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Biting The Hands That Feed Us: How Fewer, Smarter Laws Would Make Our Food System More Sustainable



Synopsis

Food waste, hunger, inhumane livestock conditions, disappearing fish stocks—these are exactly the kind of issues we expect food regulations to combat. Yet, today in the United States, laws exist at all levels of government that actually make these problems worse. Baylen Linnekin argues that, too often, government rules handcuff America's most sustainable farmers, producers, sellers, and consumers, while rewarding those whose practices are anything but sustainable. *Biting the Hands that Feed Us* introduces readers to the perverse consequences of many food rules. Some of these rules constrain the sale of ugly fruits and vegetables, relegating bushels of tasty but misshapen carrots and strawberries to food waste. Other rules have threatened to treat manure—the lifeblood of organic fertilization—as a toxin. Still other rules prevent sharing food with the homeless and others in need. There are even rules that prohibit people from growing fruits and vegetables in their own yards. Linnekin also explores what makes for a good food law—often, he explains, these emphasize good outcomes rather than rigid processes. But he urges readers to be wary of efforts to regulate our way to a greener food system, calling instead for empowerment of those working to feed us—and themselves—sustainably.

Book Information

Hardcover: 224 pages

Publisher: Island Press (September 15, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1610916751

ISBN-13: 978-1610916752

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars— See all reviews (1 customer review)

Best Sellers Rank: #131,382 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #19 in Books > Law >

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Customer Reviews

We're slicing the food scandal into ever thinner wedges, targeting diets, pesticides, sugar, salt and fat, and now, government interference. *Biting the Hands That Feeds Us* is about how bizarre laws, distorting subsidies, and endangering of the food supply are all rampant, even as

governments claim to safeguard it. There is insanity whereby pure organic skim milk cannot be sold with that name because it does not have added vitamin A. (Then it wouldn't be organic, would it.) There are places in the USA where it is illegal to water plants with runoff from your own roof (Colorado) and where feeding the homeless is a crime. It is most unfortunate that in an era of decreasing budgets and increased mandates, agencies like the FDA and USDA spend their time dreaming up new regulation they admit address no problem. Not only are the agencies unable to inspect and enforce as required, but they promote gigantic amounts of waste, such as the three million tons of spent grain that brewers normally donate to farmers as cattle feed. (They've been doing this for thousands of years.) By requiring the spent grain to be refrigerated, the whole supply chain suddenly ceases to exist. Biting the Hands that Feed Us is packed with such ill-conceived regulations. To me there is no more absurd rule than the nitrite rule. In the 1970s there was a national uproar and scandal over the amount of nitrites and nitrates in processed meat, particularly in bacon. It was dangerous, and consumers sought refuge in nitrite-free meats. Today, the FDA shuts down artisanal makers of processed meats for not having nitrates or nitrites in their meats. The book is best when it details absurd laws being enforced, such as officers ripping any food-bearing plants from front yards (Tulsa).

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