The Intersection of Food and Public Health

Current Policy Challenges and Solutions

Edited by
A. Bryce Hoflund, John C. Jones, and Michelle C. Pautz
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Collaborative Healthcare Networks
Building Community among Local Partnerships Organizations
Theodore Aaron Wachhaus, Jr.

Gun Violence
Evaluating Perceptions, Causes, and Consequences
Nicolas A. Valcik, Marvin E. Letteer and Warren S. Eller
The Intersection of Food and Public Health
Current Policy Challenges and Solutions

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We dedicate this volume to all of those individuals working to understand and address food systems and food insecurity issues in their communities and around the world.
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Introduction

Currently, ideas about food are in flux from a variety of sources. Examples of this evolution include recognizing the importance of food on health by public health and medical professionals; changing consumer desires around the production methods and components of their food, a greater focus on injustices within the national food system; evolving knowledge of how the food system impacts the environment; and shifting economic and technological realities that underpin where and how food is produced, distributed, and sold. These shifting ideas about food exist in contrast to the narrative of the highly functioning industrialized global food system that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. Therefore, the nexus of food studies and politics and public health should be obvious, yet a text that successfully integrates the two topics is elusive. This edited volume fills that void by covering in an engaging and comprehensive way key topics in food studies and systems as they relate to public health. The volume comprises research that examines current problems in food studies and how various stakeholders are attempting to address problems in unique ways.

The intersection of food policy and public health has come into focus recently regarding how policy connects to larger public health concerns, including obesity, diabetes, nutrition, and food safety issues. The prevalence of adult and childhood obesity has become a major public health concern. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), more than one third of adults are obese and approximately 12.5 million of children and adolescents aged 2–19 years are obese (Ogden et al. 2015). The estimated annual medical cost of obesity in the United States is approximately $147 billion (Finkelstein et al. 2009). Correspondingly, the CDC has consistently noted in recent years that dietary-related health morbidities (i.e., diabetes, hypertension, heart diseases, etc.) remain high (Centers for Disease Control 2016). Food safety is another public health concern. The CDC estimates that about 48 million people are sickened, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die each year from foodborne illnesses, and foodborne illnesses have a significant societal cost associated with them (Scallan et al. 2011a,b). One study estimates that the nation spent between 51 and 77 billion dollars annually on medical expenses and lost productivity as a result of foodborne illnesses (Scharff 2012).
Social justice concerns, such as food insecurity, food deserts, and concerns for workers in factory farms, is another emerging area of food studies. In the first decade of this century, food insecurity rates rose in 41 states. In the other nine states, the numbers stayed flat. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated that 42.2 million people lived in food insecure households (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2016). Food deserts, areas where fresh fruits, veggies, and other healthy whole foods are not available, as well as food swamps, areas where food options are disproportionately higher in sugar, fat, or salt, are also a growing concern and are related to food insecurity. The USDA (2009) estimates that more than 23.5 million people live in food deserts, which exist simultaneously both in highly urban and highly rural spaces. Poverty is often the link between the two; more than half of individuals living in food deserts are low income.

Finally, the intersection of food policy and public health is related to environmental issues and building and maintaining sustainable communities. The agricultural industry has experienced dramatic changes over the past few decades. Coinciding with this, the growth of general awareness of environmental and sustainability concerns has also inspired many to become concerned with the sustainability of the food industry. Global competition and the national agricultural and trade policies that favor large-scale farms have hurt small farms. Furthermore, Pirog (2009) examined produce arrival data from the USDA’s Marketing Service and estimated that fresh produce arriving in Chicago by truck had traveled over 1500 miles on average. The long-distance food travel leads to more energy consumption and pollution emission that contributes to global warming and lower air quality. Water, air, and soil quality can impact communities located near major agricultural centers.

These are highlights of the ubiquitous nature of food studies topics and concerns. Given the inherent interdisciplinary nature of food studies, this volume has a broad scope that integrates a range of topics within food policy and public health from a wide range of perspectives. This volume is organized around the following questions as they relate to the U.S. food system and public health: What units of analysis are being used or have been used to study the food system? Are they appropriate? What is the role of the regulatory state in the U.S. food system? What are some understudied areas of the U.S. food system? What are some potential ways of addressing these issues? What are some of the current debates related to food production? What are some of the current challenges related to food distribution and how are they being addressed? What are the politics of food policy? What are the governance challenges associated with food policy? What role should social contexts play in the construction of knowledge and advocacy of food system reformers and researchers?

