

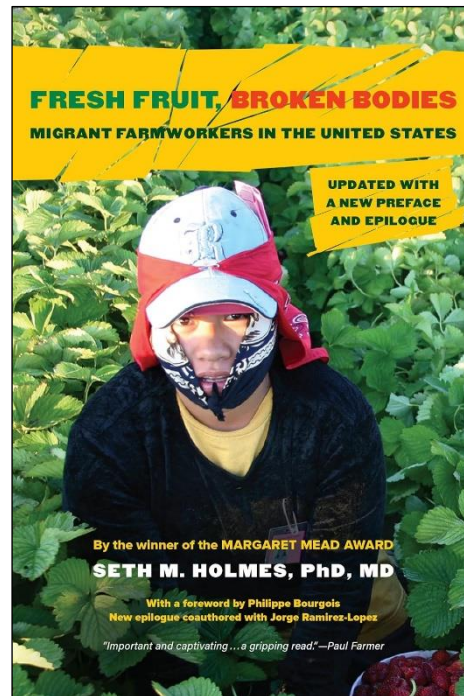
Liberating bodies and food systems from the everyday violence of industrial sustenance

Book review by

David Fazzino *

Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania

Review of *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*, by Seth M. Holmes. (2023). Published by University of California Press. Available as hardcover, paperback, and eBook; 328 pages. Publisher's website: <https://www.ucpress.edu/books/fresh-fruit-broken-bodies/>



Submitted October 11, 2025 / Published online November 3, 2025

Citation: Fazzino, D. (2025). Liberating bodies and food systems from the everyday violence of industrial sustenance [Book review]. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 15(1), 375–377. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2025.151.012>

Copyright © 2025 by the Author. Published by the Lyson Center for Civic Agriculture and Food Systems. Open access under CC BY license.

Seth M. Holmes's book, *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies: Migrant Farmworkers in the United States*, initially published in 2013 and revised in 2023, lays out the hidden costs of superfoods that are widely considered to be health-giving and life-enriching. These high-value, high-nutrition crops feed the bodies of the relatively affluent who can afford to shelter themselves from the environmental harms

* David Fazzino is a Pennsylvania lawyer and associate professor of anthropology at Commonwealth University of Pennsylvania in Bloomsburg, PA. He teaches courses in cultural anthropology, contemporary world issues, and human rights. His research interests include human rights, food systems, and heritage preservation. He can be contacted at dfazzino@commonwealthu.edu;

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3548-7421>

of living in a toxic world. Holmes delves into an embodied exploration of the suffering and harm enacted upon bodies of Triqui migrant farmworkers, Indigenous People from Western Oaxaca, Mexico, who suffer physical, chemical, and psychological distress to make these foods available to consumers. He addresses this suffering through his lived perspective based on his dual training as an anthropologist and physician based in the United States. *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* is a multisited ethnography that follows some of the people who work to cultivate and harvest these foods. The prize-winning book has been well received and widely shared in the 12 years since its initial publication. New to this edition are an updated preface and epilogue (the epilogue is co-authored by Jorge

Ramirez-Lopez) on the continuing process of addressing food systems that replicate and reinforce social inequities and violence. These additions expand the continued life of the original edition, which was shared with every member of the U.S. Congress to advance policy discussions of a just food system in America.

The unchanged core chapters of *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* cover the everyday structural violence, racism, and inequity enacted upon Triqui migrant farmworkers in both the U.S. and Mexico. It covers the physical and psychological insults that Triqui receive in their entire circuit of migration. This includes their home communities, where health authorities blame Triqui for their own health outcomes despite an abundance of evidence to the contrary. In his opening chapter, Holmes relays the clear and immediate danger from all directions that Triqui face in attempts to cross the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. In the fields, they are subject to poor working and to living conditions that fall well below minimum moral and legal standards according to human rights. As they seek medical attention to alleviate their suffering from chronic and acute threats to their health and wellbeing, they are consistently marginalized by medical staff who have a professional obligation to provide appropriate care to their patients. In sum, at every turn, Triqui migrant farmworkers are told that they do not matter, and that the rights, laws, and professional codes enacted to protect all people do not apply to them. Holmes does well to highlight the agency of the Triqui, who refuse to accept this marginalization by organizing and advocating for themselves in a variety of ways.

The themes of organization and advocacy are highlighted in the 2023 additions to the book in the updated preface and epilogue. These additions show how a researcher's work and scholarship tie in with broader projects of advocating for social justice within not only food systems, but also the systems for the delivery of health, wellness, medicine, and beyond. The book shows the struggles of migrants and their allies to deal with interrelated attempts to dehumanize people who are seen as other through pernicious xenophobia, implicit bias, racism, racialization, and neoliberal silence and silencing. Holmes shows how he continues to

engage in support of Indigenous farmworker migrants and their families as they navigate the complex social, legal, and policy worlds. He does this by helping, in a variety of individual and systematic ways, his friends along the journey of producing the book and beyond. Holmes bridges the multiscale aspects of activism and friendship in addressing the emerging and continued concerns of migrants he has worked with for well over a decade.

In the new epilogue, Holmes and Ramirez-Lopez share their vision for rectifying inequities in the food system through broad participation and solidarity, saying,

We invite you to learn from the actions and words of these individuals and reflect on ways each of us can live, eat, vote, speak, and act in solidarity with Indigenous, immigrant, and farmworker communities. . . . [S]uch solidarity is necessary not just for the health and wellbeing of marginalized people, but for the liberation of all people—including each of us writing and reading this book. (p. 207)

The epilogue follows not only the Triqui whose stories, captured by Holmes's rich vignettes, highlight the resolve of these individuals to rise up in solidarity against the everyday injustices that they face in asymmetrical power relationships, but also their children, who work to confront the continued insults to human dignity. The call is not only one that has been answered across generations for the Triqui migrant farmworkers, but one that deserves to be picked up by all of us concerned with the efforts to consolidate power, wealth, and privilege in food systems. As recent events demonstrate, rights are not guaranteed by those in positions of power or legal mandates but made possible in the lived reality for all of us by those who refuse to accept continued assaults to human dignity and backpedaling on legal and ethical obligations.

Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies pushes back against the narrative of powerlessness and hopelessness that many struggle with in the face of what may appear to be overwhelming and unprecedented hatred and xenophobia that provide ideological justifications for continued human rights viola-

tions. *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* asks all of us to consider how superfoods might be nourishing not just to individual bodies of the relatively well off in our society, but how we can continue the journey of Triqui migrant farmworkers to address everyday

and systemic inequities that lead to a diminishment of human potential and dignity, and in doing so liberate bodies and food systems from the everyday violence of industrial sustenance. 