

to confront the problems associated with economic deindustrialization and the need for an effective economic revitalization strategy. However, the authors see improved growth management and regional planning as a way to make the area more competitive economically as well as to help limit sprawl.

Sunbelt / Frostbelt provides a very good description of the urban sprawl experiences in a diverse set of metropolitan case studies. Pack's introductory synthesis organizes the book by identifying common problems and solutions. Public policy is a big part of the urban sprawl problem and reforms must take into account the distorting effects of existing policies as well as introduce new approaches. These reforms include a "reconsideration of current housing tax policy" (Gyourko and Summers, p. 137), changes in state and federal aid distributions, poverty policies for low/moderate income people, and growth management policies that discourage development of existing greenfields.

Still, there are areas where the authors never or barely tread. First, one never really gains a good sense of national historical suburban growth trends from the book. Suburban growth slowed during the 1990s and urban density has generally increased as inner suburbs have filled in. Is it possible that market forces will help slow the suburbanization process that it helped to create? Second, a variety of other explanatory variables such as changing demographics (age, ethnicity, immigration), economics (growth of the information economy, energy costs), and consumer tastes may be making urban living a more attractive prospect, but the authors never really address them. Third, the case studies do not include among them some remarkable metropolitan areas such as New York where gentrification appears to be progressing rapidly, or Pacific Northwest cities such as Seattle and Portland where more aggressive policies serve as appropriate laboratories for evaluating the feasibility of some of the policy alternatives advocated by the authors. Finally, some of the existing policies targeted for overhauling have been such enduring features of the U.S. economy that it would be hard to recognize the country without them. The interstate highway system has served as a key interregional transportation network that has facilitated regional specialization, sparked agglomeration economies, and improved technology diffusion, as well as facilitated urban sprawl. The home ownership tax policy has stimulated higher homeownership rates and household wealth and is associated with more stable property values and lower crime rates. The effects of these policies are so profound and systemic that a more comprehensive interregional modeling and social cost-benefit framework is needed to evaluate them properly. Simply put, sprawl is not all.

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The Economics of Sustainable Development, edited by Sisay Asefa. 2005. Kalamazoo, Michigan: W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research. 191 + viii. ISBN 0-88099-321-9, cloth, \$40; ISBN 0-88099-320-0, paper, \$15.

It is almost a prerequisite that any book on sustainable development begin with a quotation from the 1987 report by the World Commission on Environment and Development. The report, titled *Our Common Future*, famously defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (p. 43). The book reviewed here is no exception, as it begins with this very quotation.

Despite a common starting point, the content of books on sustainable development is highly variable. Skeptics are quick to point out that sustainable development is appealing for the simple reason that it can be interpreted to mean almost anything. While clarifying the notion of sustainable development has been the focus of an expansive literature over the last two decades, there remains uncertainty about what exactly sustainable development means, beyond good decision making that accounts for economic, social, and ecological considerations.

Readers might thus expect a book titled *The Economics of Sustainable Development* to clarify the notion and help us recognize whether development is either sustainable or unsustainable from an economic perspective. But they will find little such content in this book, which consists of an introduction by Sisay Asefa and six contributed chapters based on lectures at Western Michigan University during the 2003–2004 academic year. The authors spend little time wrestling with the concept of sustainability; rather, they discuss their subjects without any attempt at providing a unified framework. For the most part, each chapter is interesting, well-done, and has much to say on an important topic, but there is virtually no connection or unifying theme among the chapters.

The first is by Malcolm Gillis and has the provocative title “Some Neglected Aspects of Sustainable Development.” Gillis points out that poverty, and not affluence, is the cause of some of the most serious environmental problems. Thus, he argues, effective solutions must deal explicitly with the needs of the poor and landless in developing countries. He also highlights the importance of understanding the environmental consequences of nonenvironmental policies, emphasizing in particular the threats to sustainable development that arise from the underpricing and subsidies on fuels, fertilizers, pesticides, water, timber, and land clearing. Most readers will agree that these are all important points, but are they really neglected aspects of sustainable development? They strike me as central to much of the existing literature.

E. Wayne Nafziger and Juha Auvinen focus on the link between economic development, inequality, and war, and their paper is a summary of more detailed research they have done. It makes a nice starting point for those who are interested in the subject, and more of us should be. Their insights are important. Through empirical analysis, they find that slower real GDP growth helps to explain humanitarian emergencies. Moreover, higher income inequality and the struggle for control of natural resources are important sources of conflict in many countries. Because the avoidance of humanitarian emergencies and of political/social conflict are necessary conditions for sustainable development, regardless of how it is defined, I think the issues raised in this chapter are not only important, they are truly neglected aspects of sustainable development.

Vernon Ruttan’s chapter, “Productivity Growth in World Agriculture: Sources and Constraints,” is a reprint of a previously published paper (2002). It provides a nice overview of historical trends in agricultural productivity. What I find more interesting, however, are Ruttan’s perspectives on the future of resource and environmental constraints. Among his notable observations, which are based on over 50 years of experience working on the subject, are the following: While soil loss and degradation could become serious constraints at a local or regional level, they are unlikely to pose problems on a global level. Improving water productivity, which has received relatively little scientific and technical effort, is one of the more promising areas for increasing agricultural production. The control of pests and pathogens pose a greater constraint on sustainable growth in agriculture than do either land or water. Finally, Ruttan is somewhat skeptical about the potential contribution of molecular genetics and genetic engineering. If you either agree or disagree with any of these statements, you will find the paper interesting.

