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# Consumers and Citizens in the Global Agrifood System: The Cases of New Zealand and South Africa in the Global Red Meat Chain

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## CONSUMERS AND CITIZENS IN THE GLOBAL AGRIFOOD SYSTEM: THE CASES OF NEW ZEALAND AND SOUTH AFRICA IN THE GLOBAL RED MEAT CHAIN

*Keiko Tanaka and Elizabeth Ransom*

With the rapid growth in studies of globalization and mass culture (e.g., Ritzer 1992), social studies of agriculture and food, or agrifood studies, have begun to examine social relations and practices surrounding agricultural production and food consumption in the context of rapid capital concentration in the global agrifood industry (e.g., Bonanno et al. 1994; Goodman and Watts 1997; McMichael 1998). Within the global agrifood system, however, there are tremendous variations in the ways in which actors, from farm to dinner table, are linked together. This is because biochemical and ecological characteristics of food items often, though not always, define where, when, and how these items can be grown, processed, and distributed (for example, wheat versus tomatoes). Therefore, many agrifood scholars (e.g., Bonanno and Constance 1996; Busch et al. 1991; Dixon 1999; Friedland 1984, 2001; Heffernan 1984) use commodity chain analysis as a means of conducting research on different agrifood products. By following a given food item from farm to dinner table, these scholars examine how the organizations that produce, circulate, and regulate a given commodity are arranged in society.

With few exceptions (e.g., Dixon 1999; Long and Villarreal 1998), however, many commodity chain studies tend to privilege economic relationships more than any other type of social relationship, and therefore producers and consumers are conceptualized as merely economic categories (Krippner 2001). Very little effort has been made in the literature to question the

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conceptualization of the categories *producers* and *consumers*, what classifies them into these categories, and who constructs these categories.

We argue that in the highly globalized agrifood system, the categories of producers and consumers are elusive because very few countries in the world are fully self-sufficient in food production. Even if self-sufficient, most countries, including the United States, rely on imports to ensure the availability of a wide range of food products year round (e.g., coffee and bananas for U.S. consumers). Moreover, farmers and food companies in some countries may rely on consumers overseas more than on consumers in their own countries for their livelihood. To understand how the global agrifood system operates, it is therefore important for us to ask, who produces our food? Who are the consumers of the foods that “our” farmers and food companies produce?

This chapter aims to show that the process of changing rules within the capitalist market system, specifically meat safety governance reform in New Zealand and South Africa, raises profound obstacles for human agency, yet opens new spaces for conceptualizing who participates in promoting change. Agency and structure are complex concepts with dueling tensions that alter the form and substance (as Wright and Middendorf argue in their Introduction to this volume) of individual and collective action in the red meat commodity chains of these two countries. We show that, far from being monolithic, the ways in which capitalism and a changing agrifood structure affect actors in a commodity chain, and the ways in which these actors respond, vary across time and space. We hope to make clear the ways in which structures affect agency, but we also aim to show how structural changes open new opportunities for agency.

The definition of agency presented in other chapters in this volume—the active reflexive choice of individuals or collectivities—requires researchers to differentiate between intended and unintended, conscious and unconscious actions. We conceptualize *agency* slightly differently, so as to allow a focus on actions and the consequences of acts. We argue that the emphasis of empirical investigation needs to be shifted from intentions and motivations to tools and mechanisms that facilitate actors’ ability to act. In other words, such individual capacities need to be situated in a web of relationships that constrain or enable action. This kind of analysis exposes how various types of food networks (e.g., export-dependent versus domestic commercial networks) in a given commodity chain collide and converge—creating new allies and conflicts and simultaneously redefining the role of each actor in both local and global agrifood markets.

In this chapter, there are three interrelated but distinct types of food

networks surrounding red meat: export-oriented, domestic commercial, and informal. By focusing on changes in the meat safety governance system in New Zealand and South Africa, this chapter will show the fluid, unstable, and ambiguous nature of producers and consumers as categories in these three networks. Producers construct their consumers and act to respond to the needs of these constructed consumers, not necessarily to the needs of those who actually consume their products. Thus, we will deconstruct the category of consumers in order to discuss how agency is constructed and implicated through negotiations to reform the meat safety regime. Our case studies show how each actor in the red meat chain differentiates *consumers* and *citizens* and uses these categories to justify their actions in meat safety governance reform in their nation.

### Consumers Versus Citizens in Global Reform of Meat Safety

Today, a slice of beefsteak or lamb chop that most of us eat for dinner in the United States is unlikely to come from cattle or sheep raised on a family farm in our area. It may not even come from our country. This is because a relatively small number of large multinational firms in the United States, Europe, and Japan tend to dominate the meat trade in industrialized countries, controlling the distribution of meat from feedlots to grocers (Dyck and Nelson 2003). At the same time, we have begun to hear about a series of meat safety scares caused by food-borne pathogens, such as *E. coli* O157:H7, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or mad cow disease), and avian influenza virus H5N1 (bird flu), that threaten our health and the viability of our agrifood economy. Some (see, for example, Walters 2003; Schlosser 2002) attribute an increase in these diseases to certain practices (e.g., BSE caused by feeding cows with ruminant remains) and mechanisms associated with intensive production of agriculture and concentration of food distribution. They point out that when food contamination does occur, it reaches more people in a shorter period of time (e.g., meat contaminated with *E. coli* O157:H7). What can we do to protect “our” meat from such deadly pathogens? Should our goal be public health or economic stability—or both?

