



# The Struggle for Food

## *From Malthusian Tension to GMO, and beyond (19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> Centuries)*

Pre-conference of the session WEHC Boston 2018

**8 March 14:00 – 17:30**

*Welcome addresses:*

Antonino **DE FRANCESCO** (University of Milan)  
Director, Department of Historical Studies

Mario **TACCOLINI** (Catholic University of Milan)  
President, Italian Society of Economic Historians

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*Chair:* Alessandro **OLPER** (University of Milan)

Franco **AMATORI** (Bocconi University)  
*From Malthusian tension to mass production*

Irina **POTKINA** (Institute of Russian History RAS)  
*The formation of food industry  
in the Russian Empire in the 19th Century*

Dominique **BARJOT** (Université Paris-Sorbonne)  
*Scientific and practical innovation  
in the French Food Industries*

*16:00 Coffee Break*

Christiane **CHENEAUX** (Université Paris-Sorbonne)  
*The nature of the famine and the "King law"  
in the Seine Department (19th Century)*

Yves **TESSON** (Université Paris-Sorbonne)  
*The history of Champagne technical  
innovations. How to combine growth and quality  
(1660-2018)*

**9 March 10:00 – 13:00**

*Introductory remarks:*

Emanuela **SCARPELLINI** (University of Milan)

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*Chair:* Takeshi **ABE** (Kokushikan University, Tokyo)

Claudio **BESANA** (Catholic University of Milan)  
Silvia A. **CONCA MESSINA** (University of Milan)  
Rita **D'ERRICO** (Roma Tre University)

*The Food Preservation Industry  
in Italy since the 19th Century*

Phillip **DEHNE** (St. Joseph's College, New York)  
*Feeding hungry Europe  
after the First World War:  
American food, British transportation, German gold*

*11:30 Coffee Break*

Benjamin **DAVISON** (University of Virginia)  
*The Beef Economy and Malthusian Worries  
in Cold War America*

Hildete **de MORAES VODOPIVES**  
(Université Paris-Sorbonne)  
*The Brazilian Agricultural  
Research Corporation (Embrapa)  
and productivity advances in Brazil (20th Century)*

*13:30 Lunch*

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**8 - 9 March 2018**

**Aula Crociera Alta Giurisprudenza  
Via Festa del Perdono 7, Milano**

*From the website of the World Economic History Congress, Boston 2018:*

## The Struggle for Food.

From Malthusian Tension to GMO, and Beyond (19th-21st Centuries)

*“By 1800, Europe faced the challenge of producing enough basic food to avoid Malthusian tension. As high transport costs and protectionist barriers were limiting international trade in foodstuffs, local harvest failures led to price increases and, at times, crises and famines. Population pressure gave rise to several improvements in the agricultural sector: better techniques, tools, rotation systems, new crops and better selection of high-quality seeds and plants. In addition, from the 1860s onwards, substantial changes occurred: the transport revolution and the huge growth in international trade and globalisation; technical and scientific innovation in food processing, conservation and packaging; the shift from hand-made to industrial food production, which tended to make increased use of scientific knowledge, especially chemistry. Military necessities also played a role in the origins of many innovations in the food industry: e.g., world-wide colonial wars and WWI. An expanding trade network connected many areas in Western Europe, the US, the Americas, Africa and Asia, in a complex core-periphery order.*

*In the post-World War II period, when globalisation restarted, the international food system was generally linked to mass production and was based on cheap commodities. Further integration of European markets, through the European Economic Community, was underway, while an increasing number of large multinationals expanded their supply chains and sales markets internationally. New changes began following the breakdown of the Bretton Wood system, particularly from the 1980s onwards: from the mid-1990s a new global food order seems to have emerged, based on restructured international agro-food supply chains, the growing concentration of processing and markets, increasing retail power, and an emerging interest in freshness and naturalness of food.*

*However, this significant and long transformation did not lead to an equal distribution of food, in terms of both the balance of vitamins, proteins and minerals, as well as the sufficiency of calorie intake. Malnutrition or hunger was a reality for a significant part of 19th century and the first half of 20th century working classes and peasants in Europe, and continued to be tangible in many areas of the globe, so that the history of the 20th century still was, for millions of people, a history of hunger.*

*This panel aims to reexamine the history of food production, processing and trade from a global perspective, focusing on the effective role of scientific and practical innovation in the availability of food on a large scale. The primary goal of the panel is to allow scholars to consider whether, and to what extent, the food industry and innovation contributed to defeating the struggle for food in some parts of the globe, while many others, by contrast, remained under ‘Malthusian tension’. How did global waves influence the process? Is the increasing movement of goods and technology beneficial to all economies? Are industry and science enough to address the struggle for food? Or do people need many more interventions – e.g. political economy, income reinforcement or redistribution, trade agreements, institutions, support to local producers – to overcome the problem?”*

<http://wehc2018.org/the-struggle-for-food-from-malthusian-tension-to-gmo-and-beyond-19th-21st-centuries/>