

## An approachable companion text for introductory food law students

Review by:

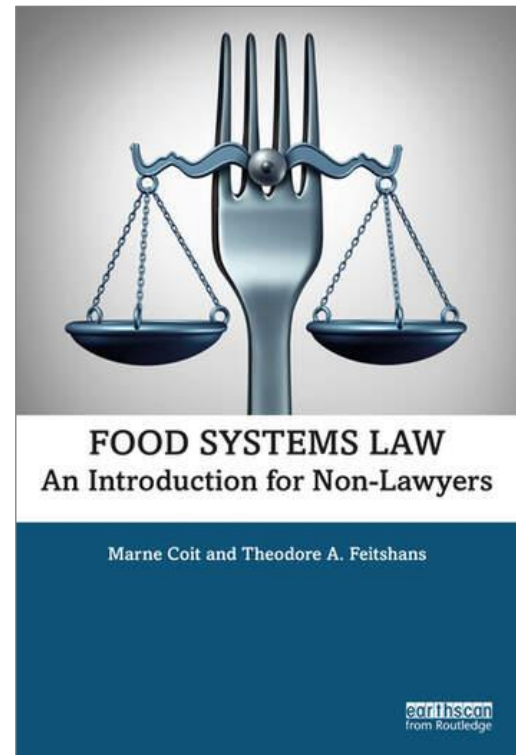
Cydnee Bence<sup>a</sup>

Center for Agriculture and Food Systems at  
 Vermont Law School

Matthew M. Giguere<sup>b</sup>

Washington, D.C.

Review of *Food Systems Law: An Introduction for Non-Lawyers*, by Marne Coit and Theodore A Feitshans. (2020). Published by Routledge. Available as hardback, paperback, and eBook; 214 pages. Publisher's website: <https://www.routledge.com/Food-Systems-Law-An-Introduction-for-Non-Lawyers/Coit-Feitshans/p/book/9781138386891>



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Marne Coit and Theodore A Feitshans's *Food Systems Law* is a broad primer providing explanations of the complex regulatory landscape of the American food system. Students will benefit from the presentation of the material—both in its clarity and through the many examples that ground the information in real-world issues. Because this book is tailored for legal and general audiences

alike, *Food Systems Law* is likely best suited for upper-level undergraduate students or graduate students. This book provides information needed for students to understand the scope, nuance, and unresolved conflicts in food law. In doing so, the

<sup>a</sup> Cydnee Bence is a Vermont attorney and LLM Fellow at the Center for Agriculture and Food Systems at Vermont Law School. Cydnee works on issues of farmed animal welfare, consumer protection, and the regulation of bioengineered and novel foods. She can be contacted at the Center for Agriculture and Food Systems at Vermont Law School and [cbence@vermontlaw.edu](mailto:cbence@vermontlaw.edu).

<sup>b</sup> Matthew M. Giguere is an attorney based in Washington, D.C., and Master of Laws (LLM) graduate (Vermont Law School, '22), Juris Doctorate graduate (University of Wisconsin Law School, '20), and holds degrees in Food Culture and Communications: Food, Place, Identity (M.A. Università degli Studi di Scienze Gastronomiche, '14), and Hotel, Restaurant, and Tourism Management (B.S. University of Wisconsin-Stout, '11). His research interests include agricultural and hospitality worker labor rights, food accessibility, and global food equity. He may be contacted at [miguere@wisc.edu](mailto:miguere@wisc.edu).

book presents background information that is approachable for students unfamiliar with the fundamentals of U.S. law and policy.

The introductory chapters, beginning with a discussion of food systems, frame complex discussions of “food systems” in a way that students will find more approachable than other, more theoretical expositions. Chapter 1 introduces the concept of “food systems” directly, succinctly, and pragmatically. As food systems, and consequently the regulation of food systems, are broad in scope and interdisciplinary, introductory discussions of the food system could easily be bogged down and become unclear. The authors avoid this pitfall by grounding the discussion in clear definitions and examples.

Similarly, chapters 2 and 3 dive into the complex work of the American legal and political system; the regulation of food highlights many of the inefficiencies and complexities in our legal system. Much as with the discussion of “food systems,” the authors take a direct route to explaining the structure of the American legal system. However, the authors do not fail to call students’ attention to the many criticisms of this method of regulation. At times, these chapters read as disjointed and lacking cohesion—although this may just reflect the subject matter rather than solely the authors’ exposition.

Chapter 4 discusses the farm bill, a topic that many food and agriculture professors hesitate to introduce early because of the complex nature of the bill’s content, procedure, and policy. However, Coit and Feitshans present the farm bill in a way that highlights its key aspects and pushes students to continue questioning: *how did American agricultural policy get here?* By providing a history of the farm bill, students better understand the often convoluted and highly technical programs in the bill. It is crucial that food and agriculture students understand controversial farm bill programs, such as commodity subsidies and nutrition programs, because these contentious programs do not exist in a vacuum; rather, by understanding the farm bill programs, students are more capable of understanding how food law and policy impact everyone.

In Chapter 10, the authors attempt to brief the complex regulatory system of labor in the food and

agriculture system. The authors provide a cursory review of wage and hour, immigration, employment at will, employment discrimination and harassment, family medical leave, healthcare, labor organization, workers’ compensation, unemployment insurance, and migrant agricultural workers protection laws. Through an illustrative case example, the authors keenly note how circuit court precedent in one circuit might affect an employer who employs labor across circuits. In discussing immigration law related to agricultural labor, the authors focus more on the particularities of the I-9 verification process than the verbosity of H-2A visa program requirements—seemingly glossing over essential details of one of the most important visa programs for migrant workers. Similarly, the authors fail to examine the historical implications and outcomes of a tipped wage system on restaurant laborers. The authors do provide a detailed explanation of laws concerning employment discrimination and harassment. Overall, this chapter is beneficial to whet the appetite of students interested in understanding several laws that affect restaurant and agricultural laborers.

In Chapter 12, the authors elucidate the interrelation between food access and food security, indicating that there is little relevant federal law in this area except that of nutrition programs in the farm bill. The authors provide a comprehensive review of both retailer and participant requirements for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), while also acknowledging the political debate surrounding the effectiveness of these requirements. This discussion inspires the reader to think critically about the policy implications surrounding food welfare programs and to consider how other policy alternatives could work better to affect to the food security problem.

Overall, Coit and Feitshans seek to engage the novice reader in numerous topics across the entirety of the food systems. Those already introduced to food law will appreciate the lack of frills in presenting the material. Similarly, this book focuses on food law more so than food policy. Introductory students, particularly those with little to no legal background, will benefit most from this book if it is used as a companion text to an additional source that provides the crucial policy explanations

underpinning these laws. Because this text covers an incredibly broad topic, it lacks specificity and depth in some topics, which food law experts may find less useful than a more specific treatise. However, for those looking for an introductory text to food law, this book covers all the necessary bases. Readers will appreciate the non-legalese, conversa-

tional tone of the book, which makes a complex legal and regulatory system approachable to those working beyond the legal profession. Those curious minds seeking to plant their first seed in the world of food and agricultural policy will be delighted by *Food Systems Law*. 