#### CONSUMERS VS. CITIZENS

When we discuss the food system, especially creating change in the food system, we are confronted with the fact that everyone who participates in the

food system is simultaneously a citizen and a consumer. Gabriel and Lang (1995, 175) recognize that the citizen is generally a political concept, "defining individuals standing within a state and a community, according them rights and responsibilities." The consumer, by contrast, is an economic concept; individuals "need not be members of a community, nor do they have to act on its behalf . . . consumers operate in impersonal markets, where they can make choices unburdened by guilt or social obligations" (174). Marsden, Flynn, and Harrison (2000, 47) show the usefulness of differentiating citizens from consumers in understanding changes in the role of the nation-state in food governance, and consequently in citizenship rights to food, as "the legitimation of social and political claims made on the part of the people." They point out that in the past two decades the traditional role of the state as regulator of both production and consumption practices has declined, as more privatized and differentiated forms of rights to food provision have increased. This change in food regulation facilitates a shift from citizens to consumers in the agrifood system.

Today, consumers are increasingly differentiated by how much they are willing to spend on food (e.g., store-brand tomato sauce sold at a national chain store versus gourmet-brand organic tomato sauce sold at a specialty food store). Often, there is little *totality* (or coherence) in the behaviors of individual and collective consumers. Many organic and local food consumers also continue to buy conventional food. Thus agrifood commodity chains have experienced a shift from producing for the assumed *citizen* to producing for multiple *consumers*.

In consumer-oriented production, certain food products are marketed using labels that identify special categories, including animal welfare, environmental sustainability, and fair trade, to name a few. Yet these issues are relevant to citizens and not merely to consumers, because they raise the question of how to create a better society (Brom 2000). On the one hand, in a global consumer culture, as Gabriel and Lang caution, *consumers* are encouraged to be atomized individuals with little interest in promoting a common good for a larger community. On the other hand, *citizens* are needed to participate in the global public debates over what constitutes a good agrifood system and to act collectively to reform institutional mechanisms for governing the existing system.

For example, after the massive outbreaks of *E. coli* O157:H7 in the United States in 1993 (see Juska et al. 2000; PBS 2002) and of BSE in the United Kingdom in the early 1990s (see Draper and Green 2002; Millstone and van Zwanenberg 2002), some consumers chose to express their concerns publicly and

collectively demanded changes in the nation's meat safety regulations. As Draper and Green pointed out (2002, 611) in the case of the UK, such active public engagement reconstructed "*consumers*, who could avoid risks through making informed choices," as "*citizens*, not only reacting to information about risk but also having an obligation to contribute to policy formation." The transformation of consumers into citizens affected not only consumers, who could afford to demand change through their purchasing decisions, but all citizens in the UK, regardless of differences in their purchasing power. In both the United States and the UK, after months of negotiations between these concerned citizens and key actors representing the interests of the agrifood industry and the national governments, a new framework of food safety governance emerged that relies on tools such as the hazard analysis and critical control point (HACCP) system to manage potential food safety risk. In short, this new food safety framework was the outcome of actions that express the agency of diverse actors in the agrifood system, each with different sets of economic interests, political motivations, and ideological perspectives.

#### HACCP AND THE REORDERING OF THE AGRIFOOD SECTOR

By the late 1990s, both government and industry actors in many industrialized, and some developing, countries had begun adopting the new framework of food safety governance, partly to respond to public concerns with food safety issues within their countries and partly to maintain their access to global agrifood trade (Roberts and Unnevehr 2003). As the HACCP-based food safety governance became incorporated as a new structural feature of the global agrifood market, new opportunities became available for some actors, while others confronted new constraints.

This is because food safety governance reform reorders the social relations and the distribution of power among actors in the agrifood system, both in a given country and between countries. A given food safety regulation classifies people (e.g., "farmers," "retailers"), organizations (e.g., "Ministry of Food," "Food Safety Inspection Service"), equipment (e.g., "meat recovery equipment"), tools (e.g., "butcher knife"), plants (e.g., "grain plants"), and animals (e.g., "meat animals") into distinctive categories, each with (re)assigned roles and responsibilities. Then, individual actors in a given classification (e.g., farmers, processors) are furthered differentiated into hierarchical groups based on their financial, technical, and moral capacity to adhere to these regulations. Food safety governance with a set of regulatory measures and procedures, such as the HACCP system, therefore becomes an important institution of

discipline and surveillance (Foucault 1979) that determines who can be included and excluded from a particular market, whether local or global.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Pathogen Reduction/HACCP Act of 1996 exemplifies this kind of classification and differentiation, especially in terms of distributing power among both domestic and international actors. This act requires that slaughter/packinghouse premises wishing to sell products in the United States operate under their own risk-management plan (called HACCP), which identifies, monitors, and controls known biological, physical, and chemical hazards (Juska et al. 2000). While the United States has no jurisdiction over slaughter/packinghouses in other countries, most major meat-producing and trading companies outside the United States adopted the HACCP system, largely in order to retain access to the U.S. market—the world's single largest export and import market for meat. However, the HACCP requirement involves additional costs (e.g., upgrading equipment) and tasks (e.g., frequently checking water temperature) in production, and therefore raises the price of meat products and puts plants with limited resources at a disadvantage (Ollinger, Moore, and Chandran 2004).

