Contemporary Issues in Food Supply Chain Management

Jane Eastham, Luis Kluwe Aguiar
and Simon Thelwell
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We live in a globalised world, however much the Brexiteers and Trump voters wish it were not so. Though that’s hard to see on the food front as we concentrate on the daily job of feeding ourselves and our families—trying to eat healthily, safely and with pleasure. Yet every day we eat this globalised complexity. The most modestly stocked food cupboard and fridge will have foods that come from the four corners of the earth and will have passed through the hands of the giant corporations at the apex of the industrialised food system—the few companies (fewer and more gigantic by the year) who have near total control over the trading of seeds and grains, bioengineering research and the production of meat, grains, oils, etc. They’re there in our kitchens: the ready meals and ready to pour sauces, as well as the staples: sugar, corn and wheat flour, vegetable oil, potatoes, salt, beans, tuna, ketchup, cola, curry powder...

In my early days as a food journalist I wrote a column called Food Biz for an American food magazine. I monitored all the business media for stories about the food industry in the Economist, FT, Business Week, Wall St Journal, Forbes, etc, etc. That was at the urging of my financial journalist husband, sceptical of me making food the focus of my journalism. If you’re going to do it, he said, then follow the money. It was good advice and my Food Biz years were an education. Writing the column gave living, day-by-day substance to what I’d seen in my early research into why the pesticide aldicarb (now banned in the EU and USA) was being used on the potatoes I was feeding my baby and why it was getting into the water supply where I was living. It showed me the power of industrial food production as a money-making enterprise first and last.

Over the past thirty-five years the increasingly concentrated industrialized food system has not only become immensely profitable but has also influenced what we eat by pushing to the margins the reality of food as health, food as culture, food as social glue, food as pleasure. But we need to have those discussions because food is not just another commodity. How it’s produced, traded, shopped for, cooked and eaten shapes our world... and us. As this book so brilliantly illustrates.

*Sheila Dillon, presenter of BBC Radio 4’s The Food Programme*