FOOD POLITICS
WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW
Food Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know, Robert Paarlberg, Oxford University Press, 2010, 0199746052, 9780199746057, 240 pages. 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.

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Hunger in the Balance The New Politics of International Food Aid, Jennifer Clapp, Feb 17, 2012, Political Science, 216 pages. Food aid has become a contentious issue in recent decades, with sharp disagreements over genetically modified crops, agricultural subsidies, and ways of guaranteeing food ....

Mindless Eating Why We Eat More Than We Think, Brian Wansink, Ph.D., Dec 19, 2006, Health & Fitness, 276 pages. This book will literally change the way you think about your next meal. Food psychologist Brian Wansink revolutionizes our awareness of how much, what, and why we eat ....

The Politics of Food The Global Conflict Between Food Security and Food Sovereignty, William D. Schanbacher, Jan 1, 2010, Business & Economics, 148 pages. A description of the current global food system, this book challenges our ethical responsibility to the global poor and implicates us all for failing to curb global hunger and ....


Food politics the regional conflict, David N. Balaam, Michael J. Carey, 1981, Medical, 246 pages.

Food Rebels, Guerrilla Gardeners, and Smart-Cookin' Mamas Fighting Back in an Age of Industrial Agriculture, Mark Winne, Oct 12, 2010, Social Science, 200 pages. In an age of uncertainty about how climate change may affect the global food supply, industrial agribusiness promises to keep the world fed. Through the use of factory farms ....

External Mission: The ANC in Exile, 1960-1990, Stephen Ellis, Sep 7, 2013, Political Science, 288 pages. Nelson Mandela's release from prison in February 1990 was one of the most memorable moments of recent decades. It came a few days after the removal of the ban on the African ....

Telling Lies: Clues to Deceit in the Marketplace, Politics, and Marriage (Revised Edition), Paul Ekman, Jan 26, 2009, Family & Relationships, 402 pages. Describes gestures and other clues that indicate a person may be lying, explains why people lie, and discusses the controversy surrounding lie detector tests.

Object-Oriented Design for Temporal GIS, Monica Wachowicz, Aug 29, 2003, Technology & Engineering, 136 pages. There has been an increasing demand in GIS for systems that support
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Political scientist Paarlberg calls on years of food-policy work and casts his net far and wide in highly opionated 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

In this 2010 book "Food Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know", Oxford University Press, Robert Paarlberg takes a Q & A approach to a broad set of food and agriculture topics, covering aid and trade, obesity and famine, organic farming and genetically engineered (GE) organisms, and the food system's effects on health and environment, among others. The work is a self-proclaimed attempt at "rebalancing some debates around food and farming" for "an aware audience of non-specialists". And on the whole, its strength lies in its accessible style and the common myths it dispels: how buying local produce, for example, is not necessarily more environmentally friendly or the fact that global market food prices do not automatically increase local consumer costs.

For all its breadth, however, the book is beset by problems. The simplicity with which the debates are framed and the generalisations employed oversimplify several issues; a number of inherent contradictions undermine some arguments' validity; a purely macro and economic appraisal of debates leads to conclusions that would have been challenged had the social and cultural politics of food been considered; it takes a US-centric approach despite promising a global overview; and the vexing lack of referencing throughout weakens the book overall since the aware reader is prevented from effective fact checking.

Food Politics' major failings, however, lie in its uneven, at times uncritical discussion of politics and presentation of broad-based counter-arguments with inadequate use of evidence to be undoubtedly convincing. He defends the GE agriculture industry safety, for example, by comparing it to GE medicine.

I'm one of those liberals who does not identify as liberal because "I don't like to be put in a box." But for all intents and purposes, one would classify me as a liberal (in the modern liberal = Prius driving, organic eating, gay-friendly and pro-choice consumer). And I think it's no accident that the cover and title of this book appeals to a liberal audience. This book will certainly challenge any liberal assumptions you may have about the modern food system.

I, who have no background in food politics or international relations, was looking for a good, informative overview of both topics and was expecting a progressive assessment of the modern food system (along the line's of Michael Pollan's work--which, it should be noted, Paarlberg takes issue with on multiple occasions). After a more 'progressive' criticism of modern farm subsidies, Paarlberg reveals himself to be an unapologetic globalist and capitalist in his stance on GMOs, organic food, local food, and green technology. He takes a pragmatic tone as most of his criticisms center around how effectively each system or technology can be monetized and capitalized. He pays short shrift to the cultural implications of each system and almost completely dismisses the importance of more abstract concepts like national and local sovereignty.