Accordingly, the goals for this book are threefold. Our first goal is to provide an overview of current challenges to the food system and present research that examines potential solutions to those challenges since there has been an

* An earlier version of the three reasons to study food policy appeared in the Winter 2016 School of Public Administration newsletter and was written by A. Bryce Hoflund and Megan McGuffey.
explosion in the interest in addressing challenges related to the U.S. food system. Research on food is rather unique as food is simultaneously experienced on an intensely personal level, but also on a level that is shared by every other human being. We deliberately cultivated a list of topics that cuts across a wide spectrum and hope that nearly every reader should find some element to interest them. This volume is broad in scope and covers a variety of issues and concerns at the intersection of public health and food at the national, state, and local levels.

Our second goal is to fill a gap in the public health and food policy literatures by beginning a conversation that addresses how food public and public health issues increasingly intersect with each other. Further, we hope this conversation underscores the interdisciplinary nature of food research. Over the past decade, many students and scholars have become interested in studying the U.S. food system and its challenges; however, the scholarship in this area remains relatively scarce. This volume fills this gap. We primarily selected topics that are in the initial stages of being studied by researchers and will be of interest to a wide variety of advanced undergraduate and graduate students, scholars, practitioners, and policymakers.

Our third goal is to shift the conversation of food, its production, distribution, and consumption, as well as the public policies that underpin it, into the twenty-first century. As we noted above, major shifts are underway surrounding how producers, consumers, regulators, planners, researchers, and healthcare professionals interface with the food system. However, as implied by many of the authors in this work, our current narratives about the food system and its functions are rooted in twentieth century realities and need updating.

This book is intended to serve as a supplementary, or secondary, text in undergraduate and graduate courses related to food systems, food policy, public policy studies, nutrition, and public health. Each contributor provides a review of the current research literature in a particular area and then explores and applies that discussion to a particular food systems issue. Each chapter offers an overview of a particular topic in food systems as well as offers lessons learned for scholars and practitioners by examining each proposed aspect of the food system.

In Part I, “Where the personal intersects with public policy,” we open with a piece by Angela Glover that examines how personal food choices intersect with larger public health issues. This piece serves as a framing piece for this book in that it highlights and demonstrates that policy emerges from the personal. Glover uses an auto-ethnographic lens to demonstrate the very intimate, personal relationship we all have with food and how that very private relationship might in turn influence our interactions with the broader world. We choose this chapter as our starting point to encourage all readers to reflect about how their personal food space influences how they examine the broader food system.

In Part II, “Understanding food insecurity,” explores the history, policies, and social and environmental determinants of food insecurity. In their chapter, Joanne Christaldi and Diana Cuy Castellanos discuss the history and context of food insecurity and the associated national and local food and nutrition policies. In Chapter 3, Teja Pristavec’s rather paradoxical study of the impacts of children’s school mean participation on adults’ food security finds that those adults
Introduction

whose children participate in school meal programs are likely to be more food insecure than those whose children do not participate in school meal programs. In the next piece, Christian King uses data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) to study how food access affects the dietary intake (particularly fruit and vegetable consumption) and the food security of a sample of adults living in rural areas. Finally, Emily Kohls's case study of a rural food desert provides some much-needed insight into the programs and activities that exist to address food access in rural areas.

The chapters in Part III, “Exploring the regulation of food,” address a variety of key issues in food safety regulation from functional foods to the role of school food service directors in the regulatory state. Courtney Thomas examines the proliferation of functional foods and questions of legitimacy, accountability, and regulatory challenges associated with the rise of these types of foods. Bhavna Shamasunder's piece on chlorpyrifos—one of the most widely used pesticides in the world—traces the history and controversies associated with its use and argues for food systems and a precautionary public health-based approach to regulatory decision-making over pesticides. In our contribution to this volume, we explore the role of food service directors in three metropolitan areas—Omaha, Nebraska, Dayton, Ohio, and Newark, New Jersey—as both local administrator of National School Lunch Program (NSLP) as well as the subject of federal regulation regarding NSLP. The final piece in this section by Tania Calvao discusses the different approaches taken by the United States and the European Union with regard to regulation of genetically modified organisms.

The two chapters in Part IV, “Considering local food systems,” explore the changing nature of local food systems and the challenges they face in light of the twenty-first century changes to communities. Alicia Andry’s chapter discusses the origins and evolution of the industrial food system, examines local alternatives that are used to replace the industrial system, and suggests some basic steps that can be taken by public health administrators to assist in this cultural food shift. John C. Jones’s chapter applies the emerging ideas of partnership governance to the challenges of developing a local food system in postindustrial communities.

