

Journal Assignment: Food/Agricultural Issues in the News

ENVS 107: Food, culture, and the environment. Student name: Sample Name

Journal Entry #1: *Farm Bill 2018: A Primer prepared for the December 2016 SAFSF Policy Briefing by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition in Washington D.C.*

Summary: The modern-day farm bill focuses on two main sections: non-perishable commodities like wheat, corn, feed grains, dairy, etc, and the other section focuses on nutrition and programs like food stamps and SNAP or EBT. Authorization legislation like the farm bill allows for the funding to be granted generally, whereas appropriation bills divide up funds and allocate them directly. Topics not included in the farm bill include farmworker/food worker issues, public lands, renewable fuel standard, agricultural taxation, and water rights including the water act. GMO policy and pesticide use is dealt with by multiple agencies like the EPA and FDA and USDA and child nutrition is dealt with by the Child Nutrition Act. The farm bill which occurs every few years is only one step in the actualization process of programs; the annual appropriation bills are where funding is actually allocated along with the mandatory spending of the farm bill. There is talk of separating the bills of farm and nutrition, and reevaluating SNAP and its dependency for people of the United States. It is expected that subsidies for crop insurance will be greater than commodity program subsidies. This bill also encompasses many other issues like conservation, and specifics like dairy farming, and cotton industries.

Social Commentary/Opinion: This process is obviously very complicated and there are many elements involved that will be voted on by congress and eventually signed by the president as well. This article was helpful for me to understand the ins and outs of the bill and how it comes to actualization. As with anything it opens up pathways for further research because now I feel that I need to keep up with the appropriation bills that occur almost every month. As far as the things that are not included in the bill, I am very surprised and also disheartened especially that farmworker rights and the water act are not intertwined, but I have to research also which entities are in charge of these areas.

Journal Entry #2: *Analysis: Ominous Symbol in Mozambique Food Riots, 9 September 2010. PRI. Andrew Meldrum.*

Summary: Mozambique is one of the world's most underdeveloped countries that was under colonial rule from Portugal until 1975 and ended a 16-year long civil war in the 1990's so they have been rebuilding their country ever since. According to the article 50% of the country is under 18 years old so there are a lot of youth that are growing up without the guidance of a stable government system. After Marxist rule, the Mozambican government took away food subsidies

that were citizen's only means of affording food they needed to survive in the cities. Most people in Mozambique live in rural areas, but an increasing amount are moving to cities and the country as a whole is not transitioning to urbanization in a way that provides for the influx of city dwellers. Although there is much poverty, there is usually not daily violence these days since the ending of the civil war, however, in 2010 there were massive food riots in response to the government cut of subsidies that made the price of bread 30% more expensive in which rioters were met with police force and 13 were killed while hundreds were injured on the streets.

Social Commentary/Opinion: Examples like these food riots just show us how real scarcity is in certain parts of the world that are being marginalized by developed societies. Although there is sufficient food to feed the world many times over, the lack of equity in its distribution is what causes over all hunger and starvation. This also speaks to the damaging nature of colonialism and how the people of Mozambique have been left to rebuild their country and are divided and chaotic because they have changed leadership so many times. On an agricultural note as well, the separation of farms and cities (or dense urban areas and spread out rural areas) is also disproportionately creating food deserts in Mozambique as it has already done in so many other places like the United States.

Journal Entry #3: *Nestle Fights Feds Over Water Rights, 9 May 2016. USA Today. Ian James.*

Summary: Nestle owns or thinks it has the right to collect water from the Arrowhead mountain area near San Bernardino where it collects around 36 million gallons of water for sale each year through pipes and other infrastructure in the national forest land. It then trucks this water to Ontario for bottling and distribution to the rest of the country. After the *Desert Sun* did an investigation on the expired state permits (as of 1988) that Nestle had to collect the water (still paying just above only \$500 a year for the permit), various individuals and businesses have sued the national Forest Service, claiming that they did not do their job monitoring the company and their permits for water rights. Nestle argues that this is a state versus federal issue and that the national Forest Service has no right to deny them of state water rights. This was especially controversial this year when a drought caused many people in the surrounding area to conserve, while Nestle had no restrictions on water collection. People are now expecting an environmental investigation to take place to determine whether the collection of water by Nestle is harming the wildlife in nearby rivers and streams. Some say that Nestle has no right to the current piping they have done, let alone to build more infrastructure, but others say it is up to the state to decide, not the feds.

Social Commentary/Opinion: After reading this I want to know more about the water rights in California when it comes to individuals and businesses and compare that to the national water rights as it relates to national forest land. I would rather that Nestle did not pipe water out of the national forest and that they stuck to making chocolate (even though that is problematic too).

Bottled water is a disgrace in the first place, and companies like these will end up having control of precious water supplies for profit when people actually need them for personal use and when the agricultural industry needs water for irrigation. I would like to see water in California under more strict protection especially considering we are the biggest agricultural producers in the country.

