

Slow Food international board member Joris Lohman read *Changing the Food Game* by Dutch changemaker Lucas Simons. His judgment: a must-read, although the theory is yet to be proven.

“To feed everyone, we will have to double our food production, to produce more food in the next 40 years than in the whole of the last 6,000.” In his new book *Changing the Food Game*, author Lucas Simons states that this challenge can only be faced by means of a so-called effective market transformation.

The system is designed that it must fail

He describes strategies to realize a market transformation in the food and agribusiness. Simons, in daily life not just CEO of SCOPEinsight and NewForesight Consultancy, two companies who work on this issue, but also World Economic Forum Young Global Leader and Ashoka Fellow, enjoys setting the bar high for himself. After a career as director of certification organization UTZ Certified, he is currently devoting himself fulltime to these “sustainable market transformations”.

Don’t hate the player, hate the game

Simons is surprised at the bad functioning of the global food system. How can food, something so important to everyone on earth, be plagued by so many issues? Through his experience in various agricultural sectors Simons is an industry insider, but reaches the same conclusions as outsider journalist Joris Luyendijk does when it comes to the financial sector: not the individuals, organizations and companies corrupt the system, but the system itself is corrupt. Its design gives it no other option but to fail.

Practically all “players” in the system are aware that it’s failing, but place the blame elsewhere. Bad practice and short-term decisions are rewarded. A lack of sustainability is a natural consequence in such a system. This leads Simons to be cynical about development aid or training projects: if all the rules of the game are against you, a project or training won’t help.

Phases in Market Transformations

This unproductive and even downward spiral must be broken. But how? Peppered with anecdotes and personal experiences, *Changing the Food Game* shows the stages of a sustainable market transformation using the coffee, cocoa and palm oil trades.

In phase 1, a problem is identified, like bad working conditions or land clearing (burning down rainforest to plant crops). Usually NGOs or civil society organizations raise awareness by raising alarm. Companies will initially try to deny the problem, but will eventually see they must act. Symbolic projects are the first to be initiated.

Then phase two starts, in which certifications are created. A number of companies will take the initiative, after which others will join them because they realize they can’t stay behind. At this stage, companies will compete on sustainability. Simons mentions the proliferation of labels and projects of this phase, each one claiming to be even “greener” than the next.

In phase three, companies become aware that the issues are too big to solve using projects and labels. A phase arrives in which organizations really start to cooperate because they

realize the problem is too big to solve alone. Coalitions will be made in which governments also participate. In the fourth and last phase, a level playing field has been created: the new 'sustainable' way of working has become the new normal.

Societal Change

The phases of Simons help to identify and understand market developments. Those who have read *Changing the Food Game* will read the newspaper differently: suddenly, the phases of sustainable market transformations are everywhere. His look helps stakeholders and actors from different areas to see and understand their own parts better and – hopefully – do better using this knowledge.

Simons hasn't yet made his own, very high, ambitions as written on the book's back cover a reality. While he uses good examples of market transformations of different subsectors in the food chain, the jump to a sustainable market transformation that results in sustainable agriculture is still a bridge too far. He himself says that he cannot yet name examples of food sectors that have gone through all four phases successfully. Sustainable development in agriculture and food is a large, complex story. Simons knows how to bring order in the conceptual chaos by providing those actors with the power to be changemakers the tools to do so. With this, *Changing the Food Game* is a must-read for all actors in the food chain, be they NGOs, companies or governments.
