Truffles are not recent comers to haute cuisine. Chapter 1, “From the Past Comes the Present,” takes us back to the days of the Greek philosopher Theophrastus (370–286 B.C.) and the Roman natural historian Pliny the Elder (23–79 A.D.), both of whom speculated on the mysterious origin of truffles. The oldest known European cookbook, thought to have been written by M. Gabius Apicius (d. 40 A.D.), contained six recipes for cooking with truffles and a method for storing them in sawdust. Interest in truffles continued until the Dark Ages, when written records about them ceased, possibly because they had acquired a superstitious reputation for being “the devil’s handiwork, grown from the spit of witches.” Then, in the sixteenth century, interest revived, ushering in “The Golden Age of Truffles.”

Chapter 2, aptly titled “Science to the Rescue,” explains the key to cultivating truffles—not in composted manure as for button mushrooms, or on wood as for shiitake, but in an intricate symbiosis between truffle fungi and living trees, termed mycorrhiza, a word derived from Greek that literally means “fungus-root.” The authors explain this amazing phenomenon, in which the mold filaments of truffle fungi sheath the tiny feeder rootlets of trees such as oaks and hazels and actually grow between the outer rootlet cells. More filaments grow from the sheath into the surrounding soil to absorb nutrients and water, which are transported to the rootlets for use by the trees. The trees, in turn, provide carbohydrates and probably vitamins and hormones to the fungi. This partnership is so mutually beneficial to both trees and fungi that neither can survive without the other. One happy product of this interdependence is the fungal fruit-body, the truffle, which contains the spores needed for reproduction.

If you suppose that it is challenging to manage this intricate fungus-root relationship in order to establish truffle orchards, or truffières, you are correct. Rootlets of tree seedlings can be inoculated with spores obtained from ripe truffles, but success in inoculating seedlings so far works for only a few species, preeminently the Périgord truffle, and is a science in itself. Moreover, the habitat requirements of the Périgord truffle, the species most commonly grown in truffières, are quite specific: a strongly alkaline, limestone soil; and a Mediterranean climate. There go the hopes of many who would like to grow truffles in their backyard. As Taming the Truffle explains in satisfying detail, however, liming can provide the right soil milieu in many cases, and climate can be partially manipulated by irrigation and control of shading to modify soil moisture and temperature. The establishment and maintenance of truffières is the main thrust of the book and will well serve any who crave to produce truffles for fun or profit.

Once truffles actually appear in a truffière, how do you find them? After all, they grow below ground. In nature, wild animals disperse the spores formed inside the truffle. The animals detect truffles by their aroma and dig them up: mice, squirrels, and many other animals are the original truffle gourmets! They digest most of the truffle except the spores, which they later excrete elsewhere to potentially colonize new feeder rootlets. Truffières are generally established where wild, truffle-eating animals are happy to harvest the truffles before the truffière owner does. Taming the Truffle doesn’t deal with this problem: I have visited truffières in Australia that have electric fences designed to keep out wombats and bandicoots, and American truffière managers have developed protocols for rodent control.

Yet animals are also the allies of the truffière owner. To harvest the belowground truffle, you have to find it. Pigs are exceedingly fond of truffles and were used in earlier times to locate them, but the hunter had to be attuned to the nuances of pig behavior to get to the truffle before the pig. Nowadays, trained dogs are the common allies of the truffle hunter, as they will accept another food reward. Hall et al. instruct you in the essentials of training a truffle dog.

Taming the Truffle contains this advice and much more. Even if you don’t crave growing truffles, this informative and highly readable book reveals the fascinating mysteries, lore, and biology of this ultimate food better than any other book in English. It is a paragon of science written for the interested layperson.

—Jim Trappe, Oregon State University, Corvallis

Trust in Food: A Comparative and Institutional Analysis
Unni Kjærnes, Mark Harvey, and Alan Warde
x + 228 pp. $74.95 (cloth)

Today’s consumers are increasingly forced to trust others to produce much of their foodstuffs, as technological and commercial changes have put more distance between the farm and the table. Distrust about food became commonplace in the 1990s following food scares relating to E. coli, salmonella, and various contaminated foodstuffs. The scandal over BSE in British beef was perhaps the most notable of these scares, reflecting a failure to understand the underlying science as well as poor political management. Remarkably, British consumers continue to exhibit relatively high levels of trust in their food supply, as do those in a number of other European nations. Hence Unni Kjærnes,
Mark Harvey, and Alan Warde rightly argue that simple, individualistic explanations of food trust that focus on consumers and their understandings of risk are inadequate. Instead, they pose the question of what promotes trust (and fosters distrust) in food. Based on survey data and institutional analysis in six European countries, they develop a sophisticated account not only of trust relating to food but also, more generally, of the very nature of trust.