But to Paarlberg's credit, he does enumerate different points of views on the issues and explains (with a transparent bias) the rationale behind them before launching into his own opinion. And that is where this book succeeds: it provides a good overview of all the major debates within food politics--which, I suppose, is what I was looking for. This book is worth picking up simply because it's easy to read and covers a wide array of issues. It will not satisfy all your curiosities nor settle any issues for you. If anything, it will challenge your assumptions and prompt you to dive deeper into these issues.

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.
Overall, I found Food Politics to be disappointing. Though it may serve as a reasonably informative introduction to both environmental and political science under-graduates alike, I found it to be somewhat deficient in significant areas and lacking factual parity in light of its implicit US-centric perspective and tone.

In addition, Paarlberg also neglects to include any notable information on water, either in terms agricultural usage or how water scarcity is becoming a significant regional/national/geopolitical issue and how water resources impact upon on food production. Food and water are clearly not mutually exclusive, and as such, research into one must surely acknowledge the significance of the other.

On Genetically Modified Organisms, Paarlberg asserts that European opposition to GMO technology is `disliked' on account that `most were developed by a U.S. multinational' (p168). The view that European opposition to GMOs is grounded in nothing more than corporate nationalism is at best contentious and at worst, erroneous.

"The author is an academic, not a journalist, and his efforts to get the food facts right ring through every page. Paarlberg challenges many of the ideas that are frequently voiced - but rarely questioned - in popular food discourse...Although many of his claims call into question sacrosanct principles in activist and academic circles, there are good reasons to hear Paarlberg out; he backs up his arguments with data, and writes based on decades of experience as a political scientist and policy analyst working in the field." â€“Nature Geoscience

"Paarlberg's book is a timely contribution to the discussion about the politics of food, both domestically and internationally. Although advocates of alternative farming methods are unlikely to agree with Food Politics, they should nevertheless read it. Paarlberg is a serious, knowledgeable scholar." â€“Journal of Politics

"[Paarlberg] is one of the most distinguished academics in the field of global food politics and is able to draw on a lifetime of research. Although the book is clearly underpinned by a considerable body of evidence, the writing style is engaging and easily digestible. It would serve as an excellent introduction to the topic for students." â€“International Studies Review

"Going well beyond its title, Food Politics addresses key questions about agriculture, including consumers' concerns about food safety, producers' concerns about price volatility, and taxpayers' concerns about subsidies. Paarlberg organizes his material around a long list of questions about food policies and practices...His answers to these and many other questions are accessible and nuanced." â€“Foreign Affairs

"The great strength of Food Politics is the breadth of topics covered. For an undergraduate class, this book will provide students exposure to the world of food production and provisioning and the underlying political and social ideas and research that shape food and our relationship to it. As the subtitle suggests, Paarlberg covers almost every topic that one should know about food. Additionally, Paarlberg uses simple but precise language to cover the vast array of food topics...The strengths of the book encouraged me to use it in a directed readings course." â€“The American Journal of Agricultural Economics

Robert Paarlberg is the B.F. Johnson Professor of Political Science at Wellesley College and Associate at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University. A leading authority on food policy, his books include Starved for Science, Policy Reform in American Agriculture, and Fixing Farm Trade.
Robert Paarlberg, Adjunct Professor of Public Policy, is an independent scholar and consultant specializing in global food and agricultural policy. He is the Betty Freyhof Johnson Professor of Political Science at Wellesley College and an Associate at Harvard’s Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. He received his BA in government from Carleton College and his PhD in government from Harvard. Paarlberg has recently been a member of the Board of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the National Research Council and a consultant to the National Intelligence Council (NIC), USAID, COMESA, IFPRI, the World Bank, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In 2009 he presented testimony on U.S. agricultural development assistance policy to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. His 2008 book from Harvard University Press was titled Starved for Science: How Biotechnology is Being Kept out of Africa. His 2010 book from Oxford University Press is titled Food Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know.