

# Health Affairs

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At the Intersection of Health, Health Care and Policy

Cite this article as:  
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Feeding The World Well  
*Health Affairs*, 34, no.11 (2015):2000-2001

doi: 10.1377/hlthaff.2015.1168

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# BOOK REVIEWS

DOI: 10.1377/hlthaff.2015.1168

## Feeding The World Well

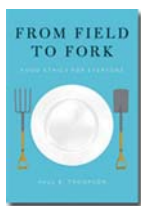
BY JESS FANZO

**FROM FIELD TO FORK: FOOD ETHICS FOR EVERYONE**

By Paul B. Thompson

New York (NY): Oxford University Press, 2015

344 pp., \$21.95



One of the great dilemmas of our time is how to provide plentiful, healthy, and nutritious food for all, doing so in an environmentally sustainable and safe manner.

The health, environmental, economic, and societal costs will be substantial if we don't change our course of action when it comes to feeding the world. Yet solving this problem is riddled with ethical and moral implications.

The author and environmental activist Wendell Berry once wrote, "Eating is an agricultural act." Reading Paul Thompson's new book, *From Field to Fork*, one would argue that eating is an ethical act as well. Through the act of eating, we are more than just consumers. Food is an essential aspect of human functioning, existence, and experience. "Food has a powerful integrative effect on the moral imagination," writes Thompson, the W. K. Kellogg Chair in Agricultural, Food, and Community Ethics at Michigan State University. "Otherwise diverse and distinct social problems come together around food." His insights help define the exceptionalism of food in our society.

Eating often involves moral decision making rooted in the context of culture, tradition, and social structures. Gregory Pence, editor of *The Ethics of Food*,

wrote, "Our food choices define who we have been, who we are, and who we want to become." These choices are often intertwined with our beliefs and values; our relationship to where food comes from; and our physiological drive toward certain foods, traditions, and habits.

While some books have loosely touched on current global food ethics, Thompson's volume is comprehensive in its detailed attention to the many current debates and challenges that have rendered food a moral issue. The book brings his thirty-year expertise in food ethics to bear and also serves as an incredible resource on the history and evolution of food security and systems.

Thompson opens with a primer on ethics and different schools of philosophy, setting the stage for his deep dive into significant unresolved ethical issues across the food system. He tackles issues involving laborers and social justice, animal welfare and food production, food insecurity and chronic hunger, genetically modified organisms and other food-related technologies, diet and obesity, and the environment and local ecosystems.

In his chapter on animal welfare, the subject of one of the most contentious moral debates about the food system, Thompson asks whether concentrated animal feeding operations (known as CAFOs) are morally unacceptable, and if they are, shouldn't we switch to an alternative livestock production approach? His chapter on the Green Revolution is well-intentioned but focuses only on technology, though this was but one piece of the larger Green Revolution strategy, which sought (at times unsuccessfully) to revamp poorly funded, broken agriculture systems in regions of the world vulnerable to famine.

While Thompson's book is comprehensive, some important ethical issues related to the food supply are little emphasized or rarely mentioned. For in-

stance, the author pays little attention to equity and empowerment issues that female laborers and farmers face in the food system or to the food industry's influence on the food environment, including how industry affects the cost of foods, consumers' choices, and the marketing of cheap calories. He also pays little attention to the fact that our food and agriculture system perpetuates inequities in access to proper nutrition for the global population. The agriculture sector at large rarely considers its impact on nutrition and health outcomes. As the British development economist Lawrence Haddad wrote: "We need to move from the era of thinking of improved nutrition as an optional extra for agriculture to one where improved nutrition status of the population is driven by agriculture as its main reason for being. What else is it for?"

The book provides plenty of food for thought on the duties and responsibilities of different actors in the food system, including consumers, the food and agriculture industry, and the public sector, with examples from the developing and developed world. I hope that Thompson will write a second volume that provides potential short- and long-term ethical solutions and strategies for producing, distributing, marketing, selling, and consuming food.

I was left with a few questions, including the following: What are the duties of governments, multilateral agencies, and grassroots organizations when other actors in the food system, such as industry, do not meet their moral obligations? Should the agriculture and food industries be governed to ensure that they act in a moral way toward consumers and laborers? Should the powerful food movement (made up of activists and advocates; writers; chefs; and local farmers and consumers who focus on local, social issues of food) be responsible for delivering to the public more messages that are evidence based?

The moral obligation of feeding the

world's population well and in an environmentally sustainable manner is increasingly coming to the forefront of policy discussions. With consensus now reached on the United Nations' post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, many of the ethical issues that Thompson has mapped out will have

to be addressed. As former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, cochair of the Aspen Institute's Food Security Strategy Group, recently wrote, "In a world where one-third of all edible food never makes it to the mouths of the hungry, we all have an individual moral responsibility to do our part." ■

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