



Just Food: Why We Need to Think More About Decoupled Crop Subsidies as an Obligation to Justice

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Accepted: 10 January 2020
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Abstract

In this article I respond to the obligation to institute the policy of decoupled crop subsidies as is provided in Pilchman's article "Money for Nothing: Are decoupled Crop Subsidies Just?" With growing problems of poor nutrition in the United States there have been two different but related phenomenon that have appeared. First, the obesity epidemic that has ravaged the nation and left an increasing number of people very unhealthy; and second, the phenomenon of food deserts where individuals are unable to access fresh fruits and vegetables. A possible solution to this problem, as has been proposed by some, is to institute a decoupled crop subsidy that would increase the production of fruits and vegetables in the United States. In this paper I explore the possible unintended consequences of this policy and how it may violate liberal international conceptions of justice. I conclude that there must be further empirical research before anyone can call decoupled crop subsidies an obligation to justice.

Keywords Justice · Agricultural justice · International justice · Global justice and crop subsidies

Introduction

Food deserts and obesity are two pressing issues in the United States when it comes to the long-term health of the entire country. Currently a large portion of the population is in a situation where they have little choice but to consume unhealthy food which results in long term health issues such as heart disease, stroke, type two diabetes and other types of cancer ("Adult Obesity"). These problems unfortunately are unavoidable for many segments of society because of their status of living within a

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food desert. A food desert is a place where there is not easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Food deserts are in both urban and rural areas. One solution to this problem that has been proposed by some is the creation of something called a decoupled crop subsidy. The goal of this policy would be to increase the production of fruits and vegetables significantly enough that it will cause the price of these goods to be affordable for people living in food deserts and suffering from obesity. The decoupled crop subsidy would be a necessary, but not sufficient condition for the relief of food deserts. Further, according to some the creation of a decoupled crop subsidy with the goal of relieving food deserts is an obligation to justice. However, this supposed obligation to justice is heavily reliant off of a domestic focused theory of justice and fails to evaluate the international implications that this policy might have. This hole and the possible empirical fallout from this policy is the focus of this paper.

Looking at current liberal theories of justice there is a large consensus on the need for international considerations in theories of justice. For example, liberal theorists such as Martha Nussbaum, Amartya Sen, Thomas Pogge and John Rawls all fall into a group of theorists who discuss obligations to justice in a post *Theory of Justice* world. Further, all of these theorists consider international implications of justice to be of great importance in any consideration of justice. However, the proposal to create decoupled crop subsidies as an obligation to justice, as is argued by Daniel Pilchman in his article, "Money for Nothing: Are Decoupled Crop Subsidies Just?" fails to consider the international implications of the application of his theory. In this article, Pilchman argues that the United States has an obligation to justice to institute decoupled crop subsidies with the goal of relieving food deserts and obesity through increased supply of fruits and vegetables to urban and rural areas.

As I will show in this work, an increase in supply and decrease in price, as Pilchman predicts would happen to fruits and vegetables if this policy was instituted, could have detrimental consequences on producers of fruits and vegetables in countries like Mexico. This action could even drive poor areas of Mexico into further economic hardship. If Mexican farmers could be harmed by this policy, then it would suggest there is an obligation to not implement it. Further, if Pilchman is correct in his prediction, and fruit and vegetable production increases, these crops may not even stay in the United States to relieve food deserts and obesity. Instead, because of the United States' free trade agreement with Canada, these goods may flow from the United States to Canada and supplement their nutrition instead, thus, not impacting the domestic food deserts the policy set out to resolve in the first place. Additionally, there is an abundance of empirical questions that have yet to be answered when it comes to reaching a complete consideration of justice according to Pilchman's argument.

