

Tony Weis. *The Global Food Economy: The Battle for the Future of Farming.* London and New York: Zed Books/Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishers, 2007. 217 pages. Paperback. Price not given.

Tony Weis's book provides a systematic analysis of the dynamics, problems, and inequities of the global food economy. Starting with the current situation regarding hunger and poverty, the author states that despite the fact that food production is more than needed to provide every person on earth with a nutrition diet, hunger still persists. The percentage of world population with food shortages has declined but absolute numbers have grown. Similar is the case with poverty. According to the World Bank estimates, 2.8 billion people are living on less than US\$2 a day and 1.2 billion are living in extreme poverty (less than US\$1). And a special feature of the hunger and poverty is that these problems are acute in developing countries, especially South Asian and sub-Saharan African countries.

The author further highlights that the quality of food has improved over the years. This has resulted in the dietary convergence between the poor and the wealthy consumers in terms of quality; also, the diversity in food has increased. Combined with improvements in the quality of food, the farm production has been industrialised as 68 percent of the world's egg production and 74 percent of the world's poultry production come from factory farms. With regard to trade, roughly 10 percent of agricultural production is traded across national borders. The major traded agricultural products are cereals, meat, soybeans, and dairy products, which collectively comprised 45 percent of the value of the agricultural trade in 2005.

Additionally, the book focuses on the structure of agriculture in developed countries, explaining its implications for farmers in developing countries, on the one hand, and multilateral trade negotiations, on the other. The structural changes in agricultural production, along with the hyper-industrialisation of agriculture, have led to greater concentration of production resulting in an extremely unequal productive base. The world is divided into two classes in terms of global food market; one comprises the world's heavily industrialised agricultural economies, which dominate the global market and prices, and the other includes labour-intensive agricultural economies, in which the world's majority farm population resides. While the USA and Europe were at the forefront of global expansion of the grain-livestock complex, highly industrialised surplus production from nations such as Brazil, Argentina, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Thailand adds to the competitive dynamics in world markets, with competition increasingly centred in Asia.

Global markets have seen intense pressure due to the subsidies provided by the USA and the EU to their farmers. The agro-based subsidy regimes in these countries have a destabilising effect on the unsubsidised Third World smallholders, who can not possibly compete with under-priced cereals from abroad. These countries not only have control over input and output sides of agriculture, they also have the capacity to rewrite, in their favour, the rules of the multilateral trading system under the WTO, starting with national-level regulation and subsidy regimes and then setting their sights on a supranational constitution that would expand market access, impede national supply management systems and price supports, and force a US-styled intellectual property rights system upon the world.

All these measures have detrimental effects on the fate of the small farmers from developing countries. Despite revolutionary changes in global agricultural production, the farming population in developing world still continues doing farming in a labour-intensive manner, typically confined to small plots within highly uneven landscapes. These small farmers are languishing under deflated prices for basic food crops as markets integrate, greatly influenced by large-scale, industrialised production from the USA, Europe, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, etc. This has caused the world's poorest farmers to face new vulnerability, having been incorporated into markets in which they struggle to earn incomes that can sustain their households.

Such discussions make up the details of various chapters of this volume. On the whole, the book is a useful addition to the literature on food security, and provides important insights for developing economies like Pakistan, where food security has become a major challenge.

Ejaz Ghani

Pakistan Institute of Development Economics,
Islamabad.