



جامعة الناصر  
AL-NASSER UNIVERSITY

## **Cultural Dependency on Food**

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جميع حقوق النشر محفوظة لمكتب البحوث والنشر بجامعة الناصر

## **Abstract**

Food in a society proves vital in more aspects than sustenance and survival. Food offers faith in the continued success of a community and provides economic stability, which allows individuals to pursue higher goals. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs places food at the base of the pyramid as one of humanities basic needs (Huit). Before people can move to higher levels, like shelter, vocational needs or relationships, adequate food supplies are needed.

Global food distribution takes needed supplies to countries worldwide. Resistance comes from people afraid they will lose their cultural identities to new, unwanted food products. The small farmers fear the same and struggle with outdated processes that fall short of the safe handling requirements larger countries mandate.

Technology makes the globalization of the food market possible. Introducing new flavors to countries around the world and contributing to the health of an unknown society. Making the food chain safe for consumers to eat and providing nutritional meals to children while merging cultures that reside on opposite sides of the Earth.

## **Food: Valued above all other resources**

Ancient Egyptians dried grapes, figs and other fruit on the hot desert sands. The ancient Greeks produced olive oil that was worth more than its weight in gold. Ancient Roman feasts were grand shows of gluttony. During the middle ages, fat meant a person had wealth and others envied the over-fed. The Irish potato famine decimated the country's economy.

The Roman Empire sent troops to conquer the known world. Though Roman rule meant a life of servitude, they allowed the people to keep their customs and cultural traditions to prevent resistance. The Empire often adopted the foods of conquered people into their own culture and put great value in the crops grown in their newly acquired lands. Figs, dates, palm oil and olive oil imported to Roman cities cost too much for peasants, but the rich bought them as soon as they came off the boat.

## **Globalizing emergency food supplies**

When tragedy strikes a nation, food and medical supplies, sent from other countries, help to rebuild the stricken communities. Where famine strikes, food supplies travel to impoverished nations to ease the hunger and engineers teach the people how to recover farmlands lost to natural disaster. The people rebuild the cities, towns or villages and they know they have found peace once again after tasting the foods from their own kitchens. Food defines the culture and societies of people everywhere. The one connection all people share comes on a plate; everyone eats.

The logistics of the food chain have expanded and food like fresh frozen produce, beef, pork, chicken and fish sail to faraway regions where people need to supplement their food supplies with staples not available in their regions. Globalization has changed in how food fulfills the social needs of people by encompassing tradition, nutrition and public safety.

Keeping the food supply safe from food borne pathogens requires the cooperation of everyone in the food chain and resources to educate those countries using outdated processing methods. The produce shipped around the world should arrive fresh and safe. The safe handling of food products makes modern food distribution much different from the ancient past.

## **Where it comes from**

The global market makes sharing cultures through food possible anywhere in the world. Markets for food imported from Thailand, Spain, Africa and the Americas grow each year. Surprisingly, some countries export foods not commonly associated with the culture. Italy, known for pasta, exports more than 400-million tons of kiwis each year. New Zealand, most often associated with the fruit, exports under 350-million tons annually.

Other countries have also begun exporting foods and drinks that seem odd to their cultures. Japan, for example, finds success making whiskey that rivals the finest Irish single malts. Greece, long known for producing the best feta cheese on the market, now competes with Canadian feta, which costs less. American Ginseng has earned much praise in a market normally dominated by China (Investopia Contributor).

## **Sharing meals and making friends**

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Mass immigration to the United States in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century makes it the melting pot of world cultures. Immigrants settled in cities and formed sub-cultures within the growing communities. China Towns and Little Italy's became parts of New York, Chicago, San Francisco and numerous other large cities. After several generations, the recipes now have distinct American influences mixed with traditional cooking methods. The Americanizing of ethnic foods makes these communities unique and the people a mix of old values with a love of new experiences.

Importing allows the people in these communities to find the ingredients needed to make authentic versions of dishes their great grandmother had to Americanize because the ingredients did not exist in her new country.

Food opens the way for friendships as cultural barriers fall when sharing meals with others. Often a regional staple food can have different flavors in different cities or villages. Arepas, made throughout Columbia and Venezuela, are a staple in everyone's kitchen. Residents can often identify the village the flatbread originated from and, to take flavors a bit farther, the kitchen in which it was prepared (Unknown). Globalization of food distribution makes it possible to taste these variations without leaving the neighborhood.

Schoolchildren benefit from the distribution of foods by learning to enjoy different cultural experiences and becoming open to the traditions of others. The educational value of sharing food extends into public school lunch programs, which continue to serve meals made more nutritious by technological advances in transport.

## **The technology of food distribution**

Freezing produce to preserve the nutrients and lengthen the shelf life still seems the best method. As the temperature inside the fruit or vegetable cools, the molecules slow to a stop, thus removing heat from the plants interior to stop aging and decomposition (Agriculture and Consumer Protection). Without this technology, exporting fresh produce, dairy products and meats could not happen.

Over the past 20-years, technological advances in food preservation and refrigeration have made it possible to ship fresh produce without losing nutritional value or spoiling. These advances have opened a global market for fresh fruits and vegetable flash frozen for export.

Flash freezing keeps the nutritional value of vegetables close to the values of fresh vegetables. Fresh vegetables and fruit provide necessary nutrition to keep people healthy. The processes of transporting food also make a big difference in reducing spoilage and loss of product.

The automation of warehouses has reduced the number of air exchanges food experiences during the unloading, storing and reloading processes. Human operated storage procedures call for each pallet to sit in unrefrigerated areas when unloaded. Then the pallets go into cold storage where the temperature rises immediately after new product arrives. The temperature then drops as the new products reach the correct temperature. The number of air exchanges increases the chances of fresh vegetable reaching a temperature that accelerates decomposition.