Both New Zealand and South Africa are meat-producing countries that have been greatly affected by the enactment of the 1996 Pathogen Reduction/HACCP Act. As Table 10.1 shows, New Zealand and South Africa play very different roles in the global red meat chain. Although New Zealand ranks second in the world for mutton (mature sheep) and lamb (sheep under twelve months of age) production, compared with their competitors, the levels of beef and veal (meat from cows under three months of age) production in New Zealand and South Africa are low (FAO 2003). In 2003, for example, the world's two largest beef and veal producers, the United States and Brazil, produced 12 million and 7.4 million metric tons, respectively. In contrast, New Zealand and South Africa each produced less than 0.6 million metric tons, making them thirteenth and twelfth in the world's beef and veal production (USDA-FAS 2003).

What makes the case of New Zealand unique, however, is that approximately 80 percent of its beef is consumed in more than eighty different countries (New Zealand Meat 2003a), making it the world's fifth-largest exporter (USDA-FAS 2003); and 90 percent of the nation's lamb is consumed in more than one hundred countries (New Zealand Meat 2003b). In 2000, New Zealand exports of cattle and sheep meat, edible offal, and other animal by-products were worth NZ\$4 billion, or one-seventh of the nation's total exports (NZMAF 2003). In other words, New Zealanders are not necessarily the most important consumers for the red meat industry in New Zealand.

In contrast, South Africa imported 37,000 metric tons of beef and veal (USDA-FAS 2003) and 34,192 metric tons of mutton and lamb (FAO 2003). Yet the case of South Africa illustrates opportunities and constraints in transforming the agrifood sector in a developing country. The latest projections estimate that by 2020, with rapid population growth and urbanization, 63 percent of meat consumed worldwide will be produced in developing countries (Haan et al. 2001). Higher-income developing countries with a fairly developed agricultural sector like South Africa are expected to lead livestock production in the developing world.

Although New Zealand and South Africa play very different roles in the global red meat chain, both countries have recently begun to transform the institutional framework for regulating meat safety, largely as part of the effort to harmonize with food safety regulations accepted by the United States, Canada, and European countries. More important, as Table 10.2 shows, the

**Table 10.1** Beef and Veal Production, Consumption, and Trade in Selected Countries in 2003

	Production		Import		Export		Consumption	
	1,000 metric tons <sup>1</sup>	Rank	1,000 metric tons <sup>1</sup>	Rank	1,000 metric tons <sup>1</sup>	Rank	Kg/person/year <sup>2</sup>	Rank
Australia	2,050	6	4	22	1425	1	32.51	6
Brazil	7,430	2	80	11	970	3	37.03	4
Canada	1,255	10	340	7	615	4	31.11	7
European Union <sup>3</sup>	7,260	3	520	4	530	6	19.48	10
Japan	525	15	850	2	0		10.58	15
Mexico	1,950	7	500	5	8	15	23.87	9
New Zealand	665	13	10	19	535	5	35.00	5
Russian Federation	1,700	9	800	3	5	16	17.40	11
South Africa	670	12	15	15	25	13	14.41	12
United States	11,993	1	1,481	1	1163	2	42.87	3

Sources: USDA-FAS (2003); World Bank (2005).

1. Carcass weight.

2. Total domestic consumption was divided by total population. The 2003 population data of World Bank were used.

3. Includes fifteen member states in 2003.

red meat chain in each country consists of multiple food networks, namely: (a) an export-dependent network, (b) a domestic commercial network, and (c) a domestic informal network. New Zealand, with a population of 3.3 million, has for decades pursued the path of export-oriented agricultural development, even though the meat industry consists of numerous relatively small-scale companies owned by private New Zealand individuals or sheep-cattle farmer cooperatives (New Zealand Meat 2003c). In South Africa, the institutionalization of apartheid effectively created and maintained a two-tier agricultural system: the commercial industry, represented by a small number of whites, and subsistence farming by blacks and "coloreds," who make up the vast majority of the country's population. Today, South Africa's government is attempting to put an end to the two-tier agricultural structure.

As discussed below, who constitutes the consumers and the producers differs significantly among these networks. In short, asymmetries between these networks make categories such as producers and consumers something that must be constantly negotiated and (re)constructed among actors. As shown in the next two sections, by negotiating the redistribution of the power to manage social order in the agrifood system, food safety governance reform becomes a site where the categories of producers, consumers, and citizens are articulated not merely as economic but also as political and social actors.

### The Case of New Zealand: Collision of Global Citizens and Marginalized Consumers

Lamb, beef, and mutton, along with wool, are the major export commodities of New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the nation's red meat chain has long been dominated by actors engaged in the production and distribution of export meat products. Yet the neoliberal reform of 1984 (Le Heron and Roche 1999), which eliminated virtually all government support programs for the agricultural sector, exacerbated the uneven distribution of economic resources and political power among the actors in three distinctive types of networks—export-oriented, domestic commercial, and domestic informal—within the red meat chain. This structural feature affected, and was affected

1. The case study of New Zealand was conducted between January 1999 and April 2001, starting when the Animal Product Act (APA) was in the final stage of negotiations, and completed in the middle of the three-year transition period from the Meat Act of 1981 and the Apiaries Act of 1969 to the APA. Our study is based on the analysis of various documents concerning the act and on interviews with thirty-five individuals representing twenty-five organizations or groups.

**Table 10.2** Three Networks of a Red Meat Chain, New Zealand vs. South Africa

	New Zealand		South Africa	
	<i>Producers</i>	<i>Consumers</i>	<i>Producers</i>	<i>Consumers</i>
Export-Oriented	Farmers, large-scale meat processors, and medium-size abattoirs	Overseas consumers	Large-scale white farmers, large-scale meat processors	Overseas consumers
Domestic Commercial	Farmers, small-scale abattoirs, supermarkets, butcher shops	Urbanites, foreign tourists	White farmers, meat processors, abattoirs, supermarkets, butcher shops	Upper-middle-class and middle-class urbanites
Domestic Informal	Farmers, rural dual operators	Rural residents	Black farmers, informal slaughterers	Poor

by, how the agency of New Zealand consumers was articulated in negotiations for meat safety governance reform.

