

***“Waiter, there’s a GMO in my soup!”***

**-OR-**

***Who’s Making Decisions In Our Food  
System and Why?***

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# Learning Objectives

1. Know what a Food System is, and why it's important
2. Understand multiple questions that can be asked of the system, and its general drivers
3. See possibilities of individual and collective action (education!)

# Where are we going?

- Introduction and stuff one should know
  - Food Systems, Control, Corporate, Local
- What's the problem?
- Examples from North America
- Take home messages

# What, Exactly, *is* the Food System?

Production → Processing → Distribution and  
Marketing → Consumers/Consumption → Waste  
recovery and disposal

Plus government, regulators, institutions

# What Else Is There to Know?

## Ask Journalism Basics:

Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How?

And...

The chain becomes a web, or network. With actors.

Ultimately, it's all about control.

...well, that and money.

# Why Should We Care About Food Systems?

The Food System Is a Unifying Concept (for life, or just lesson planning)

- Health
- Economic Development/Sustainability
- Land Use and Land Tenure/Ownership
- Transportation
- Community/Quality of Life
- Food Quality and Quantity
- Emergency Preparedness
- Environmental Concerns
- Social/Economic/Environmental Justice

## A common story...?

Ultimately, food is both a symptom and a symbol of how we organize ourselves and our societies. It is both a vignette and a microcosm of wider social realities. From the political perspective, it makes sense to see the dynamics of the food system as a titanic struggle between the forces of control and the pressure to democratize. To characterize one set of forces as driven by greed and the other by need is probably too crude, but it certainly contains an element of truth.”

-Tim Lang

# The Problem(s) in a Nutshell: Food as a Marketable Commodity

## Corporate globalization v. local food sovereignty

- Markets sensitive to money
  - 40% of world pop lives on <\$2 a day
  - 1% of world owns stock
- Corporate globalized model follows the money
- Free market WTO policies emphasize export not basic production, leading to food insecurity
- Opens markets to large companies who set prices below local prices → farmers displaced
  - →urbanization, poverty, food insecurity
- Misses externalities, subsidies, other goals

# The Problem(s) in a Nutshell II

- Food miles (long distance trade) v. sustainability
- Monoculture v. biodiversity
  - Factory farming model (meat, grain, financial control)
- Technology v. indigenous knowledge
  - Biotech/biopiracy/intellectual property (NA examples)
- Food as commodity v. community
  - Knowledge of food system is low (where does milk/meat come from?)
- People as consumers v. citizens
  - Food Justice to Food Democracy to Food Sovereignty

# US Responses

## Problem? What problem?

- Outcome of decades of explicit policy decisions and financial incentives
  - Agricultural and social policies but not really food policies

## Grass-roots mobilization

- Community Food Security Coalition
- Anti-Hunger organizations
  - Food banks and pantries
  - Faith-based organizations

## Leads to state, regional, and local policy development

- Food Policy Councils

# Canadian Approaches

- Similar to US (but more enlightened?)
  - Industrialized/corporate strength
  - Local and grassroots action
- Two approaches to food security: sustainability and poverty reduction
- Most activity exists at the regional/local level
  - Five FPCs (Toronto, Vancouver...)
- Ahead (falling behind more slowly?) of the US—why?
  - More progressive social policy, welfare state?
  - National health care?

# Hitting Where it Hurts: Mexico and Corn

Agriculture subsidies + open markets + corporate globalized agriculture = ?

- Price is lower than cost of production in US (!)
- Floods Mexican/CA market: farmers can't compete.
  - What happens?
  - Loss of food security, food sovereignty
  - Where do they go?
  - What do they do?

**Question: Power of trade agreements—who do they favor?  
Why?**

# In Conclusion

- Food systems and the policies that regulate them are important to our global, regional, and local communities, economies, and ecologies.
- There is a global struggle for control of these systems and their institutional contexts
- Your choices CAN make a difference, markets are sensitive to consumer choice
- Become more informed; ask “Where and How?”

# Thanks...Questions and Discussion?

*We can have democracy in this country or we can have great concentrated wealth in the hands of a few, but we cannot have both.*

-Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis,

1941

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