

Electronic Green Journal
Volume 1, Issue 46

Review: The Devil's Fruit: Farmworkers, Health and Environmental Justice

By Dvera I. Saxton

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Saxton, Dvera I. *The Devil's Fruit: Farmworkers, Health and Environmental Justice*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2021. 252 pp. ISBN: 9780813598611, paperback, US\$34.95.

The Devil's Fruit is a thorough discussion of the need to use activism to secure environmental justice for farmworkers. Based on the author's dissertation research conducted in the Central Valley of California, the book examines the need for environmental justice for the "im/migrant" farmworkers working in California's strawberry industry.

To help farmworkers get environmental justice, activism is necessary:

"Environmental justice movements and activism seek to end: 1) disproportionate exposure to toxic substances; (2) unequal protections under laws and policies, and affected communities ability to participate in decision making processes; and (3) inequitable access to resources like clean water and air, land, food, safe housing and recreational spaces..." (p. 11)

Many issues affecting farmworkers and their families are examined by the author. These range from access to health care, exposure to toxic pesticides and fumigants, job related injuries, the physical strain on farmworkers due to constant stooping to harvest crops, high temperatures during the harvest, low salaries, job insecurity, substandard (yet expensive) housing, access to food, and stress. It is a hard life, and many farmworkers are trying to support both their family in the USA as well as family they left behind in their home country.

In the introduction, Saxton discusses the history and significance of activism in anthropology and the similarities between activism and the ethnographic methods employed by anthropologists. Next, the author outlines coverage in the remaining chapters and conclusion: Chapter 1 looks at her experiences getting to know and working with the farmworkers as an 'engaged anthropologist'. Chapter 2 is a detailed

description and discussion of the industrial agriculture practices used in California's strawberry industry. Chapter 3 examines the use of toxic chemicals in strawberry production, and the amount used annually, by the industry. She discusses the health effects on farmworkers of direct contact toxic chemicals as well health effects in the community resulting from pesticide drift during application.

Chapter 4 is something of a call to action. Anthropologists studying a community need to become engaged and accompany members of the group as needed. As a companion (even a friend), an anthropologist can help members of the community to access things like health care or food or even help alleviate social isolation.

In Chapter 5, the author talks about "ecosocial solidarities" that evolve in a community with members including schoolteachers, farmworkers, students, nonprofits and others. These groups may become activists in the community and protest the use of toxic chemicals or demonstrate for better wages, legal rights and human rights.

Throughout the book, Saxton strengthens her discussion by recounting farmworkers' stories and experiences related to the topic under discussion. These narratives help to illustrate in a very personal way the seriousness of the problems at hand and emphasize the need for activism and for change. The author also recounts her own experiences and frustrations to get things done.

This book is very thoroughly researched and very detailed. It is recommended for faculty researchers and students interested in medical anthropology, environmental justice, the plight of im/migrant farmworkers, environmental science or legal protections for farmworkers. It is recommended for academic libraries with social science or science programs related to these areas.

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