In the export-dependant network, most products produced in New Zealand are shipped overseas. The label *export quality* on these products distinguishes products processed by export meat companies from small-scale, domestic-only abattoirs, whose products are often sold at traditional neighborhood butcher shops. This distinction between “export” and “domestic” meat products on the domestic market creates an apprehension among New Zealand consumers that they are left with “a spill-over from export,” or only those products with “inferior quality that failed to meet export standards,” as many New Zealanders have testified. The national government has always regulated the export network to ensure that the export requirements of diverse countries are met and that domestic slaughter does not infiltrate meat destined for export. Until recently, however, little effort was made to monitor the two domestic networks, either the commercial or the informal.

New Zealand established the Food Safety Authority (NZFSA) in 2002 to combine the food-related functions of the Ministries of Agriculture and Forestry and of Health and unify the authority for regulatory oversight under a single agency. Following the trend of many industrialized, and some developing, countries (Roberts and Unnevehr 2003), the NZFSA adopted the emphasis on a “farm-to-table” approach in dealing with potential hazards and the HACCP system as a basis for risk management. Thus the agency immediately took over the administration of (a) the Animal Product Act of 1999, which *requires* producers of meat products to develop and implement their own risk-management plan based on HACCP principles, and (b) the Food Act, which *encourages* retailers of meat products (e.g., supermarkets, restaurants, hotels, butcher shops) to develop and implement a food safety plan, also based on HACCP principles. These HACCP-based regulatory measures were to help the NZFSA simultaneously achieve two goals, the protection of public health and safety and the promotion of stable trade and commerce (NZFSA 2002).

How do these two new regulatory measures under the new agency, or the new meat safety regime, in New Zealand affect the three networks of the red meat chain, particularly the different types of producers and consumers implicated in the chain?

In all three of the networks, the producers refer to sheep or cattle farmers and meat-processing companies *in* New Zealand. Indeed, most farmers, meat-processing companies, and abattoirs belong to *both* the export-oriented and domestic commercial networks. The new regime required little change in

the actions of producers involved in the export network, as export-oriented meat companies had been voluntarily implementing their own HACCP plans for more than a decade (Cutt 1998). According to a leader of a farmer organization, most farmers are accustomed to preparing statutory declaration forms that record how each batch of animals was treated on their farm, so as to demonstrate that their animals are “fit for purpose” (i.e., that the goods are fit for the purpose the customer wants) to be exported.

There are producers, however, though small in number, who are involved *only* in the domestic commercial or informal networks. Some farmers choose not to or are unable to participate in a quality-certification program of an export-oriented company. Similarly, there are small-scale abattoirs that specialize in slaughtering for the domestic market. In rural New Zealand (14 percent of the population live outside concentrated settlements of a thousand or more people), the informal network also continues to operate, as some rural farmers choose to sell their products through direct marketing at their roadside markets or farm-stay operations (i.e., agrotourism). Their actions have been greatly affected by the new meat safety regime. Many small abattoirs and independent retailers now have to develop their own HACCP plan and upgrade their skills and facilities to implement them (Bristow 1999). Moreover, sheep and cattle farmers are prohibited from supplying meat for recreational catch (or so-called unregulated meat) to workers or their fee-paying guests without an approved HACCP plan (*Southland Times* 2000).

These changes imposed on the producers suggest that the new meat safety regime functions as a “disciplinary institution” in which actors who fail to produce meat “good” enough for export markets are punished by losing access to the domestic market, while those who succeed are rewarded by gaining access to the export network. In short, only actors who are able to participate in the export network can remain producers. In our interviews, NZMAF officials said that further consolidation in the red meat chain over the next two decades would be “inevitable” and “necessary” to build consumers’ trust in the safety of New Zealand red meat products.

If the social order created by the new meat safety regime aims to enable every producer to be part of the export-oriented network, then whose trust in meat safety does the new regime try to build?

In the export-oriented network, consumers mean customers or clients from eighty-plus countries who purchase products that contain New Zealand red meat. For the producers in this network, New Zealanders are hardly considered among the consumers, though a large portion of them consume meat products produced in this network rather than those exclusively produced in

the domestic commercial or domestic informal network. Some representatives of the major meat companies in the export-oriented network justified their active support for meat safety governance reform, particularly the enactment of the Animal Products Act, by stating that this new regime would enable them to more effectively respond to food safety concerns raised by consumer organizations overseas. During interviews with meat company representatives, they downplayed the impact of lobbying activities by New Zealand consumer organizations on their businesses or the negotiations of meat safety governance reform. Yet both government and industry representatives in the export-oriented network described New Zealand consumers as the ultimate beneficiaries of this regulatory reform.

Meanwhile, producers involved only in the domestic commercial or domestic informal networks expressed less enthusiasm toward the two new regulatory measures. For them, the consumers mean New Zealanders, and the consumers are stratified according to their residence (in the country or the city) and socioeconomic capacities (whether or not they can afford premium meat products). One interviewee noted that many “dual-operator” butchers, or retailers who sell both regulated and unregulated meat, in the domestic informal network were opposed to the reform because of financial and technical constraints imposed by the HACCP requirement. According to her, they were afraid of losing their business and forcing their consumers, who reside in or visit rural New Zealand, to either travel great distances to purchase approved meat products in urban areas or lose opportunities to enjoy rural New Zealand. For some rural residents, the safety of meat products is compromised when they must drive long distances from a city with unrefrigerated meat in the car. Yet some producers in these two domestic networks suggested that urban New Zealand consumers might benefit from the new meat safety regime because their meat would be regulated the way export meat is.