In the following argument, I will show some of the concerns of decoupled crop subsidies as an obligation to justice by looking at international implications of his policy proposal in three moves. First, I will provide background information on food deserts, obesity and crop subsidies in the United States in order to familiarize the reader with the concerns of the policy proposal that I will discuss. Second, I will provide a detailed summary and analysis of Pilchman's reasons for proposing decoupled crop subsidies as an obligation to justice. Finally, I will provide a critique

that revolves around two major points. First, I will investigate the possibility that the fruits and vegetables may not even enter urban and rural areas to relieve food deserts and instead flow into Canada like a large portion of United States fruit and vegetable exports currently do. Second, I will detail the potential harm to Mexican farmers assuming a decrease in price of fruits and vegetables and constant or near constant demand. I will go on to show how this might drive Mexican farmers and laborers in rural regions of Mexico further into poverty.

The Current Status of Obesity, Food Deserts and Decoupled and Coupled Crop Subsidies

The most apparent problem in the United States regarding nutrition is not a lack of nutritional food, but an abundance of cheap, unhealthy food. This is because these unhealthy options are more easily accessible and less expensive to the less fortunate who lack options for healthy food alternatives.¹ The consequences of this phenomenon can be best seen in the obesity epidemic that is currently ravaging the United States. At this time, over 93 million adult Americans are obese (“Adult Obesity”). This means that around 35–40% of Americans have a body mass index over 30 (Gonzalez-Campoy) (Blumenthal) (Richtel). The prevalence of the epidemic has been increasing since the 1980’s despite active policies proposed by the Centers for Disease Control to try to combat it. It has gotten so bad that around 7.7% of Americans are severely obese (Richtel). This means a body mass index that is over 40, or around 100 lb over what would be considered a healthy weight for someone’s height (“What is”). The consequences of this problem are much more serious than some readers might think. Not only does obesity impact everyday quality-of-life and overall wellbeing, but it causes over 40 000 American deaths each year (Blumenthal.) These deaths from complications of being obese are caused from illnesses such as heart disease, stroke, type two diabetes and other types of cancer (“Adult Obesity”).

The phenomenon discussed earlier, where individuals have an abundance of cheap, accessible unhealthy food options but lack those options for healthy foods, actually describes a condition called a food desert. Food deserts are a growing problem because of increasing urban decay in older American cities and subsequent suburbanization in outlying areas. Currently, food deserts are defined as urban or rural areas that do not have easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables (Pilchman 1109).² At this time, 23.5 million Americans, including 6.5 million children, live in food deserts—around 2% of American households. Out of these 23.5 million, 750,000 live in areas where options for nutritious foods are simply not available. Food deserts

¹ This shows the potential for another criticism of Pilchman’s work that I do not show here. The fact that getting rid of the existing structure of corn subsidies might cause increased demand for fruit and vegetables. This would further have the advantage of less actions by the government than the creation of decoupled crop subsidy.

² Typically, a food desert is an urban area that is farther than one mile from a fresh food source or rural area that is more than ten miles from a fresh food source.

often force individuals to resort to eating fast food that is high in carbohydrates and low in nutritional value. These food deserts increase the likelihood for cancer, cardiovascular disease and diabetes for the individuals living in them (“Food Deserts”) (“America’s worst”). Coincidentally, these are also diseases that can occur because of obesity. This suggests that obesity may be a symptom of the greater problems occurring within food deserts. Unfortunately, merely relieving these food deserts does not necessarily solve the problem of obesity in these regions (Haspel). Obviously, there needs to be careful intentional action to look into solving the problems of food deserts and obesity in the United States.³

In order to fully understand the source of food deserts and obesity, it is necessary to understand a major facet of domestic agricultural policy: crop subsidies. These subsidies can either be coupled or decoupled. Coupled crop subsidies create payments for farmers who grow a specific crop that is chosen by the federal government. For example, if the government wants there to be more corn production, they may introduce a coupled subsidy for corn in order to increase its production from farmers. This can be an extremely effective measure to increase the production of a single desirable crop. Without these subsidies, farmers lack financial security to attempt to grow new crops and the production of experimental goods thus becomes less common (Pilchman 1118).

