

Unit 2 Food Choices: Panorama and Politics

Lesson 3: The Politics of Food Choices

"Everything is politics"

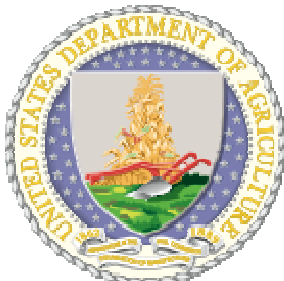
Gore Vidal (1925 – American commentator)¹

According to Griffiths and Wallace (1998), 'Powerful interest groups dominate every sphere of activity, from sport and the arts to the environment and agriculture' (page 2, ¶2).² The authors further comment, "Every decision is more complicated than it seems, because it is determined by unseen factors, by large political lobbies..." (Page 2, ¶2).³

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

While the USDA is not technically a 'political entity' the influence of this organization is far reaching. For example, the USDA is involved with animal feed, the cattle industry, irradiation of meat, food packing and distribution practices, food safety, testing and labeling of meat products, agricultural practices, food and nutrition guidelines, government-funded food assistance programs and numerous other programs and activities related to food production and distribution. However, the USDA is not an 'enforcement body' from the perspective of ensuring that safe food production practices are followed but rather an educational agency of the U.S. federal government.

The United States Department of Agriculture was founded in 1862 by U.S. President Abraham Lincoln. Known originally as The Department of Agriculture, this federal agency was established as a public depository to store information related to crop production, seed and plant use, agricultural practices and reports related to crops and the application of chemistry to agriculture (USDA, 2008).



2008. USDA Seal.

2008. Compiled by K. Cavanaugh

According to the USDA's Web site, the mission statement, vision and strategic plan framework consists of the following:

Mission Statement: We provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management

¹ Griffiths, S., Wallace, J. (1998). Consuming passions: Food in the age of anxiety. Great Britain: Mandolin.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Vision: We want to be recognized as a dynamic organization that is able to efficiently provide the integrated program delivery needed to lead a rapidly evolving food and agriculture system.

Strategic Plan Framework: USDA has created a strategic plan to implement its vision. The framework of this plan depends on these key activities: expanding markets for agricultural products and support international economic development, further developing alternative markets for agricultural products and activities, providing financing needed to help expand job opportunities and improve housing, utilities and infrastructure in rural America, enhancing food safety by taking steps to reduce the prevalence of foodborne hazards from farm to table, improving nutrition and health by providing food assistance and nutrition education and promotion, and managing and protecting America's public and private lands working cooperatively with other levels of government and the private sector (USDA, 2008)⁴

Each year the USDA publishes a "Performance and Accountability Report" which serves as a progress report to taxpayers about the achievement levels for the agency's strategic goals and objectives. Within the scope of the USDA are the following

- Agriculture
 - Education and Outreach
 - Agricultural Research and Productivity Questions/Answers
 - Soil Education
 - Agricultural Thesaurus
 - Agriculture in the Classroom
 - Educational Materials in Agriculture: DA provides educational material to students, parents, and teachers. These valuable learning tools feature up-to-date information and valuable agriculture resources that focus on health, nutrition, and science.
 - Food and Nutrition
 - Obesity Prevention, meal planning, food labeling
 - What's in the Foods You Eat
 - Meat and Poultry Hotline
 - Food Preservation, Home Canning
 - Child Nutrition Programs
 - MyPyramid, Steps to a Healthier You
 - Food Safety Guidelines
 - Laws and Regulations
 - Marketing and Trade
 - Natural Resources and Environment
 - Research and Science
 - Rural and Community Development
 - Travel and Recreation
- (USDA, 2008).⁵

⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture. About us: Mission statement, vision, strategic plan framework. Retrieved June 20, 2008 from

