

*A series edited by Frederick H. Buttel, Billie R. DeWalt,  
and Per Pinstrup-Andersen*

## THE POLITICS OF FOOD IN MEXICO

State Power and Social Mobilization

JONATHAN FOX

Jonathan Fox compares a broad range of food policy reforms in Mexico, long one of Latin America's most autonomous states, in order to shed light on the broader problem of the determinants of state capacity. Moving beyond conventional state- and society-centered theories, Fox proposes an interactive approach to discover why conflicts within the state interact recursively with changes in the balance of power within society.

In a thorough examination of the politics of policy reform from both above and below since Mexico's revolution, the author concentrates on the SAM experiment (Sistema Alimentario Mexicano, Mexican Food System), a brief but massive subsidy program designed to channel oil boom revenues toward national food self-sufficiency. Although most of the SAM's food policy reform efforts failed to reach the poorest people, the extensive village store network proved to be an important exception. For the first time in Mexico, an anti-poverty program encouraged its ostensible beneficiaries to hold the bureaucrats accountable. This opening from above encouraged autonomous mobilization from below, changing the contours of peasant politics. The dynamic interaction between state reformists and autonomous social movements weakened Mexico's entrenched authoritarian elites. This "sandwich strategy" provides a framework for understanding future paths for political change in Mexico, and may well account for rural reform processes across a wide range of political systems.

Jonathan Fox is Associate Professor of Political Science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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## HUNGRY DREAMS

The Failure of Food Policy in  
Revolutionary Nicaragua, 1979-1990

BRIZIO N. BIONDI-MORRA

The Sandinista Front for National Liberation, upon assuming power in 1979, declared its commitment to redressing Nicaragua's vast social and economic inequities. Yet although the Sandinistas commanded a wide range of policy instruments, the poor were substantially poorer at the end of the Sandinistas' tenure in 1990.

Drawing on extensive interviews and groundbreaking archival research, Brizio N. Biondi-Morra provides an even-handed and penetrating account of how the Sandinista's well-intentioned agricultural and economic policies ended in failure. He shows how the regime attempted to balance export volume against its political goals of domestic food security and land redistribution, and how this strategy led to strongly interventionist policies concerning exchange rates, domestic prices, wages, and interest rates. By nationalizing the banking system and marketing channels for agricultural exports, the state itself became an important producer. Biondi-Morra attributes the eventual collapse of this state enterprise to the inability of policymakers to link the "macro" design of government decisions to their consequences at the "micro" implementational level—so that policy designed in Managua actually frustrated production in the farms and plants.

A major contribution to our understanding of the effective balance of macro and micro policies, *Hungry Dreams* will be welcomed by readers working in the areas of food policy analysis, agricultural economics, rural sociology, and Latin American history, as well as anyone concerned with debates about the course and the consequences of the Nicaraguan Revolution.

Brizio N. Biondi-Morra is Rector at the Central American Institute of Business Administration (INCAE).

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