In contrast to coupled subsidies, decoupled crop subsidies are payments that are given to a specific farmer for a history of a specific crop production. For example, if a farmer had grown wheat for over a 20-year period and stops growing the wheat for 1 year and grows fruits and vegetables instead, a decoupled crop subsidy would provide a payment to the farmer because of his past wheat production. Because of this unique component of decoupled crop subsidies, they could allow farmers to grow different crops without the risk of financial loss if that crop is not successful.⁴ For some individuals in the pro-decoupled crop subsidy school, the flexibility provided by decoupled crop subsidies could influence producers to switch their crops to healthier alternatives. These individuals see farmers switching their traditional cereal crops to fruits and vegetables being able to provide more and better nutrition to individuals.

Revisiting Pilchman’s Thoughts on Decoupled Crop Subsidies

According to Pilchman, decoupled crop subsidies are not only advised, but are an obligation to justice. This is because these crop subsidies are necessary to help relieve the morally salient problem of food deserts. To remind the reader, these problems are significant because of the many consequences to individuals in the United

³ The reason that food is a moral issue for liberal schools of thought is because of the importance of the individual. The individual is the essential unit of concern and the individual cannot function without sufficient nutrition to be able to live a life worth living.

⁴ Currently decoupled crop subsidies would only function if they provided enough money to the farmers that they would be able to reasonably support themselves. Essentially this needs to be a feasible alternative income source.

States from food deserts and obesity, as discussed in the previous section. Any current attempts to solve these problems fall far from a resolution. As such, Pilchman's article addresses a relevant problem that is in great need of a useful solution.

Pilchman's argument comes with a set of two assumptions. First, farmers are rational economic actors.⁵ Farmers being rational economic actors means significant amounts of land are managed by people who want to make to most amount of money possible and are indifferent to the crop they grow (Pilchman 1107). This means that instead of having some historical, ethnical or personal attachment to a particular crop, these farmers just want to produce a crop that will yield the greatest profit (Pilchman 1107). Second, there is an assumption that food deserts and obesity are morally problematic because they "impinge on the liberal ideal of being able to pursue one's own conception of the good" (Pilchman 1107). This claim does two things: first, it places Pilchman firmly in the liberal school of thought; and second, it assumes that food deserts and obesity are problems that need to be addressed.

Arguing from these assumptions, there is an appeal to these decoupled crop subsidies being an obligation to justice in two moves. First, that decoupled crop subsidies are advisable through a consequentialist approach and second, that they are obligatory under the practice approach. The practice approach involves two steps to finding an obligation to justice. First, someone needs to identify a morally salient problem (Pilchman 1115–1116). Second, that same person needs to argue how adoption of a proposed plan or policy would solve the problem (Pilchman 1116). Essentially, the practice approach is an ethical theory that is about a necessary proposed policy solution to a morally salient problem.

To show that decoupled crop subsidies are advisable through a consequentialist approach there are three main reasons. First, because farmers would receive regular payments regardless of crop choice from decoupled crop subsidies, farmers would be able to grow more experimental crops without the risk of financial ruin. Even if their entire crop failed, they would still receive some kind of basic payment from the government (Pilchman 1112). This financial support makes decoupled crop subsidies beneficial to farmers and makes this policy proposal advisable. The second reason that decoupled crop subsidies are advisable is that they would help relieve rural food deserts. This is because these farmers will start to grow more fruits and vegetables. The locally grown produce will then be more readily available to consumers in these regions at a lower cost, increasing consumption and overall nutrition (Pilchman 1112). The final reason decoupled crop subsidies are advisable is that they would help relieve urban food deserts. This is because the price of fruits and vegetables would decrease due to the increased supply. With these measures, food deserts and obesity in the United States would begin to be addressed.⁶

⁵ This is partially because of Pilchman's standing in the liberal school of thought. These are rational economic actors.

⁶ Pilchman admits that his conclusions may be problematic given additional empirical information towards the end of his argument. He writes that, "Whether decoupled subsidies are obligatory depends, in part, on whether they will *in fact* mitigate the problems produced by [the United States] agricultural system" (Pilchman 1119). This shows that Pilchman realized that his work was somewhat susceptible to attack from an empirical perspective.