<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/ s.7 0 A/7 0 10B/.cmd/ad/.ar/sa.retrievecontent/c/6 2 1UH/.ce/7 2 5JN/.p/5 2 4TR/.d/0/ th/J 2 9D/ s.7 0 A/7 0 10B?PC 7 2 5JN navid=MISSION STATEMENT&PC 7 2 5JN navtype=RT&PC 7 2 5JN parentnav=ABOUT USDA#7 2 5JN>

⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture. About us: Mission statement, vision, strategic plan framework. Retrieved June 20, 2008 from

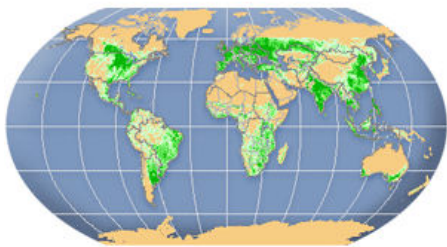
<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/ s.7 0 A/7 0 10B/.cmd/ad/.ar/sa.retrievecontent/c/6 2 1UH/.ce/7 2 5JN/.p/5 2 4TR/.d/0/ th/J 2 9D/ s.7 0 A/7 0 10B?PC 7 2 5JN navid=MISSION STATEMENT&PC 7 2 5JN navtype=RT&PC 7 2 5JN parentnav=ABOUT USDA#7 2 5JN>

Various reports and publications are available from the USDA including the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. State Nutrition Action Plans, research on human nutrition, the nutrient value of foods, diet and health and food and nutrition research (USDA, 2008).⁶

The Agricultural Division of the USDA provides information related to

- Pest Management: .S. agricultural weather highlights, weekly weather and crop bulletin, major world crop areas and climatic profiles
- Weather and Climate: .S. agricultural weather highlights, weekly weather and crop bulletin, major world crop areas and climatic profiles
- Price Support: Program updates, notices and regulations, reports, proposed rules, loan rates, forms, fact sheets.
- Nutrient Management: Nitrogen, phosphorus, fact sheets, animal waste management, irrigation.
- Plants Database: Threatened and endangered, classification, invasive and noxious, distribution, images, crop info, nutrient tool, publications. The PLANTS Database provides standardized information about the vascular plants, mosses, liverworts, hornworts, and lichens of the U.S. and its territories.
- Crop Explorer: Provides information on crops and conditions by region, satellite images, live data and maps, with links to production estimates, area, yield, and crop assessments.

(USDA, 2008)



Explore by Region North America, United States, Canada, Central America, Mexico Central America and Caribbean, South America, Brazil, Northern South America. Southern South America, Europe

Explore by Crop

Select a Commodity Barley Corn Cotton Millet Oats Oil, Palm Oilseed, Peanut Oilseed, Rapeseed Oilseed, Soybean Oilseed, Sunflower seed Rice, Milled Rye Sorghum Wheat

Source: USDA Crop Explorer Searchable Database <http://www.pecad.fas.usda.gov/cropexplorer/> 2008. Compiled by K. Cavanaugh

- Community Food Systems: A food system includes everything from farm to table. A community food system emphasizes eating seasonally while eating locally grown and produced foods. Find information about sustainable agriculture as well as resources for building and strengthening community food systems (USDA, 2008).⁷

Government-Funded Food Assistance Programs

⁶ Ibid.

⁷U.S. Department of Agriculture. About us: Mission statement, vision, strategic plan framework. Retrieved June 20, 2008 from

<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/ s.7 0 A/7 0 1OB/.cmd/ad/.ar/sa.retrievecontent/.c/6 2 1UH/.ce/7 2 5JN/.p/5 2 4TR/.d/0/ th/J 2 9D/ s.7 0 A/7 0 1OB?PC 7 2 5JN navid=MISSION STATEMENT&PC 7 2 5JN navtype=RT&PC 7 2 5JN parentnav=ABOUT USDA#7 2 5JN>

Williams' points out how American families encountering economic stress need assistance with food needs and for this reason food assistance was created as part of an entitlement program to supply food or create and expand family food buying power (2008, page 249).⁸

The USDA, as one of its initiatives, provides resources related to hunger and food security by providing "Educational resources, databases, grants, homeless shelters/pantries, non-profit organizations, governmental organizations, publications, child hunger resources and other more" (USDA, 2008) as part of the government-funded food assistance program.

