From the Farm to the Table: What All Americans Need to Know about Agriculture (Clark Lectures)

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As with other areas of human industry, it has been assumed that technological progress would improve all aspects of agriculture. Technology would increase both efficiency and yield, or so we thought. The directions taken by technology may have worked for a while, but the same technologies that give us an advantage also create disadvantages. It's now a common story in rural America: pesticides, fertilizers, "big iron" combines, and other costly advancements may increase speed but also reduce efficiency, while farmers endure debt, dangerous working conditions, and long hours to pay for the technology. Land, livelihood, and lives are lost in an effort to keep up and break even. There is more to this story that affects both the food we eat and our provisions for the future. Too many Americans eat the food on their plates with little thought to its origin and in blind faith that government regulations will protect them from danger. While many Americans might have grown up in farming families, there are fewer family-owned farms with each passing generation. Americans are becoming disconnected from understanding the sources and content of their food. The farmers interviewed in From the Farm to the Table can help reestablish that connection. Gary Holthaus illuminates the state of American agriculture today, particularly the impact of globalization, through the stories of farmers who balance traditional practices with innovative methods to meet market demands. Holthaus demonstrates how the vitality of America's communities is bound to the successes and failures of its farmers. In From the Farm to the Table, farmers explain how their lives and communities have changed as they work to create healthy soil, healthy animals, and healthy food in a context of often inappropriate federal policy, growing competition from abroad, public misconceptions regarding government subsidies, the dangers of environmental damage and genetically modified crops, and the myths of modern economics. Rather than predicting doom and despair for small American growers, Holthaus shows their hope and the practical solutions they utilize. As these farmers tell their stories, "organic" and "sustainable" farming become real and meaningful. As they share their work and their lives, they reveal how those concepts affect the food we eat and the land on which it's grown, and how vital farming is to the American economy.

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