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Corporate Power in Global Agrifood Governance

edited by Jennifer Clapp and Doris Fuchs

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Agrifood Corporations, Global Governance, and Sustainability: A Framework for Analysis

Jennifer Clapp and Doris Fuchs

Fundamental changes have taken place in food systems around the world over the past century. We now have a globally integrated food system that affects all regions of the world. The recent volatility in food prices has illustrated the global nature of this food system, highlighting the ways developments in one part of the world can have multiple and wide-ranging impacts. Transnational corporations (TNCs) have been central actors in the development of this global food system. They dominate the production and international trade in food and agricultural items, and are also key players in the processing, distribution, and retail sectors. Indeed, it is unlikely that the current global food system would exist as it does today without the participation of TNCs. Many of these firms operate in numerous countries and at more than one level along the global food chain. As food systems around the world become increasingly affected by the corporate-dominated global food system, we must pause to consider the consequences of this fundamental change in the provision of our food.

The international governance of the food system is geared toward providing some degree of regulation to put in place safeguards from potential negative socioeconomic and ecological consequences of a globalized food system. In many ways these rules govern activities of agrifood corporations, because these actors are pivotal agents in the globalization of the food system. But at the same time, these corporations play a key role in the establishment of the very rules that seek to govern their activities. This includes influence over state-based and intergovernmental mechanisms of governance, as well as private forms of governance. This situation raises important theoretical and policy questions about the impact of corporate influence on the sustainability—environmental as well as economic and social—of the global food system and the rules that govern it.

This book examines several key questions about the role of corporate actors in the global food system. First, we ask what role corporations are playing in the formation of the norms, rules, and institutions that govern the global food system. In answering this question, we examine the various facets of power that corporations exercise in an attempt to influence rules by which they themselves must ultimately play, including both state-based and private forms of governance. Second, we ask about the wider implications of corporate power in global food governance for the sustainability of the global food system as well as for societal debates over sustainability in the global food system. In particular, we examine the ways corporations use and influence the definition of the concept of sustainability in their exercise of power in global food governance in relation to other actors and other interpretations of the concept.

This book sits at the intersection of two emerging literatures on TNCs. Recent years have seen a growing body of scholarship on transnational corporations as actors in global governance (Fuchs 2007a; Cutler, Haufler, and Porter 1999; Cutler 1999; Sklair 2002). Grounded primarily in political science and international political economy, this work examines the political role of corporate and business actors in the establishment and implementation of norms, rules, and institutions governing international political and economic interactions. Power, authority, and legitimacy are central themes to this work. At the same time, a literature has emerged on the role of TNCs in the global agrifood system (see, for example, Glover and Newell 2004; McMichael 2005; Lang and Heasman 2004; Magdoff, Foster, and Buttel 2000; Heffernan 1998; Bonanno et al. 1994). Grounded primarily in sociology and political ecology, this literature examines the implications of growing corporate activity in the food system. The impacts of corporate concentration and market domination on society and the environment have been key themes in this literature.

Both of these literatures have been important in advancing our understanding of TNC activity in the global sphere. Yet while both focus on TNCs as actors in the global political economy, there has been little cross-referencing between these two literatures. As such there has been little academic work that specifically examines the *political* role that corporations play in efforts to *govern* the global *food* system. The literature on corporate actors in global governance has not yet examined the food and agriculture industry in any significant depth. The literature on TNCs in the food sector has focused on market power, with an implicit

assumption that economic dominance translates into political clout. Market power is certainly important, but it does not capture all of the facets of power that corporations can exercise in their bid to shape the rules of the game. Given the current instability in the global food system and the central role TNCs play in it, there is an urgent need for much more systematic and comprehensive analysis of the political role that corporate interests play in global food governance.

The framework we develop here identifies different channels through which corporations influence global food and agriculture governance and examines the implications of that influence. By focusing on the intersection of TNCs and global food governance, the book aims to build on the existing literature on TNCs and the global food system, as well as on the conceptual literature on the role of corporations in global governance more broadly. A crucial contribution of this book is to unpack the complex relationship between the exercise of power and the use of the concept of sustainability in the governance of the global food system.

Following a discussion of the rise of TNCs in the global food system more broadly, this introductory chapter presents a conceptual framework to help explain the role and implications of transnational corporate involvement in the global governance of food and agriculture. The case studies presented in this book have been selected to allow as comprehensive an understanding of corporate involvement in global agrifood governance as possible. They include investigations of corporate influence with respect to standard setting by retail corporations, international food safety standard setting, food aid policy, regulation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), global biosafety governance, and trade-related intellectual property rights rules. With this theoretically founded and empirically comprehensive approach, this book seeks to make significant progress in our understanding of global agrifood governance and the role of corporations in it.

