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Food Policies and Issues in the United States, Europe, and Asia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines global and local food policies in United States, Europe, and Asia and discusses possible challenges and gaps for public and food actors, particularly from an economic perspective. In this paper, food policies and regulations are assessed by reviewing global reports, documents, and scholarly journals. The paper emphasizes the possible risks and disjunctions between theory and application of economic food policies in the foodservice industry. Food regulations, inspection challenges, food insecurities, and food safety issues are summarized. Regardless of the level of strict food policies and facilities, unsatisfactory results still exist in developed and developing countries and have increased during COVID-19.

Keywords: Food, policies, food issues, food service industry

Introduction

Food policies make up the core of food systems and consist of government actions, legislations, and regulations. This system has a positive influence on the food production, consumption, and nutritional status of a population (Food Print, 2021; Helsing, 1997; IFT, 2021). Such policies are prepared both nationally and internationally by (elected) representatives from all levels of government and branches. Policymakers transcribe and pass the legislation, which guides agents and authorities to implement and enforce the law (Food Print, 2021). Some food and nutrition organizations do not act as policymakers but monitor and engage national and international legislation and regulatory developments (IFT, 2021). This article aims to briefly examine these regulations in different regions to evaluate whether they are comprehensive and strategic enough to secure stable and healthy food supplies to the public.

Food Policy and Issues in the United States

The history of food policy in the United States started with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the 1880s and continued with the Wiley Act, Pure

Food and Drug Act, and Federal Meat Inspection Act in the twentieth century. With the reorganization of the Bureau of Chemistry, a core government organization known as the U.S. Food Drug Administration, or FDA, was created in 1931. Food policy decisions in the United States are made by government entities at local and national levels in the Executive (e.g., FDA, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC; United States Department of Agriculture, or USDA), Legislative (e.g., Congress, House of Representatives), and Judicial branches (the U.S. Supreme Court) (David, 2012).

Recent articles and industry reports indicated that policymakers in the U.S. maintain rigorous standards for food production. However, U.S. federal policies still fail to address several key areas of the food system (Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, 2021). The U.S. organizations regulate the farm activities, food distribution, food supply chain, environmental practices, and sustainable food production. This task is challenging due to the complexity of the food system; therefore, a broad approach is needed. However, policymakers still frequently address the narrow objectives instead of the larger goals in the system (Muller et al., 2009). As

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a result, food- and nutrition-related challenges and issues continue to be burdens in our society and lead to detrimental results even in developed countries (Okumus & Sonmez, 2019). For example, the economic costs of healthy eating are directly affected by food prices, and low-income groups are still unable to obtain a steady supply of healthy foods for their households. According to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), economy-wide inflation has increased by 0.4% from December 2020 to January 2021. Consequently, food prices are expected to increase between 1.0% and 2.0%, and the increase of food-away-from-home prices are expected to increase between 2.0% and 3.0% in 2021 (USDA Economic Research Service, 2021).

Another problematic area of the U.S. food system is its lack of engagement with the public health system (Muller et al., 2009). Moreover, the lack of food access (Cleary et al., 2018), state- and district-level food and beverage marketing practices, school nutrition programs (Merlo et al., 2018), policy related to unhealthy food consumption (Roberto, 2020), and effective food inspections in foodservice settings (Okumus et al., 2019; Ridderstaat & Okumus, 2019) need to be reevaluated by policymakers in light of the recent data. Academia has frequently focused on nutrition policies in district schools and unhealthy food consumption by students and vulnerable populations or the link between policies and public health risks. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (2019) indicated that the economic consequences of an unhealthy diet cost approximately \$50 billion a year in the healthcare system related to cardiovascular disease and diabetes, among others. These are chronic issues that U.S. policymakers must consider to improve the food system and socioeconomic equality of citizens. In addition, certain economic, environmental, and public health threats have recently occurred. Said threats, including food crises due to the global pandemic, have gravely affected populations worldwide.

COVID-19 has severely disturbed the global food production and distribution chain according to the Torero (2020) and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2020) reports. Climate change, limited land and water sources, overpopulation, greenhouse gas emissions, and increased organic and inorganic waste have created a chaotic chain reaction against food supplies.