As in the case of South Africa, with an increase in the market share of supermarkets in the urban areas, New Zealanders have become more conscious about food safety issues. Unlike many red meat-producing countries in the world, however, New Zealand has never experienced an outbreak of *E. coli* O157:H7. Given tight border controls on the importation of biological organisms, there have been no cases of BSE or foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), which pose public health risks and damage the industry. According to food safety researchers, New Zealand has one of the most effective surveillance systems in the world for monitoring public health-related diseases. As a leader of one consumer organization pointed out, “HACCP plans and these kinds of food safety plans often do not deal with the kind of food safety

issues that [New Zealand] consumers are most concerned about" (e.g., genetic modifications, antibiotic use, pesticide residues). In other words, the constructed consumers with whom the new meat safety regime tries to build trust are not New Zealand consumers but those who reside overseas. Thus meat safety governance reform is driven not by the desire or need to protect the domestic consumers, but rather by the effort to formalize the HACCP system that has been adopted by the producers in the export-oriented network and improve their capacity to access overseas markets.

Is there, then, no agency for New Zealanders in this reform of food safety governance? Are New Zealanders merely marginalized consumers in the global red meat chain?

If we shift our attention and ask how New Zealanders might have articulated their agency as citizens, we can interpret this story from a different angle. Then meat safety governance reform in New Zealand can be examined as a *political* process involving the "public policy choices" of citizens, as well as an *economic* process involving the "purchase choices" of consumers. As pointed out earlier, however, consumers are increasingly differentiated based on their geophysical, socioeconomic, cultural, and ideological capacities to purchase food. How would citizens effectively present "the consumer's voice," given such diverse and contradictory opinions, views, and practices concerning food consumption? How would atomized consumers with little sense of social obligation transform themselves into citizens who accept responsibilities for shaping public policy on behalf of their country?

To answer these questions, let us look at a series of institutional changes that took place in the 1990s in the food safety policymaking process as the result of two sets of actions by New Zealand citizens. These actions may be interpreted as a signal, if not a direct action, of how New Zealand *citizens* responded to transformations in *their* agrifood system that in the past two decades have increasingly alienated New Zealanders by making them second-rate consumers and restricting their purchase choices of food.

The first set of actions concerns voting for national and local political candidates who consider food safety issues a priority. New Zealand has a parliamentary system similar to the British. In the 1990s, for example, the Green Party, running on a platform of environmentally sustainable development, began to see its members getting elected at the local level (Green Party of Aotearoa, New Zealand 2003). In the general election of 1999, the balance of power in Parliament shifted for the first time in ten years from conservative to liberal with the development of a coalition of Labor, Alliance, and Green parties. By winning parliamentary seats for the first time as a stand-alone

party, the Green Party pushed food safety issues to the top of the nation's political agenda and led the effort to organize the Royal Commission on Genetic Modifications in 2000, a nationwide inquiry into the benefits and risks of genetic modifications of plants and animals. In a nation with a population of fewer than 4 million and in the space of twelve months, the Royal Commission conducted a public opinion survey, held fifteen public meetings, sponsored a Maori consultation process involving twenty-eight workshops and twelve *hui* (gatherings), put on a youth forum, ran a public submission process resulting in more than ten thousand written entries, and held thirteen weeks' worth of formal hearings that involved more than a hundred interested persons and approximately three hundred witnesses within and outside New Zealand (Royal Commission on Genetic Modification 2001, 6).

The second set of actions by citizens involves the expansion of consumer representation in public policymaking. In meat safety governance reform, consumer representatives were requested by government and industry representatives to participate in the decision-making process through various channels. For example, David Russell of the Consumers' Institute, which publishes the monthly *Consumers Magazine*, invited the Meat Industry Standards Council to negotiate the particulars of the Animal Product Act with government and industry representatives. All the discussion documents and policy drafts concerning the reform were made available through the Web sites of government agencies; consumers thus engaged in policy decisions and became active citizens. As an official at NZMAF pointed out in an interview in 1999, "In the last two years, I think the industry has realized that they can't hide—[New Zealand] consumers want accountability. . . . We [the NZMAF] have to be careful, not to forget *the other side*—the consumer. So we can't look like we have been siding up with industry. It would have to be a triangle of people" (emphasis added).

Furthermore, Phillida Bunkle, a member of Parliament from the Alliance Party and the minister of consumer affairs, justified the establishment of NZFSA as follows: "It's incredibly important to get this right *for New Zealand* [citizens], especially in terms of getting our quality assurance right *for our markets*. I think that whatever structure [for a new food safety agency] gets developed, then [New Zealand] consumer interests have to be more strongly represented than they are now" (emphasis added). Russell himself and other consumer activists see the need for wider representation of consumers in any legal and regulatory reforms in the agrifood sector that would inevitably affect the well-being of New Zealand consumers. As Russell pointed out,

no organization “can represent consumers. So [Consumers’ Institute does] not represent consumers’ views, but represents consumers’ interests.” To give voice to the interests of New Zealand consumers in food safety policymaking, nine consumer and environmental organizations, each representing a different segment of New Zealand consumers, formed the Safe Food Coalition.

