

# The End of Food

From Family Farms to Corporate  
“Frankenfood”

# Family Farming and Food Provisioning

- Resistance of agriculture to capitalism:
  - First, land, like workers, cannot be produced by capital as other inputs into its production process.
  - Second, capital is always indifferent to this or that particular product and interested solely in whatever goods yields maximum profit. However, such radical indifference to heterogeneity and quality is difficult to enforce with land and its produce on both the supply side and demand side. Land uses are specific in terms of location and climate: the products of agriculture tend to defy standardization.
  - Farming reliance on the rhythms of nature interferes with what we referred to as the shape shifting thrust of capital to maximize gain in the short term.
  - Finally, agriculture factors more directly into human sustenance than do material consumer goods, thus greater attention must be devoted to furnishing goods of the former upon which

# Resistance a Win for Humanity

- While family farmers as a class, whether they owned land or leased it long term, were certainly motivated to improve farming practices and technique to increase farm profits and their incomes, they also had strong incentive to steward land over the longer term for their individual as well human flourishing

# Beginning of the End

- The destruction of the family farming model in the US began with the Great Depression of the 1930s. However, the process was much hastened during the golden age with the rise of NF-MNCs in agribusiness. And it was accelerated by expansion and influence of the petro-chemical sector. This has been referred to as the “petrofood” revolution.
- Chemicalization of agriculture enabled better operation of land according capitalist abstract quantitative designs. The emergent so-called food effectively severs the link between what agriculture and the land/soil lifeworld produces and the food human beings around the world eat for survival.
- The foregoing exacerbated by support corporate agribusiness received from IMF/WB SAPs forced much of the third world to devote prime land to mono-cropping of globally traded goods to the detriment of their local populations’ food needs.

# Petrofood

- In the US, between 1947 and 1979, petro-chemicalization of agriculture doubled yields.
- Chemical fertilizers removed needs for fallowing land and crop rotation as the application of new fertilizers and pesticides led to development of hybrid seeds that thrived on chemicalization.
- This “green revolution” was then exported across the third world where it increased the total area of pesticide-sprayed land 13 times between 1960 and 1980.
- However, the heightened petroleum-intensity of food meant that by the beginning of the 21st century ten calories of fossil fuel were needed to produce one calorie of food.
- And, with increasing energy input there were diminishing returns. In the US, while petroleum inputs into agriculture increased four-fold between 1947 and 1994, there was only a three-fold increase in crop yields. Yet by 2004 it was estimated US agriculture was using 15 million tons of petroleum based fertilizer annually

# The Faustian Bargain

- One of the hallmarks of the neoliberal period is that between 1975 and 2003 food became cheaper than at any time in the modern era going back to the 16th century
- This, of course, was the obverse to lower wages and rising inequality across the globe
- But let us be clear: On the one hand, cheap food was delivered by massive “big government” subsidies in OECD economies. For example, “the average subsidy per cow in the EU is more than the \$2 per day on which half the world’s population has to live”. In the US “big government” subsidies allow farmers to export rice at 25 percent less than it costs to produce it, wheat at 28 percent less and corn at 10 percent less
- On the other hand, the petrofood industry engenders two “epidemics”. One is obesity with roughly 25 percent of the world being “overfed and undernourished”; the other is a hunger epidemic where around 25 percent of the world’s population is underfed or starving.

# GMO Chimera

- Giant agro-food and biotechnology MNCs are seeking to “patent life” through “genetically modified organisms” (GMO)
- GMO crops produce “terminator” seeds which cannot be reproduced by farmers thus binding them in perpetuity to purchasing seeds from the MNCs producing them
- GMO has largely been deployed on four major crops: corn, canola, cotton and soybeans. But more are being eyed
- Further, GMO crops are bioengineered to “internalize” into nature two traits, resistance to herbicides such as Roundup and insect resistant chemical toxicity

# MNCs and “High-Value Foods”

- The end of food entails virtual subsumption of global food production and distribution by giant MNC producer and buyer networks and the concentration of exports of so-called high-value foods (HVF) in the hands of a narrowing club of countries
- Between 60 and 90 percent of global agricultural commodity trade in wheat, maize and rice is controlled by 5 MNCs. Three MNCs handle 83 percent of the world cocoa trade
- MNC Monsanto sells over 90 percent of GMO seeds and is set to genetically monopolize around a third of all corn cropland in the US
- Two thirds of the global seed market, GMO and otherwise, is dominated by only 10 companies
- Near 90 percent of the world pesticide market is controlled by 10 giant agribusiness firms
- Of the global packaged food market 26 percent is controlled by the top 10 firms. Only 100 global food retailers account for 35 percent of all global grocery sales
- NF-MNC concentration in the agro-food industry is, in fact, the outcome of one of the more intensive bouts of M&A across all industries

# Cool Chains and Global Summertime

- HVFs such as chicken production are dominated by the US, China and Brazil. Their production amounts to nearly 50 percent of the global total
- For fruit and vegetables, China produces 38 percent of the global total, India 9 percent, the US 4.5 percent and Brazil 3.4 percent
- Production and export of HVFs in the diverse fruit and vegetable lines also fosters a distinct hemispheric flow where the global “South” caters to the affluent “North” sustaining a “permanent global summertime” there
- This is made possible by agribusiness technological innovation in “global cool chains” which transport the fruits and vegetables of Northern global summertime around the world

# Global Farmer Debt Peonage

- However as giant agro-food NF-MNCs increasingly automate the food industry and fortify oligopoly lordship over food production and distribution worldwide, for those farmers not displaced by agribusiness itself things are going from bad to worse
- They have been locked into relationships of “extreme dependence” on single MNCs with no recourse to selling produce to someone else
- Farmers are also required to purchase specific “suites” of food and drugs that will take their chickens, hogs, and so forth from incubation to market
- System designed to transform free farmers into employees and debt peons
- For agro-food “employees” things go from worse to much worse as industry is largest user of casual labor of all modern industries