

Higgins, Vaughan, and Geoffrey Lawrence, eds. 2005. *Agricultural Governance: Globalization and the New Politics of Regulation*. London: Routledge

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This edited collection of works on regulation in the agricultural sector will be welcomed by scholars who prefer constructivist approaches to the positivism of more traditional social science, and also by those who trust states to regulate agricultural markets and agribusiness corporations wisely. The authors represented in this volume appear to share a foundational belief that the neoliberal project of globalization has taken state regulatory protections away from vulnerable farmers, consumers, and the environment, and has given power instead to predatory global corporations. (The conclusion of Chapter 3 provides an example of these assumptions).

Because little evidence is presented in support of this foundational belief (it seems assumed that readers will agree) this book is unlikely to have much impact on the traditional social science scholars who have devoted their careers to studying the actual record of past state interventions in the food and farm sector. In rich countries, most such interventions have over-protected wealthy farmers at the expense of consumers, taxpayers and the environment. These interventions have taken (and still take) the form of price supports, production controls, export subsidies, and import restrictions demanded by politically powerful rent-seeking farm lobby organizations. In poor countries, most state interventions in the sector have traditionally been designed to provide cheap food to politically powerful urban consumers, often in an unsustainable manner and to the disadvantage of politically weak rural farm producers. The vast body of empirical work establishing these (unattractive) patterns of actual state behavior in the food and farm sector, authored by notable scholars such as D. Gale Johnson, Kym Anderson, Michael Lipton, is not refuted in this book; it is simply ignored.

The first substantive chapter on "Globalization and Global Governance," for example, argues that the role of the World Trade Organization in the agricultural sector is to create a global system of cheap food, principally to the benefit of corporate agribusiness companies that use commodities as "industrial inputs." In truth, it is the protectionist farm policies of governments in rich countries (especially in the European Union and the United States) that have driven down commodity prices on world markets, and the WTO is now being used by some developing countries (led by the G-20) to secure reductions in those subsidies, both in the Doha Round and through the Dispute Settlement Body. Within the rich countries themselves, the primary impact of Europe's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and also of many US commodity programs (especially in sugar and dairy markets) has been to raise rather than to lower the price of commodities, harming rather than helping agribusiness firms. This first chapter constructs its alternative picture of reality not by referencing any peer-

reviewed scholarly works on agricultural markets, or analyzing any data, but instead by turning to non-scholarly sources from anti-globalization advocacy groups such as Public Citizen, the Farmers Union, Oxfam, GRAIN, or the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

Parts II and III of this book contain some case studies of interest, mostly from Australia, New Zealand, and the UK, on a range of more recent regulatory concerns such as third-party certification, organic standards, and genetically modified foods. A successful chapter on animal welfare policy in the EU is one of the stronger points in the collection.

For readers who might be looking here for new work on the environmental sustainability of farming, this is a topic raised in several chapters but with little resolution. There is a detailed case study of dairy market de-regulation in Australia leading to consolidation in the sector, with consequences for the environment that are assumed to be bad, but the assumption is never tested through an examination of actual environmental outcomes. A concluding chapter on "biosecurity" in New Zealand correctly points out the historic vulnerability of insular states to bioinvasions from exotic wild species, but this chapter provides no evidence that agricultural crops (which are highly domesticated species) have ever become invasive, in New Zealand or anywhere else, even in genetically modified form. Here again, a straightforward discussion of actual policy impacts is largely missing, replaced by assumptions and a constant preoccupation with how issues are being framed. Instead of an examination of actual risks, we get a discussion of something the author calls "riskification discourse" (p. 199).

This collection is published as the seventeenth volume in a Routledge series on *Advances in Sociology*, and the authors in this collection are primarily rural sociologists, anthropologists, and geographers. The absence of perspectives from historians, political scientists, or economists, on globalization, regulation, and governance in agriculture is a critical weakness of the volume.