

Sameness in Diversity: Food and Globalization in Modern America

By *Laresh Jayasanker*

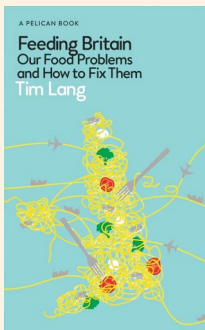
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS: 2020. 288PP. \$35

In *Sameness in Diversity: Food and Globalization in Modern America*, Laresh Jayasanker, associate professor of history at Metropolitan State University of Denver, explores the impacts that immigration and globalization have had on American culture through the lens of food.

The food choices and eating habits of American consumers have changed and expanded dramatically since the 1960s. Exotic ingredients, not then available — mangoes, hot sauces, açai drinks, kale smoothies, for example — have now become prominent in US food retailers and restaurants. Accelerated global trade and immigration, accompanied by many other social and economic upheavals, have driven this diversification of food supply and diet. At the same time, homogenization and consolidation within the food industry has led to the dominance of a relatively limited number of companies in food production and distribution, which has created a fundamental paradox in American food culture — sameness in diversity.

Jayasanker not only explores how shifts in migration patterns influence food habits, but also demonstrates that a collection of factors contributing to globalization, such as trade, labour rhythms and transportation, have shaped the variety and cost of foods. Suburbs have become centres of the new global food culture. Tensions between homogenizing and diversifying influences in the supply chain throw uncertainty on what we now mean by 'authenticity' when it comes to food and culture.

This book would appeal to social scientists, anthropologists, historians and the general public.



Feeding Britain: Our Food Problems and How to Fix Them

By *Tim Lang*

PELICAN RANDOM HOUSE UK: 2020. 567PP. £25

The UK food system is, according to Tim Lang in *Feeding Britain: Our Food Problems and How to Fix Them*, a bundle of paradoxes. There is much to admire about it — abundance and diversity of food supply, support of livelihoods and logistical efficiency — but the fragility is troubling. The UK food system is characterized by detrimental impacts on the natural world and human health, an undervalued work force, declining domestic production with domination of animal production in agricultural land use, reliance on imports (particularly from the European Union) and a boom in the use of food banks.

Lang recounts social and political food movements in the UK over the past century, where food planning was integrated with issues and interests in national defence, land use, farming, poverty and health. These were exemplified in the 1930s by the likes of Beveridge, Rowntree and Boyd Orr, and more recently by the Food 2030 report, Marmot's review on health inequalities in England and Alston's report on extreme poverty and human rights in the UK. Throughout the book, Lang draws upon the tension between such socially driven/politically led, pragmatic and holistic approaches to food planning and the 'leave it to Tesco et al' approach that characterizes the current scene, where food problems are individualized, solutions are personalized and responsibility is divested by the state to others — with nobody discernibly showing leadership. Lang advocates for a radical, decisive overhaul of the UK's food system — nothing piecemeal. Foremost among his recommendations is a strong reorientation of food policy towards a vision (be that Atlanticist, Euro-reforming, globalist, nationalist, and so on) and aspirations (human and ecosystem health, quality and diversity of diets, decency and fairness for the workforce, and so on). At one point, Lang notes that some analysts find the bundle of paradoxes so complex that only a crisis would enable conditions suitable for the scale of change needed. Although Brexit was, and is, pitched by some as the impetus for reform, this book was written pre-COVID-19 and Lang's take on the global pandemic as the agent of change would be fascinating.

This is a most-informative, interesting and pragmatic book. It describes stakeholders, challenges and transformation of the UK food system in a very comprehensive way — based on evidence and experience. This book is suitable for researchers, students and the public with an interest in food policy and the social and political initiatives to improve food and nutrition in Britain over the past century.



How Eating Insects Could Save the World

Presented by Tilly Collins

Podcast from *Making the World Better*, Apple Podcasts (<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/how-eating-insects-could-save-world-dr-tilly-collins/id1495319444?i=1000471306834>)

Insects could become an important component of our food systems, providing nutrition, supporting livelihoods and relieving pressures the human diet exerts on the environment. In this 37 minute podcast, Tilly Collins, senior fellow at the Centre for Environmental Policy at Imperial College, London, addresses the benefits of insect farming and her work promoting insect production with West African farmers.

In contrast to warm-blooded animals, insects do not need to spend energy keeping their body temperature high, and this makes them very efficient energy converters. They can grow on byproducts of meat production, thereby reducing waste and promoting circularity in agriculture. Though a complete substitution of meat by insects is unlikely to take place, Collins believes it could help minimize the problems of meat production — including high water and energy demand, as well as animal welfare issues.

Insects should no longer be viewed as exotic snacks restricted to parts of Africa and Asia where they are already consumed. Crickets, palm weevils and black soldier flies, to name a few, offer profitable business opportunities for both smallholders and big players of the food industry, who are already exploring insect-based animal feed. The consumption of insects is still seen with some scepticism by many consumers, but Collins argues that a cultural shift is possible through increasing exposure to these products, smart marketing and communication strategies.

This podcast is a pleasant and easy listening introduction to the topic. It is particularly interesting for the general public, and unveils a vast range of opportunities related to insect farming that many will not be aware of. Without delving into technical aspects such as food safety, the podcast gives a clear sense of the potential impact of current developments in this area, going well beyond the images of caterpillars on barbeque sticks — and definitely making it all more palatable. Image credit: Tim Gainey / Alamy Stock Photo.

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