Corporate Actors and the Rise of a Global Food System

The international trade in certain food and agricultural items has characterized food systems for centuries. But the truly global scale of production, trade, and marketing of food and agricultural products that we have today really only developed in the past fifty years (e.g., Busch and Juska 1997; Magdoff, Foster, and Buttel 2000; McMichael 2000, 2005;

Weis 2007). National food economies are increasingly integrated into a global food system founded on ever-growing volumes and value of agricultural trade. Although the share of agricultural trade in world merchandise trade declined between 1980 and 1997 from 17 to 10 percent (Ingco and Nash 2004, 5), the markets for global food and agriculture products have grown markedly in absolute terms, and have become much more globally integrated. There was a significant increase in the value of global agricultural trade overall during this period as well. The FAO reports that international agricultural trade is expanding more rapidly than world agricultural output (FAO 2005, 12).

At the same time that international trade in agricultural products has grown, there have been shifts in its makeup both in terms of countries and products. Over the 1971–2001 period, the growth in food imports was most marked in developing countries, which saw a rise of 115 percent, compared to developed countries with a rise of 45 percent (FAO 2004, 16). Developing countries were net agricultural exporters in the 1960s, but now are net agricultural importers (FAO 2004, 14). Since the early 1980s, trade in processed food also has grown more quickly than trade in bulk commodities. Today, trade in processed food products accounts for some 66 percent of agricultural trade (FAO 2004, 26).

Parallel to the growth in agricultural trade has been a growing participation of TNCs in the food and agriculture sector (Heffernan 2000; Murphy 2006). Indeed, global trade in food and agricultural products takes place largely among TNCs (FAO 2003). In the mid-1970s, there was heightened concern over the increasingly global scope of the grain trade and the power of corporate players in that trade (Morgan 1979). Since that time, corporations have diversified into multiple facets of the food sector, including commodity trading, food processing and retailing, as well as seed and agricultural chemical production (FAO 2003). TNCs have been central players in the global integration of the food system. They have stretched their operations both vertically and horizontally, to the point that it no longer makes sense to speak of national food systems because the agrifood TNCs are so globally integrated in their operations (Heffernan 1998). As part of this globalization process, agriculture and food have become commodified through complex and global production chains dominated by TNCs, which demand durable products and thrive on distance, both social and physical, between the production and consumption of food (Friedmann 1993, 1994; Kneen 1993).

In the industrialized world—and increasingly in the less industrialized world as well—a growing proportion of the food people eat has an international and corporate dimension. At least one of the steps in the food chain— from production, trade, processing, and packaging to retailing—is typically overseen by a major food corporation (see Lang and Heasman 2004). Moreover, the liberalization of foreign direct investment rules in developing countries in recent decades has facilitated the rapid expansion of supermarkets in the global South, most of which are owned by major international retail corporations. This shift toward truly global supermarket retailing has meant more concentration in the procurement and distribution of foods in both rich and poor countries (FAO 2005, 21–22; Burch and Lawrence 2007; Konefal, Mascarenhas, and Hatanaka 2005).

Indeed, corporate involvement at all stages along the food production chain (inputs, production, commodity trade, processing, and retailing) has become much more concentrated in recent years (Heffernan 2000). According to the FAO (2003, 119), “a small number of companies now dominate each part of the food chain in OECD countries.” High ratios of concentration are present in many sectors within countries, and this concentration is also a feature of the global system. Just four companies control nearly 40 percent of the global coffee trade, while three roasting companies control 45 percent of the global coffee market (FAO 2004, 30). A report by the Erosion, Technology and Concentration (ETC) Group documents the level of concentration in the various stages of the food and agriculture production chain:

- The top 10 seed companies control nearly 50 percent of the US \$21 billion annual global commercial seed market and nearly all of the genetically engineered seed market.
- The top 10 pesticide companies control 84 percent of the US \$30 billion annual global pesticide market.
- The top 10 food retailers control 24 percent of the estimated US \$3.5 trillion global food market.
- The top 10 food and beverage processing companies control 24 percent of the estimated US \$1.25 trillion global market for packaged foods. (ETC Group 2005)

Increasing corporate concentration in the global agrifood system has provoked many questions from both within and outside of academia about corporate accountability and responsibility in this sector (e.g., Murphy 2006; ActionAid International 2005; MacMillan 2005).