David Lam's chapter, "How the World Survived the Population Bomb," is especially informative. Against the backdrop of unprecedented population growth over the last 50 years, he provides a careful overview of worldwide trends in food production, commodity prices, and fertility. His assessment is very optimistic. He shows how we have managed to avoid the Malthusian prediction of food shortages, with the important exception being regions in Africa. He interprets the downward trend in nonenergy commodity prices to reflect how advances in technology and international trade continue to push back resource scarcity. Finally, he describes how population pressures may be coming under control, as the world's total fertility rate declined from 5.0 to 2.8 between 1965 and 2000, presumably in response to increased child survival and parental schooling. Lam is clearly a Cornucopian rather than a Neo-Malthusian, yet he manages to be persuasive without provoking the ire that is often attributed to the writings of Julian Simon.

There is, however, a shortcoming of Lam's chapter, which he acknowledges when he writes "this chapter has not dealt with the many environmental concerns that are often raised by those who are less optimistic about the world's future" (p. 128). This is indeed an important omission, and it raises the question of whether the chapter can legitimately claim to be about sustainable development. For how should we think about the sustainability of trends in agricultural production, commodity prices, and fertility if the gains have occurred at the expense of increased pollution and a loss of natural capital?

Scott Swinton also begins with an analysis of trends in agricultural production, but then focuses on the link between poverty and the potential for environmental stewardship. After sketching a few case studies, he argues that the poor are not necessarily bad stewards of natural resources. The important things to recognize, he suggests, are that even the poor respond to economic incentives and policies would benefit from focusing on the following guidelines: providing clear and durable property rights, developing local institutions that support stewardship, building transportation infrastructure, and enhancing human and financial capital. More generally, he concludes that "the common element among all the policy alternatives presented here is the importance of tailoring policy to the specific socioeconomic, infrastructural, and biogeophysical setting in which agricultural natural resources are managed" (p. 172). No doubt, this is true, but does it mean that sustainable development simply means good decision making that accounts for economic, social, and ecological considerations?

The chapter by Daniel Bromley differs from the rest because of its philosophical content. Bromley sets out to examine the relationship between notions of property rights and sustainability. He provides a nice overview of the philosophical foundations of property rights through the writings of John Locke and Immanuel Kant. Readers with philosophical interests may find this chapter useful, but others will be disappointed if they are looking for practical guidance. The following excerpt is demonstrative: "It is not the forest on the ground that we address and fuss over when we undertake management activities. It is the forest *in our minds* that we are working on and seeking to manage. Indeed it is the forest in our minds that we use when we are in it, and it is the forest in our minds that we covet and recall when we are away from it" (p. 142, italics in original).

In conclusion, *The Economics of Sustainable Development* provides a diverse set of essays. If pushed to identify a common theme, I would say it is descriptive insights about agricultural productivity. While it is questionable whether the book lives up to its claim to be about the economics of sustainable development, each chapter has its own strengths. I cannot recommend this book as one that researchers or practitioners should

have on their bookshelf, but if one or more of the chapters strikes you as interesting, it may be worth taking a look.

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On the Great Plains: Agriculture and Environment, by Geoff Cunfer. 2005. Environmental History Series, Vol. 20. College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press. 292 + xii. ISBN 1-58544-400-6, cloth, \$55; ISBN 1-58544-401-4, \$28 (paper).

Geoff Cunfer's *On the Great Plains* is a book about agriculture and the environment in the U.S. Great Plains over the last 130 years. It should be viewed by a wide audience as a most educational, yet delightful, book. It contains sufficient numerical evidence and citations to substantiate the author's points for the trained academic. Yet, the statistics do not overshadow these same points for the casual reader. Moreover, the embedded stories tracking specific actual families over time add a personal touch that makes the book hard to put down once you start reading. Finally, the book's historical perspective is unique for nearly all potential readers, and sufficiently controversial that it keeps one's attention. Consequently, it is a must read for those interested in the agricultural settlement and economic development of the Great Plains, and especially those interested in the interactions between humans and the environment. After all, today's readers typically are a long ways removed from farming, and certainly will welcome the well-documented insights provided by the author.

As a reviewer, my perspective is that of both a Ph.D. agricultural economist in the Great Plains and a lifelong farmer in the area. Like the farm families tracked by Cunfer, my family has been farming there for five generations since the land was first broke from sod. In fact, our family farm in western Kansas was and is located only about 100 miles from the most top-billed of the farm families Cunfer tracks across time, the Bartholomews of Rooks County, Kansas. Most of my life has been spent in full-time farming, experiencing first-hand the typical economic ups and downs wrought by the Plains' unforgiving climate and fickle weather. Only in the last 10 years have I taken on the secondary role of a Ph.D. academic. Even today, I am an owner and decision maker for our still successful and ever-changing family farm. With my vocational background, along with an intrinsic argumentative personality, it is not surprising that my time reviewing this book was spent in looking for holes in the author's perspectives and analyses. But I must report that the holes were shallow and few and far between.

As Cunfer points out, farmers spend their lives managing natural systems to human ends, and his book offers an agricultural and environmental history of the Plains from