US Nutrition Assistance Program

US domestic food assistance programs affect the daily lives of millions of people. Most food assistance is provided by the Food Stamp Program, WIC, and the child nutrition programs. Obtain information about these and other programs.

- Child and Adult Care Food Program
- Food Stamp Program
- National School Lunch Program
- Older Americans Act Nutrition Program
- School Breakfast Program
- Special Milk Program
- Summer Food Service Program
- WIC Program (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children)

(USDA, 2008)⁹

These food assistance programs help persons identified as low-income and vulnerable population groups to meet their nutritional needs in order to maintain their health and well being. Keeping Americans healthy means less of a burden on society over time. Reducing malnutrition which often leads to chronic illness and death, particularly among women and children and older Americans, is preferable in terms of social and economic cost.

Farm Lobbies

Defining Lobbies and Lobbyists

A lobby is a group of supporters and representatives formed to influence political policy related to a particular issue.

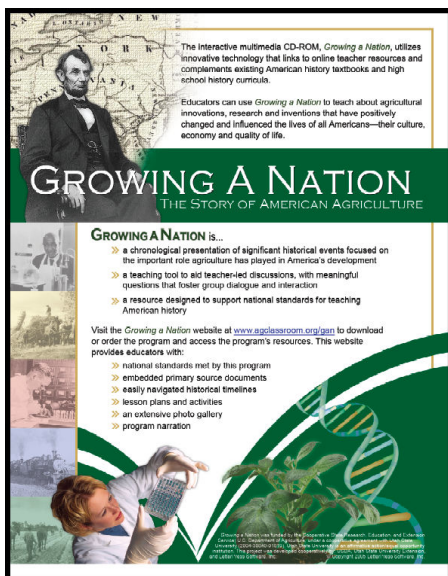
Development of Farm Lobbies

Farm lobbies consist of groups of interested parties who attempt to influence policy decision-makers on issues relate to farming, agriculture, trade agreements, food production and distribution and other farming related issues. Farm lobbies exert political pressure nationally and globally. The development of farm organizations and farm movements in the United States, according to *Growing a Nation: The Story of American Agriculture*¹⁰ is represented by the following flyer and table:

⁸ Schlenker, E. D., Long, S. (2008). Williams' essentials of diet and nutrition therapy. Ninth edition. St. Louis, MO: Mosby Elsevier.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Growing A Nation (2008). The story of American agriculture. Retrieved May 1, 2008 from <http://www.agclassroom.org/gan/index.htm>



Source: 2008. *Growing A Nation*¹¹
2008. Compiled by K. Cavanaugh.

18th century

Civic and intellectual leaders in colonial and revolutionary America copy the aristocratic and fashionable Europe interest in agriculture, science, and commerce, and form societies to promote these interests

1785

The Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of Agriculture and other rural concerns are organized

1794

Whiskey Rebellion, a farmers' revolt against taxes on grain in whiskey

1802

George Washington Parke Custis institutes an agricultural fair in Arlington, VA

1811

Berkshire Agricultural Society organized under Elkanah Watson's leadership

1817-25

Agricultural societies and fairs flourish under State aid

1838

Proposals made to use James Smithson's grant to establish a National Agricultural College

1840-60

Interest in agricultural societies revived

1850s

Farmers begin cooperative to make cheese and to market wool and tobacco

1850s

Farmers' clubs proliferate in Midwest

1852

United States Agricultural Society organized

1860

941 agricultural societies in the United States

¹¹ Ibid.

