

Frances Moore Lappé: Farming for a Small Planet

When it came out in 1971, Frances Moore Lappé's "Diet for a Small Planet" was truly revolutionary, an immediate handbook for those of us engaged personally and institutionally in changing one of the most basic behavior models of the human species--how we eat.

Like many of us at that time, I was already well on the way to leaving behind the meat-and-potatoes habit I'd been indoctrinated to as a child, already aware of the massive destruction caused worldwide by industrial agribusiness and its unsustainable reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, aware of the waste of soil, water and other natural resources that accompanied production of livestock and feeds on land that might be better used for growing grains and other human foods.

The genocidal and ecocidal use of Agent Orange in Vietnam had made all too clear the disgusting relationships between Green Revolution agribusiness and the economic-political suppression of third-world people in other countries as well as those in Appalachia and other third-world pockets of the US.

The Green Revolution pushed by the Eisenhower and later US administrations was fueled by the moral imperative to feed a hungry world--something we were repeatedly told was not possible through old-fashioned smallholder organic methods, but required high inputs of industrial products and massive plots of monocultural production.

In Latin America, for instance, we were told, it required conversion of age-old inefficient, multi-holder subsistence agriculture to chemical-intensive production of livestock and other export crops under control of a centralized, capitalized, hierarchical system that fit well with the elitist dictatorship politics Washington and Wall St. just happened to support.

Lappé's work gave the lie to all that. She showed not only how chemical mega-farming was killing the land and the people (something we'd already begun to understand thanks to the pioneering work of Rachel Carson, J.J. Rodale, and others), but how the chief culprit was the emphasis on meat production, the largely unquestioned assumption that meat was essential for human nutrition.

For centuries, especially in the Western nations, meat had been known as an elite privilege; for the lower classes, a sometimes thing which became a standard part of working class diets in the industrial era more as a mark of economic status than of nutritional need.

Lappé's book (and her widely-published essays preceding it) clearly explained how non-meat diets, in fact the common diets of most people throughout history, through simple combinations of grains and legumes, were nutritionally and ecologically not only sufficient but in many ways superior to the meat-based regimens we were increasingly addicted to.

I was very glad to see the article here, in which Lappé, one of the key figures in the ecological revolution we are still engaged in, brings us up to date on the science, the debate, and the ethical

issues. It's good to know that she's still with us, fighting the good fight.

<https://greattransition.org/publication/farming-for-a-small-planet>