



The Sociology of Food and Eating

By: Deyana Pangelinan

T SOC 165C

Introduction

Food is an important aspect of our lives as it is a basic human necessity and it is intriguing to see how the culture of food is influenced sociologically. For the final project, I would like to focus on the Sociology of Food and Eating in the U.S. I will primarily focus on three aspects which are how the food is made, distributed, and consumed. More specifically, I will investigate the politics of pesticides, how class inequality affects food distribution, and why the U.S. enjoys larger serving sizes.



1

The Politics of Pesticides



A person wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, a white cap, and dark pants is seen from behind, standing in a lush green field. They are holding a long, thin hose that extends across the field. The person appears to be engaged in agricultural work, possibly spraying or watering the crops. The background shows a vast, flat landscape under a clear sky.

“

“It is a tragedy that [the Trump] administration sides with corporations instead of children’s health” (Patti Goldman, lead attorney with the environmental law nonprofit Earthjustice).

Purpose of Pesticides

Pests are an inevitable challenge when it comes to maintaining the health of crops. In order to control weeds, insect infestations and disease carriers (i.e. mice, mosquitoes, rats, and ticks) we use pesticides.

In 2019, the Agricultural Chemical Use Survey of fruit producers conducted a study where they collected data about pesticide use and pest management strategies on the acres of 21 different food crops in 12 U.S. states. The top type of pesticides in used consisted of **Fungicides (that target fungal diseases), Insecticides (that target insects), and Herbicides (that target weeds)**. From the data, we can see that pesticides are a common and widely used solution to maintaining the health of the crops. **But at what cost?**

Fig. 2. Pesticides Applied to Selected Fruits, 2019 Crop Year
(% of planted acres)

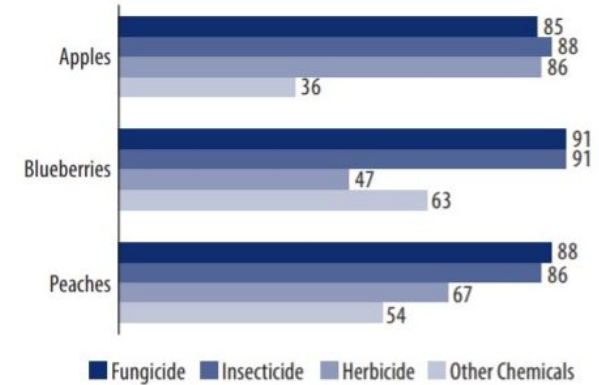



Fig. 1. States Included in the 2019 Fruit Chemical Use Survey
(number of crops surveyed in state)





The Cost of Pesticides on Human Health

- For years the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has debated whether or not to ban the use of pesticides, particularly, chlorpyrifos, on U.S. farmland due to people having brain damage from exposure through farm work or consumption of the food.
 - In 2000, the pesticide was mostly banned under **Obama administration** due to a Columbia University study that, “found links between children who were exposed to the pesticide and neurodevelopmental damage such as reduced IQ, loss of working memory and attention deficit disorders” (congressional digest)
 - With the ban implementation under way under Obama’s administration, it seemed that there was positive action taken in the right direction that would protect and respect the health of farm workers as well as consumers.
- 

The Sociology of Pesticides and Dirty Politics

- In 2017, under **Trump Administration**, the full implementation of the pesticide ban was cancelled and further investigation was required
 - The EPA's justification for this decision is that, " 'Although EPA does not have reason to believe that the [Columbia University study] inappropriately handled the data or statistical analysis, without the availability of the raw data, EPA remains unable to verify the reported findings,' an anonymous EPA official told The Hill newspaper in October 2020. " (congressional digest)
- This decision was highly upsetting to environmental law and human rights activists. Environmental law nonprofit named Earthjustice teamed up with other public and environmental health groups such as the Farmworker Justice, Natural Resources Defense Council, United Farm Workers, and Farm Labor Organizing Committee to sue the Trump administration to implement the pesticide ban. They collected over 150,000 public comments that object the EPA decision to keep using chlorpyrifos. They were disappointed that instead of the EPA following the law and caring about the well-being of their workers and children who lived in areas surrounding the farmlands, they gave into greedy corporate interests and were more worried about the profit that they may lose with the ban.
- The government's economic interests is what influences the use of pesticides on agricultural land, therefore also affecting the health of millions of innocent and hard working Americans. We can observe this effect through the difference of view on the pesticide ban between the Obama administration and Trump administration.

2

How class
inequality
affects food
distribution





Low-Income College Student and Food Insecurity

- Although there are many different categories of classes to discuss, I will be focusing on discussing Low-Income College Students and their growing rate of food insecurity.
- In the past ten years, studies have shown that the food insecurity among U.S. college students have grown from a rate of 20% to 50%, which is much higher than the U.S. population's rate of about 12%.
- Some causes of food insecurity are:
 - Increasing amount of low-income college students
 - Rising costs of college and insufficient financial aid offered
 - Increase in financial hardships among student's families
 - Weak job market opportunity for part-time working students
 - SNAP, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program has policies that don't include certain students from getting assistance.
- Having a low food security as a college student does not only affect the nutrients that you intake, but the hunger may also affect your attention during classes, which could then negatively impact your grades, which down the line could impact your chances of finding a good career.

