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Diet For A Dead Planet: Big Business And The Coming Food Crisis



Synopsis

If we are what we eat, then, as Christopher D. Cook contends in this powerful look at the food industry, we are not in good shape. The facts speak for themselves: more than 75 million Americans suffered from food poisoning last year, and 5,000 of them died; 67 percent of American males are overweight, obesity is the second leading cause of preventable death in the United States and supersizing is just the tip of the iceberg: the way we make and eat food today is putting our environment and the very future of food at risk. *Diet for a Dead Planet* takes us beyond Fast Food Nation to show how our entire food system is in crisis. Corporate control of farms and supermarkets, unsustainable drives to increase agribusiness productivity and profits, misplaced subsidies for exports, and anemic regulation have all combined to produce a grim harvest. Food, our most basic necessity, has become a force behind a staggering array of social, economic, and environmental epidemics. Yet there is another way. Cook argues cogently for a whole new way of looking at what we eat—one that places healthy, sustainably produced food at the top of the menu for change. In the words of Jim Hightower, "If you eat, read this important book!" •

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Customer Reviews

The "toxic cornucopia" of big agriculture is pilloried in this populist manifesto. Journalist Cook offers a nauseating recap of familiar charges: factory farming serves up pesticide-laden produce; the horrifying mills of high-density feedlots and hog and poultry sheds produce meat laced with hormones and antibiotics but still tainted with lethal bacteria; pesticide, fertilizer and manure runoff

pollute air and water; immigrant meatpackers are paid paltry wages and physically ruined by inhuman line speedups. The heart of the book is an analysis of agricultural economics straight out of an 1890s Grange hall. Cook laments the destruction of family farms by a corporate "octopus" of agribusiness giants and parasitic middlemen who squeeze prices for farm products and inflate them for highly processed convenience foods on the store shelf, abetted by government farm subsidies that encourage overproduction and favor big producers. Cook's objections often seem to be aimed at modernity itself "to the same forces of technology-driven, mechanized productivity that have industrialized the nonfarm economy. He doesn't explain how, without legions of housewives to make meals from scratch, we can do without food-processing middlemen nor why his program of returning to small family farms will curb abuses of animals, workers, consumers and the environment better than firmer government regulation of large-scale agriculture. His indictment is compelling, but his nostalgic remedy isn't fully persuasive. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"A far-reaching takedown of the American food industry . . . further explores the stomach-churning realm described by Eric Schlosser." —Mother Jones"A book that forces you to look at things that you took for granted. Like breakfast." —The Atlanta Journal-Constitution"Provides the big picture, along with fascinating details, to motivate change before it's too late." —Frances Moore Lappé©, author of Diet for a Small Planet

This is a well-written and well-researched description of the economic problems ailing contemporary American agriculture, and of the deleterious effects mammoth-scale corporate farming is having on the environment. The author is an experienced investigative reporter and an unashamed proponent of sustainable agriculture and the ever-dwindling "family" farmer representative of traditional crop cultivation in the United States. As such, Diet For A Dead Planet is a bit of a polemic and firmly in the camp of other books critical of the relationship between agricultural economics and modern food production, such as Eric Schlosser's Fast Food Nation. Needless to say, Cargill and Archer-Daniels Midland executives are not going to be enamored of Diet, but any citizen concerned about the state of farming in the US, and its effects on public health and environmental well-being, would do well to read this book. Cook organizes his topic into three sections, dealing with food quality and safety; the business and economic aspects of modern agriculture; and environmental consequences of profligate pesticide use and "factory" farm effluents. Each section contains several chapters with

extensive footnotes. The chapters are obviously targeted for a general audience, and as a consequence are very readable without overwhelming the reader with statistics and technical jargon. In particular, I found the chapters on the evolving history of American agriculture offered a concise but informative account of a complex and often tumultuous subject. Other chapters on such diverse subjects as the "mad cow" crisis, the continuous deposition of toxic pesticides in water supplies, and the travails of workers in high-throughput slaughterhouse operations, are all eye-opening to one degree or another. Cook ends the book with a admonition to the public: unless we actively choose to support organic / sustainable farm operations, our health and the welfare of the environment we live in are not going to improve. Rather than simple hectoring, however, in the last segment of the book he provides an extensive listing of whole-food organizations and advocacy groups dedicated to helping us change the way we eat and consume natural resources. There is of course an element of "better to light one candle" rhetoric here; even Cook is not so naïve as to think that tomorrow will see the US converted to any kind of enormous vegan commune. But his hope is that after reading *Diet* some of us will devote a bit of thought to the hows and whys of our eating habits, and in this, I think he is as realistic as any "muckraker" can be.

Whether he is taking on the exploitation of farm workers and poultry-plant employees; the take-over of large-scale agribusiness; farm subsidies, or an America swimming in pesticides and animal waste, Mr. Cook has clearly done his research. Extremely well documented, the book contains a number of startling statistics. Did you know that in California's Central Valley, the 1,600 dairies there generate more waste than a city of 21 million people? Did you know that in 1997, growers applied more than 985 million pounds of pesticides and herbicides to crops? Can you conceive of a farm subsidy system that has people like Scottie Pippin and Sam Donaldson receiving farm program monies? There is a lot to ponder in this book and some excellent ideas and suggestions as to what we as consumers can do to make changes in our lives and our communities to help bring farming back to the people and out of the hands of the giant corporations.

Prompt and as promised

A well written and informative review of the current food situation. Well researched and presented, and easy to read. Chock full of facts, and the varied, related food topics are sure to grab a reader. Resources at the end of the book guide you to organizations and sources that further your education.

The author does such a good job of showing what utter rats agribusiness/chain grocery stores/pesticide companies are I have to give this a five star rating. Environmental damage, exploitive labor practices, factory farms, unhealthy and at times out and out toxic food supply, destruction of the family farms, the FDA/USDA being there more to see to it that big food gets what they want instead of protecting the public. All of this is covered in Diet for a Dead Planet. Even the farm subsidies, which the average American probably thinks goes to prop up family farms is more a welfare program for the super wealthy who get paid for land they own that they don't farm. David Rockefeller and Ted Turner, along with corporations like Chevron and Dupont rake in the dough from these programs, not to mention big agribusiness firms. Probably the only annoyance in this book is he treads politically correct waters when talking about the exploitive labor practices used on illegal (and legal) immigrants by agribusiness. Its also very Americentric. I am really grateful to live in a country that while it is far from perfect, has higher food standards and doesn't allow all this toxic stuff into the food supply like America does and about a third of the fruits, vegetables, meats and dairy products on the shelves in Denmark are organic.

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