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RESETTING THE TABLE: Straight Talk

About the Food We Grow and Eat

by **Robert Paarlberg**

Alfred A. Knopf | February 2, 2021

ISBN: 9780525656449 | \$27.95

“On a topic all too often subjected to wild claims, emotional argument and rejection of evidence in favor of prejudice, Robert Paarlberg brings welcome good sense, a wealth of facts and an eloquent use of language.

His suggestions for how to improve our systems of food production, while benefiting the environment, are vitally important.”

—Matt Ridley, author of *How Innovation Works*

“A perceptive analysis of America’s food system. Paarlberg levels a well-informed, evidence-based critique of a broad swath of players in food production and consumption . . . A cogent, revealing look at the future of food.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

Robert Paarlberg’s **RESETTING THE TABLE: Straight Talk about the Food We Grow and Eat** (Knopf, February 2, 2021) is a bold, science-based corrective to the groundswell of misinformation about food and how it’s produced.

A descendant of Midwestern family farmers, Paarlberg examines in detail local and organic food, food companies, nutrition labeling, ethical treatment of animals, environmental impact, and every other aspect of the American food system from farm to table—and finds abundant reasons to disagree with the prevailing messaging to consumers to buy organic, unprocessed foods, sourced from small local farms. Global food markets have in fact improved the American diet. “Industrial” farming has greatly reduced environmental impact thanks to GPS-guided precision methods that cut energy use and chemical pollution, in addition to reducing land use while producing more crops. America’s very serious obesity crisis does not come from farms, or from food deserts, but from “food swamps” created by food companies, retailers, and restaurant chains. And, though animal welfare is lagging behind, progress can be made through continued advocacy, more progressive regulations, and perhaps plant-based imitation meat.

Paarlberg, an adjunct professor of public policy at the Harvard Kennedy School and the author of *Starved for Science*, *Food Politics*, and *The United States of Excess*, offers evidence-based solutions to the challenges of our food system today, ones that make sense for farmers and consumers alike. With *RESETTING THE TABLE*, he gives us a road map through the rapidly changing worlds of food and farming, laying out a practical path to bring the two together.

About the Author

Robert Paarlberg has been a member of the Board of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the National Research Council, a member of the Board of Directors at Winrock International, and a consultant to the International Food Policy Research Institute, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Praise for RESETTING THE TABLE

“Chapter by chapter, *Resetting the Table* demolishes the preconceived beliefs of smart eaters raised on progressive, post-1960s culinary social movements . . . Through a mix of history, science and reportage, [Paarlberg] makes a convincing case . . . *Resetting the Table* is sure to be controversial, and should be widely read and debated.”

—*The Wall Street Journal*

“Persuasive . . . a compelling take for anyone interested in food and its future.”

—*The Boston Globe*

“Robert Paarlberg’s evenhandedness will make him a more credible voice for a reader with no connection to agriculture, one who perhaps is deciding what to think about the notion that ‘the agriculture system is broken.’”

—*Progressive Farmer*

“A perceptive analysis of America’s food system. Paarlberg levels a well-informed, evidence-based critique of a broad swath of players in food production and consumption . . . A cogent, revealing look at the future of food.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Astute . . . Environmentally conscience readers will find much food for thought in this informative narrative.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“[A] broadly and deeply informed discussion of the life-and-death issues over how we grow, process, and consume our food . . . An almost indispensable guide to our food system—and how to make that system work better.”

—*Booklist*, starred review

“A clear-eyed look at the present and future of food production . . . A book that will be of interest to everyone who is concerned about the health effects of food.”

—*Library Journal*

“Dr. Paarlberg cogently argues for the potential power and benefits of science in farming—while aptly wondering if we can trust ourselves to use this power responsibly. He neatly clarifies some popular misconceptions—detailing, for example, how U.S. agricultural policy often raises, rather than lowers, prices of subsidized U.S. crops—while highlighting largely unrecognized and damaging cultural divides, such as that between commercial farmers and

consumers. And, he calls for America's commercial farmers to help bridge that gap by joining the advocacy movement for better nutrition and health."

—**Dariush Mozaffarian, Jean Mayer Professor of Nutrition and Medicine, Friedman School of Nutrition Science & Policy, Tufts University**

"Drawing on a lifetime of global experiences in agriculture and food systems, Paarlberg challenges the concepts of organic, local, and small-scale as the solutions to feeding the world's population a healthy and sustainable diet. Does the science-based, technology-driven plate he offers provide a path to this goal? Anyone seriously interested in this existential issue should get this highly readable and thoughtful book."

—**Walter Willett, author of *Eat, Drink, and Be Healthy***

"On a topic all too often subjected to wild claims, emotional argument and rejection of evidence in favor of prejudice, Robert Paarlberg brings welcome good sense, a wealth of facts and an eloquent use of language. His suggestions for how to improve our systems of food production, while benefiting the environment, are vitally important."

—**Matt Ridley, author of *How Innovation Works***

"Robert Paarlberg's *Resetting the Table* is a fresh, deeply researched and courageous study of the unprecedented challenge of ensuring a healthful diet in an era of super-abundant food. Paarlberg demolishes currently-popular solutions such as local, organic, and micro-scale enterprises, while taking on commercial farmers, food companies and supermarkets for turning a blind eye to problems in the food supply. In doing so, he provides much needed context for all those concerned to bring the food system into line with human needs."

—**Rachel Laudan, author of *Cuisine and Empire: Cooking in World History***

"A terrific book. Robert Paarlberg makes clear that if crops don't come in, little else matters. *Resetting the Table* shows how the whole world can be fed without environmental harm, and that's worth listening to. This book accomplishes what is so rare in contemporary writing—being urgent yet reasonable at the same time."

—**Gregg Easterbrook, author of *It's Better Than It Looks: Reasons for Optimism in an Age of Fear***

"*Resetting the Table* is gutsy, objective, and beautifully written. Paarlberg advocates 'ecomodern'—sensible—farming practices that benefit farmers, the environment, animals, and consumers. In the process he skewers some widespread, but fallacious, criticisms of America's food system. This book is must reading for anyone seeking to understand controversies over food and farming."

—**Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D., co-founder of the Center for Science in the Public Interest**