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## Economics of Agricultural Development: World Food Systems and Resource Use,

Fourth Edition, Edited by George W. Norton, Jeffrey Alwang, and William A. Masters, 2022, 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN, Routledge

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Economics of Agricultural Development: World Food Systems and Resource Use**, Fourth Edition, Edited by George W. Norton, Jeffrey Alwang, and William A. Masters, 2022, 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN, Routledge

The role of agriculture is not limited to the assurance of food security, but is largely hidden in the growth of economies, especially for countries whose economies depend on agriculture. For example, agriculture employs more than a quarter (27%) of the global workforce (FAO 2020) and 43.3% in Africa (Kamer 2022). Therefore, pressure on the future of global food security due to the rapid increase in global population, climate change and conflicts will not only hinder global efforts towards hunger, poor health and poverty, but will rather lead to an increase in economic dependence. In this situation, applying an economic technique in analysing the future of agriculture and global welfare is of greater importance.

On the other hand, for the past 30 years, the world has experienced a slight decrease in the global poverty rate (at the US\$1.90 poverty line), of which in 2015 the global poor population was 729 million, equivalent to 10.3%, but which later declined to 8.6% in 2022 (WB 2022). The poorest populations come from agriculture-dependent economies, such as those in Sub-Saharan African countries, where 48.5% of the population is living on less than US\$1.25 per day, and 69.9% on less than US\$2.00 per day (Foregeit 2019). Thus, the *Economics of Agricultural Development, World Food Systems and Resource Use* focuses on the proper utilisation of resources in the improvement of agricultural productivity, nutrition, economic development and reduction of poverty. The book's editors provided an interesting and chronological set of issues and events necessary for the development through agriculture transformation in low- and middle-income countries.

The book is significant for global audiences such as regional and international communities, policymakers, students, researchers and non-governmental organisations, among others, due to its intense information directed towards providing an understanding of agricultural development problems, including the environmental and human consequences of different development paths, the influence of international trade and capital flows and the reasons for progress in reducing poverty and improving the status of food security in the developing world.

Agriculture in the developing world is hindered by several factors, which are mainly categorised into institutional factors; poverty, geographical and climate factors; and human factors. Despite these challenges being common across countries, they are heterogeneous in terms of causality and the extent of its outcome. While most families engage in agriculture production just for subsistence goals, few families have matured to specialise in the production of cash crops whose production knowledge is passed from one generation to another within families and communities. However, studies (Rubhara et al. 2020; Nwachukwu, Ezeh, and Nwachukwu 2014) in the developing world argue that most families engaging in cash crop production are frequently facing food shortage and are characterised by poor health status, which has feedback effects on agriculture productivity and the economy at large. Unfortunately, here the authors have failed to indicate and discuss the extent of the relationship between agricultural productivity and health as discussed in the human capital theory and Grossman theory (Kitole et al., 2022a; 2022b). Poor health has been one of the key factors leading to the decline in agricultural production in developing countries. A study by Kitole et al. (2022a) in Tanzania suggested that ill-health lowers agriculture productivity significantly. The authors of the book have just focused on the narrow approach of food shortage and malnutrition and ignored the feedback effect of poor health (diseases/illness) to agriculture production, which are more elastic, to decline in agriculture production.

On the other hand, post-harvest crop losses form a large part of the agricultural challenges in developing countries, especially in Africa. For example, the East African Community (EAC) makes huge post-harvest losses in food products annually, in the range of 30% in cereals, 50% in roots and tubers, and up to 70% in fruits and vegetables (EAC 2022). Thus, addressing the economics of agriculture without paying special attention to issues related to agricultural sector inefficiencies such as post-harvest crop losses, especially in countries that highly depend on agriculture, is to limit knowledge on the matter.

Moreover, the book has not provided thorough information on the twenty-first century double threats of “food security” and “water security”. For most of the rainfed agricultural economies, having wider knowledge of the effects of water security on food security is paramount, as climate change and resource use conflict becomes part of our lives. Therefore, the book has not provided good narrations on how water security can enhance food security and the way water rights can improve food production across developing countries.

Additionally, ideologically the book is one-sided and considers developing countries having similar economic status, skills and technology, as well as demographic characteristics. These intuitions make it hard for authors to provide a specific solution towards major transformations in developing countries, rather than remaining as a teaching tool and a theoretical framework. Economic status among developing countries is heterogeneous (Todaro and Smith 2020), making each country unique from the other – hence why providing general observations or explaining the problems of a few countries to represent the entire developing world is to reduce the intensity of the correctness of the proposed solutions and strategies towards agriculture transformation.

Despite these shortcomings, there are major improvements in the fourth edition compared to the third edition. These improvements include those presented in Chapter 1 of the fourth edition (Norton, Alwang, and Masters 2021), where the subsection known as “Poverty, Hunger and Malnutrition” in the third edition (Norton, Alwang, and Masters 2014) was improved to “Poverty, Hunger and Health” – as the previous edition narrowed the relationship only to malnutrition. Apart from these improvements, the fourth edition has neither argued nor provided empirical information on the feedback effects of health on agricultural production. In the same chapter, another improvement made was the addition of the migration component in subsection four, which now reads as population and migration. This makes the book more interesting, because most literature ignores the role of the labour force, knowledge, skills and production techniques that are accompanied by changes in migration patterns. Therefore, the inclusion of this component make it easier for policymakers, researchers and practitioners to understand the dynamics of the population towards agriculture production, food security and resource use.

Another notable improvement made in the fourth edition is in Chapter 3 of “Agriculture Systems and Resource Use”, following the introduction of the new subsection known as “Theories and Strategies for Agricultural Development”, which was earlier located in Chapter 4 of the third edition, and which read as “Getting Agriculture Moving”. The introduction of this subsection has led to an increase in the theoretical perspectives of agriculture development and means towards achieving agricultural transformation under the correct chapter, compared to in the previous edition. Moreover, Chapter 4 of the fourth edition has been improved and the previous subsection which read as “Input and Credit Market” now reads as “Inputs, Finance and Risks”. These improvements help policymakers and practitioners to be able to understand areas of intervention in order to achieve agricultural development targets.

Conclusively, this book is good at providing important information on the causes of poor agriculture performance, breakthroughs and reasons for the transformation of agriculture in increasing production, as well as for overcoming poverty and food insecurity as one of the global preferences as indicated in the Sustainable Development Goals (2030). Furthermore, it provides crucial information on the application of economics in understanding and transforming the agriculture sector and being able to cope with the twenty-first century’s uncertainties.

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