In Part V, “Missing connections in food, nutrition, and health policy,” the chapters are concerned with the ethical dimensions of food policy, the changing tools used to improve health and develop, implement, and evaluate policy, and the importance of food literacy. Adele Hite discusses the ethical implications of public health nutrition guidelines and proposes ways to create a more ethically responsible public health nutrition policy. In her two contributions to the volume, Sabrina Neeley describes Health in All Policies as an emerging approach to policy development and explores the One Health framework as a means of understanding and improving the interconnections between the health of humans, animals, and the environment, and the resulting impact on food safety and food security. Finally, Georgia Jones discusses the increasingly important idea of food literacy and how it can empower consumers to make informed food choices that can positively impact their health.
Finally, in Part VI, “Changing food and health policy,” the authors discuss a variety of ways in which the food policy landscape is changing and ways to affect change in food policy. Anthony Starke and Megan McGuffey’s piece explores the development of the concept of food justice and argues for the importance of including food justice as a key consideration in any policy proposal impacting food issues. The next two chapters examine school food reform movements at the national and local levels, with Jennifer Geist Rutledge’s piece focusing on the passage of the 2010 Child Nutrition Act and the political forces that brought about this major policy change, and Helena Lyson’s piece focusing on how groundbreaking school reform occurred at a large urban school district in Northern California. Carol Ebdon and Can Chen also discuss school food reform, and focus on the movement toward privatization of school food services in Nebraska and Florida. Finally, Timothy Shaffer discusses how a little-known discussion-based adult education program designed by the USDA during the New Deal and subsequently implemented by Cooperative Extension Service agents at land-grant-based universities can engage citizens in understanding issues as well as having their experience and knowledge help shape local, state, regional, and national policy.

We hope these chapters help to engage deeper discussions about the changing nature of food in the twenty-first century and how public health actors, along with interdisciplinary allies, can play a role in improving the dietary health of all people. Further, we are optimistic that readers will become more adroit in tapping into notions about the changing food system, and its challenges that exist outside of their primary discipline. Building a better food system for all is complex work and will require many people, with many talents, across all sectors of society. We look forward to continuing to engage with our authors and our readers in the future on this topic.

A. Bryce Hoflund, John C. Jones, and Michelle C. Pautz

REFERENCES


Introduction


Part I

Where the personal intersects with public policy
1 Why “you are what you eat” matters when talking about school lunch
A personal narrative

Angela L. Glover

My mother’s parents, ranchers living in rural Western Nebraska, grew gardens, raised and butchered their own livestock, and prepared from scratch the majority of their own meals. Fried chicken, fresh buttered yeast rolls, and potatoes dug up from the garden slathered in white gravy preceded cherry pie with freshly tumbled ice cream. Conversely, my paternal grandparents living in Fort Collins, Colorado punched in at a factory at the County Clerk’s office. They prepared meals consisting of a meat, a starch, and a vegetable at home with ingredients found on the shelves at the local grocer.

The meat and potatoes mentality was prevalent in both the country and city and at times I identified with the children’s tale that addressed the intersected lives of the country and the city mice. Our meals at home were similar to those of my Colorado grandparents as we lived in the middle of the United States, where there was no question as to where the beef was; however, shortcuts and convenience food were part of weekly meal planning since my parents’ life’s work was not spent growing and preparing food. Oftentimes, meat came from Styrofoam trays, potatoes from a box, gravy from a jar, and pie from the bakery section of the supermarket. Sure my maternal grandfather would butcher a cow and send it home with us from time to time, and my grandma would load the back of the station wagon up with fruits and vegetables in jars and rolls wrapped in tea towels, but those only lasted so long. My mom gardened in the summer, but it was not so she could can or preserve food for the long upcoming winter; rather, it was a reenacted part of a blood memory tied to her childhood summers growing up in Western Nebraska. We would share the beefsteak tomatoes and plethora of green beans with our neighbors once harvest was complete, but rarely did my mom can the bounty in preparation for winter like my country grandma. There was no pressure cooker, a box of ball jars, or wax liners in our pantry, and there was no sense of urgency when foraging the garden for ripe fruits and vegetables like there was in Grandpa’s garden. It did not matter if we were gone for a week on vacation; we trusted the neighbor kid to water for us unlike my grandfather whose second job in retirement was to water, water, and water again after tending cattle for a younger local rancher.

