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**Review of *From Columbus to ConAgra: The Globalization of  
Agriculture and Food*, Edited by Alessandro Bonanno, Lawrence  
Busch, William Frieland, Lourdes Gouveia, and Enzo Mingione**

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**From Columbus to ConAgra: The Globalization of Agriculture and Food.** Edited by Alessandro Bonanno, Lawrence Busch, William Frieland, Lourdes Gouveia, and Enzo Mingione. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994. Photographs, tables, notes, bibliography, index. viii + 294 pp. \$40.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper. (ISBN 0-7006-0661-0).

Despite differing definitions, most scholars agree that the late twentieth century is an age of globalization in agriculture and the food industry. For some, globalization means the elimination of trade barriers; for others it involves the development of international relationships in production and distribution. Globalization, however, is exemplified for all by transnational corporations (TNCs), such as ConAgra, that own and control a variety of world-wide production and distribution systems, thereby controlling millions of workers, manipulating governments, and changing consumption patterns. In contrast to corporations of the past, TNCs essentially exist independently of nation states. Although national and international laws provide basic rules of behavior, TNCs have used capital to transcend the authority of the nation state. Simply put, if a nation imposes too many tax, wage, hour, and environmental restrictions, TNCs move all or part of their operations to another country where such rules do not apply, and their

nations of origin can do little about it. Controllers of global capital, rather than nation states, are making new rules for the agribusiness industry.

The changes in international business practices wrought by TNCs involve more than the creation of new economic and financial systems; they affect social and cultural relationships, mobility, communication, and buying and eating patterns around the world, for both good and ill. Although professing social and environmental responsibility, TNCs are driven by the "bottom line," that is profits; the needs of individuals as well as nation states, consequently, do not always factor into their goals. The globalization of agriculture and food processing, of course, is not an unmitigated evil. Rather, it is a new way to bring land, labor, and capital together on an international scale to reduce production costs and expand markets. TNCs have been remarkably adaptive to the regulations of various nations and skilled at identifying and targeting niche marketing. During the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, TNCs will continue to grow in the absence of integrated political regulations by nation states.

This collection of twelve essays by nineteen eminent sociologists is divided into three parts. The first section discusses the operational strategies of TNCs and their relationship to agriculture. The second uses a case study approach to evaluate the consequences of agribusiness's globalization by profiling developments in Great Britain, Japan, Latin America, and the United States. Part three discusses theoretical issues associated with globalization, such as the limits of action by nation states. Historians, sociologists, economists, and political scientists who are interested in the recent changes in international business will find this study provocative and suggestive for further research. Indeed, this collection of essays will be essential for any scholar interested in the history of agribusiness. **R. Douglas Hurt**, *Center for Agricultural History and Rural Studies, Iowa State University, Ames.*