

FOOD DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

Democracy values in context of food systems reflect the equality in food choices, information availability, sustainability, involvement and greater satisfaction. In fact, development of food industry tends to lead people away from the truth concept of democracy. Farmers hardly play in food supply chain since their roles have been replaced by sophisticated food manufacturers. Their essential roles in food system have been overtaken by other actors which belong to industrialised food system such as large supermarket and food retailers. This means that equality as the truth concept of democracy has been limited. This essay describes the comparison between two major food supply sites namely large supermarket and farmers market. This essay examines the concepts of 'food' and 'democracy' in both sites, and provides further exploration of how the implementation of 'food democracy' in both sites.

Keywords: *Food, Democracy, Market*

ABSTRAK

Nilai demokrasi dalam konteks sistem pangan mencerminkan kesetaraan dalam pilihan makanan, ketersediaan informasi, keberlanjutan, keterlibatan dan tingkat kepuasan yang lebih tinggi. Pada kenyataannya, perkembangan industri makanan cenderung membuat orang menjauh dari konsep demokrasi. Petani hampir tidak berperan dalam rantai pasokan makanan karena peran mereka telah digantikan oleh produsen makanan yang canggih. Peran penting mereka dalam sistem pangan telah digantikan oleh sektor lain yang tergabung dalam sistem pangan industri seperti supermarket besar dan pengecer makanan. Ini berarti bahwa persamaan hak sebagai konsep demokrasi telah dibatasi. Esai ini menggambarkan perbandingan antara dua lokasi penyediaan makanan utama yaitu supermarket besar dan pasar petani. Esai ini mengkaji konsep 'makanan' dan 'demokrasi' di kedua lokasi tersebut, dan memberikan eksplorasi lebih lanjut tentang bagaimana penerapan 'demokrasi pangan' di kedua lokasi tersebut.

Kata kunci: *Makanan, Demokrasi, Pasar*

INTRODUCTION

Democracy values in context of food systems reflect the equality in food choices, information availability, sustainability, involvement and greater satisfaction (Hamilton 2004, p. 16). In fact, development of food industry tends to lead people away from the truth concept of democracy. It is undeniable that food industry is being dominated by large companies (Lang & Heasman 2004, p. 160). Meanwhile, Tansey & Worsley (1995, p. 86) point out that farmers are becoming “endangered species” since there is a significant declining of the number of local farmers in industrialised and developing countries. Farmers hardly play in food supply chain since their roles have been replaced by sophisticated food manufacturers. Their essential roles in food system have been overtaken by other actors which belong to industrialised food system such as large supermarket and food retailers. This means that equality as the truth concept of democracy has been limited. Furthermore, since industrialised food system is operated based on profit-oriented principles (Berry 1989) supported by government policies, the employees’ and local farmers’ welfare and healthy food accessibility for the consumers seem to be neglected. However, there are some food supply practices that implement democracy concept in food system.

This essay will describe the comparison between two major food supply sites namely large supermarket and farmers market. Large supermarket represents industrialised food system. Meanwhile farmers market, which is considered as a food democracy site, is a form of alternative food system. Farmers market is a community-based market that sells mostly “farm-origin” and associated “value-added” processed food products and provides appropriate environment for direct

trading (The Australian Farmers’ Market Association n.d. cited in Adelaide Farmers’ Market n.d.). The explanation focuses on the largest farmers market in South Australia; Adelaide Farmers’ Market which has been operated since October 2006. This essay then will examine the concepts of ‘food’ and ‘democracy’ in both sites. It will also provide further exploration of how the implementation of ‘food democracy’ in both sites.

‘Food’ in the supermarket and Adelaide Farmers’ Market

The most significant characteristic of large supermarket is the promising of convenience in shopping by providing different food choices in attractive appearances. This kind of conventional food stores provide enormous variety of food. Many kinds of food are available in fresh as well as low, medium and highly processed form.

Processed foods which are products of industrialised food system have dominated the supermarket shelves. They are resulted from high-technology food production requiring more effective method through mechanisation and modern way of cultivation such as the use of tractors, drills and combine harvester.

Profit-oriented as the main principle of industrialised food system also has significant role in determining the outcomes. In order to achieve maximum outcomes, they concern more about profitable products having similar quality standards. For example, they cultivate specific crops (often come from genetically modified variety), use artificial fertilizer and pesticides. Moreover, in the processing and packaging stages, chemical preservatives are commonly used for extension of products’ shelf life. In addition, chemical flavour enhancer which is considered as harmful

substances also easily found in many high-processed foods.

On the other hand, food supplies in Adelaide Farmers' Market are dominated by fresh-localised products. It expresses concern to provide seasonal food supply for consumers (Adelaide Farmers' Market n.d.). Those kinds of food are cultivated by conventional agriculture method such as natural composting. Moreover, food products in Adelaide Farmers' Market are produced by using lightly processed methods such as the use of sugar and salt as natural preservatives and herbs as flavour enhancer.