1867

National Grange organized

1871

National Grange sanctions cooperative enterprise

1873-76

Granger movement at its height

1874-80

Farmers' Alliance movement begins

1880-96

Agricultural pressure groups gather strength

1882

Agricultural Wheel formed

1891

Populist Party launched on national scale

1896

Height of Populist movement

1902

Farmers' Union started; American Society of Equity formed

1905

California Fruit Growers Exchange formed

1906

Appointment of first county agricultural agent

1909-17

Boys' and girls' club work underway

1910

Farmers' Equity Union organized

1911

First Farm Bureau formed in Broome County, NY

1915

Non-Partisan League formed

1915-17

International Workers of the World ("Wobblies") organize thousands of wheat harvest workers

1919

American Farm Bureau Federation formally organized in Chicago, Illinois

1920s

Farm organization set up strong lobbies in Washington

1920-32

Cooperative movement spreads

1922

Capper-Volstead Act gives cooperatives legal standing

1925

Beginning of the Master Farmer movement

1929

National Council of Farmers Cooperatives organized

1930

11,950 cooperative with 3 million members

1932-23

Farmers' Holiday movement stages strikes and blocks farm sales

1934

Southern Tenant Farmers Union formed to cope with sharecroppers displaced during the New Deal

1947

National Farm Labor Union (formerly Southern Tenant Farmers Union) organizes strike among California farm workers

1950s

10,051 cooperatives with 7 million members

1955

National Farmers Organization formed

1960s

United Farm Workers Organizing Committee begins unionizing California farm workers

1960s

Commodity groups move to forefront of influence with Congress

1962

Silent Spring, by U.S. biologist Rachel Carson, warns of dangers to wildlife from indiscriminate use of persistent pesticides, such as DDT. The book becomes a best-seller

1966

Fair Labor Standards Act extended to include agricultural labor; Federal minimum wage extended to some farm workers

1970

7,994 cooperatives with 6.2 million members

1970

Earth Day is celebrated for the first time

1971

The Maine Organic Farmers & Gardeners Association is organized

1973

Fifty farmers organize California Certified Organic Farmers

1979

The American Agriculture Movement organizes a "tractorcade" demonstration in Washington, DC

1986-88

Country singer Willie Nelson organizes first of the Farm Aid concerts to benefit indebted farmers

Source: 2008. Growing a Nation: The Story of American Agriculture.¹²

<http://www.agclassroom.org/gan/index.htm>

2008. Compiled by K. Cavanaugh

¹² Growing a nation: The story of American agriculture. (2008). Retrieved May 1, 2008 from <http://www.agclassroom.org/gan/index.htm>

Farm Lobbies and Political Influence

According to Don Doig, Associate Policy Analyst at Cato Institute, "Powerful special interests have routinely captured government policymaking institutions and encouraged development that subsidized particular business activities" (1983).¹³

For example, according to the National Catholic Reporter in November of 2007,

An unusual alliance of progressive and conservative groups lobbied vigorously last week in a last ditch effort to radically change the 2007 Farm Bill, attempting to end a system of farm subsidies widely criticized for favoring agribusiness while harming small farmers here and overseas.

Progressives such as Oxfam, Bread for the World, Environmental Defense, Environmental Working Group and the National Urban League joined conservatives such as Club for Growth, Council for Citizens Against Government Waste and the National Taxpayers Union, calling upon their members to support the Lugar-Lautenberg amendment to the Farm Bill.¹⁴

In 2002, an article by John Garnaut¹⁵ *US farmers move to kill free trade deal* pointed to the power and influence of American farm lobbies. "America's most powerful farm lobbies are on the brink of scuttling a free trade agreement between Australia and the United States which the Howard Government claims would be worth up to \$4 billion a year."

Another way in which farm lobbies exert political influence is with the USDA. Since the USDA cannot 'demand' changes in practices by farmers, slaughter houses, meat packing, food distributors or consumers, the agency can make suggestions for improvement by 'encouraging changes' designed to enhance safety of food products improved nutrition choices for Americans. However, if a farm lobbying group is opposed to the suggested changes, the USDA is powerless to require change or enforce 'voluntary' action.

