

# Preface to the Revised Edition

Since the publication of the first edition of this book, trends of increasing concentration in food and agricultural industries have only intensified, but so has increasing awareness and resistance to these trends. In the United States, politicians from both major parties are more likely to criticize dominant firms in concentrated industries, or at least some of the most egregious ways this power is employed. A rapidly expanding number of books and articles call for greater government action to foster more competitive markets, and new coalitions are forming to take on corporate power. Perhaps the biggest surprise has been the growing number of economists willing to conduct research that challenges the pro-concentration assumptions of their discipline, which have been hegemonic in recent decades.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also helped more people to recognize problems with placing control over what we eat into so few hands. A disproportionate number of cases occurred among food chain workers, for example, which resulted in plant closures, empty retail shelves for some products, and purchasing restrictions for others. These consequences illustrated how much of our food supply is controlled by a small number of firms, and how fragile this system is in a crisis—although this has yet to translate into significant government action to reduce concentration. Jeff Bezos, for instance, was already the world's wealthiest individual, as CEO of online retailer Amazon, yet from March to August of 2020 his fortune increased 63 percent. During the same period, approximately one-third of restaurants in the United States, mostly independent, closed permanently.

The pandemic catalyzed support for alternatives to concentrated food systems, however, as well as the creation of new alternatives. Community Supported Agriculture farms, which were struggling to compete with venture capitalist-funded produce delivery firms, experienced skyrocketing demand, and growing waitlists in many regions. Other alternatives, such as retail food cooperatives, local food hubs, and small-scale meat processors also saw rapidly growing interest. Many farmers who lost wholesale and institutional buyers moved quickly to set up roadside stands or online ordering systems to connect with local consumers. These shifts helped to demonstrate the resilience of more democratic food systems in response to a crisis.

This new edition updates data on the constantly changing dominant firms' names, market shares, and locations of their headquarters—nearly all of the figures and tables have been revised accordingly. This edition analyzes the progress of their strategies to increase power as well, such as the growing reliance on big data to shape the behavior of farmers and consumers, and the greater role of some governments, particularly China and Brazil, in supporting acquisitions of competitors. Expanding resistance and new alternatives are also examined, such as new ecolabels that embody criteria stricter than USDA organic. Reflecting on both the positive and negative changes since the first edition, I agree with David Dayen, author of *Monopolized: Life in the Age of Corporate Power*—in an interview with *ProMarket* (August 27, 2020) he said, "I see a lot of near-term peril, but some long-term hope."

I am grateful to Bloomsbury, and series editors David Goodman and Mike Goodman for making this second edition possible. Thank you Ginger, Drake, and Aya for your encouragement and understanding.

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December 2020