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Wayne Roberts, *The No-Nonsense Guide to World Food*

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Wayne Roberts, *The No-Nonsense Guide to World Food* (No-Nonsense Guide Series).
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Reviewed by Rachel Kelly and Timothy LeDoux

In 2007, an amalgamation of rising fuel costs, natural disasters, declining food reserves, increased biofuels production on agricultural lands, and the mounting demand for a meat-based diet created a global food crisis in which food prices skyrocketed. Subsequently, these events pushed millions of people around the world into poverty and created political and economic instability along with violent social unrest in three dozen countries. Tackling these problems, let alone rethinking the structure of the global food system, might appear daunting to the average reader. However, Wayne Roberts, a food activist who works for the Toronto Food Policy Council, takes advantage of this opportunity to provide an optimistic and succinct account of the structural contradictions in the modern food system along with his recipe for creating an alternative system. Designed to be read in a few hours, *The No-Nonsense Guide to World Food* adeptly guides the reader through the complex web of issues surrounding the global food system and suggests how an informed citizenry can implement change.

This book touches upon a wide range of philosophical, social, economic, and political issues related to the global food system. Everything from the industrialization of food, food security, and food waste to the environmental impacts of agriculture, global trade regimes, and alternative social movements are woven together into a concise account of the global food system. No matter what the issue, Roberts consistently draws upon agrarian ideals in his analysis by exhibiting a deep concern for the increasing corporate concentration in agricultural production. This is evident in his critique of the Modernist food system as well as his construction of an alternative Fusion movement. Essentially, the Modernist food system is the dominant industrial food system, replete with its social, economic, and environmental quandaries. Fusion, on the other hand, is Roberts' vision for bridging the divide between consumers and farmers in an attempt to reassert food as a public good and reclaim the commons. In the Fusion system, food is not simply a commodity but rather a spiritual and cultural manifestation of humanity that values the environment and the worth of people.

Roberts' insightful accounts of the numerous Fusion food movements that have arisen in response to the Modernist food system are the greatest strength of the book. With great passion, Roberts describes how groups like Via Campesina attempt to reestablish the connection between people, culture, food, and the environment while battling corporate attempts to commoditize food. In essence, Fusion movements revolve around community-based themes of food sovereignty and food democracy, which are grounded in the belief that people can actively influence the policies and practices that control, shape, and transform their food environment. In direct contrast to 'consumer sovereignty' or 'voting with your fork,' whereby consumers attempt to affect social change at an individual level (Johnston, 2008; Pollan, 2006), these movements are centered on collective attempts to create and maintain sustainable, self-reliant and culturally appropriate local and regional food systems.

Roberts' faith and confidence in the power of Fusion permeate every page of the book. Even in the darkest corners of the Modernist food system, Roberts finds beacons of nurturing sunshine. Peppered throughout the book are suggestions for how to improve certain aspects of the modern global food system. For example, Roberts foresees the spread of 'smart food systems,' which similarly to multifunctional farms in Europe will provide various services aside from food production (e.g., ecological services). Yet, Roberts' overt optimism regarding Fusion movements is also a major weakness of this book.

Roberts' unreflexively praises the localization of the food system as the lynchpin of resistance to the modern food system. Alternative movements promoting local food systems are considered more sustainable, equitable, community-oriented, ethical, caring, and democratic than the conventional system. Yet despite the appeal to localism, Roberts neglects to question its objectives and assumptions. As Hinrichs (2003) and DuPuis and Goodman (2005) have argued, uncritical conceptions of localism are not emancipatory; they can be dangerous. While the local could be an option for regaining control of the modern food system, unreflexive localism can hide many historical forms of inequality and overlook the complex power geometries embedded in locales. By recognizing the socially constructed, dynamic, and relational nature of localism, activists open the possibility that other scalar movements might provide long lasting sustainable solutions to the ills of the modern food system. Moreover, such a realization provides a framework for activists to build coalitions and movements across space that avoids the pitfalls of taking for granted an exploitative pre-given collective identity grounded in a locality.

Despite these shortcomings, several chapters of the book could be used as supplemental reading for introductory courses on the global food system or as case studies for course sections exploring alternative food movements. Furthermore, an instructor might find it practical to combine this book with a screening of a film such as *Fresh*. *Fresh* would be a good choice because it includes footage of the sustainable urban farms of ‘Growing Power’ run by Will Allen, whom Roberts refers to in the final chapter as a Fusion-minded entrepreneur. Such a movie may help students better appreciate the significance, not only of what Allen is doing, but of what Roberts is trying to convey about the Fusion food system.

Overall, Roberts has a knack for making complicated global food matters easier to understand. He provides a compact lucid account backed by peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed references, charts, and tables of many critical components of the modern food system and the various counter-movements aimed at reforming the current system. Nonetheless, Roberts’ overlooking of important issues such as migrant worker rights and food regulatory regimes, combined with the superficial treatment of key alternative food movements such as the fair trade and organic movements, will leave many informed readers wanting a more detailed and nuanced coverage of the complexities of today’s food system, as well as any long lasting sustainable alternative systems. In the end, *The No-Nonsense Guide to World Food* will be a success among like-minded activists, but will leave academics yearning for a richer account.

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