

# REAPING WHAT SHE SOWS

## How Women Are Rebuilding Our Broken Food System

Nancy Matsumoto

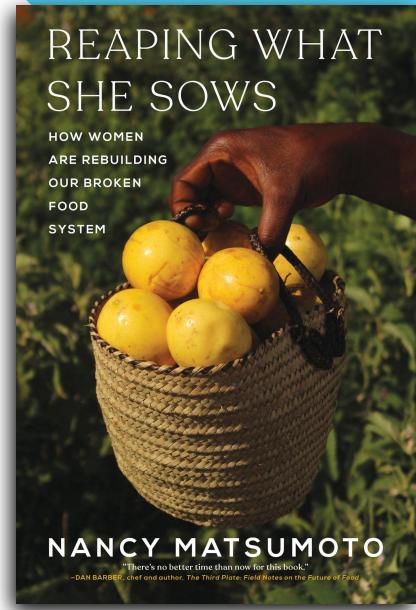
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“Women play enormously important roles in food systems and in the food movement, but are often overlooked. Matsumoto brings women out of the shadows and highlights the efforts of a wide diversity of women to create food systems healthier for people and the planet.”

— Marion Nestle, nutritionist and author, *What to Eat*

“Matsumoto’s authoritative, eye-opening writing provides readers with important, actionable information for everyone who eats.” — *Booklist*



### NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

My journey through the alternative, or “alt food system” to meet the inspiring women who are rebuilding our broken food system was one that for years I knew I wanted, and needed, to take. The desire rose out of years of reporting on sustainable and agroecological farming and food production. I saw many eaters intuitively want to support such methods. But they lacked a deep understanding of all of the hurdles and hardships that come with building short, direct, transparent, and equitable supply chains.

My idea was to tell the stories of the passionately committed women at the forefront of food system change, while at the same time showing how profoundly different their way of feeding the world is from the long, extractive, and exploitative supply chains of Big Food and Big Agriculture. Instead of prioritizing profit alone, they take a holistic approach that places equal importance on people, planet, and profit. And you can be part of the solution, too! My book is filled with actionable ways for you to become part of and help grow the alt food system.

Thank you for reading, *Reaping What She Sows*! I hope it helps spark change and joy in your life, and better health for our communities and planet. — Nancy Matsumoto

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **Defining the two opposing food systems.** What are the characteristics of Big Food and Big Agriculture’s global supply chains? How do they differ from the alternative, or “alt food system” supply chains that the women of *Reaping* are forging, link by link?
2. **Putting a cost on our global food system.** In 2023, how much did the Food and Agriculture Organization estimate our broken global food system is costing us? What accounts for this astounding price tag?
3. **If we have to live in the past, how can we make it better?** What can we learn from the mutual aid societies and southern African American agricultural enterprises of the Jim Crow and Civil Rights eras, or the Japanese prison camp cooperatives of World War II? Are there organizing strategies and techniques from Chapter One that could help us defend our civil rights today? How do these examples point the way for today’s alt food system?

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- 4. What does it mean to “re-regionalize” a local or regional food system?** How would you define a “foodshed” or a “grainshed”? What are some of the barriers that regional grain pioneers June Russell and Amber Lambke faced when they were trying to rebuild their local grain economies? What were some of the “chokepoints” in the supply chain that they encountered?
- 5. By contrast, what are some examples of women who are building brand new regenerative and direct supply chains, from the ground up?** What are the advantages of this type of alt food system? How do they build equity of access, and consider people and planet as well as profit?
- 6. How does prioritizing taste act as a sort of secret weapon for the alt food system?** How has the commodity food system taken both taste and nutrition out of many of the foods we eat today? How are the women of the alt food system putting those elements back in?
- 7. We often hear about the very large carbon footprint of beef.** Why are the rangeland practices of a rancher like Cory Carman considered regenerative and eco-sensitive? What are some ways to work meat and poultry into a climate-friendly diet?
- 8. Women who harvest the sea.** Why was it that Sonia Strobel grew up next to the ocean yet did not taste delicious local seafood catch until she got married? What did she learn about our broken industrial fisheries, and how did she go about disrupting and fixing that system?
- 9. Community building, information sharing, and peer-to-peer learning.** Can you identify examples of this important thread that runs through all sectors of the alt food system? How does this kind of intellectual, emotional, and information sharing help strengthen an alt food system?
- 10. Seed saving in Indigenous and diasporic communities.** Was there one story in Chapter Nine that resonated with you most? Why? What are some reasons the women in this chapter feel that they need to protect their foods and seeds from the reach of multinational pharmaceutical and chemical companies that control the seed market? Can you identify an independent seed saving organization or breeder in your community?
- 11. Actionable items.** What are some of the suggested actions given in the book’s epilogue, and sprinkled throughout the book, that you think you act on to participate in your local alt food system? Can you think of one action on an individual level, and one on an institutional, or community-wide level?
- 12. Assessing the impact of this book.** Which chapter of *Reaping What She Sows* made the biggest impact on you, and why? How motivated are you now to change your purchasing patterns, and to seek out alt food system producers in this category? How likely is it that these changes will stick, will be lasting?



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Nancy Matsumoto** is a Toronto- and New York City-based writer and editor who covers food, agriculture, and the environment. With Michael Tremblay, she is the author of the book *Exploring the World of Japanese Craft Sake: Rice, Water, Earth*, which won a James Beard Media Award. Her articles have appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *NPR*, *Saveur*, *Food & Wine*, and *Civil Eats*.

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