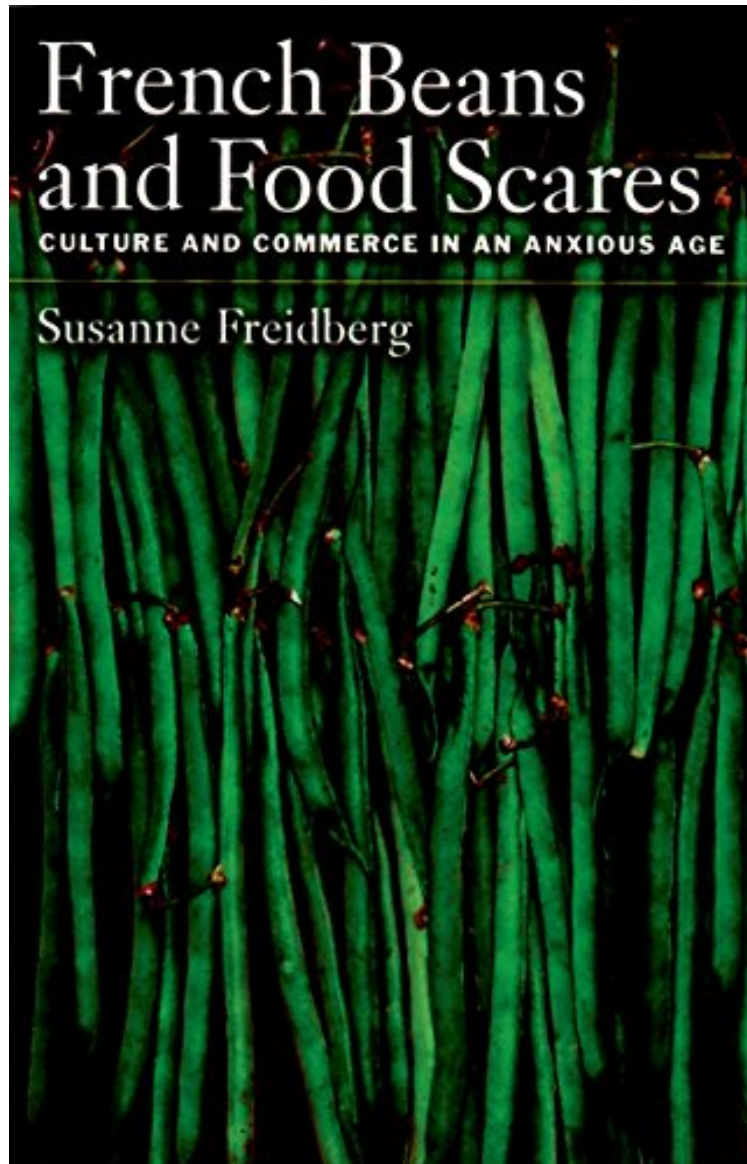


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## French Beans and Food Scares: Culture and Commerce in an Anxious Age

*Susanne Freidberg*

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**Susanne Freidberg : French Beans and Food Scares: Culture and Commerce in an Anxious Age** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised French Beans and Food Scares: Culture and Commerce in an Anxious Age:

16 of 18 people found the following review helpful. An excellent book. By Catherine Ziegler This book was a pleasure to read. Part of the enjoyment derived from the delightful writing style which is rare in academic books explaining

complex topics like this. However, a great deal of the pleasure came from the author's comprehensive research, including extensive interviews, and her extremely sophisticated analysis. Among other things, she explores the historical bases of two contemporary global networks trading in highly perishable vegetables and clearly demonstrates the continued influence of colonial ties in the contemporary links between African vegetable growers and European retailers. This is something often mentioned but rarely demonstrated in such convincing detail as it is here. I was also particularly impressed with the author's detailed exploration of the contemporary social and cultural factors (including media influence) that have produced quite different fresh vegetable retailing behavior in France and U.K. She shows how this, in turn, contributes to different sets of relationships between growers, middlemen and retailers and among African growers themselves. It is one of the most interesting books I have read to date in the area of global horticultural chains and networks and establishes a very high standard against which to measure similar publications. Anyone interested in globalization, food studies, horticultural production in Africa, contemporary European food retailing and supermarket chains, would learn a great deal from this book.