Decoupled crop subsidies are obligations to justice because of the practice approach. The morally salient problem, as was discussed in the background section, is obesity and food deserts in the United States. These are pressing issues that need to be addressed carefully and intentionally (Pilchman 1117). The proposed policy that would solve the problem is the creation of decoupled crop subsidies because of the consequentialist benefits that have been previously outlined. However, there may not be sufficient empirical evidence in Pilchman's argument to show that this approach is the best one. Instead, there might be a policy that better is able to accomplish this goal (Pilchman 1119).

There are two important conclusions from this pro-decoupled crop subsidy argument up to this point. First, decoupled crop subsidies could raise the amount of production of fruits and vegetables with the goal of lowering their price. The lower price that might be provided by the increased production would then make the fruits and vegetables cheaper in urban and rural food deserts. This would hopefully help relieve the morally salient problems of food deserts and obesity (Pilchman 1112). Second, in this argument there are two additional points of weakness that are both encapsulated in one concept: empirical evidence. First, the idea that there might be better alternatives and thus decoupled crop subsidies may not be the most effective approach to solving the problem of food deserts and obesity. However, there is a need for significant empirical evidence in order for this to be considered as a major flaw of the practice approach's conclusions, and therefore these conclusions might not be considered invalid (Pilchman 1119).

Critique of Pilchman's Perspective

There are multiple issues raised when regarding Pilchman's argument. The first of these issues with the proposal for decoupled crop subsidies is a lack of consideration of all of the typical components of the liberal field of political thought. Liberal theorists after *Theory of Justice* typically recognize the fact that there must be international considerations in any application of a theory of justice. For example, I previously mentioned the theorists Pogge, Sen, Nussbaum and Rawls. All of these individuals consider the importance of international and global consequences of their theories when determining what our obligations to justice should be. Pilchman in failing to consider international implications like Pogge, Sen, Nussbaum and Rawls make a key mistake in his work. This is because a main component of many of these liberal arguments is the universal importance of the individual. The universal importance of the individual for these global and international ethicists transcends the political boundaries of nations. This means that in a consideration of obligations to justice all individuals that will be affected need to be considered according to most liberal theories of justice.

Pilchman admits that the empirical evidence in support of decoupled subsidies as an obligation to justice is incomplete. Similarly, I cannot prove that Pilchman's claim for decoupled crop subsidies is definitively wrong. However, the lack of consideration for the international implications of increased production of fruits and vegetables with the proposal of creating decoupled crop subsidies brings up a serious point

regarding decoupled crop subsidies being an obligation to justice. It is plausible that these effects could have a two-fold impact. First, decoupled crop subsidies might not actually help to solve the initial problems of food deserts and obesity in the United States. This would happen if farmers continue to export their fruits and vegetables into the Canadian market instead of keeping them in the domestic market. Thus, the larger market would mean that the subsidy has a lower effect than previously thought. Second, decoupled crop subsidies could lower fruit and vegetable prices and prevent Mexican farmers from being able to continue to support themselves. This would be especially disastrous for Mexican fruit and vegetable farmers who currently depend on the export of their goods to the American marketplace.

Currently in the Canadian marketplace, there is a significant dependence on fruit and vegetable imports from the United States. This is illustrated by the fact that Canada is currently the largest export market for American agricultural goods. In addition, fresh and canned vegetables from the United States are the third and fourth most popular exports from the United States to Canada, respectively (“Opportunities for”). More specifically, around 14% of all American agricultural exports arrive in Canada,⁷ and out of those agricultural exports Canada consumes 80% of the fruit and vegetable exports that are farmed in the United States (“Canada-Agricultural”). Further, these Canadian markets can be seen as open to further development by American farmers if the American fruits and vegetables continue to go lower in price.

