

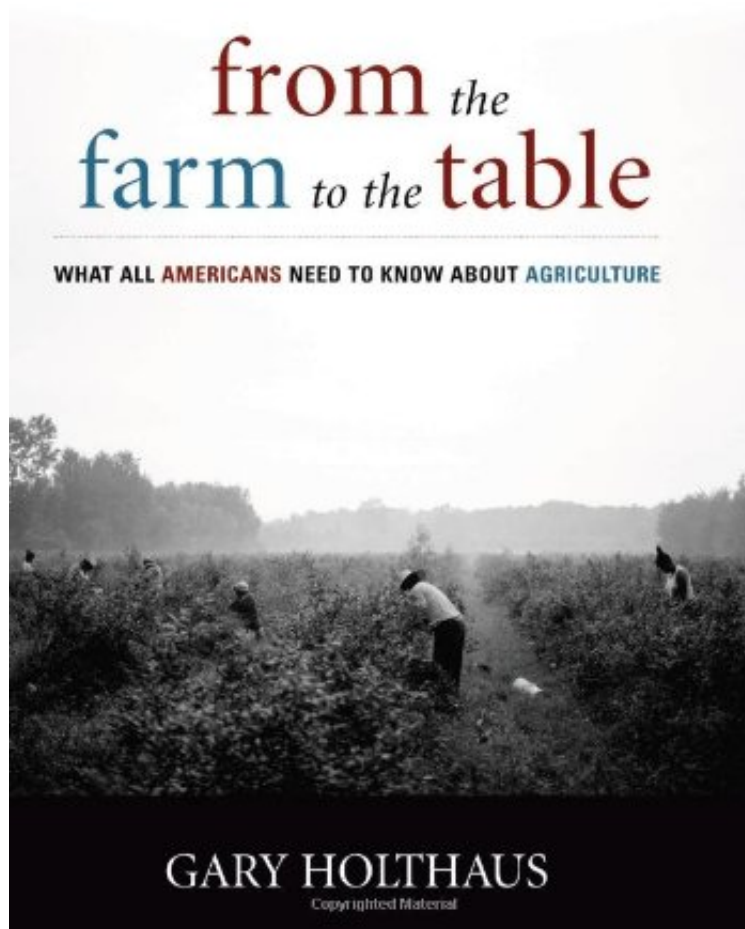
(Free pdf) From the Farm to the Table: What All Americans Need to Know about Agriculture (Clark Lectures)

From the Farm to the Table: What All Americans Need to Know about Agriculture (Clark Lectures)

Gary Holthaus

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#2016760 in Books The University Press of Kentucky 2007-01-05 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.20 x 1.33 x 6.361, 1.67 #File Name: 0813124190384 pages | File size: 78.Mb

Gary Holthaus : From the Farm to the Table: What All Americans Need to Know about Agriculture (Clark Lectures) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised From the Farm to the Table: What All Americans Need to Know about Agriculture (Clark Lectures):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. In an age of climate change and multinational corporations seeking...By Daniel T. Benedict Jr. In an age of climate change and multinational corporations seeking control of the planet and food production, Holthaus takes us on a tour of upper Midwest farms and let's us eavesdrop on conversations with

farmers, migrant workers, and agrarians seeking to save the soils, preserve wildlife habitat, and grow and share food on a more human scale. The book exposes the so called "free trade" agreements that are devastating small farmers all over the world. Americans hardly think about where their food comes from and how it comes to be on their tables. This book is an eye opener!

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Excellent overview of farm to fork

By Christine Heinrichs

Gary Holthaus' book has the best of non-fiction accounts of human drama and the solid facts of a reference resource. It is a valuable addition to the collection of all of us seriously pursuing the challenges facing modern agriculture. The book is the first in the University Press of Kentucky's Culture of the Land: A Series in the New Agrarianism. It was written as a collaborative project of the Experiment in Rural Cooperation and The Rural Writers Center in Plainview, Minnesota. Mr. Holthaus is administrative director of the Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society in LaMoore, North Dakota and one of the holders of the University of Minnesota School of Agriculture Endowed Chair in Agricultural Systems. He has lived in Red Wing, Minnesota since 1995. He divides his subject into five sections, beginning with a brief overview of the situation and the story the rest of the book tells. He then settles in with individual stories of farmers and their farms. He and the reader sit down with them in the café (dinners range from \$6.25 to \$6.95, homemade apple or banana pie for dessert), at the kitchen table sipping coffee and riding a four-wheeler in the rain out for a tour around the farm. Farmers tell him about their work and their lives, and how modern economics and policies are battering their livelihoods. Mr. Holthaus lets these farmers tell their stories of how increasing consolidation of farming under corporate ownership, factory farming of livestock, monoculture crops supported by federal subsidies and other factors are making life on the farm more of a struggle. "Your question is, who is going to benefit the most from this farm program?" one responds. "The chemical and seed companies and the person who buys the corn. It will set them up for six years. And there's no way to educate the people fast enough to stop it." Stewardship, and the personal responsibility they feel for the land, are crucial for these farmers. "I can't change what's happening in the rest of the world, but I can control this farm," says a Minnesota farmer who feels a spiritual obligation to care for the land. In the third section, "Farming in America: Who Cares?" Mr. Holthaus explores the philosophic and spiritual sides of basic issues such as soil erosion, farm working conditions, wages, genetically modified plants and production. He and his sources explain how farming has changed in response to increased contract farming that reduces farmers' freedom, dominated by megamerchants such as Wal-Mart. He weighs the politics of agriculture, currently dominated by transnational corporate interests. "Collaboration among farmers, consumers who care about how their food is grown and processed, and environmentalists may yet create a political constituency that legislators and congresspeople will have to listen to," he concludes. "Those collaborations, including collective bargaining, though difficult and sometimes even painful to achieve, may lead to farmers' getting a bigger share of the agricultural dollar than they do now." Part Four, "It All Works Together, or It Doesn't Work at All," looks at the sociology of farming, both local and global. For every seven farms that go under, one retail store in the neighboring community will close. "We should remind our Chamber of Commerce development committee that the purpose of economic development is not to create jobs but to create prosperity - for the community, not for an industry or two whose corporate profits go elsewhere," he writes. Globally, food security remains elusive. Industrial farms selling subsidized commodity crops undermine prices for crops grown by farmers in developing countries. Pumping more groundwater than is replenished threatens food security in the future. The international agreements and organizations signified by their acronyms, WTO, IMF, NAFTA, CAFTA, FTAA and the World Bank provide arenas for influence by corporate interests. "Even when hunger is growing around the world, steps that could feed the world's impoverished hungry are ignored, undermined, or prohibited by free trade agreements," he writes. He documents the trade agreements and how they play out in the real world of farming and consumers. He identifies as myths the transnational corporations' sales pitches that substitute for economic theory in the chambers in which such agreements are discussed. He makes his case well, which I found all the more discouraging. He salves the dismay with ideas to reverse the economic and political tides: collective bargaining with transnational agriculture corporations, more diversified farms worked with more sustainable techniques, refusing contracts, and being informed and politically active advocates for farming. The concluding section, "Alternative Visions, Hopeful Futures," is a welcome relief after the tough going of the politics of world hunger. And indeed, this book alone is evidence that both producers and consumers of agricultural products can make food different. "Agrarianism is again on the rise," he quotes Eric T. Freyfogle in "The New Agrarianism: Land, Culture and the Community of Life." "The new agrarian values held by farmers you've met in this book, and by those who work with them, are smooth stones for our slingshots against the Goliaths that are now stomping around our world, more vulnerable than they appear," he concludes. An extensive bibliography and detailed index make this a valuable reference and resource as well as an inspiring and touching document. It belongs in the library of anyone who writes about agriculture or who is concerned about where American agriculture is heading.

