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Peer reviewed

**Review: Watering the Revolution: An Environmental and Technological History of  
Agrarian Reform in Mexico**  
by Mikael D. Wolfe

**Reviewed by Lia Vella**

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Wolfe, M. D. *Watering the Revolution: An Environmental and Technological History of Agrarian Reform in Mexico*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018, 336 pp., 29 B&W illustrations. ISBN 9780822363743 paperback, US \$26.95; ISBN 9780822363590 hardcover, US \$94.95; ISBN 9780822373063 ebook, US \$26.95.

Water availability has been proclaimed a matter of national security in Mexico, and the past century has seen a significant decline in the availability of water. Mikael D. Wolfe's fascinating and in-depth history of agrarian reform efforts, *Watering the Revolution: An Environmental and Technological History of Agrarian Reform in Mexico*, demonstrates how 20th century land-redistribution and dam-building in Mexico, efforts that may have been well-intentioned, have led to greater inequality and impoverishment of the people, and to environmental degradation.

Wolfe uses the lens of "envirotech" history to examine the Laguna district as a microcosm of 20th century Mexican agrarian reform. Distinct from environmental history, which considers human events in relationship to the landscape and natural forces around them, or the history of technology, envirotech history considers the interrelationships between non-human nature, technological development, and humans' relationships with both. A relatively recent approach to history, envirotech has slowly been gaining in popularity within European and North America historical studies, but less so in Latin America. *Watering the Revolution* is the first envirotech history of Mexican agrarian reform.

The source materials for this study come from the Archivo Historico del Agua as well as other archival collections throughout Mexico and the US, and Wolfe has masterfully gathered the threads of his many sources and woven them into a multi-faceted narrative of agrarian history in Mexico. His text is thus both sweeping and minutely detailed. Readers will learn about many subjects, including the differences between various

strains of cotton, the effects of the pink bollworm upon crop yields, and the daily lives of construction laborers working on the Palmito Dam project.

Watering the Revolution will be of interest to environmental historians, historians of technology, and others who have an orientation toward historiography. This book is required reading for anyone studying the politics and economics of agrarian reform in Latin America.

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