

# Alternative Paradigms for Food Production, Distribution, and Consumption: A Non-economist's Perspective

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# The Naturalist Paradigm – An alternative to industrial paradigm

- The industrial food and agricultural paradigm (IFA), the dominant agricultural paradigm, is under attack.
- The naturalist paradigm is an alternative paradigm, which has many strengths.
  - It is led by non-economists that became media stars (e.g. Michael Pollan and Mark Bittman) and wrote best-sellers (e.g. Fast Food Nation, Omnivore's Dilemma)
- Nothing new under the sun;
  - Continuation of Rachel Carson, John Steinbeck, Pearl Buck, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau

# Pollan's Alternative food system

- Food is more than sustenance.
- Food Rules “Eat food, not too much, mostly plants”
  - Emphasis on moderation
  - Aversion to processing
  - Meat is acceptable, but within limits

System	Example	Advantages	Disadvantages
Industrialized	McDonalds	Cheap	Harmful to the environment
Big Organic	Whole Foods	No chemical use	Energy intensive and wasteful
Small Organic	Joel Salatin	Local, fresh, resilient	

# Related schools of thought

- *Slow Food Movement*
  - focus is on pleasure derived from cuisine
  - Does not oppose markets but commodification of food
  - Aims to increase rents of original food regions
- *Agroecology and Diversified Farming Systems*
  - “organic farming” & “sustainable agriculture”
  - Contact between food producer and consumer
- *Animal Welfare*
  - Animals feel emotions and pain
  - Reduce mistreatment - it's good for the animal and you
- *Food Justice*
  - Poor live in food deserts
  - Policies result in non nutritious food

# Agro-ecology/Diversified farming system

- Values
  - biodiversity (Kremen)
  - traditional and agro ecological knowledge(Altieri)
  - Appropriate technology (Berry)
  - collaborative social learning
  - Local Farmers markets
  - Subsidy to Ecological services
  - Small is beautiful
    - Link between small farms and restaurant (Alice waters)
    - Small farmers make Strong communities (Goldschmidt)
- Opposes
  - Monoculture
  - Corporations and GMO
  - Profit motive
  - Globalization
  - Subsidies to commercial farms
- Recognizes trade offs
  - IFA : has higher yield (25%) DFS-
  - DFS: less purchased inputs, resilient (Climate change)

# Assessment

- The naturalist paradigm takes a strong advocacy position, short on analysis
  - Captures some public sentiments
    - Desire for more competition
    - High-quality food and safety
  - Ignores tradeoffs and heterogeneity
    - People tradeoff cost, quality, convenience and taste
  - Doesn't recognize learning and progress
    - Suspicious of science
    - Underestimates the role of technology in enhancing precision and efficiency
  - Raises good questions and presents some valuable answers
    - But includes many valuable practices (e.g. IPM, crop rotation)
    - Multicropping has a lot of advantages
- However, the naturalist paradigm is not the only way to sustainability
  - Organic and biotechnology can make a more powerful combination

# Co-existence

- The Naturalist Paradigm cannot support 9 billion people
  - It can meet the demand of the well-to-do
- We always have a bifurcated food system
  - We need to produce healthy, affordable and convenient food to take advantage of science
  - These are the objectives of the Industrial Paradigm
  - The two can coexist