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Global
Food Ethics
Project

COMMISSIONED PAPER ABSTRACTS

7 Projects to Make Progress on Ethics and Global Food Security in 5 Years

Commissioned Paper Abstracts

NUTRITION AND HUMAN HEALTH

White Paper:

1. Ethical Issues for Human Nutrition in the Context of Global Food Security

Jessica Fanzo

By 2050, the global population is expected to reach nine billion people, more than doubling the need for nutritious food and creating unprecedented stresses on ecosystems and the environment. Underlying this dilemma is the unanswered question of how to feed nine billion people *well*, in ways congruent with positive social, health, environmental and economic outcomes. Many complex challenges threaten our capacity to accomplish that goal, including population growth and extreme poverty, along with the rising prices of food, fuel and fertilizer, and intense social conflicts and divisions over what constitutes a safe, sustainable and nutritious food supply. Feeding the growing population *well* while treading lightly on the environment, in an era of climate change, changing energy-intensive food patterns, water scarcity, land degradation, the contentious debate over genetically modified organisms, biofuels, and land grabbing adds another complex dimension to the task. One of the greatest areas of debate is how we will *secure and provide plentiful, healthy and nutritious food for all, and to do so in an environmentally sustainable and safe manner while addressing the co-existing double burden of under- and overnutrition, such as nutrition-related infectious and chronic non-communicable diseases*. The food security directive often focuses solely on ensuring the world is producing and consuming enough *calories in bulk* to reduce hunger and safeguard survival, as opposed to a goal that includes nutrition for well-being and development. To advance the dialogue, it is necessary to address the ethical questions that swirl around integrating nutrition into the food security paradigm. Key ethical issues to consider include how to make societal decisions and define values about food security that impact nutrition outcomes, and the ethical trade-offs between environmental sustainability and ensuring that individual dietary and nutritional needs are met. It is also important to consider questions such as: What ethical obligations do we have with respect to the consumption of certain nutritious foods such as resource-intensive foods from animal sources? What are the obligations and responsibilities of different public and private actors towards realizing the right to adequate nutrition? Finally, what are the moral obligations of stakeholders to ensure that the global population has access to a nutritious diet? Such complex questions underscore the need to articulate the broader ethical landscape of the nutrition debate within global food security.

Short Papers:

2. Response to Jessica Fanzo’s “Ethical Issues for Human Nutrition in the Context of Global Food Security”

Anne Barnhill

This response paper elaborates on three themes from Jessica Fanzo’s illuminating paper, “Ethical Issues for Human Nutrition in the Context of Global Food Security.” First, I draw a parallel between debates about priority-setting in nutrition interventions and debates about priority-setting in global health, a topic of ongoing inquiry by ethicists. While it’s tempting to think health priorities should be set on the basis of cost-effectiveness alone, many ethicists dispute this presumption, arguing that we must also consider equity (the fair distribution of opportunities and outcomes across people). Second, ethicists and food activists have argued that we should see specific food-related goals in a larger context. Food security is one among many food-related human goods; so, too, nutrition and health are just some of the goods that food provides, along with pleasure, comfort and a variety of personal and social goods. Acknowledging that food has value in many ways, do certain food-related goods (such as food security, nutrition and health) nonetheless have particular moral importance because of their fundamental value? Third, I survey some of the ethical concerns that have been registered with government interventions promoting a healthy diet. One set of ethical objections which have generated significant debate among ethicists concern individual autonomy, choice and self-determination.

3. Risk Evaluation and Occupational Exposure in Agriculture

Ettore Capri

Nearly 30% of the world’s labour force is employed in agriculture. Recent years have witnessed an increase in awareness from policy-makers on the adverse effects of occupational exposure of agricultural workers to pesticides. European risk assessment of the pesticide authorisation process does not include socio-economic evaluation, except in a very few cases. Also, socio-behavioural aspects are not addressed. Commonly, it is argued that engagement in unsafe pesticide use and disposal practices is the result of a lack of knowledge and misperceptions of the risks associated with pesticides among operators and workers. However, explaining the risk posed by pesticide use without exploring the underlying reasons for particular attitudes about pesticide risks could limit the efficacy of the risk analysis process. We underline the importance of analysing, from a social science perspective, the knowledge and risk perception of pesticides, and to investigating the principles and socio-behavioural factors that need to be taken into account in the risk analysis.

4. Ethical Issues for Food Safety in the Context of Global Food Security

Clare Narrod

Ensuring the safety of food as a preventive measure is on the agenda of governments and the private sector. Food safety is a fundamental component of food security, but ensuring food safety comes at a cost. Small scale producers and consumers often cannot afford the additional costs until their incomes increase. This response raises ethical issues for food

safety in the context of global food security and highlights roles for public and private sectors might play.