McMichael (2005, 280) argues that this increasingly globally oriented corporate control over the food system is resulting in a privatization of food security, whereby we see “an emerging *world* agriculture subordinated to capital.” The push for agricultural trade liberalization under programs of structural adjustment in the global South as well as via the Agreement on Agriculture of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are seen by many to have pushed the global food system yet further in this direction (McMichael 2005, 292; Weis 2007).

The globalization of food and agricultural systems may have produced some benefits, such as increased varieties of foods available to consumers and new markets for producers. But critical thinkers and a number of NGOs have also raised concerns about the impacts of corporate control of “food globalization” on socioeconomic and environmental outcomes. In particular, there is a growing critique of the effects that corporate concentration in a globalized food system is having on food security, small-farmer livelihoods, environmental quality, food safety, and consumer sovereignty. These concerns have been driving forces behind international efforts to establish rules, norms, and institutions to govern the global food and agricultural systems. Global food governance rules and institutions supposedly seek to ensure that each of the steps in the food chain is carried out in a manner that mitigates risks and maximizes benefits of the internationalization of the food system (Phillips and Wolfe 2001). At the same time, however, corporate actors in the global agri-food system are increasingly playing a role in setting the very rules that govern their activities. This raises further concerns about the efficacy and legitimacy of these rules.

Private, corporate actors have taken on a significant role in the global food system, not only as economic actors responsible for much of the world’s food production, processing, and retailing, but also as political actors in global mechanisms to govern the food system. But does the economic significance and growing concentration among agrifood TNCs translate into political power in global governance mechanisms? And what is the significance of corporate involvement in global food governance in terms of outcomes?

To answer these questions it is important to understand the multiple facets of power that corporations exercise in global governance more broadly, and to investigate whether these facets of power are visible in their activities with respect to global food governance. It is also important to examine the ways in which the power of corporate actors

influences outcomes, particularly with respect to questions of sustainability (Fuchs 2007b). In the following sections, we outline the various facets of corporate power in global governance and begin to map out how they unfold with respect to governance of the global food system.

Conceptualizing Corporate Power in Global Food Governance: Toward a Framework

Recent years have spawned numerous studies on different aspects of the political role of business and corporate participation in global governance (Clapp 2005; Cutler 1999; Haufler 2002; Levy and Newell 2004). Supplementing earlier scholarship in international political economy on the structural power of TNCs (Gill and Law 1989), this recent work has looked at the rise of “private authority” in the global political realm and its wider implications (Cutler, Haufler, and Porter, 1999; Fuchs 2005a, 2007a; Grande and Pauly 2005; Falkner 2003).

Several main themes emerge from the literature on the political role of corporations. First, strategies pursued by international industry lobby groups in their attempts to frame the politics of specific issues represent an important object of inquiry (Clapp 2003; Rowlands 2000). Second, the ways in which the structural power of corporate actors in the broader global political economy influences governance outcomes need to be considered (Fuchs 2007a; Levy and Egan 1998; Newell and Paterson 1998). Third, the “legitimacy” of corporations as political actors and the “authority” they can exercise vis-à-vis the state and civil society—in particular via the development of private-industry-driven governance institutions and the discursive framing of policy issues—require attention (Fuchs 2005b; Falkner 2003). These themes provide a starting point for investigations into the role of corporations in global agriculture and food governance.

The understanding of corporate power employed in much of the literature on globalization, including that in the food sector, tends to equate corporate power with market share (e.g., MacMillan 2005). While the economic dimension of corporate influence is important, our approach is to go deeper to uncover the different political facets of corporate power and its sources. A multifaceted approach to corporate power reveals the many ways this power is being employed, which together constitute corporations’ ability to influence the governance of the global food system. Specifically, these different facets of power enable corporations

to have a say in what is on the agenda and what is not, and to shape the distribution of the costs and benefits of the resulting rules and regulations. Market power influences political power, but one cannot assume that it translates into political power in a one-to-one relationship. Accordingly, it is important to unpack corporate power and to look at its different political facets as well as to consider important additional sources besides market power such as access to information and the policy process, or the perceived political legitimacy of corporate actors. Following on earlier work with respect to the dimensions of power in global governance more broadly, we pay particular attention here to the instrumental, structural, and discursive dimensions of corporate power (see also Fuchs 2005a, 2007a; Levy and Egan 2000).

