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## Book review

C. Besana, R. D'Errico & R. Ghezzi (eds.)  
*Cheese Manufacturing in the Twentieth Century. The Italian Experience in an International Context*.  
European Food Issues, P.I.E. Peter Lang, Bruxelles, 2017, pp. 406.

When approaching to the food sector, we need to consider and keep into account certain features that, despite not being new, still present innovative characters due to the particular situation in which they are evolving: The present food system (to say better: the several food systems interacting together) is multi-dimensional, globalized and interdisciplinary.

For what concern the first character, the agri-food sector entails a complex, multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional nature, as the food systems concern several heterogeneous interests and factors combing together (agricultural traditions and techniques; consumers' interests; economic production; trade; the environment; cultural believes, local tradition, malnutrition and the right to access to food; enhancement of quality and so on and so forth). The public governance of food safety, for instance, does not regard only the protection of health and the salubriousness of food and feed products, but also concerns and influences the regulation of other fields of society, such as trade of goods, consumers' information and expectations, protection of the environment, the development of agriculture and food security. Coherently, the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge Science and Technology for Development defines agriculture – that is evidently strongly connected to food production – as a *multifunctional* sector:

“Agriculture operates within complex systems and is multifunctional in its nature (...). Multifunctionality recognizes the inescapable interconnectedness of agriculture's different roles and functions, i.e. agriculture is a multi-output activity producing not only commodities, but also non commodity outputs such as environmental services, landscapes amenities and cultural heritages”. (International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for development (IAASTD), *Towards Multifunctional Agriculture for Social Environmental and Economic Sustainability. Issues in Brief*, unpagged, 2009).

Secondly, food systems are globalized, as food is produced, manipulated and traded all over the world with less and less obstacles: the globalization of markets, reducing or eliminating barriers to trade has favored the movement of food items all over the world, so that this sector has reached a strongly developed extra-national character. This needs common approaches, common rules, common visions: it needs harmonization and stand-

ardization. With the globalization of trade and the European common market, everything that concerns food must take into account the necessity to look at a common and shared global/regional (EU) space that goes beyond the State and responds to its own cultural, legal, economic and social rules. Such “food globalization”, however, is not away from controversies and conflicts, as food is, at the same time, authentically local, as it is strongly and for tradition connected to the territory where it is produced and transformed. This causes a complex dialectic between a global and worldwide approach and the national and local differences and diversities, between homogenization on one side and traditions on the other.

Thirdly, the agri-food sector implies the interaction of several disciplines dialoguing among one other. Then we see: technical and hard-sciences’ norms; civil law limitations, prescriptions of a penal-law nature, administrative regulations; cultural and traditional conditions; economic and social relationships among the actors involved. Therefore, food is not only multi-sectorial and extra national, but also interdisciplinary, as it needs to rely on the contribution of several scientific disciplines in order to have a clear and complete picture of the reasons why food is produced, transformed, sold and consumed in certain ways (on these three aspects allow me to mention D. Bevilacqua, *Introduction to Global Food-Safety Law and Regulation*, Groningen, Europa Law Publishing, 2015, p. v ff.).

The book “*Cheese Manufacturing in the Twentieth Century*” has the merit to keep in consideration all the three described characters of food, thus being a very useful tool for every scholar approaching to the study of this sector, as well as for any actor wanting to go deep into a specific sub-sector, such as the production of cheese and the dairy industry.

Firstly, it is interdisciplinary, with a detailed and technical approach coming from several authors, belonging to different scientific contexts (e.g. historians, economists, agronomists).

Secondly, it has a special consideration and attention for the international character of production and trade of food products. In addition, the authors use the comparative method in order to better define positive and negative aspects of the present methods of cheese manufacturing in Italy and in similar contexts.

Finally, while concentrating on the specific sector of cheese manufacturing, entering in details and going deep in the analysis, the authors do not renounce to provide general considerations on food production in the XXI century, thus on innovation, on industrialization, on local typical products and on globalization; showing

all the different interest and factors that we must consider when we approach such a theme.

As declared by the editors in the *Introduction*, the aim of the book is to stimulate further interest in the subject and inviting scholars to orient their research towards some of the underlying themes indicated in the titles of the volume’s three sections (p. 22).

The chapters included in the first section (“The Experience of Different Nations during the Age of Globalization”) compare various national scenarios in the midst of a period of transformation, when great technological advances were being made and markets were progressively becoming globalized. This first part is more international-oriented and use a comparative method to investigate the most important changes of last decades in the Dairy industry in Italy (p. 71 ff.) and in other countries (pp. 33 ff, 53 ff., 113 ff. and 129 ff.). A consideration is given to the EU institutions and their influence on the Italian Dairy Sector (p. 95 ff.) and a special focus is dedicated to a smaller reality, that of a city: namely, New York (p. 143 ff.).

The theme that brings together the chapters contained in the second section (“Terroir, Typicality and Market Openness”) is the relationship between tradition, authenticity and innovation. This section shows, in a very interesting and problematic way, the dialectic between the need to preserve and protect the authenticity of local traditions and, at the same time, the will to conform to the industrialized and standardized approach of a global food market, trying to investigate if and when the protection of typicity becomes an unjustified barrier to the promotion and spread of a traditional cheeses. The chapters composing the second part of the book dedicate their attention to the history of a small group of cheeses that, while playing a prominent role in international trade, can also be considered typical expressions of unique local conditions and of ancient traditions that cannot be reproduced elsewhere.

The chapters included in the third section (“Forms of Enterprises in Italy in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries”) highlight the changes occurring in Italy’s dairy sector during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, by tracing the history of some of its most important companies and describing the unique structures adopted by businesses operating in this sector. If the second part was dedicated to typical and artisanal production and traditions, the third part focuses on the industries, underlining their driving role for the whole sector and their contribution in the development of cheese production, not only in terms of quantity, but also for what concerns quality and promotion of typical products.

An important consideration – which could have been developed more in the book – concerns the necessity of having common (i.e. global) rules to protect and guarantee high quality standards and an exhaustive consumers' information about food: the need to import foreign raw materials to be transformed into typical food is not a problem *per se*; however, it could produce a diminution of food quality if the importing products are not controlled and assessed as they should be. For these reasons, we need uniformity and common rules of quality protection, but these must entail high standards and efficient mechanisms of enforcement. In addition, they can be adopted and implemented only if the same approach is shared and agreed; and this is a sector in which many different voices coexist and bargain.

All the mentioned themes and issues are well combined together, with an original and courageous approach, able to show contradictions and mythologies of the general opinion on food quality and on typical products. Moreover *Chees Manufacturing in the Twentieth Century* is clear, full of data and information and, despite being a collective book, it maintains a certain uniformity and coherence, which is another merit making it worthy of being read.

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