3

Why the U.S. Enjoys Larger Serving Sizes



U.S. vs U.K. Portions

When compared to other countries, the portion size of foods in the U.S. are noticeably much larger and increasing in size as the years go on. But why is that? In most cases, it is the decisions of powerful, international food producers and restaurant chains who influence the decision of portion size. As seen in the photo to the right, the fast food chain of KFC has a much smaller portion size in the U.K. than the USA. These enterprises are naturally driven by the main desire to make profit, therefore they will not take action that would put them in a competitive disadvantage, such as decreasing portion size.



Obesity in the U.S.

One of the causes of obesity in the U.S. is growing food portion size. I found a an interesting sociological study that researched adults' reactions when given varying portion sizes. In 1976, scientists, Pudel and Oetting served people food from normal bowls to find out their usual intake of foods. As the days of the experiment gradually went on, they would start to feed their subjects larger portions without letting them know. Ultimately, they gained strange results. Despite differing portions, the hunger and satisfaction after each meal were about the same (only 45% of the subjects noticed the change). They wondered if this also applied to vegetables. The results were an increase in vegetables led to an increase in consumption regardless of differing physical characteristics such as BMI or dietary restraints. This says a lot about how easy it is to influence majority of our society's consumption as well as how easy it is for these powerful food franchises to profit off of research data such as this.

Annotated Bibliography

Charlie Floyd, Harry Kersh. “Every Difference between UK and US KFC Including Portion Sizes, Calories, and Exclusive Items.” *Insider*, 8 Aug. 2020, www.insider.com/food-wars-every-difference-between-uk-and-us-kfc-2020-7.

- I used the video and article of this source to capture images that supported my argument that the USA has larger chain restaurant portion sizes when compared to the U.K.

Did you find it useful? Rate it 4.9/511 ratings { "@context": "schema.org/"}. “Modern Food. Free PowerPoint Template & Google Slides Theme.” *SlidesCarnival*, 10 Dec. 2020, www.slidescarnival.com/egeon-free-presentation-template/12786.

- I used this resource for the free slides template of this presentation and it contributed by becoming a stylish food focused theme to use that inspired some of the design edits I’ve included myself.

Freudenberg, Nicholas, et al. “College Students and SNAP: The New Face of Food Insecurity in the United States.” *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 109, no. 12, Dec. 2019, pp. 1652–1658. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.2105/AJPH.2019.305332.

- This secondary source scholarly journal article provided the statistical evidence of the increasing amount of low-income college students and their food insecurity, it also discussed the possible causes of this insecurity.

Annotated Bibliography

Freudenberg, Nicholas, et al. "College Students and SNAP: The New Face of Food Insecurity in

the United States." *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 109, no. 12, Dec. 2019, pp. 1652–1658. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.2105/AJPH.2019.305332.

- This secondary source scholarly journal article provided the statistical evidence of the increasing amount of low-income college students and their food insecurity, it also discussed the possible causes of this insecurity.

Levin, Sam. "Largest Maker of Pesticide Linked to Brain Damage in Kids to Stop Producing Chemical." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 6 Feb. 2020,

www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/06/chlorpyrifos-pesticide-corteva-trump-administration#:~:text=1 year old-,Largest maker of pesticide linked to brain,kids to stop producing chemical&text=US government experts.-,Chlorpyrifos has been widely used on corn, soybeans, almonds, children, including impaired brain development.

- This article was used for background research on the damaging effects of chlorpyrifos on the brain.

Annotated Bibliography

“Pros & Cons of Banning Chlorpyrifos: A Need for Further Study versus Potential Brain

Damage in Children.” *Congressional Digest*, vol. 100, no. 1, Jan. 2021, p. 30. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=147708415&site=ehost-live.

- This secondary source scholarly journal article provided the quotations used in my slides covering pesticides and politics, it gave data from the EPA about pesticides harmful damage on the human brain, and how ultimately the decision on whether or not to ban it is based on the intentions of the current government administration (which oftentimes acts out of self-interest and corporate desires).

MailOnline, Margot Peppers for. “How McDonald's Cup Sizes Vary around the World.” *Daily Mail Online*, Associated Newspapers, 27 Oct. 2014,

www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2809810/Just-large-large-soda-McDonald-s-cup-sizes-vary-globe-biggest-U-S-30oz.html.

- This article provided the images utilized in slide 10 of the difference in McDonald's cup sizes in the U.S. compared to the U.K. in which the U.S. has the larger size.

Pudel , VE, and M Oetting. “Eating in the Laboratory: Behavioural Aspects of the Positive Energy Balance.” *Europe PMC*, 31 Dec. 1976, europepmc.org/article/med/617114.

- This source was the laboratory report and journal article summarized in slide 12 that talked about how adults react to being given different portion sizes.

Annotated Bibliography

Rosenbaum, Leah. "EPA Rejects Ban On Common Pesticide Linked to Brain Damage in Children." *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 19 July 2019, www.forbes.com/sites/leahrosenbaum/2019/07/19/epa-rejects-ban-on-common-pesticide-linked-to-brain-damage-in-children/?sh=3704b2c11026.

- This article provided information about the Trump administration's decision to not implement the ban on pesticides possibly due to not wanting to lose money.

"United States Department of Agriculture." *USDA*, www.nass.usda.gov/Surveys/Guide_to_NASS_Surveys/Chemical_Use/.

- I used this source to find the bar chart of pesticide types used on plants in 12 different U.S. states.

"Why We Use Pesticides." *EPA*, Environmental Protection Agency, 27 June 2017, www.epa.gov/safepestcontrol/why-we-use-pesticides#:~:text=Pesticides are used to control,weeds, insect infestation and diseases.&text=Herbicides to kill or inhibit,plants, also known as weeds.

- This research was used to show the amount of pesticides used in 21 different large food crops in the US.