

Green Wednesday: December 2009.

## **“Food Inc.”**

*“I’m always amazed at how good we’ve [mankind] become at hitting the bull’s-eye, but on the wrong target.” (Farmer, Food Inc.)*

**Magnolia House Documentaries, (2008). Running time: 91minutes.**

***Warning: Some material may not be suitable for children, and some themes are sensitive and viewers may find them disturbing.***

Food Inc lifts the veil on our nation’s (USA) food industry, exposing how food supply is now controlled by a handful of corporations that often put profit ahead of consumer health, the livelihood of the American farmer, the safety of workers and our own environment. Food Inc reveals surprising - and often shocking - truths about what we eat, how its produced and who we have become as a nation.

### **Introduction.**

The average US supermarket now contains 47,000 products! There are no seasons in the supermarket, e.g. tomatoes are available all year round. Nor are there any bones in the meat aisle. Where does the meat in a burger come from? Drive-ins were the original ‘fast food’, then McDonalds brought in production line mentality to food services. Ultimately, this has led them to becoming the largest buyer of beef, pork, other produce in the US. This has led to a small number of corporations who control how the majority of our food is produced. The top 4 beef packers now control 80% of the global beef market.

### **A cornucopia of choices and variety.**

Michael Pollan traces food origins and discovers that most of it is based on corn in one form or another. In the US, 30% of the land base is down to corn production. Government subsidies means corporations can purchase corn at below the cost of production – hence stores are full of apparently ‘cheap’ food.

### **Un-intended consequences.**

The story of a 2 ½ year old boy who dies after eating a burger contaminated with pathogenic E. coli. The process of cattle production and slaughter means that cross-contamination of meat is very likely. There are now only 13 slaughterhouses in the US.

### **The Menu.**

Why is it that you can buy 2 McDonald’s cheese burgers for 99c, yet you can’t buy a head of broccoli for that price?

### **In the grass.**

Polyface Farms is rearing grass-fed meat. The benefits include use of the land rather than buying in ‘cheap’ corn, no waste disposal issues (cattle manure the land, so the waste doesn’t have to be hauled away), less fertilizer input (manure instead of synthetics). But can the natural (organic) system really provide enough food to feed the world?

**Hidden costs.**

The current food system is subsidized creating the 'mystique' of cheap food. But the real costs are high: health care for increased diabetes, heart disease, environmental costs, water issues, loss of soil/farm land.

**From seed to supermarket.**

Story of Monsanto / 'Roundup® Ready' soya beans. By 2008, (only 12 years since it was introduced), 90% of soya grown in the US now has GMO genes.

**The Veil.** Labelling, Law and Libel.

Many of the past / current US Government / administration advisors were / are on the Boards of large multinational food companies, like Monsanto and Cargill. Labelling GMO products is being fought by all the big companies and the government alike, and we are now at the point of nearly 70% of foods containing GMOs.

**Shocks to the System.**

We grow a very small number of crops, with a very small number of varieties, supplied by a very small group of companies. We use lots of oil and other non-sustainable inputs in agriculture. The system has no long-term resilience against shocks to prices or availability of those inputs.