Democracy in the supermarket and Adelaide Farmers' Market

Regarding the implementation of democracy concept in two different sites, this essay will use four main components of a functioning democracy namely "free and fair elections; open and accountable government; civil and political rights and a democratic or civil society" (Beetham & Boyle 1995) to evaluate the implementation of democracy concept.

Focus on supermarket; it can be proven that democracy is not implemented purely. In other words, it operates based on monopolise system which allows large companies to dominated the marketplace. Dominating practices influences the food supply available in supermarket. Customers may think that supermarket is a best place to buy food since it supplies the community with vast variety of food. In fact, they are persuaded to buy foods that already predefined available in supermarket.

The fundamental characteristic of democracy has been corrupted since money overtaken the consumers' right to vote. It is very common that price is the main determinant of purchasing goods. Even though there are many healthy eating campaigns that promote

fresh food and light processed food products, price is always the main consideration.

In addition, supermarket expresses less concern if there is a complaint about food products. It is because they are not regulated to respond costumers' complaint aside from their services. However, consumers' right are protected by Australian Competition and Consumer Commission which maintain the open and accountable principles to the community (Markow 2011, p. 4).

In relation of democracy implementation in Adelaide Farmers' Market, from the beginning of its establishment, fundamentally, it based on democracy principles. The idea is to build a market accommodated farmers' and consumers' need. The community decided to establish a non-profit market in order to support their local farmers which have been marginalised by large food companies. Adelaide Farmers' Market creates equal opportunity of each region to trade their local products (Adelaide Farmers' Market n.d.). Moreover, direct trading between farmers and consumers allows valuable feedback delivery. Both farmers' and consumers' opinion are valuable in order to improve the quality and continuity of the market. The involvement of farmers and consumers as main components in the market structures represents a democratic practice.

Food democracy in the supermarket and Adelaide Farmers' Market

Aside from there are many definition of food democracy, it can be concluded that basically, food democracy refers to equal right to access an "adequate, safe, nutritious and sustainable food supply" (Flinders University 2014). This essay will use four dimensions of food democracy according to Hassanein (2008, p.209) to

examine the food democracy implementation in supermarket and Adelaide Farmers' Market.

Becoming knowledgeable about food and the food system

The important point that can be noticed in supermarket is its services that offer much information such as price and healthy food recipes through website and other resources. The provided information can develop costumers' cooking skill and gain costumers' knowledge about food-nutrition related products. However, the information of food system seems to be ignored.

The issue highlighted in these circumstances is the transparency of the products. Large food companies provide online access through their website. Consumers can find easily the name of company and some details about the company. However, there is insufficient information of how the products are produced, processed and packaged.

In contrast, Adelaide Farmers' Market support direct trading that allows consumers to collect as much details information directly from the food producers including the cultivation methods, processing and packaging stages.

Furthermore, Adelaide Farmers' Market promotes healthy eating campaigns through Market Kitchen and Kids' Club supported by professionals such as chefs. They perform not only educational cooking demonstration but also entertaining by providing free food testing.

Sharing ideas about the food system with others

The process of sharing ideas about the food system is hardly found in supermarket settings. Even though large supermarket provides customer services, this department mainly focus on costumers' complaint about their

services in general. The ideas of how the food system might be developed are absolutely only belong to internal stakeholders in top managerial level.

On the other hand, Adelaide Farmers' Market runs by an independent committee. They conduct regular meeting with clear and transparent agenda. The ideas of market development are discussed holistically by equal consideration. Consequently, a maximum achievement of market development can be realised.

Developing efficacy with respect to food and the food system with others

Supermarket settings encourage people to be passive consumers. Customers are not included in decision-making process regarding development of food products. The decision-making process is ultimately driven by top managerial level and shareholders which are profit-oriented. They consider products as the main focus instead of valuable communication between producers and costumers.

Meanwhile, Adelaide Farmers' Market is developed based on farmers' and costumers' feedback. Both food producers and consumers can involve freely without any intervention. The collaboration of all participants including committee members, food producers and consumers create a strong foundation of market development. Consequently, efficacy both individuals and community can be achieved.

Acquiring an orientation toward the community good

Supermarket often offers charity programs such as fund raising for children and others vulnerable groups. In fact, those programs are subtle marketing techniques to increase sales.

In contrast, the concept of "not-for-profit operation, owned and operated by the community for the community" are the key successful of

Adelaide Farmers' Market. It is translated by community contribution in both the project development and ownership opportunity through membership (Flanagan 2007, p. 33). It means that Adelaide Farmers' Market contributes significantly to community strengthened through economic development.

In conclusion, this essay has explored, compared and examined the food, democracy concept and implementation of food democracy

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- concept in supermarket and Adelaide Farmers' Market. It has been discussed that the main principles of democracy and food democracy are implemented holistically in Adelaide Farmers' Market rather than in supermarket. Since food democracy promote equal opportunities to the healthy and nutritious food, environmental sustainability and community strengthened, this essay strongly suggests that people should be more critical in assessing their food.
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