Populism and politicization of agro-food policies (Sheingate & Greer, 2020), lack of marine and aquaculture support for farmers, production of genetically modified (GM) foods, and lack of information about novel food technologies (Rickard et al., 2020) have hindered food security. As a result, the stress on food systems require a new focus on the U.S. and global food policies. The USDA's report on climate change and food security (2015) indicated that climate change will unpredictably affect food security, food availability, and food stabilization in the long term. Future scenarios are projecting that high levels of greenhouse gas emission (GHG ~850 ppm) are expected globally and will affect regions with higher populations than those with lower populations. Consequently, the risk of undernourishment will increase in low economic populations by as much as 175 million by 2080. Therefore, new adaptations are needed. Even if the success of the policy implementations may not be guaranteed or may be unaffordable and not offer sufficient benefits in a short time, adaptations will offer great potential to manage the destructive effects of climate change (United States Department of Agriculture, 2015).

Consumer welfare indirectly affects any food policies that assess consumer preferences. A nationwide survey showed that U.S. consumers support investments in food studies and policies to educate the population about what they eat and drink (Caputo & Lusk, 2020). Economic implications of consumer welfare have also been a subject of debate in the United States since 1979. Under the consumer welfare standards, Congress passed the Sherman Act in 1890 to create trust in the free market economy. However, Congress is now attempting to modify consumer welfare by addressing antitrust issues, product prices, and market competition (Hatch, 2019).

Food insecurity is another issue of the U.S. food policy. According to recent data, one in seven U.S. households experiences food shortage or food insecurity due to poverty. Individuals rely so heavily on food aid programs (Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, 2021) that the USDA gives such aid to any who qualify. Currently, 15 federal food and nutrition assistance programs (United States Department of Agriculture, 2021) are available in the United States. For example, SNAP offers food stamps that are funded by the U.S. Farm Bill, while

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) offers nutritional assistance for women and children at the state level funded by Congress to nearly 8 million low-income applicants annually. However, the program budgets do not increase equally with inflation (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2017), and food insecurity is still more common in large cities and rural areas than in suburban areas (United States Department of Agriculture, 2021). Besides, the unemployment rates drastically increased due to the pandemic from 6.2 million to 20.5 million in May 2020 and food insecurity has risen proportionally in the U.S. as a result (Pew Research Center, 2020). The hunger-relief organization known as Feeding America reported that food insecurity was directly affecting 37 million people before COVID but increased to 54 million people after the pandemic (Balch, 2020). The annual cost of hunger-related illness was calculated to be \$130.5 billion, \$19.2 billion due to low income and \$17.8 billion for charitable activities to reduce hunger. Ultimately, hunger costs every citizen in the U.S. \$542 according to Iowa Food Bank Association (2021).

Food hygiene and inspections in the food supply chain are also governed by U.S. food policy. The Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are U.S. government agencies that control and coordinate local, state, and federal officials in inspecting food supplies (Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, 2021). Local and state food inspections are regulated by state (health) departments and risk-based inspections are performed under the 2013 version of the FDA Model Food Code. Different divisions in each state department also use the department “codes and statutes” along with the FDA food code to ensure the quality of the inspection facilities (Florida Health Department, 2020; Food and Drug Administration, 2021).

The Economic Assessment Report (1997) showed that food safety applications reduced the costs of foodborne illnesses and productivity losses. However, the cost of food safety applications has increased from \$1.1 to \$1.3 billion in over 20 years (Crutchfield et al., 1997). According to recent studies, food safety costs were estimated to be around \$7 billion per year in the U.S. This figure included

lawsuits, health hazards, and product waste (Hussain & Dawson, 2013). Although state food inspectors follow strict food safety regulations, some studies still report safety violations in foodservice establishments (e.g., Leinwand et al., 2017; Okumus et al., 2019). Therefore, the effectiveness of said regulations is still subject to the scrutiny of scientists and food authorities (Appling et al., 2018; Okumus & Sonmez, 2019).

Environmental concerns are also frequently raised by numerous organizations, although U.S. farm policies promote ecologically sustainable farming practices (USDA Economic Research Service, 2020). In general, the U.S. Farm Bill proposes incentives to farmers for water, land, and wildlife habitat protection. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) controls certain agricultural contaminants, industrial food animal production (IFAP), and concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) (Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, 2021). However, the research still reveals the significant environmental and social issues associated with farming, toxic chemicals, alteration of wildlife habitats, and invasive species in the United States (USGS, 2007). These research studies indicated that the current U.S. food system is environmentally damaging and unsustainable therefore, the U.S. food policy needs serious reforms to improve agricultural ecology for beneficial farming practices (Shannon et al., 2015).

