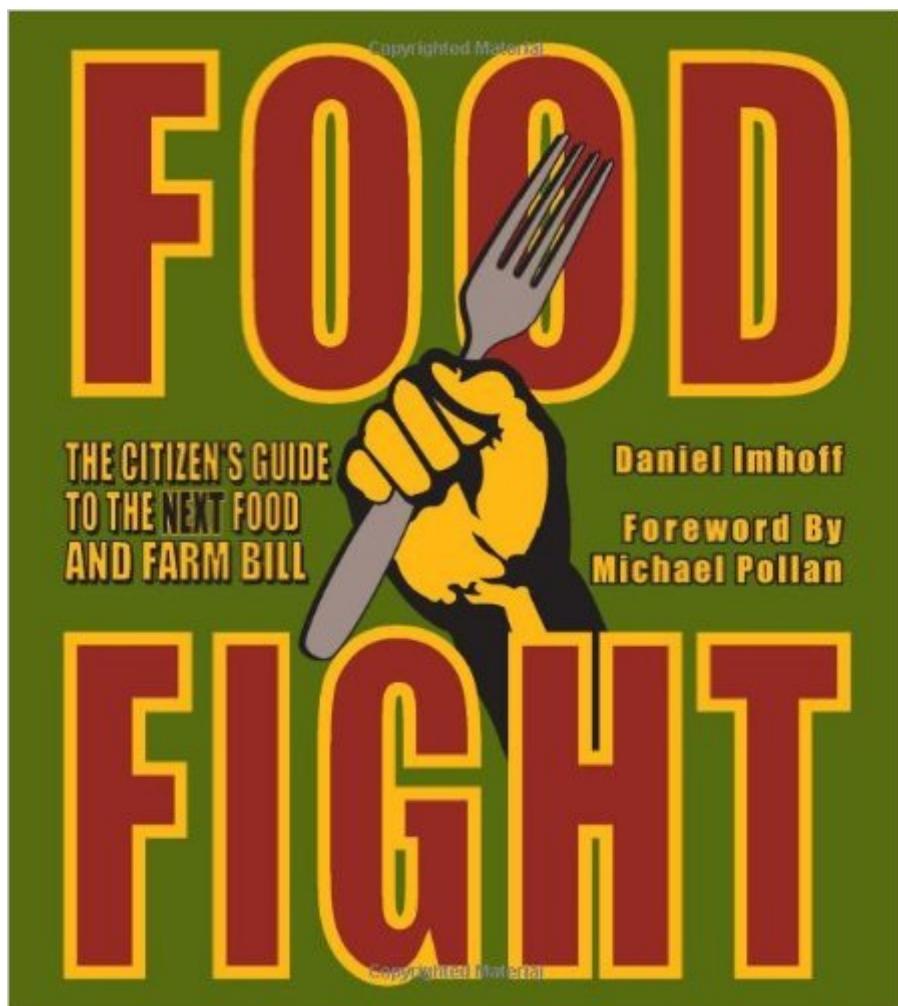


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Food Fight: The Citizen's Guide To The Next Food And Farm Bill



Synopsis

Every five years, the U.S. Congress passes a little understood piece of legislation called the Farm Bill. Primarily accountable for setting the budgets and work plans for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Farm Bill is anything but bureaucratic trivia. It is an essential economic and policy engine that drives the food and farming system and provides nutritional assistance to tens of millions of Americans--many of them children. In recent years, more and more citizens are realizing just how much is at stake in this political chess game. Originally published in 2007, Food Fight was Daniel Imhoff's highly acclaimed primer on the 2008 Farm Bill. Now in a newly updated and expanded edition, packed with helpful charts and illustrations, Imhoff looks ahead at this important issue, as the debate for 2012 is already underway. With the legislation due to be reauthorized in late 2012, Food Fight offers a critical resource that can help all who live in the U.S. to deconstruct this challenging bill, organize in their communities to gain a seat at the bargaining table, and ultimately vote with their forks. Includes a foreword by Michael Pollan and introduction by Fred Kirschenmann.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

All citizens of the United States should read this book, and many outside the US could well use it. It exposes the grim truth about American agriculture: it is massively distorted by the subsidy system. Subsidies go almost exclusively to large-scale producers of a handful of basic commodities, largely maize (41% of all), cotton, wheat, sugar and soybeans. This greatly lowers the price of these items, distorting the market. One result, explored in detail in the book, is unhealthy diet;

sweeteners--high-fructose corn syrup and sugar--are artificially cheap, and thus find their way into almost everything. Processed starches and soybean oil are also artificially cheap. So are meat and dairy products, which get some subsidies and benefit from artificially cheap feeds. Americans wind up with poor health, because the "bad" foods are cheaper and also because the subsidy-enriched giant agribusiness and food processing firms advertise heavily. (The book does not mention it, but one particularly annoying form this advertising takes is paying Fox News personalities to make constant, scathing, derogatory remarks about anyone who cares about good diet--calling such persons "food nazis" and making racist remarks about Michelle Obama when she shows an interest in better foods.) Another point about subsidies is that they block change. The giant subsidized interests can get research steered to their wants. They also block new initiatives, and of course they can outcompete any new or different farming, because the playing field is so far from level. We are thus locked into an increasingly dinosauric rural economy, with a few giant producers committed to an agricultural style that is less and less sustainable.

The second edition of *Food Fight* (February 2012) is a systematic overview for citizens of the labyrinths of a powerful piece of federal legislation commonly referred to as the Farm Bill, which is up for renewal as the 2008 Farm Bill is set to expire this year. With the assistance of many graphs and charts, it breaks down this colossus into as simple and understandable components: commodity crops, crop insurance, conservation, exports, etc. --- including the mammoth allocation that now goes to "nutrition", which involves SNAP (a.k.a., food stamps) and a gamut of smaller programs. The author gives a history and critique of each component of the Farm Bill. He is especially critical of how the allocations (and budget cuts) directed at farmers have shaped the agricultural landscape, creating perverse incentives to consolidate (subsiding agribusiness oligopolies) and to abuse the land. (The author doesn't quite say it, but nothing seems to cut the funding for conservation programs faster than their demonstrated effectiveness.) This book does an excellent job of making comprehensible an opaque subject matter, and as such will be a useful reference (probably even after the passage of the next Farm Bill passes). If someone wanted to be critical, there are several areas that could be pointed out. First, as a revision of a book written for the 2008, it suffers from the same problem that often afflicts second editions, namely you're never sure how much they're actually updated. Judging from the data, it looks like this book has been substantially overhauled, far more than is usual for books. There is, however, one sentence that implies 2009 is in the future, and that's jarring. The second issue is one that is inherent in the subject matter.

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