliberal development.

These case studies include relatively successful and unsuccessful examples of mitigating the negative effects of insertion into global food markets. One basis for success appears to be collaboration between regulatory officials and agencies—whoever they may be—and producers and their organizations. Where producers are given a positive and material stake in the regulatory regime, they are simultaneously better able and more willing to participate in an ongoing way. Where regulations and standards are imposed over the heads of producer groups, however, they tend to combat, circumvent, or fall victim to the governance arrangements, with perverse consequences for people, communities, and ecosystems.

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