Journal Entry #4: *Mexico Ready to Play Corn Card in Trade Talks, 2 April 2017. NY Times. Kirk Semple.*

Summary: I learned that yellow corn is mainly grown for animal feed production and white corn is used for tortillas and other human consumption. Mexico is the United States' third largest customer of exported goods under NAFTA and Trump's campaign promises to remove NAFTA have pushed the Mexican administration to seriously consider buying their corn from other nations like Brazil or Argentina, even though that will be much more costly because of the lack of defined trade routes and general distance. Many American farmers who voted for Trump in the first place are now concerned that the corn belt will lose its market in Mexico with a disruption from the Trump administration. Although no legislation has been passed yet, and as always, people are waiting on Trump for some kind of action which is still uncertain. In the meantime, trade partners are seeing the U.S. as less trustworthy or dependent and preparing for a shift.

Social Commentary/Opinion: I personally am still not sure how I feel about NAFTA because although it encourages trade around North America which is more sustainable than importing from farther countries at a larger carbon footprint for transportation, I think it might have contributed to wiping out domestic production of goods in an even more local economy and affected small family farmers in Mexico negatively. The article argues that this causes an influx of illegal immigration to the U.S. and I definitely see how NAFTA could cause Mexico to import so much corn from the U.S. for livestock feed that small farms would not be able to compete and lose a multigenerational business, causing them to resort to leaving the country. I would personally love to see Mexico's domestic production of white corn and other types of indigenous corns increase and revive small family farms for the local economies, and I am not sure how NAFTA's role helps or hinders that.

Journal Entry #5: *Led By Nigeria, Africa Opening Door to Genetically Modified Crop Cultivation, 6 March 2017. Genetic Literacy Project. Steven E. Cerier.*

Summary: This article provides a list of African countries, led by Nigeria that are adopting the commercialization of GM crops and embracing their usage in their nation's farms. They argue that although many environmental groups oppose GMOs and many worldwide movements have banned GMOs in cities, states, and countries, there is no reliable scientific data to support their claims that GMOs cause birth defects or autism. The article argues that genetically modified crops are as safe as any other crop and can help farmers who suffer from losing their farms to disease and insects. Specifically in Africa, they mentioned that isolated crop field testing is being done as the first stage to test out GM crops and their results. Some countries are in the testing phase still and others, like Nigeria have approved GM crops completely. The article argues that to feed a growing population, this is the only viable way to do it.

Social Commentary/Opinion: The interesting pieces of this article for me were the fact that Africa exports most of its crop to Europe and that since Europe has banned the usage of many GM crops, they have has a huge influence on the way Africa views GM crops as major consumers and importers of their products. This is interesting to me because considering that Europe played the biggest role in their colonization it is unfortunate to see them having to rely on them still as consumers, but I am glad that countries like Nigeria are successful in exporting goods in the first place. So one the one hand, Africa's decision to use GMOs to improve their crops even though the EU is against it makes me happy for that sense of independence, but in the same way, harmful farming practices that have marginalized family farmers and subsistence farmers in Africa are the reason we need GMOs in the first place so that is very sad.

Journal Entry #6: *World's First Farm to Use Solar Power and Seawater Opens in Australia, 10 October 2016. Ecowatch. Kristin Falzon.*

Summary: Basically, this farm uses ocean water that is desalinated by solar energy in a 49 acre greenhouse operation that grows tens of thousands of tomatoes a year and sells them as 13 percent of Australia's tomato market share. The plants are grown in coconut husks and apparently the salinity in the water makes it impossible for bacteria and therefore viruses to thrive and spread, creating an almost aseptic environment for growing. This setup is also looking to be implemented in Portugal and the U.S. in the future. Since they are self-sustaining, they have been able to continue production through massive blackouts that bankrupted several businesses in Australia last year.

Social Commentary/Opinion: I obviously think this idea is genius and the amount of brain that went into designing this operation is incredible. I applaud the engineers and scientists who made it possible and of course I hope it succeeds. I love that it is self-sustaining and does not depend on fossil fuels for production either. The overall concept is amazing and shows the ability of the

creative human mind to solve modern issues with modern science, but of course this type of large scale production of produce in the middle of nowhere still separates people from the origins of their food and disconnects us from the process of the natural way of growing food completely. I see this as a sort of Mad Max solution that is an amazing accomplishment, but not a solution for the growing of all crops. It is very realistic, but I think more of a cultural shift like our textbook mentions is more important for the better of our society as a whole.

Journal Entry #7: *Michelle Obama Champions Vegetable Gardens and Healthy Food in "American Grown", 2 August 2012. Washington Post. Adrian Higgins.*

Summary: Michelle Obama wrote a book about the shift in the American diet and exercise lifestyle that also is a memoir of her personal story as it relates to health and follows the story of the gardens that had lasted four growing seasons at the White House implemented by Michelle. These gardens have been places for local students to also participate in harvests and sowing of crops and learn about healthy food choices. Michelle Obama has also spearheaded movements to encourage kids to be active and incorporate fun exercise into their lives everyday. The article also points out, however, that of course there is criticism for her work where people are saying that she is doing too much talk and not enough actual law changing to change this obesity epidemic.