Influence of Farm Lobbies on Governmental Nutritional Recommendations

According to Mike Dorning and Andrew Martin of the Chicago Tribune, *Farm lobby's power has deep roots* (2006).¹⁶

The "real environment" ... is a self-perpetuating cycle of money, votes and political power that has made agriculture one of Washington's most entrenched special interests, even as the number of farmers has dwindled to about 1 percent of the population.

On the inside, it's a wheel of fortune for everybody involved, including farmers, lobbyists and farm-state congressmen. Taxpayers pick up the tab: a record \$23 billion in farm subsidies last year. For critics, subsidies are a costly anachronism in a

¹³ Doig, D. (1983). The Farming of Washington: How U.S. agricultural policies affect the American farm. Retrieved May 10, 2008 from <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa027.html>

¹⁴ Fox, T. C. (2007). Bipartisan alliance lobbies for Farm Bill reform. *National Catholic Reporter*. Retrieved May 12, 2008 from http://www.natcath.com/NCR_Online/archives2/2007d/111607/111607s.htm

¹⁵ Garnaut, J. (2002). Farmers move to kill freed trade deal. *Sidney Herald*. Retrieved May 13, 2008 from <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/09/19/1032054869737.htm>

¹⁶ Dorning, M., Martin, A. (2006). Farm lobby's power has deep roots. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved May 22, 2008 from <http://www.floridafarmers.org/news/articles/Farmlobby'spowerhasdeeproots.htm>

country that long ago moved from its agrarian base.

Critics also contend the system encourages unhealthy eating. Corn subsidies lower costs of grain-fed meat and sweeteners used in soft drinks. Consumers generally pay full cost for fruits and vegetables, most of which are not subsidized (Dorning & Martin, 2006).¹⁷

On the one hand, the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005* encourages healthy eating based on nutritional principles designed to address obesity and other health risk among Americans. Yet because of subsidies promoted by farm lobbies, unhealthy food costs American consumers less while healthy foods cost more.

Dorning and Martin conclude,

Although the health-care industry and trial lawyers spend far more than Big Farm to influence Washington, the farm lobby is distinguished by a well-organized grass-roots network of organizations that extends throughout rural America. In the capital, farmers are represented by a core group of long-serving lobbyists who regularly band together, setting aside divergent interests to keep the dollars flowing to farm programs. And this lobby can draw on public sympathy for a stereotype of a quaint family farm (2006).¹⁸

Corporate Food Lobbies

One of the major impacts of the growth of fast food chains is the consolidation in the meat packing industry (Schlosser, 2008, page 136, ¶2)¹⁹ resulting in a transformation "...through mergers and acquisitions with a "...few large corporations gaining...a stranglehold on the market..." (Schlosser, 2008, page 136, ¶2)²⁰

ConAgra Corporation

This means the power to influence farming policy and practices is held in the hands of a few corporate giants such as ConAgra Beef Company which operates the largest meat packing plant in Greeley, Colorado (Schlosser, 2008, page 150)²¹ and is the largest meatpacker in the world.

ConAgra is the largest meatpacker in the world as well as the largest supplier of food products and byproducts such as bone and blood meal, in North America. ConAgra is the "...number one producer of French fries (distributed by a subsidiary Lam Weston), the nation's largest sheep and turkey processor, the largest distributor of agricultural chemicals, the second largest manufacturer of frozen food, the second-largest flour miller, the third-largest check and pork processor, as well as a leading seed producer, feed producer, and commodity futures trader (Schlosser, 2008, pgs. 158-159)²²

¹⁷ Doig, D. (1983). *The Farming of Washington: How U.S. agricultural policies affect the American farm*. Retrieved May 10, 2008 from <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa027.html> Ibid.

