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Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food, And Community (Civil Society: Historical And Contemporary Perspectives)



Synopsis

While the American agricultural and food systems follow a decades-old path of industrialization and globalization, a counter trend has appeared toward localizing some agricultural and food production. Thomas A. Lyson, a scholar-practitioner in the field of community-based food systems, calls this rebirth of locally based agriculture and food production civic agriculture because these activities are tightly linked to a community's social and economic development. Civic agriculture embraces innovative ways to produce, process, and distribute food, and it represents a sustainable alternative to the socially, economically, and environmentally destructive practices associated with conventional large-scale agriculture. Farmers' markets, community gardens, and community-supported agriculture are all forms of civic agriculture. Lyson describes how, in the course of a hundred years, a small-scale, diversified system of farming became an industrialized system of production and also how this industrialized system has gone global. He argues that farming in the United States was modernized by employing the same techniques and strategies that transformed the manufacturing sector from a system of craft production to one of mass production. Viewing agriculture as just another industrial sector led to transformations in both the production and the processing of food. As small farmers and food processors were forced to expand, merge with larger operations, or go out of business, they became increasingly disconnected from the surrounding communities. Lyson enumerates the shortcomings of the current agriculture and food systems as they relate to social, economic, and environmental sustainability. He then introduces the concept of community problem solving and offers empirical evidence and concrete examples to show that a re-localization of the food production system is underway.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"An eye-opening read recommended for collections on agriculture, community development, economics of food production and sociology."
—Academia
"[Lyson] provides an excellent historical context on how Northeast growers, who traditionally sold their products in local urban markets, have been able to resist somewhat the pressures to "go corporate" and in the current century, preserve their land by embracing the CSAs, farmers' markets, and other forms of civic agriculture."
—The Community Farm

5 1/2 x 8 1/2 trim. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a great book if you don't know a lot about what's wrong with the current food system and if you want to learn more about small-scale agriculture. If you already know a lot on the topic, it might be boring. It's a short, fast read and it can be dry but it is a lot of good information. I already knew a lot on the topic from reading "Eating Animals" by Jonathan Safran Foer (which I highly recommend), but as a text for one of my classes, this was helpful as a refresher. Don't get too downtrodden from the first few chapters; Lyson gets to the revival of civic agriculture in the later chapters.

This book was purchased for a class I am in. Of all the books I have had to read for school this was the most straight forward, easy to read and informational.

Informative and useful for my class in civic agriculture

The issues that are addressed by Thomas Lyson in this small volume are important and becoming more so. He describes in adequate detail the progression from subsistence farming of our great grand parents to the industrial farms of today. He goes on to discuss how feeding and clothing the world's growing population in that manner is becoming more and more problematic and shows how the development of community based agriculture provides a path out of that morass. One need not be an agronomist or agricultural economist to appreciate Professor Lyson's statement of the problem and its possible solution. In fact, the non-technical reader could well perceive this book as a

good starting point for participation in this most important discussion.

In 2005, Thomas Lyson published an article "Civic Agriculture and Community Problem Solving" in the journal "Culture & Agriculture" (vol 27 no2 pages 92-98). In this short article, he articulates all of the important points of his book with the same title. I really enjoyed the article and hoped to find more in the book, but it mostly just adds history and background detail about the food system in general that can be found in most books on the subject.

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