



**Fresh: A Perishable History**, by Susanne Freidberg (Belknap/Harvard, £13.95)

According to Susanne Freidberg, “few food qualities seem as unquestionably good as freshness”. But as she shows in this meticulously researched social history of our relationship with perishable food, it is in fact a complex and contested term. The “New Ice Age” ushered in by the refrigerator revolutionised our relationship with perishable food and created today’s global fresh food industry: “refrigerators promised the garden in a machine”. Opening the door to our fridges, she traces the history of their perishable contents - beef, eggs, fruit, vegetables, milk and fish. She shows that “fresh” means different things for different foods. Fresh supermarket eggs will have been sitting in their cartons for three weeks or more. And thanks to a calcium citrate formula that took years to develop, “fresh-cut” fruit may have been sliced up to 28 days ago. Freidberg also highlights the human cost of keeping our fridges stocked with fresh food, such as the Zambians who earn a dollar a day picking baby sweetcorn: “the real cost has always been borne by the people whose work we don’t see.”

**PD Smith**