The significant Canadian dependence on fruits and vegetables from the United States has been going on since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) initially went into effect in 2003.⁸ The dependence that was fostered between the United States producers of fruits and vegetables and the Canadian consumers of these goods is seen in post-NAFTA Consumer Price Index data. When there was full trade liberalization between Canada and the United States in 2003, the price of fruits and vegetables increased 5.1% in 1 year. Further the market did not go back down to its original equilibrium price in an expected amount of time. This shows a low level of elasticity for the supply of fruits and vegetables in the United States (U.S. Bureau). The original 5.1% increase also illustrates that there was some kind transformation in the equilibrium price when there was major trade liberalization in the fruit and vegetable sub-market. There is no major explanatory factor for supply drastically decreasing in this year thus dismissing the possibility of explanatory externalities on the supply side of the market. However, demand in the liberalized market between the United States and Canada for fruits and vegetables could have increased because of the now open trade barriers between the United States, Canada and Mexico. This leaves a lesson: that the supply of fruits and vegetables in the

⁷ Agricultural exports in this scenario include all types of agriculture goods. This can include things that are obviously not fruits and vegetables like ethanol and corn. However, as is shown just a sentence later there is significant amount of fruit and vegetable import to Canada from the United States.

⁸ 2003 was the year that fruit and vegetable tariffs were stopped between the United States, Canada and Mexico.

United States do not just affect the people living in the United States, but the people living within the entire NAFTA zone in a post-NAFTA North America.

More specific to Canada, and to further bolster the previous conclusion of the inter-dependence of the American and Canadian markets, the amount that fruit and vegetable imports increased between these countries in post-NAFTA was astonishing. From 1997 to 2017, there was a 400% increase in fresh vegetable imports from the United States to Canada. In this time period there was also a 300% increase in fresh fruit imports from the United States to Canada (“Agricultural Provisions”). The heavy increase in the amount of imports between the two countries shows that there was an increasing amount of inter-market trade going on and the two marketplaces are extremely interconnected. Further, I can conclude that policies that effect market behavior in the United States will have effects in Canada as well.

The heavy amount of trade that goes on between the United States and Canada in agricultural products in a post-NAFTA world and the implications that would occur because of decoupled crop subsidies is the first serious weakness with a pro-decoupled crop subsidy argument. The possible outcomes of the relationship between the United States and Canada in a post-decoupled crop subsidy world can be broken down into three stages.⁹ These three stages are currently hypothetical and are only a rehearsal of what could happen with decoupled crop subsidies being instituted under Pilchman’s proposal. First, the United States’ supply of fruits and vegetables would increase because of the financial security that is provided by the decoupled subsidy initiated by the government when the new policy is put into effect. Second, the price of American produced fruits and vegetables becomes lower than the price of Canadian produced fruits and vegetables. This is because Canada, in this situation, does not have a similar decoupled subsidy for fruit and vegetable production. Third, an increase in the movement of fruits and vegetables across the northern border begins. The increase in food flowing across the northern border is because of the accessibility of the foreign market in Canada for US goods and the lower price of fruits and vegetables from the United States because of the decoupled crop subsidy (“Opportunities for”). To describe further, the excellent trade relationship between the United States and Canada, coupled with the fact that they have open economic borders, means that goods could freely flow across their borders. This means that these two countries’ fruit and vegetable markets essentially behave as a single open marketplace. At this point the demand would go up on the fruit and vegetable market,¹⁰ causing prices to actually increase, contrary to Pilchman’s initial argument. If my prediction is true, then the price of fruits and vegetables would likely remain at a similar level than they were previously or only marginally decrease. This hypothetical scenario provides evidence for a reasonable prediction of the possible consequences of

⁹ These stages are heavily reinforced by what happened to the American fruit and vegetable market after the NAFTA trade liberalization went into effect.

¹⁰ Some crops may behave differently, there are a lot of assumptions going on here about consumers responding to rational economic assumptions of wanting to have more goods when they are a lower price. However, the point is that there is a plausible path for economic analysis going on here.