¹⁸ Dorning, M., Martin, A. (2006). Farm lobby's power has deep roots. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved May 22, 2008 from <http://www.floridafarmers.org/news/articles/Farmlobby'spowerhasdeeproots.htm>

¹⁹ Schlosser, E. (2008). *The dark side of the all-American meal: Fast food nation do you want lies with that?* New York: Harper Perennial.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Schlosser, E. (2008). *The dark side of the all-American meal: Fast food nation do you want lies with that?* New York: Harper Perennial.

The company sells its food under one hundred consumer brand names including:

- Hunt's
- Armour
- La Choy
- O'Sea
- Knott's Berry Farm
- Hebrew National
- Healthy Choice

(Schlosser, 2008, page 159, ¶1)

Schlosser reports that ConAgra (the name is Latin for 'partnership with the land') in 1988 was "...an obscure Nebraska company with annual revenues of about \$500 million" and in 2007 revenues exceeded \$25 billion (2008, page 159). As a corporate giant, ConAgra exerts tremendous political power. ConAgra lobbyists work full time in Washington, DC to influence lawmakers to keep farm subsidies in place and enact legislation favorable to corporate agricultural interests.

Overview of the U.S. Meat Packing Industry

The U. S. meat packing industry is made up of companies that perform slaughtering, processing and distribution of animals such as cattle, pigs, sheep and other livestock for human consumption. Meat companies purchase animals live (and dead) from cattlemen and farmers. According to the REAPINC Organization

The meat packing industry is the largest segment of the U.S. Agriculture industry which slaughtered and processed more than 8.5 billion cattle, hogs, chickens, sheep/lambs and turkeys in 2007. Annual sales for this sector of the agriculture industry approached \$100 billion in 2007. By sales the following handful of companies controlled some \$80 billion of those sales: Tyson Foods, ConAgra, Smithfield Foods, Swift & Co. (now owned by South American giant JBS S.A.), Excel owned by private company Cargill, Hormel, Sara Lee Red Meat/Food Division, privately owned Perdue Farms, Pilgrims Pride and its recently acquired subsidiary Gold Kist. Said companies are among the world's largest slaughterers and processors of beef, hogs, poultry, sheep and lamb and employed more than 300,000 of the industry's 450,000 employees. The production and sales of the meat packing industry is highly concentrated into the hands of the few companies listed below (REAP, 2008).²³

Ranking by Sales	Company	Product	Public or Private Co.
1	Tyson Foods	Cattle, Hogs, Poultry	Public
2	ConAgra	Cattle, Hogs, Poultry	Public
3	Smithfield Foods	Cattle, Hogs, Poultry	Public
4	Cargill Meat Solutions	Cattle, Hogs, Poultry	Private
5	Swift/JBS S.A.	Cattle, Hogs, Poultry	Foreign Owned
6	Pilgrims Pride/Gold Kist	Poultry	Public

²³ REAPINC Organization (2008). A general overview of the U.S. meat packing industry. Retrieved May 02, 2008 from http://www.reapinc.org/ProfileIntro_Meat.html

7	Geo. Hormel	Cattle, Hogs, Poultry	Public
8	Perdue	Poultry	Private

Source: Hoovers & SEC²⁴

According to Eric Schlosser, "The unusual power of the large meatpacking firms has been sustained by their close ties and sizable donations to a Republican members of Congress (2008, page 197-198). This power is further demonstrated by the claim of four large meatpacking firms that "an oversupply of beef, not any corporate behavior, is responsible for the low prices that American ranchers area paid for their cattle" (2008, page 142, ¶2).²⁵

Schlosser discusses how "A 1996 USDA investigation of concentration in the beef industry found that many ranchers were afraid to testify against the large meat packing companies, fearing retaliation and 'economic ruin'" (2008, page 143, ¶3).²⁶