One of the more obvious forms of power held by corporate actors is the instrumental power they attempt to wield in policy processes via corporate lobbying or political campaign financing.¹ This type of power can be characterized as direct influence of one actor over another, and assumes the existence of a functional, unilinear causality; of individual voluntary action and instrumental causality (e.g., Dahl 1957). Specifically, scholars link this type of power to a change in the decision outcomes by one actor due to the influence exercised by another. Actor-specific resources, such as financial, organizational, or human resources, as well as access to decision makers, all feed into this type of power. In political science, this instrumental power has been at the center of analyses of pluralism and interest-group politics. Such instrumentalist approaches to power can also be found in traditional power theories in the field of international relations, where scholars focus on the use of power by states in pursuit of national interests.

While an instrumentalist perspective is important in explaining direct power of one actor over another, it fails to capture the power exercised via the imposition of limits on the range of choices given to actors. To more fully understand the way corporations might exert control over actors' choice sets, a structuralist perspective on power needs to be added to the framework. This "second face of power" stresses the importance of the input side of the political process and of the predetermination of the behavioral options of political decision makers by existing material structures that allocate direct and indirect decision-making power. This structuralist perspective on power takes into consideration the broader influence corporate actors have over setting agendas and making proposals as a product of their material position within states and the global

economy more broadly. In doing so, it emphasizes the importance of examining the contexts that make alternatives more or less acceptable before the actual and observable bargaining starts (Bachrach and Baratz 1970). The structural power TNCs derive from the ability to punish and reward countries for their policy choices by relocating investments and jobs has been the focus of considerable attention by critical international political economy scholars (Cox 1987; Gill and Law 1989; Fagre and Wells 1982).

A further, more dynamic type of structural power has also emerged in recent years. As globalization has continued, material structures have increasingly put corporate actors in a position to make governance decisions themselves, either supplementing or in some cases replacing traditional actors such as states and global institutions. Economic and institutional structures, processes, and interdependencies have created a setting where corporate actors have control of pivotal networks and resources. This control has given them the capacity to adopt, implement, and enforce privately set rules that may then take on an obligatory quality and that also have distributional consequences for others (Fuchs 2005a, 2007a). Some scholars have pointed to the development of private and quasi-private regimes, such as the International Organization for Standardization's ISO 14000 standards, whereby industry players took a key role in not only setting the agenda, but also in delineating the rules (Clapp 1998). When privately developed regimes are adopted or encouraged by states as a form of "regulation," or given legitimacy by international organizations such as the World Trade Organization, they take on broader public significance, even though they were not developed in the public sphere. Firms' growing adherence to "corporate social responsibility" (CSR) and private certification standards, and the growing significance they play in the regulatory structures governing the global economy, illustrate the importance of understanding this aspect of corporate power. This type of power is structural in the sense that it affects the input side of the political process. In other words, it allows corporate actors to determine the focus and content of rules. Likewise, it is structural in that their position in global economic networks provides corporations with a strong influence on which private standards and labels are widely adopted.²

Even an analysis of both the instrumental and the structural facets of a corporate actor's power, however, does not fully explain the power that preexists decisions and nondecisions. A more discursive approach,

which recognizes that power is also a function of norms and ideas and is reflected in discourse, communicative practices, and cultural values and institutions, is necessary as well (Lukes [1974] 2004). Scholars attach increasing importance to this discursive dimension of the political process. They point out that policy decisions are, to a growing extent, a function of discursive contests over the framing of policies and the assignment of problems into categories by linking them to specific fundamental norms and values (Hajer 1997; Kooiman 2002).

Discursive perspectives draw out two main insights on corporate power. First, power not only pursues interests, but also creates them. Power in this sense precedes the formation and articulation of interests in the political process because of its role in constituting and framing policies, actors, and broader societal norms and ideas. Corporate actors, in other words, often play an important role in framing certain issues and problems in public discourse. This discourse in turn can have an important yet indirect influence over the ways public debates are carried out and over the choices presented to society for addressing them. Corporate lobby groups, such as the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (later transformed into the Business Action for Sustainable Development), played a prominent role in issue framing around the Rio Earth Summit as well as at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. Its engagement in the global dialogue on globalization and the environment portrayed voluntary corporate measures as more user-friendly and efficient, not to mention more environmentally sound, than government regulation (Finger and Kilcoyne 1997; Clapp 2005).

A focus on discursive power allows for a richer analysis of the presence and exercise of power in the absence of observable conflicts of interests. Conceptualizing power in this way provides a basis for a more comprehensive explanation of how political systems prevent certain demands from becoming political issues. This “third face of power” considers attempts to socialize politicians and the public into accepting “truths” about desirable policies and political developments and pays attention to media and public relations efforts, among others (Lukes [1974] 2004).³ While such attempts to influence the public perception of key issues may sometimes backfire, this discursive engagement can have profound impacts on public debate.

