

Food Policy: An Introduction

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ABSTRACT

A food policy is designed to influence the operation of the food system (network of farms, distributors, restaurants, retailers, and consumers). It impacts on how food is produced, processed, distributed, marketed, consumed, and disposed. Implementing good food policies is crucial to achieving more equitable and sustainable food systems. This paper provides a brief introduction on food policy.

Keywords: food policy

How to cite this paper: Matthew N. O. Sadiku | Tolulope J. Ashaolu | Sarhan M. Musa "Food Policy: An Introduction" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-4 | Issue-2, February 2020, pp.735-737, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd30133.pdf



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INTRODUCTION

Food is very essential for obvious reasons. The foods we consume directly or indirectly impact our health. Food has been a driver of social movements, who are focused on different aspects of the conventional food system and seek to reshape the system. As illustrated in Figure 1, three ingredients for a good food are culture, infrastructure, and policy [1]. The food system is directly and indirectly linked to critical issues facing US citizens, including public health, employment, aging population, and sustaining the American way of life.

Today, food is increasingly becoming an issue of major concern for Americans, as many struggle with obesity and chronic disease. At the international level, poor diet and obesity are worldwide public health problems. Many of these issues in the food system will require national food policy change and intergovernmental collaboration [2].

WHAT IF FOOD POLICY?

A policy is basically a statement of intent that guides decisions and achieve specific outcomes. Food policy is part of policy-making which is concerned with shaping and analysing who eats what, when and how; and with what consequences. It is a relatively new specialty of public policy. As shown in Figure 2, food policies are meant to influence the operation, production, processing, marketing, availability, utilization and consumption of food with the goal of meeting the expectations of the consumers [3]. Food policymakers involve themselves in food related issues such as food regulation, food access, food standardization, food

safety, food assistance, food safety, food labeling, food trade, food control, and dietary guidance. They also work to educate the public, shape public policy, and attempt to protect our air, water, and land. They take into consideration a variety of political, social, environmental and economic factors that affect the food supply [4].

Food policies can be initiated at the domestic, state, federal, national or international levels. They can also be proposed governments, companies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or individuals. The food industry also set standards for itself on a regular basis. Food policy is also influenced by goals of importance to policy makers: balance in international trade, economic growth, resource mobility, moderate income redistribution, and cost-effectiveness in federal expenditures [5]

In the US, the agencies that are responsible for food policy include the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP). The primary international agency for food policy is the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, which was established in 1945 [4]. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), established in 1975, is an international agricultural research center founded in the early 1970s and based in District of Columbia as non-profit corporation. IFPRI has offices in several developing countries, including China, Ethiopia, and India, and most of the research takes place in developing countries in Central America, South America, Africa, and Asia [6].

FOOD POLICY COUNCILS

Food policy is any policy that addresses, shapes or regulates the food system. Food policy plays a unique role for public, nonprofit, private, and academic stakeholders. Food policy issues are interdisciplinary in nature. One opportunity for legislative policy change is through the creation of a food policy council (FPC). FPCs exist to promote food policy.

The food policy council is one tool designed in theory to engage food systems stakeholders and community members, including under represented groups, around food systems decision-making. Ideally, FPCs include participants representing all five sectors of the food system (production, consumption, processing, distribution, and waste recycling). FPCs are essentially institutions that can bring a broad array of people together to consider and respond to issues related to the food system. The first Food Policy Council started in 1982 in Knoxville, Tennessee. Since then Food Policy Councils have been established at state, local, and regional levels across US. Interest in the FPCs has grown significantly [7]. More than 150 FPCs are operating at various cities, regions, and states in US and Canada. While legislative decisions are made by government bodies, FPCs usually recommend and implement food policy decisions at the local and regional levels. Private sector stakeholders serve on the state Food Policy Council and remain active in food policy decisions. Other stakeholders gained a clear understanding of food policies and integrated that knowledge into their business.

EXAMPLES OF FOOD POLICIES

Governments around the world increasingly engage in food governance, aiming to address food system challenges such as obesity, food waste, or food insecurity, environmental degradation, and food price volatility. They try to confront their food problems and solve them using good analysis and good analysts.

