



Fresh, by Susanne Freidberg

My colleague Jonathan Zasloff’s [recent post on refrigeration](#) reminded me of a fascinating book published last year: [Fresh, by Susanne Freidberg](#). This book — authored by a college classmate of mine who teaches geography at Dartmouth — chronicles the evolution of the culturally-constructed concept of “freshness” in 19th and 20th-century America, and the development of modern food storage technology, through the lens of six common household food products.

Among other things, the book shows that refrigeration, in some contexts, was actually resisted by consumers since, by prolonging shelf life, it facilitated sale of items that people perceived as less fresh, or that might actually be less fresh. (See, for example, these [two posts](#) by the author at the New York Times Freakonomics blog for some details about the adoption of cold storage in the egg industry.) And consumers even resisted the modern refrigerator. As odd as it seems today, refrigerators were adopted widely only after a rather vicious public-relations campaign by refrigeration interests against the prior technology of the icebox, implying that iceboxes were dirty and that the icemen who replenished the ice were lowlifes that no self-respecting housewife should allow in the home.

Aside from telling some very interesting stories about food and the modern world, [the book](#) is worth a read for anyone interested in how technology and marketing shape our consumer preferences. The book makes a persuasive case that neither is merely a contemporary phenomenon.