These concrete institutional changes emerged from actions by New Zealanders and effectively created a space in which individual consumer voices in the impersonal market are transformed into a coherent set of collective actions in the political sphere. Certainly, none of these actions may be interpreted as an expression of *resistance* to meat safety governance reform. The establishment of the new meat safety regime proceeded with little opposition from consumer or environmental organizations. This was because the demand of New Zealand consumers for stronger food safety governance happened to correspond with the desire of the producers in the export-oriented network to legitimize the HACCP-based system, though HACCP may not have been a priority area for consumers.

Active, collective citizenship in New Zealand faces challenges, not necessarily “from the assertion of individual consumption rights” (Marsden, Flynn, and Harrison 2000), but from the expectation that New Zealand citizens *should* support policies that would help to grow the nation’s economy and political power in the global system. As Bunkle put it, “The only way to convince [New Zealand] consumers is to make sure that there is integration between consumer and producer interests. The current system was heavily weighted towards producer interests, but I think the two interests—producer and consumer—are one and the same. . . . We are food producers and we are all consumers. So, we had better get it together if we are going to protect New Zealand’s future.”

Such a view, widely shared by government and industry representatives, suggests that New Zealanders are important allies for actors in the export-oriented network, even though they may not be as important as international consumers. Their enrollment as citizens in this network is necessary to legitimize the actions of these actors to pursue their economic and political agendas in the global agrifood system. To protect the future of their nation, New Zealanders therefore are expected to exercise their agency as *citizens*, rather than as *consumers*, who select their political representatives and participate in the processes of policymaking. By doing so, they are, though indirectly, shaping how various actors in the New Zealand red meat chain participate in the global market and what kind of images about the nation these actors present to the world.

## The Case of South Africa: Building the Modern Food System

If the New Zealand red meat chain illustrates how globalization forces are used to justify the nation's political and economic strategy for becoming an important actor in the global system, the South African red meat chain shows how the same forces are used to build a modern (postcolonial) nation-state.<sup>2</sup> Unlike New Zealand, the export network in South Africa remains small, but it is steadily increasing. For export producers, who tend to be large and moving toward vertical integration, the traceability of the product from the farm to the dinner table is essential in gaining and maintaining an export certificate. Prior to 2000, the only HACCP systems in place were in the three European Union (EU) certified export abattoirs. Currently, the United States does not allow any raw red meat from South Africa to be imported because South Africa's food safety system does not satisfy the U.S. requirements for imported meat. Thus, some of the larger participants in South Africa are in the process of voluntarily implementing HACCP in order to further expand their export opportunities, both in Europe and in the United States.

At the other end of the spectrum lies the informal network common in rural South Africa. Much as in New Zealand, rural South Africans rely to a large extent on home-kill meat and informal slaughtering (i.e., slaughtering, cooking, selling, and consuming on site, usually under a tree or in the open air). But the majority of producers and consumers in South Africa fall within the domestic commercial network. After apartheid was ended in South Africa, economic liberalization was pursued as the new economic model. This meant significantly less government regulation of the agricultural sector. Thus, as the red meat chain shifted away from government control, the number of individuals participating in the red meat commodity chain increased, while there was simultaneously an increase in concentration and vertical integration in the export and higher-tier domestic commercial sector. Today, approximately 70 percent of red meat sold in the domestic commercial sector is supplied by feedlots, a 50 percent increase since the early 1990s. Similarly, starting in the late 1990s, as the nation gained membership in key international trade groups like the WTO, South Africa has begun to move slowly toward the HACCP-based food governance system using logic similar to that used in New Zealand. In 1999 the South African National

2. The case study of South Africa was conducted between September 2000 and August 2001. Approximately ninety-eight interviews with actors in the red meat commodity chain of South Africa were conducted, and documents related to the industry were collected and analyzed.

Department of Agriculture (NDA) introduced the Hygiene Assessment System (HAS) as “a standardized assessment method of hygiene standards in abattoirs.” Modeled on the British HAS, this system gives abattoirs a score based on the level of hygiene in postmortem meat handling and penalizes those who receive substandard scores. This was an effort to move toward implementation of food safety standards at abattoirs while avoiding the high costs of HACCP and attempting to offset the increased consolidation and vertical integration occurring in the industry. (As costs rise, small operators are more likely to go out of business, which allows large operators to capture more of the market.)

In 2000 the South African government passed the Meat Safety Act, which stipulates the use of an independent inspection service. In March of that year, three industry organizations, the South African Meat Industry Company (SAMIC), the Red Meat Abattoir Association, and the National Emergency Red Meat Producers’ Organization, jointly established the International Meat Quality Assurance Services (IMQAS) with the aim of becoming a designated inspection service provider under the Meat Safety Act. In June 2003 the National Department of Health established new regulations under the Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act of 1972 that require food-handling enterprises (or food handlers) to develop and operate with an HACCP system (SANDH 2003). In the future, the South African government hopes to follow the New Zealand model and establish a single food-control authority to administer various laws and regulations concerning food safety.

The South African case is significantly different from the New Zealand because the negotiations for food governance reform tend to be carried out among actors in the red meat chain who understand that South Africa is a developing country. The South African government has made food security for all South African citizens a top priority of domestic agrifood policy, and most actors within the commercial industry are aware of this priority. South Africa is currently not fully self-sufficient with respect to red meat (SANDA 2003). During an interview, one longtime researcher who works with the red meat industry said, “In the U.S., the consumer expects quality and meat is in excess, so they are unwilling to pay more, whereas here, meat is in shortage and therefore, if you want higher standards, then you will have to pay a higher price.” The researcher’s observation appears to correspond with the view of the majority of South African citizens who rank food access as their primary concern. Thus meat safety governance reform was driven by a desire to protect *citizens* and promote the growth of international *consumers*.

