

Contested Industrialization of Food Systems in the Unequal Anthropocene:  
Critical Histories of Agriculture- and Food-Affiliated Industries from a Global Perspective  
(1945-present)

International workshop, May 15-16, 2025

Organizers: dr. Floor Haalboom (Erasmus University Medical Center/Utrecht University), Amber Striekwold MA (Utrecht University), Anna Teijeiro Fokkema MA (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Location: Utrecht University, the Netherlands

This workshop aims to bring together historians working on food systems during a time of unprecedented global ecological crises. Accelerating after 1945, food and agriculture-affiliated industries became dominant players in the global food system. Rooted in colonialist relations and with growing economic and political power, they came to have a significant share in global environmental damage. Still, the social, environmental, and health impacts of these industries were contested from the start. Problematically, these historical processes are understudied from an Anthropocene perspective that recognizes unequal responsibilities and vulnerabilities. By bringing together scholars working on food and agriculture-affiliated industries and scholars working on historical contestations of the industrialized food system, this workshop aims to produce collaborative histories that help to understand and change the current food system.

Two sets of questions are central to this workshop. One set of questions historicizes the dominance of food- and agriculture-affiliated industries in the postwar Anthropocene. We invite papers on industries that have been relatively understudied despite their dominance in the food system. Examples include the animal feed industry, chemical industry, the food industry, pharmaceutical industry, the meat industry, supermarkets, and trade industry (such as ports). Why and how did these industries become dominant in different contexts? How did the food and agriculture-industry shape knowledge, expertise, and ignorance about its impact? How did industries and affiliated experts shape national, continental, and global policies? How did they relate to and navigate controversies? And how did they relate to one another?

The second set of questions focuses on historical contestations of industry-dominance in the postwar food system. How did critical voices on health, environment, animal liberation, and labor conditions shape or not shape postwar industrialization and globalization of the food system? Why and how did NGOs, experts, and governance actors criticize the industrialization of food? And how did this relate to criticism within the industrialized food system, for example from agricultural organizations, industry workers, and experts? What 'alternatives' were developed to the industrialized food system, like cooperatives, organic agriculture, and alternative food networks?

Methodologically, we aim for transnational and global perspectives as much as possible. (Please note that such perspectives are also possible on national source material.) We also explicitly invite reflections on source difficulties, including industry secrecy, challenges of scale, and overview, and challenges of technical complexities. We seek to include perspectives on how to write histories of alternative pathways that did not happen; or how to deal with source gaps of food and agricultural movements striving for food system change. Working on such a large thematic field, we invite a variety of historical subdisciplines to send in a proposal, including

environmental historians, agricultural historians, historians of science, medicine, and technology, food historians, animal historians, economic historians, and political historians. Scholars working in the environmental humanities and social sciences more broadly are also very welcome.

The workshop is organized by two Dutch Research Council projects: 'What does your meat eat? A global environmental history of Dutch livestock feed (1954-2020)' (dr. Floor Haalboom, Erasmus University Rotterdam Medical Center/Utrecht University, VI.Veni.201H.017), and doctoral project 'Food as a Tool for Social Change: How Ideas and Practices on Natural Food and Farming Entered the Mainstream in the Netherlands (1950-2000)' (Amber Striekwold MA, Utrecht University, PGW.22.011). The workshop is co-organized with the doctoral project 'Discourses in Dutch post-war agricultural history: politics, agricultural industries, and environmental issues' (Anna Teijeiro MA, VU University Amsterdam), and with the Environmental Humanities Network and the Descartes Center for the History and Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities (Utrecht University).

The workshop will take place on **May 15 and 16, 2025 in Utrecht**, the Netherlands. Participants are expected to circulate a **5000-words paper before April 11, 2025**. The proposed outcomes of the workshop are:

- Collaborative research proposal/proposals on global/transnational histories of food- and agriculture-affiliated industries in the unequal Anthropocene
- A special issue in a prominent journal, publishing the workshop's papers and plenary discussions

We plan to cover travel and accommodation costs for workshop participants, prioritizing colleagues who need this most.

**Please submit an abstract of 400 words by December 1, 2024** to [a.haalboom@erasmusmc.nl](mailto:a.haalboom@erasmusmc.nl).

Timetable	
Submission of abstracts (400 words)	December 1, 2024
Decision on participation by organizers	January 6, 2025
Submission of pre-circulated papers (5000 words)	April 11, 2025
Workshop	May 15-16, 2025
Submission of manuscripts to journal	December 1, 2025



**Utrecht  
University**