

Sustainable Food Consumption: A Practice-Based Approach

Elizabeth Sargant Wageningen Academic Publishers, Netherlands, 2014, 174 pp., ISBN 9789086862634

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Reviewed by Debbie Prescott & Angela Colliver, Angela Colliver Consulting Services

This is a high quality book that deals with the complexity of issues around sustainable development in everyday food consumption. It documents a PhD student's research while studying sustainable food consumption in the Netherlands. The chapters step out the student's research aims, questions, topics, theoretical framework, research methodology, literature study, results, and conclusions.

Chapter 1 sets the scene of the student's research and her interest in the consumer, everyday food consumption, and sustainability. It describes the current agro-food system and its components; the alternative food sector and its networks, which include products such as organic food, fair trade products, local and seasonal produce; practical actions that can lead to eating less red meat and food wastage; and systems that include farmers markets, direct producer-retailer-food service providers, regional delivery services, and community-supported agriculture initiatives.

Food retail and services are also explored in this chapter, and the reader is introduced to the Dutch market and its offerings, which include organic supermarkets, organic convenience stores in train stations and shopping centres, organic discounters, organic wine and tea shops, organic butchers and bakers, natural cosmetic and textile shops. Of note are their varying marketing techniques that feature animal, environmental and trade welfare; ethical and sustainable production; and health benefits.

This chapter also describes sustainable food procurement principles, a context that features strongly in the second half of the book. The focus here is less on the individual and more on the interaction between consumers and catering providers, as well as the consumption and procurement behaviours that are seen to occur in Dutch lunch practices with canteens.

Chapter 2 details the author's understandings of the many theories and studies about food consumption. It also details the theoretical framework, different research areas, and methodologies used in this study.

Chapter 3 provides a more in-depth discussion of the position of the consumer in sustainable development of the agro-food sector. This chapter considers some of the striking characteristics of food consumption today and looks at the many and varied features of food practices today, including the use of convenience foods and foods made by someone else (i.e., the food industry, food services or retail outlets). The author suggests that because consumers (in Holland) eat meals made by someone else that it is therefore important that sustainable food alternatives are made available and are accessible at the many varied locations where food is ordered, shopped for, and eaten.

Chapter 4 presents the results from the author's survey held with Dutch consumers about their consumption choices and shopping practices in the attempt to better understand their values in relation to food and sustainable forms of consumption.

Chapters 5 and 6 delve deeper into out-of-home food consumption and explore food consumption in canteens in businesses and universities, and the way the catering sector influences the lives of Dutch people of all ages and from all walks of life. It is interesting to note that around half of all Dutch employees have access to canteen facilities, which amounts to approximately 2 million meals being served in Dutch workplace canteens every day. The catering study is discussed over the two chapters in some depth as the author investigates both the opportunities and challenges in the procurement and provisioning of sustainable food in these workplace canteens.

This book offers interesting perspectives on food consumption and thoroughly explores the question of how sustainable food consumption can be encouraged.

Sustainable Food Consumption: A Practice-Based Approach is strongly recommended for tertiary courses in environmental policy, urban sustainability, urban studies, planning, geography, and marketing. Its quality emanates from a well-ordered structure and well-paced text that carries its story by providing an appropriate level of detail, with links and connections made between the chapters. It is, in fact, the 11th volume of an environmental policy series.

Reviewer Biography

Angela is the Director of Angela Colliver Consulting Services. She has written over 30 educational resources for schools, particularly in relation to using student-centred and interactive teaching and learning approaches. She uses a teaching and learning model based on the current philosophy that knowledge is a social construction, highlighting how people's ideas and explanations create new knowledge. The teaching and learning model is also based on the idea that learning is a process of personal construction and reconstruction of ideas, rather than the absorption of a hierarchy of taught facts and concepts. Her most recent work is creating curriculum-linked resources designed to introduce young people in Australian schools to the production of food and fibre and primary industries in Australia, which emphasise the relationship between food and fibre industries, individuals, communities, the environment, and our economy.

The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia

Bill Gammage Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2011, 434 pp., ISBN 9781743311325
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Reviewed by Debbie Prescott, Angela Colliver & Sandra Nichols, Education for Sustainability. Email sandra@educationforsustainability.com.au

This is a wonderful book that brings together the two Australian Curriculum cross-curricula themes of sustainability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture. According to the author, Aborigines managed the Australian land mass for thousands of years in a way that preserved both the ecology of their country and the