Tension between the national government and the meat industry persists, however. For export producers and large domestic producers the new food governance system is a necessary step for the future growth of the South African red meat industry. Yet the majority of actors who handle meat, whether from the domestic commercial or the domestic informal network, currently do not use a hygiene management system. This makes it extremely difficult for the NDA to implement the Meat Safety Act and other food safety laws. In part, the lack of hygienic meat-handling practices among actors in the domestic commercial network, who are overwhelmingly white, is due to increased costs, but it also is justified by racist stereotypes about their consumers, who are overwhelmingly black and poor. At the same time, industry groups such as SAMIC tend to blame the national government for hampering potential growth opportunities for the red meat industry. For example, the NDA has not yet approved IMQAS as a designated inspector.

What, then, is this reform for? It appears that there is no *agency* for South Africans in the reform of the food governance system, either as consumers or as citizens. Do South African citizen-consumers have any role to play?

Red meat chain actors, especially the larger producers and processors of the domestic commercial and export sector, attempt to enroll consumers to justify their actions. Take, for example, a campaign launched by the industry feedlot association, as described by an online marketing business Web site: "The South African Feedlot Association, this week launched a first-of-its-kind advertising campaign that will educate, persuade and assure consumers of the hygiene and wholesomeness of South African Beef as well as its health and nutritional value, appetite appeal, versatility and affordability" (Write Agency 2003). A description of the campaign can also be found at the feedlot industry association's Web site ([www.safeedlot.co.za](http://www.safeedlot.co.za)).

The red meat chain actors have attempted to determine how the three food networks intersect, and they defend their view about how to balance the nation's goals to achieve food security and harmonize food safety standards with those set by international organizations and overseas governments. As a meat inspector at SAMIC pointed out, "The government's first priority is food security [for South African *citizens*]. You cannot have food security with expensive food; cheap food must be available. And you cannot give [South African *consumers*] cheap food with high standards, because standards cost money. Ninety percent of the meat industry is in a Third World situation, while the other 10 percent cater to elite markets. It will be quantity with a low price that is the goal for that 90 percent. Ten percent will have high prices and be focused on export markets."

Yet the establishment of food safety regulations is necessary to protect the domestic red meat chain from increased overseas competition and to protect South African citizens from being marginalized in the global red meat system. A representative of the South African Bureau of Standards stated, "Quality is important, but is not the primary concern. Quality standards are in place primarily to keep [overseas] countries from dumping poor quality products on the South African market."

Policy and institutional reforms initiated by both the government and the red meat industry—such as measures to improve production and protect the domestic industry from overseas competition—have been overwhelmingly producer-oriented (domestic commercial). Yet consumers are seen as a key group in raising food safety standards. A representative of a meat import-export group stressed the importance of multinational supermarkets in standardizing consumers' expectations for meat quality and safety: "Changes are being brought about by bigger retailer groups like Pic 'n' Pay, Woolworth's, Spars, who use first world standards, and they are expanding. They are probably selling 65 percent of the meat. The other guys (small butchers, bush slaughtering, farm slaughtering) their standards have dropped, they have Third World standards." With a rapid increase in the number and market share of supermarkets in eastern and southern Africa (Weatherspoon and Reardon 2003), consciousness about food safety is increasing among white and black consumers alike. Actors who produce and circulate meat products in the domestic commercial network will be further differentiated by their ability to adopt and implement HAS, just as consumers are being differentiated by their ability to purchase meat products of varying quality.

While *citizens* continue to be concerned about access to red meat, the industry needs *consumers* to willingly embrace changes occurring in red meat production, distribution, and retailing. Many conventions surround the consumption of industrialized red meat, including the need for consumers to learn the names of specific cuts of meat and how different cuts of meat should be prepared. In addition, consumers must adjust to meat that tastes and looks different from meat produced in nonindustrial settings. Industrialization of the red meat chain also undermines traditional bases of trust (Lockie 2002). Standards and standardization (e.g., HACCP) are part of the increasing industrialization of the red meat chain, and consumers must accept the increasing distance between production and consumption practices and be willing to adjust their conception of *trust* from an individual to an institutional relationship. In rural areas, people rely on their trust in a local bush slaughterer that the meat he is selling is safe. As an industry adopts standards

and standardization for the purpose, in part, of international trade, the industry must simultaneously persuade domestic consumers to trust institutions over and above individuals. Only by securing the participation and trust of the majority of consumers can the industry successfully implement consistent industry-wide standards. Finally, by winning the cooperation of South African consumers, the industry and the government further their ability to control animal diseases like measles and foot-and-mouth disease that, if left unchecked, inhibit South Africa's export potential.

In short, the reform of the food governance system in South Africa does not consist merely to allow a few large-scale producers to participate successfully in the global market. It must also secure the participation of previously marginalized consumers, while at the same time making the state define and protect citizenship rights to food. While *consumers* are increasingly differentiated on the basis of socioeconomic status, the *citizens* of South Africa will be further integrated by overcoming race as the fundamental category for redistribution of economic wealth, political power, and social status. In the postapartheid era, the state is expected to be responsible for improving land and capital distribution among black South African citizens who hope to become commercial producers. At the same time, the state is expected to support the development of the red meat chain through measures to promote meat export, while protecting the domestic chain from international competition and deadly animal diseases such as FMD and BSE and food-borne pathogens such as *E coli O157:H7* and salmonella. Despite the nation's status as a developing country, negotiations for the new food governance system take place within the red meat chain in the effort to answer the question whether South African citizen-consumers will have access to meat in general and safe meat in particular. Despite the significant level of socioeconomic inequality among South African consumers, they are far from powerless. Consumers' power is situated in the fact that the industry must enlist the cooperation of consumers, because without their cooperation the industry restructuring will not be successful.