The second insight from discursive understandings of power is that legitimacy is intimately wrapped up in discourse itself (Fuchs 2005b). In other words, in order to effectively exercise discursive power in the

political process, an actor requires political legitimacy. After all, discursive power is relational in that it relies on the willingness of message recipients to listen and to place at least some trust in the validity of the contents of the message. Political legitimacy, in turn, can derive from a variety of sources. Public actors generally have this legitimacy on the basis of electoral processes and the formal authority associated with political offices. Actors can also obtain political legitimacy from the trust the public places in their expertise and capacities as well as in their intentions. These latter sources of political legitimacy apply primarily to nonstate actors and are frequently discussed in the literature on private authority.⁴

An analysis of the role of corporations in global agrifood governance, then, needs to consider the instrumental, structural, and discursive facets of corporate power. Analyses should pay attention to the role played in the governance of the global food system by lobbying and associated financial payments and contributions, agenda-setting power derived from capital mobility, rule-setting activities reflected in self-regulation and public-private or private-private partnerships, and efforts to influence the public debate through the framing of policy issues and underlying societal norms.

Some caveats to our three-dimensional concept of power need to be mentioned. First, it is important to note that the clear differentiation between the different dimensions of power is a simplification for analytic purposes. Empirically, the dimensions of power are more difficult to separate. Moreover, they interact and can even enhance each other (Fuchs 2007a). Second, this three-dimensional concept of power is one of a number of concepts of power currently employed in the field of international relations. Susan Strange's notion of "structural power," for example, included various sources of power—namely, finance, production, security, and knowledge (Strange 1988). Her view of structural power, then, combined several elements of power that we discuss here, in particular market-based power (what we call structural power) as well as discursive power (as part of the knowledge structure). While they are indeed related, we feel that it is important to differentiate more explicitly between these types of power. Barnett and Duvall (2005) have suggested a four-dimensional concept of power, differentiating between compulsory, institutional, structural, and productive power. In our view, however, the lines between some of these dimensions of power are all too blurred, while other important aspects of power, captured particularly in the notion of discursive power, do not receive sufficient attention.

Thus, we believe that the three-dimensional approach to power with its differentiation between instrumental, structural and discursive power holds the most explanatory value.

In addition, potential relationships between corporate power and the power of other actors, such as states and nongovernmental organizations, need to be taken into account. While it often makes sense to employ an analytic simplification and investigate business and state power separately, they ultimately interact in complex and multifaceted ways, and are frequently interdependent (Falkner 2003). Thus, one has to ask whether American TNCs are particularly powerful actors in global governance due to the predominance of the United States among the state actors. Similarly, state and TNC actors operate closely on many regulatory fronts, as is seen in the agrifood sector, for example with regard to trade policy, food safety, and biotechnology (see, e.g., Newell and Glover 2004). Some have pointed to the “revolving door” between industry and the state in the agrifood sector, where high-level employees of the state leave government to take on industry positions, and vice versa, affecting the making of governmental policy and regulation (e.g., Murphy 2006; Newell 2003). Similarly, there are a number of instances where NGOs and industry are working together with respect to setting industry standards (Nadvi and Wältring 2002). In this context, the potential instrumentalization of the state and other actors by private actors needs to be considered.

By offering a differentiated analysis of the instrumental, structural, and discursive facets of this power in global food governance, this book aims to contribute to the literature on corporate power. Specifically, the various chapters all analyze at least two of these facets in the context of specific issues associated with the governance of the global food system. In addition, they explore the interaction of corporate power with the power of other actors in their specific areas of analysis and the ways this interaction may enhance or constrain corporate power.

Implications of Corporate Power for Sustainability in the Global Food System

It is widely agreed that the organization of food and agriculture systems must be a key component of policies to promote both socioeconomic and environmental sustainability (e.g., IAASTD 2008; World Bank 2007). There are sound reasons for this centrality of food and agriculture

in discussions of sustainability. Over half of the world's population is engaged in agricultural production, making it a source of livelihood for a significant proportion of people on the planet. Agricultural production is also intimately tied to the land and thus has direct environmental consequences. Farmers are often inadequately recognized for their stewardship of almost one-third of the Earth's land (IAASTD 2008). Yet while there is agreement that food and agriculture policy are vital components of sustainable development policy, there is considerable debate over exactly how the global food and agriculture system should be organized in order to best promote socioeconomic and environmental goals. For example, there are widely differing viewpoints on the relative merits of industrial agriculture versus small-scale farming, genetically modified seeds versus organic production, and global versus local food systems (see, e.g., Weis 2007; Ansell and Vogel 2006; Falkner 2007; Lang and Heasman 2004).

