

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

In summer 1998, the International Sociological Association held its XIV World Congress of Sociology in Montreal, Canada. RC40, the ISA's Research Committee on the Sociology of Agriculture and Food, was very active during the World Congress. Nearly one hundred scholars from around the world presented their work at sessions sponsored by RC40.

Some of the work was presented in one of five sessions that constituted a mini-conference on "The Global Agro-Food Sector and Transnational Corporations." Nineteen papers were presented, of which a dozen were submitted for consideration to be published in this special volume of the *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*.

The review process was lengthy and difficult and would have been doubly challenging without the invaluable assistance of more than two dozen reviewers. I extend my gratitude to each for the excellent work they did for the journal. I also wish to extend a very special thanks to William Friedland, a pioneering and inspirational scholar whose scholarship has influenced much of the work presented over the years in this journal. I am personally indebted to Bill for his mentoring, which was indispensable for me throughout the editorial process of this special issue. Due in no small part to all of this support, I am confident that the articles featured in this volume represent some of the best contemporary scholarship on the topic of the role of transnational firms in the expanding globalization of planet Earth's agro-food system.

The six thematic articles selected for this issue utilize a variety of theoretical and conceptual frameworks, as well as an assortment of methodological approaches. In addition, I am pleased to note that the cases or locations of each of these studies come from different geographical settings, including Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and the Southwestern Pacific. However, in spite of this diversity, a number of interesting themes emerge as one reads through these contributions. Three among them are: a) the complexity and variety of forms and strategies utilized by transnational firms or firm networks, b) the tremendous impacts which these strategies are having on the lives of producers and consumers of food in each of these world regions, and c) how these strategies have to be adapted not only to the commodity or food being produced, but also to the socio-cultural setting where the production or consumption is taking place. I am sure that each reader will find additional insights as they read through these pages.

The final article, on the historical development of export agriculture in Iran, was an earlier submission to the journal. It offers insights on the value of understanding the historical roots of the contemporary process of global agro-food restructuring. Indeed, one area of research that needs to be expanded is the study of the specific histories of transnational agro-food firms. It is my hope that this special volume of the *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food* will inspire work on this and other topics within the overall theme of "The Global Agro-Food Sector and Transnational Corporations."

Raymond A. Jussaume Jr.
Department of Rural Sociology
Washington State University
Pullman, Washington, USA