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Stacia Falat
Michigan State University

Jayson Otto
Michigan State University

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Amy Trubek, *The Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey into Terroir*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008 (318 pp.), ISBN: 9780520252813, US\$45.00.

Reviewed by Stacia Falat and Jayson Otto

Amy Trubek invites readers to consider a new way to think about taste through the French concept of *terroir* in *The Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey into Terroir*. French *terroir* is a discernment of taste rooted in the environment and culture of a place and reinforced by an agrarian tradition that reveres the farmer, or *le paysan*. The French commonly express *terroir* in products such as wine and cheese. Even children take part in juice “tastings” to explore nuances of flavor and aroma. This national sensibility of taste captivates Trubek. As a chef, anthropologist, and Kellogg Food and Society Fellow she attempts to uncover an American translation of *terroir*, ultimately crafting a comparative ethnography. Trubek is confident that a change in “cultural common sense” realized through local food initiatives is beginning to influence how some Americans think about food.

Trubek starts her journey by digging up the roots of *terroir* in France, framing the concept in a historical context. French ties between place and gastronomy are reinforced by governmental support for regional cuisines and the protection of rural areas. For readers unfamiliar with French food policies, (e.g., *Appellation d’Origine Controlée*), this section is particularly fascinating. Trubek devotes the rest of her book to exposing what she believes is an emerging American *terroir* through stories of localization in California, Wisconsin, and Vermont. Trubek admits that French-style *terroir*, which is based on collective regional ownership, does not easily translate to American business culture. In France, select foods are identified by their region of production through state governance, not by companies promoting brands. As scholars such as Barham (2003) have pointed out, an American *terroir* would have to reflect a political economic structure rooted more in the individual than the collective.

Nevertheless, Trubek believes a new, more entrepreneurial version of *terroir* is emerging in the US. This movement around local food is led by entrepreneurs, whom Trubek dubs tastemakers (e.g., chefs) and taste producers (farmers). These individuals give a discerning public food that “tastes good.” Trubek suggests that refined tastes elevate foods and beverages from commodities to valuable goods. This transformation reflects earlier calls for a local food system characterized by embedded exchanges drawing on the sensual and expressive (DeLind 2006). Yet,

by placing the burden of shaping American *terroir* on restaurateurs, farmers, and artisan food producers, Trubek often downplays the importance of home food preparation and consumption.

Additionally, Trubek elevates particular regions of the United States as *terroir*-enlightened, culminating in an analysis that is geographically uneven. While it is understood that there are subjective limitations with any ethnographic study, Trubek's assertion that taste discretion is exclusive to particular regions may come off as unintended elitism. Trubek argues that most Americans do not yet have the vocabulary to discuss taste from a geographic perspective. Such claims reduce the autonomy of particular regions and may ignore important inklings of US-style *terroir*. For example, it is suggested that people in states like New Mexico and Kentucky will as likely as not purchase frozen appetizers from a big-box store for a party. Also, fruit farmers in Michigan probably cannot use words like *terroir* to describe their fruit because the area lacks discerning tasters. Yet, as Nabhan's (2008) work has shown, there are many cuisines characterized by place-based taste and culture throughout North America. Further, these remarks contradict Trubek's main message that *terroir* is a worldwide phenomenon that can exist "as long as it matters" to people. The issue of *terroir* being elitist is passed off as a cultural obstacle without breaching issues of access. Nevertheless, many ideas expressed in this book can inform local/global discussions of the food system. Unfortunately, this work never makes a solid connection between this point and Trubek's data.

The Taste of Place is written for a popular audience, one interested in taste and alternatives to the homogenization of American food. This book would be useful in an undergraduate classroom as a broad introduction to French and American food cultures, especially if paired with a viewing of the documentary *Mondovino*. For graduate classes the book could be accompanied with literature on localization, as well as critiques of social impacts of geographic indicator systems (DeMaster and Bowen available online 21 September 2010). However, Trubek's lack of theoretical grounding could be disappointing for upper-level academic audiences. Although this book deals with place there is no mention of current geographic theories of place and local food. Other concepts affecting American foodways such as vertical integration of the food industry and corporate involvement in organics are discussed, but do not look for calculated criticisms. Still, there is much to be gained from Trubek's comprehensive historical accounts of *terroir* and her introduction to a few of the corners in the US where place-based taste is emerging.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Stacia Falat and **Jayson Otto** are graduate students in the Community Food and Agricultural Systems program in the Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies at Michigan State University. Stacia's research interests include values-based value chains and local food distribution. Jayson's research interests include direct marketing of food and the history of U.S. food distribution. Contact information: Stacia Falat (falatsta@msu.edu) and Jayson Otto (ottojays@msu.edu).

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