Pilchman's proposed policy. This prediction is that nutritious food could actually be almost as inaccessible as it was before for people living inside of an urban food desert after the implementation of decoupled crop subsidies in the United States. Thus showing that this is not a solution to the morally salient problem of urban food deserts and obesity.

There is a second plausible outcome, in accordance with Pilchman's prediction, where fruit and vegetable prices actually do fall. It is likely that this could have negative consequences on an international scale, which Pilchman failed to consider, and especially on Mexican farmers. The Mexican agricultural industry exports 80% of their crops to the United States (Mexico's Fruits) which equates to over 13 billion dollars' worth of produce (Agricultural Trade). Because of Mexico's dependence on the United States for the exportation of their produce, it is important to consider the effects of American decoupled crop subsidies on these individuals who are employed in the Mexican agricultural sector. One would need to consider the international implications in any proposed obligation to justice as was implied in the theories of Pogge, Sen, Nussbaum, and Rawls. I predict that the decreased price of domestically grown produce in the United States would decrease the amount of imports from Mexico, harming those farmers greatly.

The impact of decoupled crop subsidies in the United States on Mexican farmers could be high because currently 22% of the Mexican labor force is employed by the agricultural industry. This massive labor force contributes to 8% of the overall GDP of the country. However, it was not always like this in Mexico. Since NAFTA, there has been a monumental change in the Mexican economy to center around exporting crops to the United States (Zapanta). This raises the question and the seriousness of the claim that decoupled crop subsidies would likely have an effect on Mexico as well.

I have based this prediction on the fact that there has been a time when the United States' use of subsidies damaged the Mexican agricultural market. For example, the effect of importation of United States agricultural products after NAFTA on the Mexican soybean industry was significant. After NAFTA, a combination of different agricultural assistance packages totaling 16 billion dollars in the United States soybean industry created a significant 'dumping margin' between the United States and Mexico. A dumping margin is the price between the crop that is being imported—the American crops into Mexico—and the cost to grow the crop in the country—in this case the Mexican soybeans (Wise 165). The dumping margin that was created had real effects on everyday Mexican crop farmers and laborers that were dependent on soybeans for work. This is evidenced by the fact that the soybean industry for Mexico was almost completely wiped out in post-NAFTA Mexico (Wise 166). For example, around the time that the United States and Mexico first started removing trade barriers between each other, the United States government was paying 1.3 billion dollars in soybean subsidies to American farmers (Schnepf 23). The large American subsidy radically lowered the price of production of soybeans in the United States. This negatively impacted Mexican farmers by nearly eradicating a market for soybeans there that had been dependent on domestic consumption. Further, it suggests and stands as evidence that increased US agricultural subsidies could do damage to Mexican farmers again.

The question then is what harm would be done to the Mexican agricultural markets if new decoupled crop subsidies now increased production of fruits and vegetables. The answer to this question is pretty simple: increased poverty and little options but to become an economic refugee. Take, for example, the Mexican state of Guanajuato, which is one of the largest producers of asparagus in the country—one of the crops that decoupled crop subsidies would likely produce—and is also one of the poorest states in the Mexican federation (Mexico Becomes). The individuals working and living in Guanajuato already live on the edge of destitute poverty. If decoupled crop subsidies take away the demand for Mexican asparagus in the United States, the Mexican farmers here essentially have two options. First, a large number of these workers could be forced to emigrate after they have no more work in the fields. This would be consistent with the large number of Guanajuato citizens that have already migrated because of dismal agricultural economic opportunities inside of this Mexican state (Quirk). The dismal economic opportunities only further contribute to Guanajuato's biggest problem: that many individuals leave because they lack fertile land to grow crops on (McDermot). The second option for these farmers is unfortunately destitute poverty. Without the production of agricultural products in Guanajuato to meet American demands, there would likely be a drastic decrease in the income of these farmers. The lack of income could then greatly impact the available resources for their families. The children of these families could join the other one million Mexicans already not attending school (Cullmann). In addition to not being able to send their children to school, these people in Guanajuato could join the 10%, or 12.9 million people in Mexico, that do not have access to food because they would not have the money to buy it. Consequentially, there could then be a swelling of the already 13% of children who are suffering from malnutrition (Thelwell).

