



Special Issue: Mapping the Global Food Landscape

Section IX

Sustainable food systems and global environmental change

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There is growing evidence and concern of the role of mainstream industrial agriculture in contributing to environmental degradation and global climate change. In this section we examine three different aspects of the relationship between agriculture, nature, and society.

Tony Weis focuses specifically on the environmental and social impact of intensive livestock production and the increased meatification of diets. Framing his discussion around the problems with the “doubling narrative”—that is, the dubious call for the need to double global food production to be able to feed increased population levels—Weis eloquently questions the assumptions behind the seemingly unstoppable worldwide meatification of diets to argue for a major rethink of this trajectory and concludes by questioning what kinds of alternatives are needed if we are concerned about environmental and social sustainability and social justice. Carol Hunsberger then centres on another key response to and driver of global environmental change: the increased production of crop-based biofuels. Her paper analyzes the implementation of several strategies and policies that form part of the global governance landscape, and points to tensions between national and global rules and their failure to remedy key environmental and social problems. Faris Ahmed follows by exploring the dynamics, benefits, and potential of peasant agriculture to ensure sufficient worldwide food production and ecological sustainability.

Ahmed stresses the importance of socially just seed policies and governance structures, and the promotion of agro-ecology as mechanisms for increased biodiversity, which is central to peasant agriculture.

Helena Shilomboleni concludes by synthesizing the key debates, concerns, and alternatives raised throughout the section, which clearly point to the fact that agriculture is at a crossroads. She ends with a cautionary note relating to the human rights framework as an effective strategy.