### Conclusion

Through comparative analysis of meat safety governance reform in New Zealand and South Africa, this chapter has attempted to show how agency is constantly reshaped and transformed, as structural features of the global agrifood system continue to change. On the one hand, the efforts of these

countries to incorporate the HACCP system is a response to emerging structural features of the global agrifood system that has the potential to transform their predominant agrifood systems fundamentally. On the other hand, our case studies also show that this transformation is not necessarily uniform across time and space. This is because institutional methods of bringing food from farm to dinner table are built through historically contingent processes in a given place over a given time. The red meat chains in New Zealand and South Africa are the product not only of geographical location and ecological conditions, but also of sociocultural and political histories of negotiating how to produce, distribute, regulate, and consume red meat in these countries.

As many commodity chain studies (e.g., Bonanno and Constance 1996; Busch et al. 1991; Dixon 1999; Friedland 1984, 2001; Heffernan 1984) show, commodity chains are a vehicle for organizing the state and the market. But the relationships that consumers have with the state and the market are different from those that citizens have, though there is a considerable overlap. In everyday practices of producing, distributing, regulating, and consuming beef or lamb, individuals and groups are situated in a web of social relations and become social actors with multiple positions and roles. By differentiating between *consumers* and *citizens*, we can analyze how social actors strategically differentiate their roles to express their agency to shape their relationships to the market and the state.

In our case countries, meat safety governance reform aims to transform the roles of both state and market in regulating meat safety, and therefore the relationships that consumers and citizens have with these social institutions. As Marsden, Flynn, and Harrison (2000) suggest, this new food governance system *delegates* the state's traditional responsibilities to private companies—as seen, for example, in the development, implementation, and maintenance of HACCP plans. This appears to give meat companies greater accountability in maintaining the safety of food supplies in order to protect their consumers, while allowing them more flexibility in responding to the diverse food safety requirements imposed by governments and companies overseas. But this market self-governance approach also indicates that regulating meat safety is no longer about a *state's* responsibility for protecting *citizens'* rights to safe food, but instead about a *market's* responsibility for protecting *consumers'* rights to safe food.

Equally important is the state's role in fostering commerce in the increasingly global economic system. To maintain social stability, it is vital for the state to invest resources for the enhancement of economic prosperity for its

citizens. In the process of negotiating reform, asymmetries among the three food networks mentioned above are exacerbated. Participants in the red meat commodity chain in New Zealand and South Africa do not benefit equally from reforms. New regulations threaten the existence of informal producers and processors and potentially impair the livelihoods of these citizens. Such asymmetries are nothing new. Numerous agrifood studies have repeatedly suggested that unequal distribution of economic resources and political power within a given commodity chain, or within the agricultural sector as a whole, is a structural feature of capitalist economies. But it is important to stress that the benefits and costs of a given reform are distributed very differently among countries and over historical periods.

In the case of incorporating the HACCP system, the central question is how to ensure the safety of meat. In order to answer that question, each actor in the red meat chain must also determine who are *the consumers* to be protected and who are *the producers* who must protect consumers from unsafe meat. In our case countries, consumers are differentiated into informal, commercial domestic, and three export market segments. In New Zealand, the differentiation is most notable between overseas and domestic consumers. In South Africa, the differentiation between rich and poor consumers is most apparent. Despite structural changes beyond their control, consumers and citizens are far from powerless. While consumers may exercise their agency through purchase choices in impersonalized markets, the reform of food safety governance in New Zealand and South Africa provide citizens with an opportunity to bring together their individual voices as consumers to express a *collective* form of agency through the political process that demands of the state the right to safe food. While consumers may be differentiated by their consumption patterns, citizen participation in public policymaking is necessary in order for the structural changes to succeed.

Agri-food studies should not take categories like “producers” and “consumers” for granted, nor should they ignore the importance of citizens as a viable category in the increasingly global agrifood system. Empirical studies must clarify how certain producers and consumers become participants in global agrifood markets while others are excluded from them; and how citizens in a particular nation participate in restructuring global agrifood markets. Only then will we be able to understand how tensions between structure and agency in the increasingly global agrifood system are articulated in a given place and time.

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## INSTRUCTOR'S RESOURCES

### Key Concepts and Terms:

1. Global agrifood system
2. Commodity chain
3. Food networks
4. Hazard analysis and critical control point
5. Constructed consumers, constructed producers

### Discussion Questions:

1. Why do the categories of producers and consumers become elusive in the global agrifood system?
2. Increasing the export of agrifood products is considered an important strategy for economic development in a given nation. Compare and contrast how the strategies of New Zealand and South Africa have positively and negatively affected actors in these countries.
3. What alternatives currently exist for people to purchase food without using the grocery store?

### Agriculture, Food, and Environment Videos:

1. "Modern Meat." *Frontline*, Public Broadcast Service, 2002 (60 minutes).

### Agriculture, Food, and Environment on the Internet:

1. United States Department of Agriculture, Food Service Inspection Service: [www.fsis.usda.gov/](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/).
2. New Zealand Food Safety Authority: [www.nzfsa.govt.nz/](http://www.nzfsa.govt.nz/).
3. World Trade Organization: [www.wto.org/](http://www.wto.org/).

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