In 2006, Public Broadcasting System (PBS) aired a special on the meat packing industry, *Meatpacking in the U.S.: Still a "Jungle" Out There?* related to employment practices in the industry which is part of the U.S. agricultural sector. "Today, America's meat industry is the nation's largest agricultural sector and sales of meat and poultry exceed \$100 billion a year in the U.S." (PBS, 2006).²⁷

Because of the economic 'clout' of the meat packing industry, due to the fact that ...the sales and production fallen into the hands of fewer and fewer companies but unlike the 1970s and 1980s today's giants are slaughtering, processing and producing brand name products for multiple species, whereas in the past a company specialized in handling and selling one specie of animal. This, of course, further concentrates power into the hands of fewer companies. It should also be pointed out that the concentration of sales and production has, in large measure, come by acquisitions (REAP, 2008).

Companies that make up the meat packing industry exert tremendous political influence and pressure on the USDA, cattlemen and ranchers and ultimately consumers and the food choices they make.

Schlosser points out how "...the growth of fast food chains has encouraged consolidation in the meatpacking industry" For example, "McDonald's is the nation's largest purchased of beef and in 1978 purchased ground beef from 175 suppliers and a few years later reduced the number of beef suppliers to five (2008).²⁸ This supports the assertion by REAP that power of the meatpacking industry rests in the hands of a few major companies (REAP, 2008).

Food Industry

The U.S. food industry is comprised of major and minor food companies. According to Hoovers,

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Schlosser, E. (2008). *The dark side of the all-American meal: Fast food nation do you want lies with that?* New York: Harper Perennial.

²⁶ Schlosser, E. (2008). *The dark side of the all-American meal: Fast food nation do you want lies with that?* New York: Harper Perennial.

²⁷ Public Broadcasting System (PBS). (2006). *Meatpacking in the U.S.: Still a "jungle" out there.* Retrieved May 20, 2008 from <http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/250/meat-packing.html>

²⁸ Schlosser, E. (2008). *The dark side of the all-American meal: Fast food nation do you want lies with that?* New York: Harper Perennial.

The US is a major food trader, with annual exports of more than \$30 billion and imports of about \$29 billion. As the US food market has matured, many companies are expanding overseas with a few basic strategies. Some companies, such as Wrigley, can simply take existing products and set up shop in foreign countries. But most others must adjust their products to fit local palates, and many, including H.J. Heinz and Campbell, have found success by teaming up with or buying local companies already producing popular products.²⁹

Among some of the more influential food industry companies are:

- McDonald's
- Nestle, owner of Stouffer's Corporation
- Anheuser-Busch
- Campbell Soup
- Newman's Own all-natural food line
- General Mills (Olive Garden restaurant)
- Jenny Craig Incorporated
- Coca-Cola
- Swanson Foods
- Snapple
- Oscar Mayer
- Ben and Jerry's
- Hudson/Tyson Foods

Influence on Governmental Nutritional Recommendations

Governmental nutritional recommendations are linked to farm lobbies and the food industry in both positive and negative ways. Nutrition and the food industry are inexorably linked and according to Luise Light, MS, Ed.D, food recommendations by the USDA are highly subject to lobbyist pressures from the food industry (2007).³⁰

Based on Ms. Light's doctoral research, government research studies related to nutrition and diet for Americans is heavily influenced by the food industry because of lack inadequate research information.

Most Americans don't have the information they needed to make informed eating choices and they don't know where to get it. Better labels are needed, but also the understanding that some eating patterns increase your risks for common chronic diseases, while others lower your risks. The government is talking a good line but failing to educate consumers in ways that really count. That leaves practical advice about nutrition to the food industry. They use their persuasive techniques to tell the public what's good to eat while stifling news reports about what's harmful.

Consumers take it on faith that anything in print or on TV has passed the government's "truth in advertising" test. Nothing could be farther from the truth. "The government is talking a good line but failing to educate consumers in ways that really count. That leaves practical advice about nutrition to the food industry" (Light, 2007).

The influence on governmental policy by corporate lobbies does not just impact national nutrition and dietary guidelines but creates environmental concerns in America's neighbor, Canada.