- **Lunch Policy:** Feeling hungry is a central experience of low-income students, impacting their experiences in schools in ways rarely considered by education policymakers. For low-income students, food insecurity is of more concern than obesity. Federal programs like school lunch ensures that every child should have consistent access to nutritious food all day and all year [8].
- **Feeding the Hungry:** Roughly one in seven US households go hungry because there's not enough money to buy food. Numerous US governmental programs provide food assistance for an increasing number of citizens. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) constitutes the largest federal food assistance program. Another Federal food program is Women, Infants and Children (WIC) which helps low-income families put food on their tables.
- **Food Subsidies:** Food subsidy can be done at local or international level. At the local level, food subsidies generally work as direct payments to the food producer, meaning that the more a farmer grows of one crop, the more money he/she receives from the federal government [9]. At international level, subsidies are provided to enhance the food production in a county, as it encourages the adoption of specific technology and benefits small producers. The food subsidy interventions remain the major policy instrument for

reducing hunger and poverty in many developing countries. These countries are often encouraged to give agricultural development top priority.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

Food policy is linked with the health of a population. Every food consumer can be regarded as a stakeholder in food policy because everyone spends a significant part of their income on food.

There are some factors that can cause a food policy to fail. Educating consumers on what foods to buy and which are nutritional can be an issue. High food prices can cause lower-income households to have a poorer quality diet. There is a fine line between food supply and food demand, which creates a challenge for food policy. Implementing food democracy by engaging under-represented groups remains challenging for Food Policy Councils (FPCs). Some of the existing food policies are inadequate to combat global hunger and poverty. Some of these issues can be addressed right away, but some will require research and changes in public opinion.

CONCLUSION

Food is an essential need for human survival. Food policy consists of the actions by government that influence the supply, quality, price, production, distribution, and consumption of food. It entails the legislative and administrative decisions of state and local governments which are designed to influence the operation of the food system. Food policy significantly impacts all members of society and engages both food consumers and food producers.

Governments and industry must prepare for the ongoing revolution in global agriculture with long-term policies and investments that will satisfy consumer demand, improve nutrition, prevent obesity, reduce poverty, and contribute to environmental sustainability [9]. More information about food policy can be found in the books in [10-20] and related journals: *Food Policy* and *Food Review*.

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Figure 1 Three ingredients for a good food: Culture, infrastructure, and policy [1].

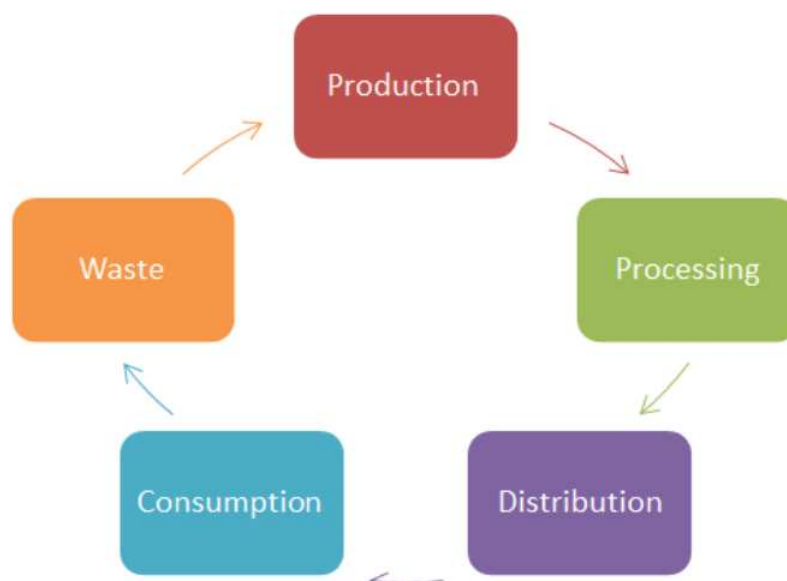


Figure 2 Food policies are designed to influence the production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste disposal of food [3].