Occasionally, when we would visit my city grandparents on one of our family vacations, we would pick up “to go” food and I vaguely remember eating
Kentucky Fried Chicken from a bucket in the back of our station wagon and thinking it tasted good, but different from the meal prepared by my country grandparents. Yes, the biscuits were flaky and the coleslaw was cut up into smaller bites, but the butter in the packet tasted weird. My taste for homemade butter straight from the shaken jar or churn developed early. In “Food, Self and Identity,” Claude Fischler (1998) states, “food is central to our sense of identity. The way any given human group eats helps it assert its diversity, hierarchy, and organization, but also, at the same time, both its oneness and the otherness” (p. 1). The food I ate and eat as the granddaughter of a rancher is quite different from what I ate at home as a child or choose to eat today, even though this cuisine was locally sourced and farm raised. The meals served at the country grandparent’s home were quite diverse from what my mother prepared, regardless of the health factors. I identify with fried chicken and seek it out whenever I can in order to measure it to what I remember eating as a child. The food we ate at home in the city was usually chosen for convenience, unless it was for a holiday; the food eaten in the country was often the result of living in a food desert and the need for independence of individuals who live there. The experiences of eating in a rural environment are essential to how I identify as an individual eater today and sometimes provide a way to engage in certain eating communities.

This oneness and otherness provides the threshold between the habits of the country and the city food experiences I shared with my family. For example, this morning I started the day out with a green smoothie full of organic kale, spinach, blueberries, ginger, turmeric root, hemp seeds, coconut oil, pineapple, and cucumbers grown from my own garden but then my snack was a bag of Cheeto Puffs, Almond M&Ms, and a Coca-Cola from McDonalds. I know I need to eat vegetables and they need to be grown organically or purchased locally, but my memories of gas station eating with my city grandparents, and even my mom, conjure blood memories of the best kind. My understanding of myself as an eater was intuitive and influenced by the private sphere of my family with the occasional influence of the public sphere. As Ruth Reichl (1999) puts it in Tender at the Bone, “food could be a way of making sense of the world (back cover).” The way I ate when I was young made sense to me; it was diverse, had a range of options, and was often shared with others who were introducing and modeling ways of eating to me; however; my world was much smaller than that of the students who are eating in public schools.

Today, the public sphere is increasing its influence on individuals and it is making it harder to understand one’s food identity, let alone what one should or should not eat. In addition to the traditional influences of one’s family, culture, and geographical region, the influences of visual rhetoric, advertising, traditional media, social media, and social policy must be factored in to understand why we eat what we eat and who we are because of what we eat.

To back up, one’s food identity can be explained by looking at one’s human relationship to food, which combines at least two scopes. The first tracks the biological to the cultural and the second links the individual to the collective (Fischler 1998, p. 2). These two scopes create a liminal space. For example, my
mom attempted to prepare meals based on her childhood eating patterns, food literacy, and known food identity. These meals included liver and onions, pork chops and apple sauce, biscuits and gravy, and as she ventured into a liminal space as an eater I grew up eating tacos with ketchup on them instead of hot sauce. Our cultural eating experiences were limited to Mexican and Italian. Interestingly, we often ate Italian at home, with the “I” being pronounced in the long vowel form, but Thai, Korean, and German cuisine were foreign to me until I moved away from home. The first time I ate Asian food was my freshman year of college. As my mom’s food identity transitioned from living in the country to the city, our family adapted to the daily food rituals of place and by the time I was in college we mostly ate out in restaurants due to my parent’s lifestyle.

The public craze for cooking shows had not graced our four-station network television set; however, convenience foods, microwaves, crockpots, and the golden arches were available and my mom capitalized on what they had to offer after she re-entered the workforce once I entered high school. *Good Housekeeping* and *Better Homes and Gardens* magazines showcased recipes with processed foods intended to make life easier and on Wednesday, the local paper’s “Living Section” reviewed new restaurants inviting alternatives to those who lacked the time or interest to grow and prepare food. Yes, the tune from Hamburger Helper was sung in our home, but it did not give my mom a quick and easy way to serve a home-cooked meal even though the jingle “hamburger helper, helped her hamburger make… a great meal” made this promise. By eating out in restaurants, we were given choices and the opportunity to try new foods such as taco salad and fried ice cream. Sure Mom tried her hand at the crockpot and made roast in speckled pans on Sunday, but these foods were never well received. The food prepared by our country grandma was what we identified with when a home-cooked meal was mentioned. Eventually, my mom became the go-to person for the latest news on restaurant openings in town and we became the family that dined out on holidays as well. Others would talk of the home-cooked food they longed for and what their folks would have waiting for them upon arriving home for college breaks. I would look forward to ordering a meal off a menu. Bee Wilson (2015) asserts in *First Bite: How We Learn to Eat*, “what we learn about food happens as children sitting at the kitchen table. Every bite is a memory and the most powerful memories are the first ones. At this table we are given food and love” (p. 17). Today I’m married to a chef, and one of the first inklings of “it might be love” came when he prepared fried chicken for me. His coleslaw and chicken batter each had a kick to them and since spicy food was still on the “we don’t eat” list for me, I was cautious, but I soon discovered I liked a little spice and started seeking out Southern fried chicken. In fact, my husband’s chicken was a close second to my grandma’s, so eventually I said “I do.”

