

## Book Review *Anne Mitchell*

*The Future Control of Food: A Guide to International Negotiations and Rules on Intellectual Property, Biodiversity and Food Security.* (A project of the Quaker International Affairs Programme in collaboration with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa. Published by Earthscan, (UK) 2008, edited by Geoff Tansey and Tasmin Rajotte)

This book is well written, well researched, and the topic is timely. The task for the 2<sup>1st</sup> century is to change our economic system to be more resilient, fair, and responsive to the needs of people, not corporations. Economic and food production systems have to change if we are to have a food-secure future. This book is a wakeup call about what is at stake and who is in control of our food. It is a handbook for negotiators, policy makers, concerned Friends, and those who care about the changing power structure that controls access to food. In a world where access to food is uneven this book offers basic information to help readers understand the issues: people in North America are dying of obesity while people in the global south are dying of malnutrition, and the temporary solution of food banks has become a permanent fixture in our landscape. It provides a vital analysis of the complex inter-relationships of intellectual property, biodiversity, access to food, and the role of international agreements for negotiations

Increasingly, seeds and food crops are treated as commodities that are subject to patents and intellectual property rules. This book looks at patents and trademarks on seeds, plant and animal genetic materials, and how the multinational holders of these patents control and genetically modify our food, now and into the future. The holding of such patents is of concern to Quakers in light of our testimonies of simplicity, peace, equality, integrity, and community.

**Access to food is a basic need and therefore a social justice issue.**

This book provides vital information for negotiators and policy makers of all stripes in rich and poor countries. It is certainly a must-read for those with responsibility for negotiating at the international level on behalf of their citizens. It covers global intellectual property standards and their extending reach; the need to safeguard biodiversity and the need to give priority to the Commons. It also discusses capacities required to successfully negotiate in such international

arenas as: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

Better negotiations alone however, will not result in fair food systems. Our global economic system rewards technological fixes without due analysis and care. As long as large global corporations are able to concentrate their power, and control the production of food from seed development to food on the table, access to food will remain uneven.

Concerned Friends, who see access to food as a basic need and a social justice issue, can learn what is at stake by reading this book, and encouraging those who are negotiating on our behalf at the international level to read this book. (*Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy* - Quaker project, of the Quaker Institute for the Future – also addresses some of the changes needed in our economic system). We can move toward a food secure future now: grow food if you can, buy locally grown food, support local farmers, and try to purchase organic food.

*Anne Mitchell, Toronto Monthly Meeting*

[Anne is the Executive Director of the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy (CIELAP) who recently convened a national, multi-stakeholder workshop in Ottawa on Resilient Agricultural Systems. She is also a board member of the Quaker Institute for the Future, and incoming clerk of Canadian Yearly Meeting.]

