



## Ray Goldberg: The man that coined the term “agribusiness”

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Wise word: Ray Goldberg says the term ‘agribusiness’ covers all aspects of the food system. DecisionAg

There’s a plague right now of buzzwords. Ecosystems and cohorts, stakeholders and disruptors, new words for old things, unnecessary, ill-defined terms destroying once clear conversations.

But what happens when there really is no word for what you are trying to do?

It was a situation that faced Ray Goldberg, a 30-year-old Harvard Business School economics lecturer in the late 1950s when he was trying to find a way to describe the way farming and business overlap.

So Goldberg invented a word — agribusiness.

“We had to decide what to call the food system,” says Goldberg, now 90, from his home in Boston. “We felt that everyone involved in it was involved in business, from technology all the way to the consumer.”

This year marks 60 years since Goldberg coined the term agribusiness, then defined as “the growing interdependence of agriculture and the industries that supply agriculture, and that process and distribute the products of agriculture”.

These days it’s a word thrown around with abandon.

“People often misuse agribusiness to mean big business,”

Goldberg says. “Or they think it just about making a profit. But it covers all aspects of the food system.”

In 1957, he and the director of the Program in Agriculture and Business, John Davis, published *A Concept of Agribusiness*, in which they discussed the interrelated functions of agriculture in the hope farming and industry could produce food and fibre more efficiently.

“We had to ask ourselves, how do we teach this subject and is there something more than profit? Do farmers do more than just make money? It became clear that the firms that were successful were the ones that looked at society’s needs and not just made money.

“And we discovered that every decision-maker in the food system is involved in private, public and not-for-profit policy ... and it was important because this one system does more for society than any other system.”

While inventing the term agribusiness would be a lifetime’s achievement for some, it was just the beginning for Goldberg.

He and Davis developed the Agribusiness Program at Harvard Business School, which Goldberg later headed. He has taught courses on food policy and agribusiness and climate and its impact on the global food system.

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He has helped universities and institutions around the globe on food policy and agribusiness, from Costa Rica and the Philippines, to Poland, Israel, the World Bank and England's Royal Agricultural College. He has written extensively and has taught countless students for more than 60 years.

As for agribusiness over that time, Goldberg says the greatest change has been in technology.

"The biggest changes are the scientific advancements that have enabled us to understand how plants and animals and humans all interact," he says.

"And our knowledge of nutrition and mental and physical health. We are really just in the infancy of a new era, a new revolution for the food system."

Goldberg says one of his major focuses has always been looking at the relationship between the technical, economic, environmental and human aspects of agriculture and, most importantly, about bringing people together.

"People don't realise how much they connect to each other," he says. "It's all about working together. The European Union couldn't get started until they had a common agriculture policy. That came first."

While he taught his last class in 2015, Goldberg is still active in the field, putting the finishing touches to his latest book, *Food Citizenship*, and continues to run the Private and Public, Scientific, Academic and Consumer Food Policy group, which meets annually to discuss the global food system.

"Universities are beginning to understand it. It's not just agriculture and business, it's people from the medical school and government and the school for public health all working together," he says.

"It's about bringing critics of the food system together and asking them what's wrong with it. That's the greatest contribution we can make to agriculture. To understand how we can all work together."