



Book Review

Eat local, taste global: how ethnocultural food reaches our tables

By Glen C. Filson and Bamidale Adekunle
Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017: 190 pages

Review by Regan Zink*

Eat Local, Taste Global: How Ethnocultural Food Reaches our Tables addresses the demand, availability, and production of ethnocultural vegetables in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). The book is centered around the three largest ethnic groups in the GTHA (Chinese, South Asian, Afro-Caribbean) and considers histories of immigration, acculturation, and the availability of ethnocultural food. Taken as a whole, this book provides an overview and justification for the local production of ethnocultural vegetables. While this book is primarily based in the Southern Ontario context, there is some discussion of ethnocultural vegetable value chains in other parts of Canada and the USA. Further, Filson and Adekunle distinguish between the corporate food regime, characterized by longer value chains, and local and community level food sovereignty which are primarily discussed through farmers' markets, community shared agriculture, and gardening. The authors cite numerous benefits of producing ethnocultural vegetables in Southern Ontario, including economic, health, social, and environmental benefits. They argue that ethnocultural vegetables are not only fresher and more nutritious when produced locally, but there is also increased opportunity for producer-consumer contact and lower transportation costs associated with local production.

The book is organized into seven chapters that consider a myriad of perspectives related to ethnocultural vegetable value chains. Topics covered in the chapters include: political economy; demographic preferences; a value chain analysis; consumption of culturally appropriate food; inclusivity of farmers' markets, or lack thereof; community shared agriculture; and the health and economic benefits of producing ethnocultural vegetables locally. Filson and Adekunle, clearly link the growing demand for culturally appropriate food with the potential to produce ethnocultural vegetables, such as okra, Chinese or Indian long eggplant, yard-long beans, and bok choy, among others, in Ontario. It is important to note that the scope of this work is limited to Chinese, South Asian, and Afro-Caribbean ethnocultural vegetables and interesting

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to reflect that this includes vegetables that are more commonly known in Ontario such as onions and potatoes.

In their work, Filson and Adekunle address the contradictions and challenges associated with the provision of ethnocultural vegetables. This includes Canada's reliance on the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program for farm labour, the prevalence of anglophone and Dutch Canadian farmers, the current relatively limited production of ethnocultural vegetables locally, and the tensions between industrial agriculture and small-operation farmers. The book also addresses contradictions in retail settings including the location of grocery retail and access to ethnocultural vegetables, the dynamic between global supermarkets and independent ethnic stores, and consumers' desire for healthy, fresh produce despite the time and distance most fruit and vegetable travels before reaching their table. These contradictions, the authors argue, contribute to unsustainable ethnocultural supply chains.

To address these contradictions and challenges, several recommendations and policy changes are provided. Many of these are directed at municipal and provincial governments, but this book also provides important insight for producers, consumers, and retailers. Addressing larger systemic issues of economic inequality and human rights, Filson and Adekunle call for creating space and providing support for non-white farmers, including food preferences in Canadian human rights codes, and supporting the development and approval of inputs (fertilizers and pesticides) specifically for ethnocultural vegetables. Other recommendations include the use of multiple languages on signs for ethnocultural vegetables in retail settings and the creation of an organization to represent ethnocultural vegetable producers in Ontario. Specific to policy making, the authors argue that municipal bylaws, intended to prevent fragmentation of agricultural land, are a barrier for small producers looking to lease or purchase a small parcel of land.

This book offers important insights for a variety of stakeholders, including policy makers, consumers, producers, and researchers, and is written using language that is accessible to many of these groups. Filson and Adekunle provide background information on concepts such as ethnicity, acculturation, transnationalism, food security, and functional foods in the context of discussing ethnocultural vegetables. Each of the chapters clearly address the role of power in shaping the agri-food sector today.

Discussion and analysis around the role of farmers markets and community shared agriculture was particularly insightful and highlighted the importance of farm-to-table relationships and the role of alternative markets in supporting opportunities to produce ethnocultural vegetables in Ontario. As a Guelph resident, I have noticed some community shared agriculture programs introducing ethnocultural vegetables, such as diakon radish, kobocha squash, and napa cabbage, over the past couple of years. Filson and Adekunle position alternative food systems as having the most potential to support the production of ethnocultural vegetables locally. Circling back to the contradictions and challenges related to the provision of ethnocultural vegetables there are several access issues associated with alternative food systems today.

Eat local, taste global: how ethnocultural food reaches our tables provides an excellent overview of Chinese, South Asian, and Afro-Caribbean ethnocultural vegetable value chains in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. After reading this book I cannot help but wonder how things have changed since 2017 and how this information translates to other parts of Ontario and Canada. Additionally, there is the opportunity to address how Indigenous food fits into this discussion. As a rural studies scholar and planner, I see great potential for the production of ethnocultural vegetables. Local and regional production of food including culturally appropriate food, contributes to food sovereignty, resilience, and wellbeing of rural and urban populations.

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