Wilson continues, “our tastes follow us around like a comforting shadow. They seem to tell us who we are” (Preface). Since how we learn to eat is influenced by our parents, families, cultures, and celebrations, our food identity is in a constant state of betwixt and between. “I like” and “I don’t like” shift over time, and what and why we eat shifts as well and draws us into and out of community. A point of
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distinction here regarding food identity: there is a difference between recognizing that what we eat is what we are and that what we eat constructs who we are. We symbolically consume identity through our food choices and, more specifically, by what we do not eat; hence, the identity of the eater is often characterized in communities: the fast-food eater, the cultural eater—I am Italian, and therefore I am only the Italian food eater, the healthy eater, the gourmet, the organic eater, the vegetarian eater, the gluten-free eater, the dieting eater, and the school lunch eater. It is important to have ownership and an understanding of how and why we interact with food and how it shapes who we are within the various food communities in which we live and interact. Like the family celebrations of many of our neighbors, ours revolved around food.

As a child, choosing a flavor and shape of a birthday cake with coordinating napkins was a big deal. I liked white cake with chocolate frosting for many years, and the design and the candle had to match. In keeping with my need for consistency, I often had a cake in the shape of a dog, not to be confused with the ever-popular Peanuts canine, Snoopy. Again, my mom did not have the luxury of watching Rachel Ray or Cupcake Wars and nor did she own the fancy pans to bake exact replicas, so she had to use her geometry skills and bake circles and squares that she cut into shapes to configure the cake. There was no fondant. She used simple powdered sugar frosting and from what I remember of the few photos that were taken, it was a glorious cake. Often the cake was consumed by just our family, but as we grew older, we were allowed to invite friends over to share in our yearly treat and we were invited to their homes to share in their celebrations where we learned about cupcakes, bars, and buntinis. As our private sphere grew to include the influence of friends, so did our curiosity for other cuisine. Victor Turner (2002) offers that with liminality, “communitas tends to characterize relationships between those jointly undergoing ritual transition. These bonds are anti-structural in the sense that they are undifferentiated […]. Communitas is spontaneous, immediate, concrete and not shaped by norms. Communitas does not merge identities, it liberates them from conformity to general norms” (p. 72). The current intersection of public health and food is disrupting the communitas once found in the development of one’s food identity within a family by imposing too many rules on the options that are being offered.

The private sphere of eating has been impacted by a public interest in food, whether for personal health reasons or sheer entertainment. Consumers are increasingly food-literate and empowered to comment on and ask for what they believe to be the best, whether it be local, sustainable, organic, or merely personal preference, and the current foodie culture and diversity of foods available in the United States have made food a more democratic facet of our society. Movies, TV, public speakers, community awareness programs, fairs, festivals, and classrooms are influencing how eaters understand and interact with food. From “Bravo” to the “Food Network” to online recipe sharing on Instagram, Pinterest, and Facebook via Tasty videos, today’s eaters are showing up and are curious, and these eaters include students. This chapter aims to offer insight into the challenges and opportunities that intersect the space between an individual’s
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food identity and public health as well as how the information age and current political interest in food and public health has increased students’ food literacy, while also creating issues for families and students subjected to school nutrition regulations.