As with other areas of human industry, it has been assumed that technological progress would improve all aspects of agriculture. Technology would increase both efficiency and yield, or so we thought. The directions taken by technology may have worked for a while, but the same technologies that give us an advantage also create disadvantages. It's now a common story in rural America: pesticides, fertilizers, "big iron" combines, and other costly

advancements may increase speed but also reduce efficiency, while farmers endure debt, dangerous working conditions, and long hours to pay for the technology. Land, livelihood, and lives are lost in an effort to keep up and break even. There is more to this story that affects both the food we eat and our provisions for the future. Too many Americans eat the food on their plates with little thought to its origin and in blind faith that government regulations will protect them from danger. While many Americans might have grown up in farming families, there are fewer family-owned farms with each passing generation. Americans are becoming disconnected from understanding the sources and content of their food. The farmers interviewed in *From the Farm to the Table* can help reestablish that connection. Gary Holthaus illuminates the state of American agriculture today, particularly the impact of globalization, through the stories of farmers who balance traditional practices with innovative methods to meet market demands. Holthaus demonstrates how the vitality of America's communities is bound to the successes and failures of its farmers. In *From the Farm to the Table*, farmers explain how their lives and communities have changed as they work to create healthy soil, healthy animals, and healthy food in a context of often inappropriate federal policy, growing competition from abroad, public misconceptions regarding government subsidies, the dangers of environmental damage and genetically modified crops, and the myths of modern economics. Rather than predicting doom and despair for small American growers, Holthaus shows their hope and the practical solutions they utilize. As these farmers tell their stories, "organic" and "sustainable" farming become real and meaningful. As they share their work and their lives, they reveal how those concepts affect the food we eat and the land on which it's grown, and how vital farming is to the American economy.

"With much love, dedication, and diligence, and through interviews with farmers in Minnesota, Holthaus tells the story of today's agriculture... it is not a pretty picture... This book serves as an eye-opener. Highly recommended." ?Choice"[Holthaus's] book is a comprehensive look at the context of agriculture today and is valuable for urban readers as well as rural people who want to know where their food comes from and how it is produced." ?Dickey County Leader""Rural America is not somehow 'behind us,' a part of a past that is no longer central to our lives. For all of us, Holthaus shows, the thinking of rural people is relevant to the well-being of the nation and far more complex than we have realized. This book provides fresh insight into what is going on in the rural countryside and what farmers themselves have thought about those changes." ?Donald Worster, author of *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*""Farmers all over the world have begun to choose a new path." ?Fred Kirschenmann, Distinguished Fellow for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture""His selected interviewees are all compelling studies." ?Harvard Book Review""Holthaus is a world-class listener, so much so that he is able to bring us farm stories that enlighten and enrich our sphere of knowledge and understanding of agriculture and all that it encompasses." ?Helene Murray, Executive Director, Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture""Holthaus's book tells the story of modern agriculture through engaging interviews with men and women who make a living farming in southeastern Minnesota. In a tone reminiscent of Wendell Berry's *A Place on Earth*, he examines the far-reaching effects of genetically modified organisms, free-trade agreements that nurture 'transnational corporate profit,' dependence on fossil fuel-derived chemicals, and the toll all this has taken on the land and farmers... Recommended for academic agriculture collections." ?Library Journal""When farmers tell their story, there is no end to learning. A solid piece of work in the mosaic of the farming history of our country." ?Claus Sproll, *Lilipoh*""About the Author Gary Holthaus is the author of several books, including *Wide Skies: Finding a Home in the West*, *Circling Back*, and *Unexpected Manna*.