Given little option, many Guanajuato citizens decide to immigrate to the United States. This is exactly what happened after the soybean industry collapsed in Mexico post-NAFTA. In doing this, the workers post-NAFTA, and potentially post-decoupled crop subsidies, would often join something in the United States called "hometown associations." These are groups that are dedicated to continuing to foster connections between the United States and Mexico by increasing the amount of remittances that are sent to Mexico from the United States.¹¹ Typically, there are more of these groups present in the United States when there is less economic opportunity in Mexico. This is because there is more immigration of Mexican farmers and agricultural workers to the United States, who form new hometown associations for themselves, and others like them. After these organizations are formed, they often send money to their hometowns for additional assistance to whatever family is left living there. These hometown associations are actual consequences of crop subsidies, as there was a 200% increase of them following NAFTA's implementation and the previously discussed dumping margin occurred (Leiken). In addition to this, Guanajuato became one of the biggest sources of immigrants from Mexico to

¹¹ This may be an overly reductive version of what these hometown organizations are. However, for the purpose of my argument, the fostering of a relationship between the Mexicans in the United States and their hometown is what is important for this analysis.

the United States following NAFTA.¹² The problem here from a liberal perspective is that these individuals are being deprived of the choice to be able to live in their hometown or not. Instead, the only real option is to immigrate. The fact that there were and could be potentially only two bad options for the citizens of Guanajuato in post-decoupled crop subsidy worlds suggests a violation of justice.

In weighing the risks between eliminating food deserts in the United States and the possible creation of poverty in Mexico, there are a lot of unanswered questions. In addition, whether these fruits and vegetables will simply be subsumed by the Canadian market instead of staying domestically is a major question that must also be considered. For these reasons, before one can say that there is an obligation to justice to institute decoupled crop subsidies, there must be significantly more empirical research into the effects that this policy could have on other countries. This is the mistake that Pilchman has made: a failure to consider justice outside of the domestic sphere empirically. Essentially, there needs to be an examination of the global effects that decoupled crop subsidies could have on the world before one can call them an obligation to justice.

Conclusion

The goal of this work from the beginning was to not show that decoupled crop subsidies are unquestionably a violation of international justice. Instead, it was to show that reasonably, a person can look at what could happen and want more empirical evidence before decoupled crop subsidies can be called an obligation to justice. In fact, Daniel Pilchman agrees that these subsidies being obligations to justice is heavily dependent on empirical facts. More specifically, he acknowledged in his argument that, “Whether decoupled subsidies are obligatory depends, in part, on whether they will *in fact* mitigate the problems produced by [the United States] agricultural system” (Pilchman 1119). The problem with Pilchman’s claim is that there are in fact possible empirical examples that suggest the creation of these decoupled crop subsidies actually causing harm to international actors with the intention to solve food deserts and obesity in the United States. This violates the considerations that are often made according to liberal thought, which he claims to belong to. Further, the Canadian example suggests that these subsidies may not even be able to mitigate the problem at all and are thus not obligatory under the practice approach.

In order to completely understand if what Pilchman is suggesting is just or not, there must be even more significant work in economic and public policy circles to determine the exact effects that international actors would be subjected to with the creation of decoupled crop subsidy policies in the United States. Again though, this was not the goal of my argument. Instead, as I have stated before, it was to simply

¹² It is important to clarify here that I am not saying that Mexicans immigrating to the United States is bad thing. The problem is that they are not given choice in the fact to immigrate. Instead, they are forced to either be extremely poor or go through the currently hard process of coming to the United States legally or illegally. The big problem here is being robbed of individual choice.

show that there *is* room and *need* for further empirical analysis before I (or anyone else for that matter) can call decoupled crop subsidies an obligation to justice to address the problems of food deserts and obesity in the United States.

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