From mad cows to McDonaldization to genetically modified maize, European food scares and controversies at the turn of the millennium provoked anxieties about the perils hidden in an increasingly industrialized, internationalized food supply. These food fears have cast a shadow as long as Africa, where farmers struggle to meet European demand for the certifiably clean green bean. But the trade in fresh foods between Africa and Europe is hardly uniform. Britain and France still do business mostly with their former colonies, in ways that differ as dramatically as their national cuisines. The British buy their "baby veg" from industrial-scale farms, pre-packaged and pre-trimmed; the French, meanwhile, prefer their green beans naked, and produced by peasants. Managers and technologists coordinate the baby veg trade between Anglophone Africa and Britain, whereas an assortment of commercants and self-styled agro-entrepreneurs run the French bean trade. Globalization, then, has not erased cultural difference in the world of food and trade, but instead has stretched it to a transnational scale. *French Beans and Food Scares* explores the cultural economies of two "non-traditional" commodity trades between Africa and Europe--one anglophone, the other francophone--in order to show not only why they differ but also how both have felt the fall-out of the wealthy world's food scares. In a voyage that begins in the mid-19th century and ends in the early 21st, passing by way of Paris, London, Burkina Faso and Zambia, *French Beans and Food Scares* illuminates the daily work of exporters, importers and other invisible intermediaries in the global fresh food economy. These intermediaries' accounts provide a unique perspective on the practical and ethical challenges of globalized food trading in an anxious age. They also show how postcolonial ties shape not only different societies' geographies of food supply, but also their very ideas about what makes food good.

"This is a fascinating, funny, and very well written multisited ethnography about globalization--in particular, the globalization of fresh vegetables. Through this study, Freidberg makes an important contribution to critical ethnography in geography not only through the empirical reach and comparisons of two globalized green bean networks, but also in emphasizing the crucial role of culture in shaping production and consumption decisions and practices. In this way, she extends our knowledge of how to further integrate a Marxian analysis of the political economy of agrarian development and change with a cultural analysis of consumption and commerce, making an excellent contribution to research on the geographies of food and agriculture." --Annals of the Association of American Geographers

"On the trail of the (preferably slender) green bean, Susanne Freidberg takes the reader on a fascinating tour of cultural foodways among the French and the British, contract farming in former colonial territories in Africa, the roles of friendship and stereotyping in assuring the flow of foodstuffs to European supermarkets, and the links in the commodity and personal chains linking small farmers and entrepreneurs in Africa with consumers in Europe whose shopping has been made anxious by fears of old and new diseases." --Pauline E. Peters, Kennedy School of Government and Department of Anthropology, Harvard University

"Burkina Faso and Zambia are two very poor African countries producing high-value vegetables for European markets. How did this come about? By exploring culture and power within two transnational food trades, *French Beans and Food Scares* reveals the imperial roots of French and British foodways. It also raises important questions about contemporary movements to purify and relocate food supply. Anyone who cares about the past and future of globalized food should read this compelling book." -Judith Carney, Professor of Geography, University of California, Los Angeles

"Freidberg's theoretical insights and vivid narrative make this a fascinating study, a thoughtful and historically sophisticated look into contemporary food systems. This book is essential reading, and sets a new standard for scholars of agriculture, food and globalization." -Deborah Fitzgerald, Professor of History and Technology, MIT Program in Science, Technology and Society, and author of *Every Farm in a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture*

"A genuine contribution to the ever-expanding field of food studies. American readers will be interested in the questions Freidberg raises about the extent to which power can be exercised by consumers over producers, inside particular kinds of state systems. Throughout, she does not forget that cultures can help to shape economies." -Sidney W. Mintz, Research Professor of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University

"*French Beans* effectively links theory and practice while raising a number of issues of concern to the broader public." -- The Geographical

"*French Beans and Food Scares* is the first truly comparative

investigation of how food commodity networks operate internationally. Analyzing two culturally specific dyads- France/Burkina Faso and England/Zambia-it reveals the important work culture still does in the global economy. It also demonstrates in detail how social and economic realities in developed countries are translated into particular social and economic outcomes in the developing world through culturally inflected international trade. Written with humor and insight, it provides compelling and surprising reading.""-Erica Schoenberger, Professor of Geography, Johns Hopkins University

About the Author  
Susanne Freidberg has written about food regulation for the Washington Post and numerous journals. She grew up in the Pacific Northwest, attended Yale and Berkeley, and has received fellowships from the Fulbright Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, and the American Council of Learned Societies. She teaches in the Department of Geography at Dartmouth College.