²⁹ Hoovers. (n.d.) Industry financials: International sales. Retrieved May 16, 2008 from <http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~sc417697/esp/industry12.html>

³⁰ Light, L. M.S., Ed.D. (2007). The education of an American: Part one. Retrieved May 15, 2008 from <http://www.rense.com/general78/educa.htm>.

A study by the Union of Concerned Scientists in the US and translated into Canadian terms by the David Suzuki foundation has determined that the production and distribution of food in North America is one of the top three contributors to the environmental impact of the average Canadian household (Harvey, 2003).³¹

According to Lawrence Buzzell-Saltzman the USDA's *Dietary Recommendations for Americans* is a contradiction; the stated goal of proper diet and nutrition of Americans is at odds with the prevailing practice of submitting to the dictates of the powerful corporate food industry which focus on what sells which is not necessarily healthy.

Americans have become obsessed with dieting. The arguments rage over the virtues of low carbohydrate diets vs. high protein diets. The corporate food industry lobbies the government to control the contents of the food pyramid. The resulting food pyramid is often not based on science, but based on what corporate America thinks they can sell (2004-2005)

The U.S. Food Industry while somewhat subject to regulation by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) may take 'voluntary action' or self-correcting action to address areas of concern. For example, Dr. Gary Vogin, in an article posted to *WebMD Health News* reviewed a move by the U.S. Food Industry to improve food labeling practices (2001).³² In 2007, Kellogg Corporation instituted a move to self-regulate food advertisements to children (Egerton).³³

Critics of the U.S. Food Industry's connection to the USDA point out the need for increased surveillance of imported food and food products as well as food produced in the U.S. (Zwillich, 2007).³⁴

According to Nestle,

Lobbying is any legal attempt by individuals or groups to influence government policy or action, a definition that explicitly excludes bribery. Historically, lobbying always has involved three elements (1) promoting the views of special-interest groups, (2) attempting to influence government laws, rules, or policies that might affect those groups, and (3) communication with government officials or their representatives about laws, rules, or policies of interest. Food lobbyists therefore, are people who ask government officials to make rules or laws that will benefit their client's companies, whether or not they benefit anyone else (2007, page 95, ¶1).³⁵

Using the food lobbying method, food lobbyists "...make sure that the government (1) does nothing to impede clients from selling more of their products and (2) does as much

³¹ Harvey, J. (2003). Corporate food system: Runs counter to nature and community. Retrieved May 18, 2008 from <http://www.elements.nb.ca/theme/ecologicalfootprint/janice/harvey.htm>

³² Vogin, G. M.D. (2001). Food Industry Pushes for Better Food Labels. Retrieved May 22, 2008 from <http://www.webmd.com/news/20010531/food-industry-pushes-for-better-food-labels>.

³³ Egerton, J. (2007). Kellogg self-regulates food ads. *Broadcast News*. <http://ibc.broadcastnewsroom.com/articles/viewarticle.jsp?id=151784>

³⁴ Zwillich, T. (2007). Congress debates moves on food safety: Democrats attack Bush plan as too little, too slow. Retrieved on May 12, 2008 from http://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/news/20071204/congress-debates-moves-food-safety?src=RSS_PUBLIC

³⁵ Nestle, Marion. (2007). *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Health and Nutrition*. Berkeley, CA: University of Berkeley Press.

as possible to create a supportive sales environment. This is successfully accomplished, in part, through the use of financial contributions to federal agencies, policy makers and elected officials. (2007, page 110, ¶1).³⁶

This means that nutritional guidelines and dietary recommendations by the USDA are not made objectively and perhaps not with the best interests of American consumers at heart because of the power and influence by the corporate food industry and other commercial lobbying groups focused on maximizing profits rather than providing proper nutrition.

³⁶Nestle, Marion. (2007). Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Health and Nutrition. Berkeley, CA: University of Berkeley Press.