

The Complexities of Food Sovereignty: Agrifood Activism in Oregon and Ecuador

Understandings of the term “food sovereignty” are multiple, fragmented, and vague, yet the idea motivates agrifood activists around the world. They struggle to re-orient the global industrial food system by changing practices and policies as they attempt to create a food system consisting of small and medium-sized sustainable farms embedded in their communities and ecological zones. Movements attempt to downplay the division between producers and consumers, rural and urban, but the divide is not easily sutured. This paper, based on participant observation among agrifood activists in Oregon and Ecuador over the past decade, explores some of the complexities related to food sovereignty discourses in these two locations. One question concerns the scale at which people strive to be self-sufficient: the homestead? the region? the nation? Within these various models, how can we ensure that everyone has access to healthy, culturally appropriate food? Ethnographic inquiry into agrifood activism in Oregon and Ecuador provides a base from which these questions can be explored.