FARMLAND ACCESS AND SMALLHOLDER AGRICULTURE

White Paper:

5. Farmland Access Ethics, Land Reform, and Food Ethics

Michael Lipton and Yashar Saghai

The focus of this paper is on ethical issues surrounding farmland redistribution through land reform to increase food security. As the main agent of land reform is the state, we explore the overlapping territories of moral and political philosophy. The ambition of this paper is two-fold. Our first goal is to provide an overview of evidence about facts and consequences of land distribution and redistribution and to compare it to feasible alternatives. Our conclusion is that private land redistribution (but emphatically not collectivization) in low-income and most middle-income countries with very unequal land control has not only raised poor people's share of income, but also accelerated, or at worst not decelerated, growth. It has reduced poverty and inequality, and increased equality of opportunity and food security. Our second goal is to clarify some crucial issues in farmland access ethics by exploring the roots of the moral case for and against land reform: the competing claims of equality of opportunity and incumbent legitimacy based on property rights. The received view is that this fundamental moral disagreement on land reform is intractable. We disagree. We identify some morally relevant considerations that, to the extent they apply to the case at hand, alter the weight assigned to equality of opportunity or legitimate incumbency claims. We argue that advocates of these competing claims can endorse, minimally converge on, or at least not reject this approach that is responsive to their claims. If we are right, it is then possible to deliberate on the moral permissibility and desirability of land reform on a case-by-case basis.

Short Papers:

6. Between State Policies and Social Movements Does the Smallholder Have a Voice?

Bina Agarwal

This paper is largely based on: Agarwal, Bina. 2014. "Food Sovereignty, Food Security and Democratic Choice: Critical Contradictions, Difficult Conciliations." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 41(6): 1247-1268. [doi: 10.1080/03066150.2013.876996](https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2013.876996)

Focusing on the role of smallholder agriculture in feeding the world, this paper argues that both state policies and social movements raise a common ethical concern—how much say do the farmers themselves have in deciding their futures? It emphasizes that charting pathways to global food security that are ethically defensible and environmentally sustainable will require creating conditions and institutions that respect individual freedoms when defining collective responsibilities

7. Contract Farming and the Global Land Grab

Madison Powers

This paper addresses some ethical issues presented by two trends in the globalization of agricultural supply chains. The first trend is the global adoption of contract labor models prominent within the garment industry and within the US agricultural sector. The central problem addressed is the prospect that widespread use of contract labor arrangements will result in unjust exploitative transactions. There are many theories of what makes a transaction or the social practices within which they are embedded exploitative, and so some suggestions for answering that question in this particular context are explored. The second trend is what has been labeled as the global land grab. The paper considers whether the practice of foreign direct investment in purchases or leases of agricultural leases might result in the imposition of substantial negative externalities for non-contracting parties and the discussion of such externalities is framed in light of what is widely known as the natural resource curse.

THE GLOBAL AGRIFOOD SYSTEM

White Paper:

8. Food Security and the Global Agrifood System:

Ethical Issues in Historical and Sociological Perspective

John Wilkinson

The world food system was developed under the auspices of free trade. Very quickly, though, free trade was countered with protectionism in the form of policies favoring national and cultural food security. The traumas of World War led to the introduction of international commitments on individual rights with respect to labor and the right to freedom from hunger. From the 1970s, the pendulum swung back in favor of free trade, this time provoking a response in the form of fair and ethical trade. The introduction of new food markets promoted by social movements—as in the 1980s, when values were attached to the conditions and processes of production rather than the product itself—imbued agriculture and food markets with ethical attributes.

At the same time, international forums began to adopt an increasingly holistic concept of food security, pointing to the need for policies that were no longer reducible to food aid. For a period, broader ethical values were identified only with alternative food networks. From the turn of the new millennium, under the collective umbrella of economic, social and environmental sustainability, global agrifood players adopted them as the triple bottom line for all agricultural and food markets. While a new consensus has been achieved on the centrality of sustainability and food security, a range of tensions and conflicts persist over the relation between food security and trade, investment, biofuels, producer and consumer rights, animal welfare, nature and the environment. While each of these issues is the subject of specific debates an underlying tension persists between those who view food security as essentially a productive challenge to respond to increased demand under new restraints and those for whom the central question is the need for change in the food consumption model.

Short Papers:

9. Principles and Perceptions: the Invisible Hands in Food Security Outcomes

Bina Agarwal

Access to adequate food and nutrition is usually mediated by social perceptions about deservedness and social norms. Due to these ‘invisibles’, which are often gender biased, universal principles that tend to guide distribution—such as contributions, needs and abilities—while seemingly neutral, can lead to iniquitous and ethnically unjust outcomes. Access to food is a basic human right and constitutes a foundational ethical concern. Indeed, some countries such as India have even passed a Right to Food Act. Access to food may be defined broadly both in terms of consumption and the ability to produce or procure food.