In addition to one’s food identity, one’s food literacy shapes a way of being and living whether it be the connoisseur of onion rings, the biggest loser, or the gourmet who travels the globe to eat the next bizarre food item revealed on Andrew Zimmer’s show found on The Travel Channel. “You are what you eat” has been more clearly defined in the past decade and what and where you eat it brings people together in community. Families plan summer vacations around where they will eat with many of the destinations appearing as episodes on “Diners Drive-Ins and Dives” and restaurants featured in books by Jane and Michael Stern who have written extensively about road food found across the United States. Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook have pages devoted to “food porn,” dishes meant to entice an appetite; news regarding food issues; and opportunities for eaters to engage in conversations with one another. Yelp and Urban Spoon offer eaters the opportunity to make or break a restaurant with the ability to comment on or write a review about a recent dining experience, and the big screen offers controversial, thought-provoking films such as Fast Food Nation by Eric Schlosser, Supersize Me by Morgan Spurlock, Fathead by Tom Naughton, and Food Revolution by Jamie Oliver, which ask viewers to engage with and question current food practices in the United States. As a country, we have embraced and problematized the quest for our next meal whether it be healthy, or novel, or on the top 10 list of our favorite sports figure, Hollywood celebrity, or political leader. Americans are eating and talking about eating and worrying about what they eat more than ever.

Being eaters of food, not to be confused with foodies, along with the traditional vows found in a marriage ceremony, my husband and I pledged to eat at the top 100 burger joints in America. Our first anniversary found us at the Hamburg Inn in Iowa City where we noted the portraits on the wall featuring politicians both elected and merely moving through town while caucusing in the state. We also noted the quality of the burger and fries we consumed, but honestly, the reason this place was listed in George Motz’s (2008) Hamburger America: A State by State Guide to 100 Great Burger Joints was undoubtedly as much about the political celebrity factor as it was the food, which was good, but not as good, in my opinion, as the burger served at Bobos in Topeka, Kansas, but I digress. This fever for political celebrity is not all that new, but it is more pronounced than it was a decade ago. The inclusion of branding an eatery with a celebrity name in addition to identifying the cuisine it serves now includes a list of where the ingredients are sourced and whether or not they are organic. Not only can you eat at Jimmy Buffet’s Cheeseburger in Paradise while shopping at many upscale malls, you can read about farm-to-table, local, sustainable efforts, and in some cases, from where the lamb and heirloom tomatoes featured on the evening’s menu were procured.

This current interest in food transcends age groups and ranges from toddlers to retirees and individuals from all fields are weighing in including but
not limited to nutritionists, athletic trainers, physicians, marketing gurus, educators, and politicians. Juliann Michaels, trainer of the stars and former host of the “Biggest Loser,” is selling workouts and menu plans and Nutri System has noted Marie Osmond to be one of their most successful spokesmodels. Rachel Ray has been serving up meals and stories along with her own line of cookware for over a decade, and the competition for Top Chef is offering food enthusiasts the opportunity to watch up-and-coming chefs from around the nation compete for valuable cash awards and experiences to cook for world acclaimed chefs and community celebrities in their hometowns. Anthony Bourdain gave voice to sous chefs and kitchen workers in Kitchen Confidential and continues to offer dining experiences via his hit TV show “No Reservations.” The Travel Channel features not only places to visit, but also eateries that complement the experience of the country, and “The Food Network” has something for everyone. One can learn how to eat on 40 dollars a day, start a food truck, and specialize in cupcakes. Bar-b-que, Italian, and Southern fried chicken are brought straight to us in our homes. Recipes are available online as are cooking tutorials by world-renowned chefs. Websites for Cooks Illustrated and Epicurious complement the programming of Julia Child and Martha Stewart and are joined by Cooking Light, Bon Appetite, and Gourmet magazines. Food glorious food is available if only we tune in or log on.

Local communities which have offered seasonal festivals honoring traditions and customs are now advertised to families who are invited and encouraged to sample cultural foods while experiencing music, art, and dance. Increased revenues assist with board-sponsored projects, scholarships, and future events and public health officials sell permits and licenses. Libraries, community centers, and schools along with home shows, state fairs, and farmer’s markets provide opportunities to dine on food plated on a stick and to try products being grown and produced by local artisans. There is no loss of opportunity for the public to learn about, interact with, or eat food. Also, there are no missed opportunities to generate revenue while eating. T-shirts, ball caps, and cookbooks are available in order to preserve the memory and promote the event or business. The intersection between food and public health and the current challenges and solutions with regard to policy and politics is great.

