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**Reviews of *Fatal Harvest: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture*  
and *The Fatal Harvest Reader: The Tragedy of Industrial  
Agriculture* Edited by Andrew Kimbrell**

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Fatal Harvest: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture.** Edited by Andrew Kimbrell. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2002. xii + 384 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$75.00 cloth, \$45.00 paper.

**The Fatal Harvest Reader: The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture.** Edited by Andrew Kimbrell. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2002. xiv + 369 pp. Bibliography, index. \$16.95 paper.

*Fatal Harvest* introduces and dispels key myths about industrial agriculture: greater efficiency; safe and nutritious food that is cheap to consumers; benefits to wildlife and environment; how biotechnology will save the world. In essays by leading proponents of a more equitable and sustainable food system, the book presents compelling evidence that alternative systems guided by an agrarian ethic will better address our food needs while protecting our natural environment and soil resources.

Wendell Berry cites the separation of people from their food supply and natural environment as a causal factor in our ready acceptance of today's industrial agriculture. When we lose proximity and identity with our food system, it is easier to accept the myth of cheap food that is produced and processed far away under unknown conditions. Berry defines agrarianism as both a culture and a way of thought based on land, an important alternative to industrialism based only on monetary capital and technology.

*Fatal Harvest* is much more than a critique of current problems growing out of industrial agriculture. Joan Nassauer describes an ecological conservation approach that could guide the design of productive and sustainable landscapes. From experiences in Ladakh and elsewhere, Helena Norberg-Hodge insists that localized food systems are a cultural imperative and a viable alternative to globalization. Wes Jackson of The Land Institute proposes a "natural systems agriculture" that relies on lessons from the land and rewards farmers rather than distant corporate stockholders. Other authors focus on the environmental, economic, and potential long-term economic costs of industrial agriculture.

The book's final section presents practical strategies for understanding the power structures that support an industrial agriculture. Dave Henson cites the key importance of democratic decision making, compared to corporate domination of resources and power. Organic farming systems described by Jim Hightower and Michael Sligh are productive and ethically

sound, although there are new challenges with the industrialization of organics. Finally, the important connections between farmers and consumers and how they can be achieved are detailed by Rebecca Spector and Andrew Fisher.

Concluding with twenty-three pages of references and organizational resources, *Fatal Harvest* is an essential primer on the state of today's food systems, one that provides useful guidelines for a more sustainable future. Although the well-illustrated, large-format edition is an attractive table item, *The Final Harvest Reader* contains the entire text for one-third the cost. **Charles A. Francis**, *Department of Agronomy and Horticulture, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.