I argue below that underlying the issue of access to food (or another basic need) are some universal principles followed by societies. But the interpretation of those principles, and hence the outcomes of their application, are mediated in critical ways by social perceptions which can also amalgamate into social norms. Perceptions have implications, especially for observed gender inequalities in access to food, both in its distribution within families and in women’s ability to procure food via production or markets. Efforts to change perceptions must therefore constitute a central element in ensuring more equitable outcomes.

10. Brazilian Agriculture and Ethical Issues Associated with Food Security

Antônio Salazar P. Brandão

Ethical concerns regarding food production are viewed from the perspective of Brazilian agriculture. Production in the country will increase by sizeable amounts in consequence of growth of world population and income. Choices that will be made affect consumer rights, producer rights, exports of food, production of biofuels and have impacts on the environment, areas where ethical debates are significant. The fact that the country has a relatively abundant supply of resources contributes to reduce the tensions among competing objectives. Social movements will be important to protect rights and the environment, but government policies have to be consistent with stated principles.

11. Comments on John Wilkinson’s “Food Security and the Global Agrifood System: Ethical Issues in Historical and Sociological Perspective”

David Groenfeldt

In his analysis of the ethics implicit in global food trade policies, Wilkinson (2014) describes an historical evolution starting from colonially-imposed free trade through the accretion of ethical concerns ranging from workers’ rights to environmental issues. I argue that this inductive approach to revealing underlying ethics is largely constrained to “headline” issues, and propose instead a systematic deductive approach, based on a conceptual framework of agricultural ethics. This approach helps identify a more comprehensive set of ethical issues embedded in agriculturally-relevant policies along four dimensions: environmental, social/cultural, economic, and governance. Meaningful evaluation of the policies from an ethical perspective, however, presumes referencing

against an ethical prescription. Thus, the development of ethical prescriptions becomes a logical pre-requisite for assessing policy alternatives.

FARM ANIMAL WELFARE

12. Animal Welfare and Intensive Animal Production: A New Model for Change

David Fraser

Portions of this article are based on: Fraser, David. 2014. "Could Animal Production Become a Profession?" *Livestock Science* 169: 155-162. [doi:10.1016/j.livsci.2014.09.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.livsci.2014.09.017)

In the industrialized countries, the intensification of animal production has been widely perceived as a shift from agrarian to industrial production, and the resulting public concerns and policy responses have closely paralleled those seen during the Industrial Revolution. During the Industrial Revolution, public concern arose over the decline of rural life and the welfare of workers in factories, and a major policy response consisted of legislated controls on factory environments and hours of work. Similarly, concern over intensive animal production has focused on the decline of small-scale farms and the welfare of animals, and a major policy response has involved standards and regulations for the animals' physical environment and time in confinement. However, such basic welfare outcomes as lameness, injuries and survival show extremely wide variation between farms using the same type of physical environment, presumably because animal welfare is strongly influenced not only by the physical environment, but also by the skill, knowledge and commitment of animal producers and staff. A system of professional performance standards would be a more promising way to promote animal welfare in specialized, intensive production systems. In non-intensive systems (which prevail in less industrialized countries), a range of other actions, some involving international agencies and corporations, may be of value.

13. Farm Animal Welfare and Human Health

Alan M. Goldberg

The paper examines the relationship between animal welfare, industrial farm animal production and human health consequences. The data suggest that when animal welfare of land-based farm animals is compromised, there are resulting significant negative human health consequences as a result of the environmental degradation, the use of non-therapeutic levels of antibiotics for growth promotion, and the consequences of intensification. In water-based farm animal production, many new systems are resulting in a product that actually protects the environment and can be done at industrial levels without the use antibiotics.

FOOD NEED, DEMAND, AND SUPPLY

White Paper:

14. Global Food Security and the Ethics of Ensuring Adequate Food Production Capacity

Kenneth G. Cassman and Yashar Saghai

Determining how much food ought to be produced and what farming methods are most likely to secure a reliable source of the right kind of foods for a growing population conditions virtually all other debates in food security and food systems. Some oppose “production” approaches to food security that favor conventional agriculture and instead promote “distribution” approaches that are more sympathetic to alternative agricultural methods. We believe this polarity in framing the debate is deeply misleading. All those who care about justice in the distribution of food also have responsibility to take seriously the need to achieve adequate levels of production and select the most appropriate agricultural methods based on a combination of values and the best evidence available. In this paper, we argue that indeed crop production capacity needs to be substantially increased to feed the world, and we discuss empirical, conceptual, methodological, and ethical issues surrounding “sustainable” or “ecological” intensification. We conclude by calling for a focus on outputs (in a broad sense, to include economic, environmental, and social performance criteria and metrics) rather than inputs (source or type of nutrients and pesticides, or GMO versus conventionally bred seed) from agricultural systems as the basis for evaluating optimal solutions for meeting global food security in an ethical manner.