The social and economic impacts of food policies in developed countries are complex processes that policymakers must address sensibly. The U.S. agriculture sector has grown 2.5 times in the past 60 years and added more than \$100 billion worth of farm income in 2013. The impressive growth of the U.S. farm system is supported by public policies that include labor, product insurance, trading, and environmental practices. Such inflation has steadied the net income of U.S. agriculture for almost 40 years. Although the earnings and capital of the large commercial farms are still high, small and medium-size farmers and livestock actors have been affected seriously by recent changes in the food supply chain distribution and its economic returns (National Research Council, 2015).

The U.S. food system offers more employment opportunities than other sectors of the U.S. economy,

calculated to be almost 1.7 million in October 2019. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, massive job losses occurred and the U.S. food system was heavily affected by this negative turn. While food-service jobs were lost, food manufacturing stayed relatively stable despite a high transmission risk of COVID-19 in processing plants. Moreover, food prices increased significantly in the retail market. Farmers did not earn accordingly. The income level of many farm employees remained low due to the pandemic. Given this inequality of income distribution, the U.S. food system needs to be reevaluated by policymakers (Costlow & Masters, 2020) and should provide effective solutions regarding economic turnover, prices, and income in times of crisis.

Food Policy and Issues in the European Union and the United Kingdom

The European Union (EU) “is a unique economic and political union between 27 EU countries” created in 1958 as the European Economic Community (EEC). In 1993, the name was changed to the European Union (EU). The United Kingdom (UK) was a member of the EU but left it on January 31, 2020 (European Union, 2020). The main purpose of EU food policy is to ensure “safe, nutritious, high quality, and affordable food to Europe’s consumers” across all supply chains (European Commission, 2021). According to a report put out by the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food), EU food policy needed a more comprehensive analysis of its national, regional, and local European governments, organizations, and stakeholders. Therefore, the study group analyzed the current EU food policy and indicated the gray areas in which agri-food policies are not sustainable and where economic, social, and environmental trends have not been analyzed effectively. The policy was built with the aid of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), European Parliament, and the EU’s Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR), recognizing the limitations of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) at the national level (IPES Food, 2019).

The fundamental issues of EU food policy are land erosion, climate change, resource and energy shortages, sustainability, price instability, and

chemical usage standards for agriculture and livestock (European Commission, 2021). The European Commission reports show that 970 million tons of soil are lost in Europe annually due to soil erosion. Moreover, the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has done little to address structural problems in Eastern and Central Europe (Gorton et al., 2009). Therefore, the EU food and farming systems need a fundamental change. Consequently, Dutch, French, and Swedish governments have established comprehensive objectives for developing a sustainable food system through national food and drink policies. The EU reformed its previous food policy and dubbed it the “Common Food Policy” in anticipation of fundamental long-term shifts in the food system (IPES Food, 2019). Yet, recent studies have shown that the “Common Food Policy” is still inefficient to build healthy food environments. Under the new governance approaches, the updated policy does not meet the EU’s public health and sustainability objectives (De Schutter, 2020). The CAP also failed to ensure climate-friendly activities, soil preservation, prevention of land deprivation, creation of biodiversity, and an increase in socioeconomic equality (Pe’er et al., 2020).

The UK’s food policy has also been criticized by experts regarding its lack of animal welfare, environmental protection, food workers’ rights, and low-quality food imports (Food Ethics Council, 2021). The country is living in uncertainty since leaving the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy. The EU’s reform of the CAP may drastically impact food prices for producers and citizens in the UK (Morrison, 2020). Brexit presents further challenges for the UK to ensure proper food standards. For example, UK food poverty and public health issues such as obesity are growing rapidly. The UK’s trade, agricultural policy, food prices, food availability, fair trade practices, and excessive water extraction are growing problem areas highlighted by its governance mechanisms (Benton, 2019). Given this rise in food policy concerns, the government has recently dedicated more attention to its post-Brexit food policy. The European Union and the UK continue to cooperate on trade deals narrowing the severity of Brexit. However, uncertainties remain between manufacturers and policymakers (Matthijs, 2020). Moreover, the recent pandemic has rendered uncertainties over

the economy, employment, and finances beyond control.