The contested nature of the concept of sustainability has enabled it to be used strategically by different actors (Fuchs 2007b). As such, the institutions and arrangements for governing the global food system have become sites of debate over how best to organize food and agricultural systems to promote sustainability. The exercise of corporate power and influence is important to consider in this respect. The various facets of corporate power can play a role in setting the parameters and tone of debates about the sustainability implications of various models of organization for global food and agriculture. In the past decade in particular, corporate actors have become much more active in attempting to influence these debates as public concern has risen over food safety and the introduction of genetically modified (GM) foods (Falkner 2007; Ansell and Vogel 2006).

At various points along the food production chain, governments and multilateral institutions oversee the governance of various aspects of the global food system. These mechanisms include international agreements and other institutional arrangements. These global efforts have been important sites of debate over ecological and socioeconomic issues—in terms of the need to set rules to mitigate negative consequences of the global food system in the absence of rules, but also in terms of the impacts of the rules themselves.

At the agricultural-input end of the spectrum, corporations and environmental groups sparred over the extent to which the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety should restrict trade in GMOs in order to protect the

environment. At the same time, it has become clear that the agreement has not been able to prevent the unwanted spread of GMOs (e.g., Glover and Newell 2004; Clapp 2006a). There has also been active debate about whether stronger intellectual property rights rules under the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement provide actual benefits for developing countries (e.g., Sell 1999). And environmental groups have accused international agricultural assistance institutions of bending under corporate pressure to encourage the use of industrial agricultural practices associated with the Green Revolution—many of which have been associated with environmental problems such as soil erosion and loss of genetic diversity—throughout the developing world (e.g., Shiva 2000).

With respect to agricultural commodity trade, there has been extensive debate over whether and the extent to which rules as established in the WTO Agreement on Agriculture exacerbate inequities relating to agricultural trade and protectionism between rich and poor countries (e.g., Clapp 2006b; Rosset 2006). There has also been critique of corporate attempts to influence the current governance of international food aid (Zerbe 2004; Barrett and Maxwell 2005). On the food processing and retail fronts, the Codex Alimentarius has been accused of setting standards that facilitate trade and meet the needs of agrifood corporations more than they promote food safety per se (Sklair 2002; Suppan 2006).

Private industry and third-party-led initiatives in the global food and agriculture system are also sites of debate. Reporting efforts that reflect corporate social responsibility have been increasingly adopted by major firms in the food and agriculture sector, which argue that it demonstrates their commitment to sustainability. Some have raised doubts, however, about how much CSR initiatives contribute to development and environmental and social protection in this sector (e.g., Tallontire 2007; Clapp 2008). Private, industry-led standards, which sometimes are third-party certified or involve NGOs in standard setting, have also emerged to promote food safety and quality, as well as certification for organic and fair trade products. The large transnational grocery retail corporations, for example, are increasingly demanding that their suppliers meet quality and safety standards, and this requirement filters all the way back through processors, traders, and down to the level of production by farmers. But the proliferation of private certification schemes is seen by many to be pushing small farmers out of the market, particularly those operating in

the developing world, in favor of large agribusiness and food processors (Hatanaka, Bain, and Busch 2005; McMichael and Friedmann 2007).

Concerns about the various institution-, industry-, and third-party-led governance efforts have raised important questions about the ability of these measures to effectively promote sustainability in all its dimensions. Some scholars see corporate concentration in the global food system as directly leading to rules that reinforce a global and corporate-led agri-food system (McMichael 2005). Many regard a corporate-controlled global food system as antithetical to sustainability because it contributes to an industrial agricultural model that relies on heavy chemical use and agricultural biotechnology (IAASTD 2008). Corporate concentration is further seen to foster inequality as well as a reliance on international trade for food security, which many believe contributes to heightened vulnerability (e.g., Norberg-Hodge, Merrifield, and Gorelick 2002). Such critiques have spawned movements such as those promoting “food sovereignty,” and “local food movements,” which seek to retreat from the global, corporate-led food and agriculture system, to a more local and ecologically sustainable food system. Such movements reject current governance mechanisms, such as the WTO Agriculture Agreement, and also seek to promote “GMO-free zones” in the face of perceived weaknesses of the Biosafety Protocol (e.g., Rosset 2006; McMichael 2005).

