



The Real Cost of Cheap Food

Michael Carolan

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This challenging but accessible book critically examines the dominant food regime on its own terms, by seriously asking whether we can afford cheap food and exploring what exactly cheap food affords us. Detailing the numerous ways that food has become reduced to a state, such as a price per ounce, combination of nutrients, yield per acre, or calories, the book argues for a more contextual understanding of food when debating its affordability.

The author makes a compelling case for why today's global food system produces just the opposite of what it promises. The food produced under this regime is in fact exceedingly expensive. Thus meat production and consumption are inefficient uses of resources and contribute to climate change; the use of pesticides in industrial-scale agriculture may produce cheap food, but there are hidden costs to environmental protection, human health and biodiversity conservation. Many of these costs will be paid for by future generations - cheap food today may mean expensive food tomorrow. By systematically assessing these costs the book delves into issues related, but not limited, to international development, national security, health care, industrial meat production, organic farming, corporate responsibility, government subsidies, food aid and global commodity markets. The book concludes by suggesting ways forward, going beyond the usual solutions such as farmers markets, community supported agriculture, and community gardens. Exploding the myth of cheap food requires we have at our disposal a host of practices and policies. Some of those proposed and explored include microloans, subsidies for consumers, vertical agriculture, and the democratization of subsidies for producers.

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