

Food, Farming, and Sustainability

Readings in Agricultural Law

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Preface

Agricultural law and policy, once of concern only to agricultural economists, farm commodity group lobbyists, and a handful of congressional aids is now a topic of everyday discussion. And, to be certain, it is a controversial topic.

After years of claiming responsibility for “feeding the world,” farmers are caught between advice that their operations must be bigger, more efficient, and produce a more uniform product and criticism that they are too big and their practices unsustainable.

Some farm groups vigorously oppose any type of regulation; others clamor for additional regulatory protection.

Everyday news stories contrast the iconic image of the family farm with pictures of sheds that house tens of thousands of animals, manure lagoons, and watersheds threatened with runoff. Animal welfare advocates with secret video cameras film scenes that horrify the public. Food safety recalls seem common.

Our food system—with perhaps the cheapest and most abundant supply of a wide variety of food products in the world—is now linked to obesity and related diseases.

How can U.S. farm policy assure an adequate and healthy food supply in a manner that can be sustained for generations to come?

Food, Farming, and Sustainability: Readings in Agricultural Law attempts to make sense of these controversies by providing an issues-based study of some of the complex topics that make up the body of agricultural law. Each is presented in the context of one or more current policy issues. The readings raise difficult questions, provide contrasting information, and leave readers with the task of developing solutions for the future.

Because of the extent and variety of the legal issues involved in agricultural law today, many important issues are not included. These readings provide only a first step in an analysis that affects us all.

From its initial discussion of “agricultural exceptionalism” to its concluding remarks on food and agriculture, the book is written to spark thoughtful dialogue.

Some citations and footnotes have been eliminated from the original source in the editing process. Full original source citation is provided so that readers can view the original document in its complete form is so desired.