In this context of debate over the sustainability dimensions of food and agriculture, it is important that the roles TNCs are playing in that debate are further unpacked and examined. The framework we set out in the previous section helps to better understand that role and in turn to better understand the origins of the corporate positions in the broader debate. The framing of the discourse around agricultural technologies and sustainability itself on the part of agrifood corporations, the structural power corporations hold in the market, the influence of lobby power held by a handful of agrifood corporations, and self-set voluntary rules and certification standards, all play into the framing of sustainability in this broader debate as well as sustainability outcomes as such.

The Plan of This Book

The case studies presented in this book document the channels through which corporations today shape global agrifood governance, and the implications of this role for sustainability and the broader debate over

agricultural sustainability. The various chapters investigate a large range of political activities by corporate actors, the linkages between a corporation's economic and political power, the interaction between corporate power and state power, as well as the existing constraints on corporate power in the global governance of the agrifood system.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I provides insights into the nature of corporate power in various areas of global food governance and its implications. Part II then focuses on one particular area of global food governance: the governance of genetically modified organisms, which have received particular attention in recent years both in analyses of the global food system in general and in studies of the role of corporations in the global food system. The case studies in both sections contribute unique insights on corporate power in global food governance and its implications for debates over socioeconomic and environmental characteristics of the global food system.

In chapter 2, Fuchs, Kalfagianni, and Arentsen explore the increasing power of retail corporations and its implications for sustainability. Starting from the recognition that a new type of retail corporation has arrived on the scene and produced a shift in power between the actors involved in global agrifood governance, Fuchs and colleagues delineate the structural and discursive power of retail corporations today. Specifically, they examine retail corporations' rule-setting power as expressed in private standards and the exercise of discursive power reflected in the strategic use of quality and sustainability frames. They then investigate the implications of those forms of power for sustainability, considering issues of food safety, as well as environmental and social sustainability. It is with respect to the latter, especially, that Fuchs, Kalfagianni, and Arentsen highlight the danger of dramatic costs to societies, especially in developing countries. In consequence, they discuss opportunities for the regulation of retail power in the food sector as well as for reducing the negative effects of private retail governance on sustainability.

Scott, Vandergeest, and Young continue the discussion of food marketing in chapter 3 with their examination of certification standards for "green" foods in Southeast Asia. They argue that because transnational corporations are key players in setting and enforcing standards that are required for local firms to export organic foods from this region to international markets, these players have significant structural power. Corporations also have discursive power due to the way they frame organics as a key marketing point for Western markets. While

corporations are key players in the politics of certification standards for these “green” foods in Southeast Asia, this chapter highlights their complex relationship with other actors, including the state, NGOs, farmers’ associations, aid agencies, and social movements in this fast-growing international market for organic foods.

In chapter 4, Smythe examines the role and extent to which corporate power affects emerging norms of transparency at both the global and national level and thereby raises questions about democratic accountability and the rights and capacity of food consumers to have choices. She specifically addresses corporate power in the rule-making process of the Codex Alimentarius. Consumers in many countries are increasingly distant and detached from the sites of crop production and processing. As food production has become globalized, it has fallen under this complex array of governing institutions and private corporate networks, raising questions about the nature and legitimacy of the rules that are established and the interests they serve. As Smythe shows, the voices of consumers and small-scale local producers are increasingly at risk of becoming marginalized in this governance system. One reaction to globalization and global governance has been a growing demand for increased transparency in the processes of governance. However, this demand is as yet unfulfilled.

In chapter 5, Clapp analyzes the role of corporate power in international food aid policy, with a focus on the United States. She argues that corporate actors exercise instrumental power at the national level through their lobbying activities in the US Congress regarding international food aid policy. Moreover, she shows how they exercise structural power, which results from their economic and national security significance in the United States. In addition, she documents that corporations exercise discursive power in food aid governance by engaging in public debate over questions of hunger and food security and its link to food aid. Finally, Clapp delineates the complex and changing relationship between corporations and other nonstate actors with a stake in food aid policy.

Part II starts out with Williams’s analysis in chapter 6 of the promotion of GMOs by corporate actors. Specifically, he examines discursive strategies pursued by individual corporations as well as industry associations in attempts to frame GM food, highlighting how the discursive power of corporate actors is being used to construct a positive normative consensus around GMOs as an alternative to the discourse of risk employed by GMO opponents. In this context, the chapter examines the

promotion of “environmental sustainability” and “food security” as key normative frames, using official statements and publications by leading biotechnology firms. Here, Williams shows that the power to determine what counts as knowledge, which actors disseminate it, and the terms on which it is communicated has an enormous impact on public policymaking. Finally, the chapter examines interventions designed to promote the spread of GM crops and the consumption of GM food in Africa, in particular.