Social Commentary/Opinion: Although I agree that policy is where the biggest change can be made to stop the spread of obesity, especially in children's schools, I do not by any means see the former first lady's work as invaluable. I have so much respect for her to take on this challenge and really try to open America's eyes to a preventable problem that affects all of us and our children. I love that there is a huge veggie garden on the South Lawn and that Michelle is being a powerful woman and voicing her opinion on such a strong issue. Not only is she voicing her opinion, but she is actively making a difference with her platform so I love her forever and am buying this book!

Journal Entry #8: *Mumbaikars Drop Seeds on I-Day, 15 August 2017. Times of India. Ismat Tahseenl.*

Summary: In a part of Mumbai whose wildlife and greenery is threatened more than any, environmentalists have taken to seed bombing the area to increase vegetation. They say there is a proposition for a new subway station that might pose more of a threat to the once densely covered forest in the area. The seed bombs consist of cow dung, compost, cow urine, clay, soil,

and seeds of local plants that do well in the climate like papayas and other more tropical native plants. The groups are organized on bike so they bike along hiking trails and spend the day chucking these seed bombs into the forest in less densely covered areas so they break open and the seeds can begin to germinate within the soil.

Social Commentary/Opinion: I like this concept and it is really cool to see it gaining momentum internationally. The first I heard of seed bombing was from a friend who work in Oakland Lake Merritt trying to increase populations of native bees and butterflies, who would create seed bombs of clay and seeds of native host plants like milkweed and poppies and bee plant to chuck around and sometimes hit like golf balls around the city which was very renegade, but I liked the idea a lot. It is awesome to see this working everywhere in different climate-relevant ways and it is a cool thing to do on a Saturday so we don't even take the weekend off from resisting the destruction of the environment.

Journal Entry #9: *Crossing Borders: The Journey of Alaskan Salmon, 6 December 2017. Utah Public Radio. Aimee Tallian.*

Summary: Lee Perkins is a salmon fisherman from Utah who was able to work for many companies on every angle of fishing, processing, quality management and sale and says he learned most about his work as a consumer which pushed him to go into his own business of distribution. He wants consumers to be savvy in their buying of fish and says that if a consumer does not know where their fish was even caught, it has lost its story and the connection to the environment is lost which comes with consequences. A third party quality assurance agency MSC also says they want to ensure that consumers know what they are buying and can have evidence that they are being told the truth. Sockeye salmon is often caught in Alaska, not kept cold and allowed to bruise and then frozen to be shipped to China to be filleted on a mass scale and injected with artificials to reabsorb the water that was lost in the thawing process. Since Perkins has learned about all these unsustainable practices that also make lower grade meat, he has built a company around marketing the transparency of knowing where your fish comes from and about its whole journey.

Social Commentary/Opinion: I liked this article because I began to think about the concept of sustainable when I was in Hong Kong since they consume more seafood than any other city in southeast Asia and came back seeing how blind consumers are when it comes to our fish's stories. I can never get a response at sushi restaurants when I ask where their fish was caught and how long ago and feel like a psycho when I whip out my sustainable seafood guide. This is super sad and the underlying issue is lack of consumer education like Perkins said. I think this is the root of all societal problems, but especially in the fish market, I agree with Perkins completely and I like his business model.

Journal Entry #10: *U.S. Touts Fruits and Vegetables While Subsidizing Animals that Become Meat, 3 October 2011. The Washington Post. Arthur Allen.*

Summary: The article in a nutshell basically uses strong statistics and sources to prove that the American government's propaganda on what is healthy directly opposes the actual subsidies given to farmers. These subsidies were put in place largely after the Dust Bowl to protect farmers from losing their land and to keep them from farming and eroding the soil. Many commodity crops are heavily subsidized like corn, beans, and surprisingly, tobacco and cattle ranches and some farmers are given government money to not enter the market at all and let their land fallow. There are also price floors set and excess canned foods purchased by the government to keep prices stable that are often used for school lunches. At the same time, fruit and vegetable and nut producers do not receive any significant subsidies and do not have the same price floors to keep them from losing their businesses. All this is happening while the government My Plate program is promoting a diet of 50% fruits and vegetables and only about a 20% intake of "protein" which could be meat, but also beans and nuts.

Social Commentary/Opinion: This type of hypocrisy makes me super mad because the American people are directly contributing to an unhealthy food system through no fault of their own through their tax money. On one end, I am shocked the government does not have their My Plate show the highest intake of what makes the most revenue for the state and big businesses that are in their pockets, but I still get that vibe with the "dairy" portion they incorporate into the plate and the "protein" that is really unnecessary because fruits and vegetables could give us all the protein we need. I am happy this article exists to educate people and this type of journalism is important, but action and policy change also needs to happen so we don't fund things that give us preventable diseases in the long run.