Robots now unload and load trucks inside cold rooms. They even palletize mixed loads inside cold storage, which humans do outside the temperature controlled environment because the prolonged cold poses health risks. Robots run on a series of tracks built on the ceiling in grids. Robots programmed for specific tasks take little room to run and reduce storage space needed. Robots built to withstand the cold insure air exchanges stay at a minimum and new loads have little impact on the temperatures inside cold storage.

Container ships carry food from port to port without food spoiling during the long trip. Refrigerated containers hold foods at the proper temperature and should the temperature vary too widely, alerts go to the logistics manager. The time of the fluctuation, temperature variations and length of time the temperature stayed out of specification all get recorded for future reference. The information also provides a link in the cold chain as accountability and the ability to trace any problems with products have become standard for countries wanting to export food products to large countries. The distribution of food reaches far, but some countries have yet to join the market.

## **Loss of identity**

Food and the flavors cooks coax out of them come from the history of a people. The pride taken in preparing the dish and knowing it represents a specific people leaves many with a fear of imported foods. They fear that change will take away their traditions and make their history disappear.

They also fear losing the rights to crops they plant and harvest every year. They fear exporting food will deplete the supply they need to sustain their ethnic identity. In the minds of many, global food distribution will take away everything they own and leave them with nothing.

They do not take into consideration how imports can enhance their diet and help keep their children healthy. The threat of drought or flood wiping out the year's food supply always shadows the future. During times of need, imports keep people alive.

Another problem stemming from the global market falls to poor nations whose farmers cannot keep up with changes in agriculture. With little time or money to invest in research projects or continued education, small scale farms will lose money trying to compete in the global market.

### **Safe food handling**

The food chain begins in the fields at harvest. Food borne pathogens like salmonella, listeria and E coli can easily sicken an entire community and have the potential to kill.

The United States, Europe, Australia and, most recently, China maintains strict inspection and testing of imported foods. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires all foods the United States import meet the country's domestic standards for quality and safety (Unknown ).

Countries must keep records of inspections and each instance of testing for food borne bacteria. The international program allows FDA inspectors to inspect foods awaiting shipment in foreign countries and the authority to issue import alerts when an inspector is denied access to the product.

Food borne pathogens present health hazards to entire communities. Symptoms of food poisoning include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and, in severe cases, death.

Food contamination happens by several means. Fresh produce contaminated during harvest when workers handle produce without washing their hands has occurred. The pathogen stays on the produce and multiplies. Cross contamination happens if any other produce meets a surface touched by the contaminated food.

Produce loaded in open crates and stacked in trucks pass bacteria when they rub against one another. Another threat during transport occurs when produce, wet from the fields, drips on the floor. The contaminated water then runs under other containers, spreading the pathogens to nearby products. If the truck does not receive a thorough cleaning between loads, the next load picks up the pathogen, as well.

The effects of food borne illnesses on a community go beyond the health issues; illness causes depression and a lack of trust in local authorities to keep the food safe. If cleanliness during harvest and transport improves worldwide, the instances of illness will decrease. Educational programs developed to teach farmers safe handling practices and strict inspection rules will help reduce the risk to public safety.

Safe food earns the trust of a society. Consumers buy foods they know will not harm them and foods they recognize as tasting good.

## **Food distribution and advertising**

Because food appeals to people on a cultural level, advertisers try creating advertising campaigns that remind viewers of their ethnicity.

Food packaging means more than a safe way to get food from the grocery store to the home. Packaging portrays the product in a way consumers find comforting or exciting. The brand name and the style of packaging must appeal to consumers in order for a product to succeed.

Much consideration goes into the packaging of popular foods. For example, cereals aimed at children generally come in colorful boxes with cartoon characters on the front. In the grocery store, these cereals sit on lower shelves where kids can easily see them.

In open-air market places, vendors appeal to the senses by arranging colorful displays of fresh fruit and vegetables. They will keep a pot of cooking food nearby so shoppers, lured by the smell, shop at that stand.

Test markets, created by advertisers, track consumer behavior through social networks, club cards, debit cards, emails and surveys to find the best way to market products. Modern marketing can pinpoint the exact demographic that will buy a product and they advertise directly to that section of society.

Television commercials, for example, come on at certain times of the day because surveys and observations show a certain demographic will see it. Commercials for private vocational colleges will air in the mid afternoon during talk shows because the demographic consists of young mothers who may want to go back to school.

Advertising campaigns use psychological stimulants to sway consumers. Worldwide, the campaigns appeal to each society differently. European commercials have more nudity and sexual content than other countries. The brand names even differ as some product names do not translate well in other countries.

Appealing to the masses via advertising takes teams of artists and stacks of algorithmic reports. But, the campaigns work to bring consumers into stores for the produce and other edible products.

The globalization of the food market brings cultural diversity into the grocery store and brings people together to learn new ways to prepare family meals. Increasing the safety of foods and providing transparency in the food industry assure consumers that those who supply their food care. The health and safety of communities nationwide improves as suppliers and scientists work to end the contamination of food during processing. Educating farmers and food processors on food safety procedures keeps communities healthy.

As countries around the world implement safety inspectors and programs like the HAACP program in the United States, food supplies become safer, the community improves financially, and socially. The basic need for food once fulfilled leads to better health and higher education. These programs draw in the entire community and put the responsibility of a safe food supply on them. Accountability makes a culture stronger and better able to sustain a growing population.

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