The current political administration, led by First Lady Michelle Obama (2016), is attempting to alter those that came before it. Political administrations have always had a voice in what children eat at school, but lately this voice has entered with greater vibrato regarding what public school-aged children should eat in order to address the childhood obesity epidemic currently underway in America. In addition, it appears that the “achievement gap,” with regard to test score disparity, is not one of learning or even being able to read, but of public health: Students cannot learn if they do not have proper nutrition. This is a fact. Without a healthy breakfast, behavioral problems occur and it is difficult to concentrate. So the changes made by the School Nutrition Association have not only raised the awareness of parents and those who prepare the food for students, but also of those involved in the process of educating and supplying food, including
local sustainable organic growers, food vendors, and distributors, chefs, dietitians, researchers, college professors, entrepreneurs, and community activists. In Marion Nestle’s (2007) *The Politics of Food*, she discusses how the food industry influences what we eat and therefore our health by way of healthy dietary advice, government influence and influences on the government, corruption faced by children due to governmental and public policy, and the deregulation of dietary supplements. This book was published shortly after food study programs became known entities on college campuses. Circa 1990, both New York University and Boston College began offering food studies programs, and as of today this field of study is growing. Food studies currently include looking at the connections between food and

- Food insecurity
- Food deserts
- Economics
- Production
- World hunger
- Public health
- Narrative
- Holidays
- Communities
- Travel
- Culture
- History
- Politics
- Science
- Criticism
- Schools
- Public health

As this list shows, food is a vehicle with which to study the world we live in and one’s food identity stretches way beyond what was eaten for Sunday dinner or at grandma’s house. Interestingly, one of the first food experiences many children have where someone else controls what ends up on their plate is at school whether it be at a daycare, preschool, public or private school.

Chef Jamie Oliver has taken on childhood eating habits with his program “Food Revolution” as have half the hosts on TV food and online cooking shows. Eating healthy and portion control are parallel to the quality of the food we are eating. Alice Waters, owner of Chez Panisse, a Berkeley, California restaurant famous for its organic, locally grown ingredients and for pioneering California cuisine, shares, “Teaching kids how to feed themselves and how to live in a community responsibly is the center of an education.” Moreover, Michael Pollan’s (2006) voice speaks honestly about what and how we ate in *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* when he offered “deciding what you should eat will inevitably stir anxiety” (p. 37). Even Sesame Street has an opinion on our country’s healthy eating initiative,
which impacts a student’s food literacy. The “Let’s Move Campaign,” started by First Lady Michelle Obama, has been embraced by a host of TV personalities including Rachel Ray and Jimmy Fallon both during day and nighttime programming. As noted by First Lady Michelle Obama, “America’s Move to Raise a Healthier Generation of Kids is vital for the success of our country. In the end, as First Lady, this is not just a policy issue for me. This is a passion. This is my mission. I am determined to work with folks across this country to change the way a generation of kids thinks about food and nutrition” (Let’sMove.org). The “Healthy Lunch Time Challenge” invites students across the country to create healthy lunch recipes for a chance to win a trip to Washington, DC, and the opportunity to attend the Kids’ “State Dinner” at the White House. Everyone is cooking and eating and thinking about what goes on his or her fork, and this is good, but are we all equally able to discern what is best for someone else’s family or child? Yes, nutrition labels matter; yes, some food tastes better because of where it was grown or prepared, but ownership of one’s palate is equally important, and a voice in what is being offered and eaten is paramount to whether or not the said food will be consumed, digested, and put to good use in one’s body and whether or not Communitas will be achieved.

