Book Review:
Growing Resistance: Canadian Farmers and the Politics of Genetically Modified Wheat

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Emily Eaton (Author)
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The author, Emily Eaton, is an assistant professor of Geography at the University of Regina specializing in political economy, natural resource economics, and social justice struggles. In Growing Resistance: Canadian Farmers and the Politics of Genetically Modified Wheat, Emily Eaton reveals the motivating factors behind Canadian farmers opposition to genetically modified wheat (as opposed to canola) due to concerns about health and environmental implications, in addition to international market opposition to genetically modified crops, and the lack of transparency and democracy in Canadian biotechnology policy and regulations. This is actually an important topic that concerns many people, including scientists, politicians, growers and consumers in terms of the health and environmental implications of genetically modified crops, not only in Canada, but in other parts of the world, as well. The theme of the book is actually considered in the core of the author’s specialty. This is a unique and important work, since there is no other work (to the best of my knowledge) in the same genre that was focusing on consumer health, environmental and economic issues, combining with thoughts, arguments and political regulations of genetically modified crops. However, the theme of this book can only be considered by specific group of professionals, such as politicians, governmental agencies, industry organizations and agricultural companies, rather than scientists, small growers and consumers. It also has some terminology that cannot be adapted by such group of people (e.g., subjectification, advanced liberalism, comodification, etc). This work is mainly based on: 1) the authors doctoral research (1997-2001), 2) data collected from US department of Agriculture (1997-2001), Canadian wheat board (2003-2007), Canadian wheat commissions (2001-2002), Statistics Canada (1985, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006), Industry Canada (1999-2008), and 3) interviews with producers, industry organizations, biochemical companies and politicians. The author didn’t point out to the any new published data after 2008, which consider a constraint in this work. A brief summary and comments on each chapter are shown in the next paragraph.

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First Chapter, the author set up the stage by providing information about farmers’ resistance to one particular genetic modification (Roundup resistance) in wheat produced by Monsanto Company. Roundup is a brand name of broad spectrum herbicide produced by Monsanto in 1974. The author gave introduction about wheat production and market in Canada. Also, the author demonstrated some details about her doctoral research methodology and theoretical concepts that essential to understand this book. Author addressed her ideas in a well organized way, although she did not demonstrate any new data after 2008.

Second Chapter, the author started talking about promoting biotechnology in Canada and the Canadian strategy and public opposition toward genetically modified wheat. The author stated the main mechanisms through which the state maintains regulation process through “science” and “product-based” approach wherein social, ethical and economic risks are defined as ‘unscientific’ and where genetically modified products are considered substantially equivalent to their conventional counterparts. On the other hand the Canadian State has relied on a ‘functional democratic’ approach, where only ‘scientific’ recommendations by advisory body and stakeholder consultations can be considered, however, when such bodies made recommendations, the state has not acted on these recommendations! The author demonstrated her idea in a very neutral way pointed out to the rules and regulations, arguments and discussions among governmental agencies, and industrial boards. It would be better if the author refer to some scientific findings, as well, related to the impact of genetically modified wheat on health and environment.

Third Chapter, the author argues that Canadian farmers are strongly opposing the genetically modified wheat. She illustrates wheat’s cultural, historical and political significance as well as its role in crop rotation, seed saving practices and the economic livelihoods of prairie farmers. On the other hand, author stated that by 2005, Canadian farmers accepted to grow genetically modified canola, which accounted for 78% for all canola grown nationally. So, in this chapter, she tried to answer why farmers stand up for wheat, but not for canola. Simply, because the income from canola production is higher than that for wheat, and this is was the title of the chapter ‘the difference between bread and oil’. The author addressed her idea in this chapter in a very organized way, however she did not point out to new statistics after 2006.

Fourth Chapter, the author demonstrated farmers’ opposition against production and consumption of genetically modified wheat. She illustrated the arguments that articulated between producers and consumers regarding the environmental risks of these crops. She also pointed out to the argument that the discourse of genetically modified wheat revolved around the lack of democratic and transparent process in the development of biotechnology policy and regulation in Canada. This chapter has too many details on the famers’ opposition and working collations defeating the introduction of genetically modified wheat, but at some points within the chapter, the reader gets astray from the main idea, but overall the chapter is addressed in a proper way.

Fifth Chapter, the author stated that only the consumers get to decide whether they buy genetically modified wheat or not. While Canadian farmers fight the logic of market choice in genetically modified wheat, industry organizations argue that this a matter of individual market demand, and they support the notion of ‘voting with your dollar’. Although it has too many details, the chapter is well written and the ideas are organized.

Sixth Chapter, the author conclude his book in this chapter stating that in early 2000s, Canadian farmers led an international coalition to a major victory for the anti-GM movement by defeating the introduction of Monsanto’s genetically modified wheat. Due to the lack of transparency and democracy in Canadian biotechnology policy and regulations, plus the powerful forces of the governmental agencies and industry organizations vying for genetically modified wheat. It seems that a new round of resistance to genetically modified wheat is urgently required with new strategies, taking into account that the strategies and tactics that warded off genetically modified wheat in early 2000s will not work again. A broader and more international struggle is needed to sustain pressure against crops modifications taking into account the contingencies associated with local ecologies, histories and cultures.
In conclusion, the preponderance of discussion on genetically modified wheat in this book has focused on consumer health, environmental, economic and political issues that hardly can be combined in one book, which make this work unique compared to other books in the same genre. The book is well written and the ideas are organized and demonstrated in order throughout the six chapters. The author is very neutral and expressed her idea in an instructive way. I recommend this book for publication, and for people interested in political economy.