Trust has diverse connotations depending on context; it carries different meanings in various languages, ranging from certainty, confidence, being safe, and feeling safe (pp.4–5). Although an extensive literature on food worries exists, Kjærnes, Harvey, and Warde correctly point out that most of the existing scholarly discourse has focused on risk perception and Ulrich Beck’s influential idea that we now live in a “risk society,” in which we experience rapid scientific, technological, and economic changes. Expertise is increasingly contested, and individuals have ever-increasing responsibility to decide to what extent they are willing to expose themselves and their families to various risks. These accounts view distrust as an individual and cognitive consumer phenomenon arising out of the uncertainties and fears in our unsafe and oftentimes frightening modern world.

By contrast, the authors of Trust in Food problematize the concept of the consumer and go beyond the typical issues relating to food safety by taking a broader approach and examining the institutions that support food consumption, provisioning, and regulation. Most important, they take trust and distrust not only as reflections of individual opinions but as relational concepts that emerge from individuals’ various attitudes toward food. These relationships range from close and local, such as with a neighborhood shopkeeper, to more distant ones, such as with government regulatory agencies or multinational supermarket chains. They involve a range of practices (e.g., cooking and eating) and roles (being a customer and a citizen) and are instantiated in different ways in different countries.

The empirical project at the core of the book triangulates a population survey with documentary analysis and qualitative interviews, thus allowing integration of data about how consumers view five “key food issues” (nutrition, quality, ethics, safety, and value for money) associated with food trust and its challenges with institutional-level data about the structures that produce and maintain this trust. Although the survey data are complex, they are likely to be of considerable interest to many: for instance, distrust, both in food and more generally, is high and widespread in Italy and Portugal, yet the Portuguese have greater trust in the safety of food and also make finer-grained distinctions about the safety of various types of food than do the Italians. Denmark and Norway evidence high degrees of trust in food for all of the factors measured, perhaps not surprising, given their generally high levels of societal trust and their political and cultural commonalities, yet the Danish have markedly lower confidence in take-away food than do the Norwegians. And although Germany and Great Britain both have had significant food crises as well as having similar, complex market structures, the British are fairly positive about institutions relating to food, while there is considerable skepticism about such institutions throughout Germany.

Thus Kjærnes, Harvey, and Warde conclude that institutional arrangements are central to the generation of trust (and to the fostering of distrust). They describe new forms of governance that will allow realignments between norms and expectations as well as reassurance for consumers and thereby foster the sorts of relationships that generate trust. Trust in Food is written in scholarly and sometimes dense prose, and at times it fails to explore adequately such factors as local and regional variations and gender-related aspects of food trust. Nevertheless, I recommend it highly to anyone interested in our attitudes to food or national differences in food beliefs.

—Rachel A. Ankeny, University of Adelaide

Kitchen Literacy: How We Lost Knowledge of Where Food Comes From and Why We Need to Get It Back
Ann Vileisis
332 pp. Illustrations. $26.95 (cloth)

Ann Vileisis’s Kitchen Literacy can be read as a companion to Michael Pollan’s influential The Omnivore’s Dilemma. In his book Pollan laments: “As a culture we seem to have arrived at a place where whatever native wisdom we may once have possessed about eating has been replaced by confusion and anxiety” (p.1). Pollan’s solution is “to go back to the very beginning, to follow the food chains that sustain us, all the way from the earth to the plate” (pp.5–6).

Kitchen Literacy begins with a similar rhetorical question: “How on earth did we get into the modern situation where we know so little about what we eat, yet regard it as entirely normal?” (p.4). Vileisis, an independent historian and the author of a history of America’s wetlands, takes a different approach than Pollan: instead of going back to the start of a biological chain, she begins with our country’s postcolonial history, chronicling what she calls, in one of