Responses to the changes made to school lunch programs vary from full support to disgruntled depending on who is responding. The full impact and repercussion of the changes made to the national school lunch program is yet to be seen, but these changes are certainly being questioned by many and pose realistic challenges for those being asked to eat the lunches. Yes, the lunches may be deemed healthy, but if the food offered is not being eaten, are students any better off than they were when they had a choice of what to eat that was informed by family, culture, and a small dose of media? Or, more importantly, what they liked or knew? Yes, we are all in agreement that a tray of all brown food is not good for us, but unless there is ownership in what one eats, do those calories count? In “How School Lunch Became the Latest Political Battleground,” Nicholas Confessore (2014) notes how the “Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act” was intended to impose strict new nutrition standards on all food sold in public schools. The idea was to convince “a generation raised on Lunchables and Pizza Hut to learn to love whole wheat pasta and roasted cauliflower” (p. 4). Not only did this initiative backfire, but the School Nutrition Association is now the most public critic of this Act. In addition to Lunch Ladies battling the new rules, students are reacting adversely to what and how much is being served (p. 1). In Ariana Eunjung Cha’s (2015) article, “Research Shows Healthy School Lunch Program Leading to Wasted Vegetables,” “Public Health Reports” researcher Sarah Amin revealed that since the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) new requirements mandating that children taking part in the federal lunch program choose either a fruit or vegetable with their meals went into effect in 2012, children’s consumption of fruits and vegetables actually went down 13% and worse, schools were throwing away a distressing 56% more food than before (p. 1). Moreover, faculty, staff, families, and community members are concerned about how this experience is impacting the educational process, which involves both social and
emotional ramifications for students. Social media coverage on Facebook found on “The Lunch Tray” and “Lunch and Recess Matter” shows that there is a need for an ongoing dialogue and modification to school lunch guidelines currently practiced in the United States (Facebook 2016a,b). Specifically, on the “Lunch and Recess Matter,” parents and educators dialogue about the amount of time and encouragement students are given to consume their food and the need for physical movement after eating. “The Lunch Tray” is currently explaining the Smart Snack Standards put forward by the USDA, which feed into Nestle’s ideas presented in Food Politics regarding influences and their intended purposes. The posts on these pages and interactions on these pages are smart, informed, and necessary for the mandates currently facing the lunch trays of students in the United States. The OTHER Lunch Lady, an online catering service I founded in 2015, offers students options for how to build a lunch of their choice and delivers to private schools. The mission of The OTHER Lunch Lady (LLC) is twofold: the first is to make eating lunch at school a positive, fun experience for children while providing a healthy, entertaining alternative to the lunch programs available in local schools; the second is to provide a convenience for those packing lunches. To date, this small business has been able to provide lunch for summer camps, but is unable to get past the necessary SNA guidelines and packaging requirements for public schools. The idea of allowing students to have a say in what they eat has proven successful. Many students order the same meal every day, which pediatricians support as calories in and calories out. Parents and school administrators alike have been supportive of the business noting the ownership students have when creating their lunches works. Addressing parental concerns is a high priority for many school officials working to meet the requirements, mandates, and guidelines set forward by the current political administration. The topic of public health and food permeates conversations with politicians, school officials, and pediatricians and parents.

In speaking with Erin Vik, director of Nutrition Services of Westside School District in Omaha, Nebraska, I learned that parents in his school district were looking for more nutritional info, calorie counts, and ingredients that contain potential allergens and ways to pass on healthy eating habits, which are all important for student success. An answer the district has found to meet this need is a new website menu powered by LunchTray and developed by Noah Kochanowicz (Vik, E. 2016, personal interview). The site is mobile-friendly and provides information many parents are looking for as they manage the health concerns currently surrounding school lunch menus. According to Vik, “It’s kind of a one-stop shop for what we do, it’s much more accessible and timely for parents, teachers and students, since we’re in the age of the smartphone.”

My parents went home for lunch or carried leftovers in a pail or sack; there was no hot lunch program at their schools, and as a child, I preferred the lunch my mother packed for me so much that I took my lunch from first grade until my senior year of high school. I would occasionally eat on the days the cafeteria offered pizzawiches or chilli and cinnamon rolls. I knew the worst morning could be turned around if my lunch included a turkey sandwich with Miracle Whip on
white bread cut on a diagonal, Lays potato chips, green grapes, and a Hostess Ho Ho, not to be confused with a Little Debbie. If there was a seasonal napkin and a note from my mom, I was assured I could make it through the rest of the school day. I had input and choice on what I was eating. Some of it was healthy, but not always. I understood that food was part fuel and part love. I intuitively knew eating was an act of community and that harm came from excess, and I wonder if we can change the way a country eats simply by looking at calories, fat content, and “healthy” choices. Yes, we need to move on and be aware of what we are putting in our bodies, but taking the joy and fun out of eating is not working. Knowing who we are as eaters and our food identity is paramount to understanding how public health and food will intersect in the future. Wilson ponders the question of how we learn to eat—both individually and collectively, “[how we learn to eat] is the key to how food, for so many people has gone so badly wrong. The greatest public health problem of modern times is how to persuade people to make better food choices” (p. 7). She simply identifies that “we have been looking for answers in the wrong places,” and although I feel the process of addressing obesity and healthy eating practices for public schools is important, it is just as important to understand where an eater is coming from before the said changes are imposed. The conversation of which foods are being served in schools and why needs to be considered. The efforts to modify school nutrition and provide healthier options for those eating school lunches may be well motivated, but mandates rarely offer successful programs. A balance between who we are and what we eat needs to be addressed before we see this intersection of public health and food policy shift to a place where we as a nation should feel successful with what we are offering our children.

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