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A Detailed, Useful Look at Vegetable Markets

Vegetable Markets in the Western Hemisphere.
Edited by Rigoberto Lopez and Leo C Polopolus
Ames Iowa State University Press, 1992, 266 pages,
\$32.95

Reviewed by A. Desmond O'Rourke

This book is an excellent exploration of the major forces shaping vegetable markets in the western hemisphere and, to some extent, around the world. The book is the outcome of a conference on the same theme held at Rutgers University in 1988. The conference organizers did an excellent job of choosing speakers who could address a wide variety of issues and who could also approach topics from differing perspectives.

The book's first section explores vegetable demand changes over time (Hamm) and across socio-demographic groups (McCracken). In Section II, Pierson and Allen demonstrate how the distribution system is adjusting to changes in demand, technology, and trade. Polopolus documents the surprising level of U.S. government intervention in vegetable markets. Schwedel provides an insightful discussion of Mexican government intervention.

The third and fourth sections of the book focus on various aspects of trade in vegetables. Cook examines the increasing integration of the California, Arizona, and Mexican vegetable industries. The next two papers contrast empirical analysis of trade in vegetables (Sparks) with conceptual analysis (Lopez and Pagoulatos). Vertrees and Meyer demonstrate how the Uruguay Round negotiations may impact vegetable trade. A further two papers examine the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) from U.S. (Seale) and the Caribbean (Guardia) perspectives. Both agree that the CBI in vegetables can have only modest economic development impact. A final paper by Martin and Thompson examines the complex linkages between vegetable trade and the labor markets in the United States and Mexico.

Both the main papers and the excellent responses to those papers provide often subtle but valuable insights into the key forces affecting vegetable markets. For example, it is difficult to relate improvements in nutritive intake of vegetables to increases in disappearance because of changes in how and where vegetables are consumed. Also, in discussions of free trade in vegetables, it is important to consider the general welfare benefits of increased trade as well as the industry impacts. A number of contributors comment on the decaying data system and the problems it poses for critical

trade and policy analysis. Pierson and Allen document how the vegetable business is moving from a production/commodity-based system to one where market-oriented strategies will dominate. Also interesting is the role of the National Union of Vegetable Producers (UNPH), in cooperation with the Mexican Government, in controlling exports of fresh Mexican vegetables.

The papers on trade illustrate that trade involves not just commodity producers and sellers on either side of international borders but the political and social agendas of participating and third countries. For example, relocation of California vegetable operations to Mexico in response to less hospitable relations at home may eventually lead to Mexican-owned competing operations. Brader notes that meeting demands for pesticide inspection of imports would require an additional 5,000 inspectors and be "incredibly expensive." Lopez and Pagoulatos demonstrate that pesticide restrictions will lead to reduced trade and higher prices. Martin and Thompson illustrate both the unreliability of data on farm labor availability and the difficulty of predicting how changes in trade policy might affect internal or cross-border availability or price of farm labor, which in turn affects competitiveness of trade partners.

This book will be a valuable source of information and insights for policymakers, industry leaders, economic and market analysts and others interested in the health, environmental, labor, natural resource, or other aspects of vegetable production, consumption, and trade. Many of the chapters would be appropriate readings for graduate or undergraduate trade and marketing classes. Clearly, vegetables will remain an important element of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the CBI, and other hemispheric trade agreements.

The major weakness of the book is one that is out of the control of the authors. Because the contributions were derived from a 1988 conference and had access only to 1987 data, there is little or no coverage of the Canada-US Trade Agreement, NAFTA, or major developments in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). An updated compendium on many of the issues raised in the book would be invaluable. There is also a lack of coverage of the potential role of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile in Western Hemisphere vegetable markets, either as suppliers or as markets. However, these comments are not meant to detract from the usefulness of the comprehensive work.