Food Policy and Issues in Asia

South Asia has the highest poverty rate (423 million people) in the world. According to statistics, approximately 40% of the world's hunger originates from this region, where people live on less than one dollar a day and 299 million people face malnutrition and hunger daily (Mittal & Sethi, 2009). The 2020 Global Food Policy Report shows that South Asia faces severe economic outcomes due to COVID-19, so inclusive food systems are needed to reduce the damaging effects of long-standing issues such as food insecurity and poverty. The Indian government has recently launched several policy reforms focusing on knowledge and technology regarding modern farming, especially for small farmers. Similarly, Bangladesh and Nepal have focused their efforts on regional inclusive food systems for specific groups such as small farmers, women, and other vulnerable groups (Laishram, 2020). The South Asia Food and Nutrition Security Initiative (SAFANSI) launched a three-phase program in 2010, creating innovative actions to expand food and nutrition security in countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The Department for International Development (DFID) of the UK, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the European Commission, and the World Bank have invested in SAFANSI over the past decade (World Bank, 2021). However, growing populations, urbanization, and industrialization in South Asia limit the practical applications of this program due to a lack of frameworks for policies and programs at the governmental level (Rasul & Neupane, 2021). Similar results have been reported by the Independent Evaluation Department (IED) of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The report highlighted the rising food prices, declining agricultural productivity, food insecurity in rural areas, over-exploited natural resources, high oil and energy prices, and ineffective policy responses in Asia's major exporting and importing countries (Asian Development Bank, 2013).

The economic situation in industrialized Asian countries and the Pacific region is different from

South Asia. The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) has been achieved by some countries in the region, where poverty rates have been reduced, some countries have been growing fast, and agriculture and livestock have become gradually commercialized and diversified (e.g., in Malaysia, China, Japan, and Australia). Food consumption and dietary habits have dramatically shifted in the region from plant-based foods to animal protein (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2010). Southeast Asia has had a successful transition to sustainable agriculture and stabilization with policies aimed at the development of rural areas, thereby increasing farming and ensuring economic freedom for food actors and citizens (Van Donge et al., 2012).

Despite the region's rapid growth, Asia still faces serious food security challenges and risks with recent increases and volatility in world food prices. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased job losses and food insecurity, specifically in Southeast Asia. International rice prices rose by 20% during this time, and the strength of the U.S. dollar increased food and oil prices overall. Food access has been severely reduced in refugee camps and poor countries such as Afghanistan and Bangladesh. The small Pacific islands that are heavily dependent on tourism have also been affected by job losses and food insecurity (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2020). Recommendations of the World Bank and G20 governments, which are obliged to take inclusive actions to reinforce "the longer-term productivity, sustainability, and resilience of the food and agriculture system worldwide," have been used by food policymakers in institutional contexts (Asian Development Bank, 2013). However, policymakers in Asia must rethink to find more efficient and politically acceptable applications between supply chains and price management to reduce food crises in their region.

Conclusions and Future Research

This study briefly examined global and local food policies in United States, Europe, and Asia and offered discussions on possible challenges and gaps for public and food actors, particularly from an economic perspective. The reports from the World Bank, FAO, WHO, private sectors, and scholarly

articles were scanned and found that food security has increased to the point of re-emerging as a global concern. Urbanization, industrialization, rapid economic growth, and rising prosperity have exacerbated this global threat, leading to increased unsustainable farming, diversified food demands, and volatile food prices in the United States, the EU, and Asia. Because food policy is a government action from farm to fork, policymakers should reconsider the recent issues, such as pandemic, heavily affecting the food system globally. Transforming food systems to more affordable consumption patterns is crucial. The FAO's preliminary assessment indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic added approximately 132 million people globally to the total undernourished population in the world. Health and climate change costs also contributed to this negative shift in the food system (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2020). Therefore, policymakers must reconsider agricultural and food policies across the food supply chain to decrease food losses and waste and to increase affordability, especially for vulnerable populations.

In light of these arguments, future food policy research needs to focus on the impact of upcoming ecological and human health crises, as well as natural disasters, on food security and availability. According to the World Economic Forum (2020), the world population will grow by two billion by 2050, and the current agricultural output will be inefficient to deliver enough food for people, a demand will increase over 56%. This shadowy picture should compel policymakers to address these specific issues due to demographic changes, poverty, and climate change. It is clear that freshwater, marine, and coastal ecosystems and land sources have been negatively affected by climate change and insufficient food systems and will continue to follow that trend. Therefore, research on technological adjustments for food production and information exchange between food actors on land and water resources is crucial (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2021). The novel agriculture methods practiced in wetland, marine, and coastal areas are needed for sustainable food production. Therefore, policymakers must adjust the current food policies at the federal, state, and global levels to establish food policy priorities for the public and manufacturers alike.

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