In chapter 7, Sell examines the role global biotechnology firms have played in efforts to raise regulatory standards for intellectual property protection worldwide and its implications. She points out that the complexity of the regulatory environment has given corporations important advantages in achieving their objectives, because vertical and horizontal forum shifting between multilateral, regional, and bilateral venues and across international organizations has made it difficult for developing countries to keep abreast of intellectual property policymaking and has made them vulnerable to power plays from global corporations and their supportive trade ministries such as the Office of the United States Trade Representative. Sell delineates the impact of this process on developing-country agriculture, highlighting the instrumental, structural, and discursive dimensions of the contemporary policymaking environment. In addition, she explores the potential outcomes of the ongoing contest between corporate actors on the one side and NGOs and developing-country governments on the other for the setting of IPR-related norms in the global economy and the emerging alternatives for developing-country agriculture.

In chapter 8, Falkner investigates the contestation of corporate power in the governance of GMOs. He shows that the growth of agricultural biotechnology has not been straightforward, pointing out resistance by consumers, food producers, retailers, farmers, and regulators as well as the creation of biosafety regulations at the national and international level. On this basis, Falkner questions the actual extent of corporate power in global food governance as well as the potential of social and political checks on international business and technology. In pursuit of these objectives, Falkner examines recent cases of contestation in agribiotechnology that have shaped the seemingly unstoppable march of biotechnology. He finds that business conflict plays a key role in limiting the power of the corporate sector and opens up crucial political spaces for other actors.

In chapter 9, Newell inquires into the role of corporate power in the governance of GMOs in Argentina. This country is a leading exporter of GM foods, a key ally of other biotech superpowers like the United States and Canada, and a potential gateway to the rest of the Latin American continent for biotech products. He shows that the story of agricultural biotechnology in Argentina brings to the fore a powerful combination of the politics of poverty, the power of transnational corporations, and the political economy of food and agriculture. Following a brief overview of developments in GMO politics and policy in the country, the chapter provides insights into the role of key private actors in this sector, and describes their corporate and policy strategies and forms of association and mobilization. Newell then discusses different dimensions of corporate power at play, before closing with some tentative conclusions about the implications of these forms of corporate power for alternative ways of organizing the governance of food and agriculture in a context in which state economic strategy is so entirely dependent on private agricultural interests.

Chapter 10, the book's conclusion, draws together the common and differing insights from the various case studies and discusses the complex implications of corporate power in global agrifood governance for sustainability. In addition, it explores the role of the structural context of this power, the relevance of other actors, and the role of issues such as knowledge. The chapter highlights interesting strategies employed by corporations as well as factors influencing the likelihood of success of the corporate exercise of power. The chapter then points out strategies for limiting negative effects of corporate power on the sustainability of global agrifood governance. It closes with a discussion of the implications of the insights on global food governance gained for assessing and improving its democratic legitimacy, addressing questions of participation, transparency, and accountability.

Indeed, based on an investigation of the role of corporate power in global agrifood governance and its implications for sustainability, issues of democratic legitimacy—that is, questions of participation, transparency, and accountability—remain as the central issues in global food governance. While public actors are not necessarily “good” nor private actors necessarily “bad” forces in governance, public actors generally are selected by more participatory processes and have to be accountable to more interests and criteria than private ones. Accordingly, the book's documentation of the large role corporate actors play in global agrifood

governance today raises the questions of how to select the new “governors” and how to make them accountable to those governed. By providing a first set of answers to the questions of the corporate power in global agrifood governance and its consequences, then, the book and the case studies gathered in it serve to guide future research on the topic of agrifood corporations and global food governance toward pivotal issues for the future of humankind: the issues of the sustainability and democratic legitimacy of the global food system and global food governance.

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Notes

1. Note, however, that in critical state theories, the term *instrumental power* is used to refer to specific mechanisms of business control of state policy. Examples include the “revolving doors” and social networks that facilitate the lobbying and campaign finance frequently associated with claims of a substantial degree of business control of state policy levers (Miliband 1969).
2. In other words, corporations can punish and reward NGO-created standards and labels—for instance, for their choice of criteria—just as the traditional notion of structural power identified the ability of TNCs to punish and reward governments for their policy choices.
3. That media and public relations efforts would be among the key foci of such an analysis makes clear that an actor’s material resources matter in the exercise of discursive power.
4. It is important to note that the underlying notion here is one of output legitimacy rather than input legitimacy—that is, a legitimacy focusing on results rather than notions of participatory democratic norms and procedures (Scharpf 1998).

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