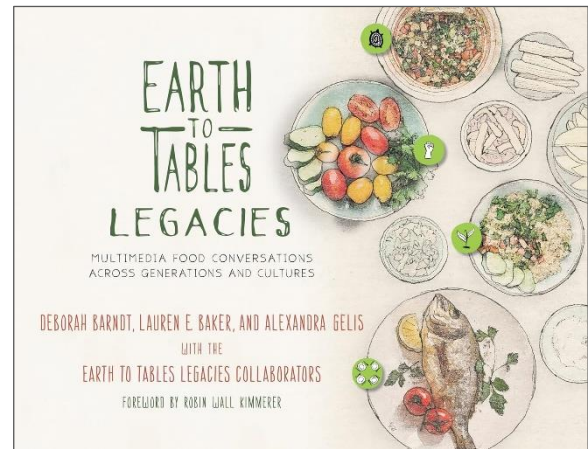


Leaving a legacy where food is medicine and food stories can heal

Book review by

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Review of *Earth to Tables Legacies: Multimedia Food Conversations Across Generations and Cultures*, by Deborah Barndt, Lauren E. Baker, and Alexandra Gelis with the Earth to Tables Collaborators; foreword by Robin Wall Kimmerer. (2023). Published by Rowman & Littlefield. Available as hardcover, paperback, and e-book; 256 pages with accompanying website, <https://earthtotables.org/>. Publisher's website: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/earth-to-tables-legacies-9781538123492/>

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If there is one academic book that will make one “hungry for change,” it is *Earth to Tables Legacies* by Deborah Barndt, Lauren E. Baker, and Alexandra Gelis. This book is full of colors and offers a novel format, as it is a multimedia

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celebration of stories and visions for a better planet through food systems transformation. Also novel about this book is that it provides resources for the readers to help facilitate dialogue and includes notes on how its readers can participate in an interactive website with videos and photo-essays from diverse “legacies collaborators.” While some

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of the contents are harrowing, covering issues such as Indigenous residential schools as well as corporate concentration and racism, the approach Barndt, Baker, and Gelis use to bring the reader in is healing, a clear homage to the Indigenous teaching that food is medicine. A foreword by Indigenous scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer emphasizes the transformative power of food, the importance of reciprocity, and honors the Haudenosaunee “Dish with One Spoon” treaty. This particular treaty sets the context for where this project was originally seeded, in Tkaronto/Toronto, Ontario. It is a reminder that the metaphorical “dish” (earth) is meant to be shared and that we all use one “spoon,” and there is a responsibility to ensure that there is enough for everyone. As Kimmerer writes in the foreword, “there is only one dish and only one spoon, the same size for everyone. It is a statement about making justice” (p. xii).

With the dominant industrial food system extending beyond planetary boundaries, the book argues that we are at an environmental and ethical crossroad. The various solutions offered to address these cascading issues were inspired by the stories of 17 diverse legacies collaborators (storytellers), many of whom are activists, growers, and scholars. While the book can be read as a stand-alone piece, it is not complete without engaging with the accompanying website (<https://earthtotables.org>). This is where videos, stories, and photos weave together themes of food justice, food sovereignty, agroecology, and intergenerational knowledge-sharing to emphasize the urgent need for communities to reconnect with the land and their traditional food systems. The book’s “facilitators guide” helps support community dialogues and community engagement, which the authors framed as “pollinating relationships,” a way to weave people, knowledge, and practices across species, borders and cultures.

In Chapter 1, “Greetings and Gratitude,” the book opens with ceremony, and the reader is situated to start this work in a good way through a Thanksgiving address they can read in both English and in Mohawk. Indeed, featuring the Mohawk language is an important reminder about the connection between a richly biodiverse food systems and language diversity (Gorenflo et al.,

2012), and the history of language suppression in Canada. The intentionality of opening the book in Mohawk is relevant, as it was not long ago within the context of colonial residential schools, that both food and languages were weaponized. Indigenous food practices, traditional foods, and Indigenous languages in some cases were prohibited (Mosby & Galloway, 2017; Richez & Pandya, 2020). The chapter “From the Mush Hole to the Everlasting Tree School: Colonial Food Legacies among the Haudenosaunee” highlights the Mohawk Institute, where Indigenous students were fed nutritionally inadequate diets while they cultivated nutritious foods that would be sold for profit for the school. The long-term effects of these Eurocentric, nutritionally deficient diets ripple across generations, contributing to what Chandra Maracle, one of the storytellers, defined as “collective indigestion”—a disconnection from culturally significant foods that has hindered communities’ ability to process past traumas, emotions, and thoughts. In Part 2, “Setting the Table,” the authors also engage with tensions and dualities; this includes outlining different ways of knowing (Eurocentric vs. Indigenous knowledges), as well as tensions around relationships and identities between settlers and Indigenous peoples.


We found the format of Part 3 (Storytellers) unique, as if replicating a back-and-forth conversation. The stories by the storytellers would be followed by reflections from scholars. In this part, the book made the effort to celebrate the collaborators who have contributed to the book. This approach was a way to challenge the commodification of knowledge and the importance of crediting non-academic expertise. This was also a reminder of the power of participatory and community-engaged work and that academia still has a long way to go when it comes to acknowledging whose voices matters.

The stories offered are diverse, ranging from a section on medicinal plants (Chapter 6: Ways of Knowing) to a celebration of soil (Chapter 7: Earth), the intersection of food and environmental justice (Chapter 8: Justice), and ending with Chapter 9: Table, which we read more as the beginning of a journey of action for the reader,

instead of an “ending.” The stories highlighted in this book are rich and nuanced and highlight the paradox of our food system, where some are “stuffed” and other are “starved.” One particularly poignant example of this paradox was found in the story of Leticia Deawuo at Black Creek Community Farm in Toronto Canada. Toronto is a thriving wealthy metropolis, and yet also a city where many of its residents, especially people of color, are disproportionately affected by food insecurity (Tarasuk et al., 2022). Deawuo’s work at Black Creek Farm applies a community-based approach to proactively address systemic injustices that create barriers for racialized and low-

income communities in accessing fresh and affordable produce.

A minor gap in this book is the lack of an exploration of the role of technology (beyond the videos developed by the authors) and where, if, and how it may fit in the struggle for food sovereignty. In general, however, readers and educators will benefit from the multitude of resources (videos, photo essays, etc.) offered by this book to spark conversations either at the kitchen table or in a classroom setting. *Earth to Tables Legacies* concludes with a hopeful vision, setting our table for a more just and relational future for our food systems.



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