



Neoliberalization and the shifting political landscape of Australian food and agriculture

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With global population and living standards continuing to rise, Australia's export-focused agricultural and food businesses are looking forward to strong long-term market growth. However, global environmental change will almost certainly prove a major disruptive force resulting in heightened year-on-year volatility in food production. Meanwhile, a range of social and economic stressors threaten to undermine the adaptive capacity of agricultural businesses. Dominant policy responses to these challenges emphasize continued commitment to the project of trade liberalization and deregulation, encouragement of foreign investment, and colonization of new production spaces. These responses ignore key changes in the political landscape for food and agriculture including: (1) consumer and civil society interest in and activism around food production; (2) imposition by a highly concentrated retail sector of safety and quality standards that include social and environmental criteria; and (3) global momentum for climate mitigation policies that may influence input costs and/or discriminate against products seen as greenhouse gas intensive. This paper thus proposes the development of more flexible, participatory and robust governance arrangements incorporating, among other things, verifiable standards, collaborative resource planning and clarification of property rights.