**Using Food, Inc. to Address Obesity and Food Access**

“When you have five or six times more fast food restaurants and convenience stores than you do grocery stores and places where people can buy fresh fruit and vegetables, when mostly everything that is being sold is unhealthy, what kind of choice is that? That isn’t a choice.”

– ROSA SOTO, CALIFORNIA CENTER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH ADVOCACY

*Food, Inc.* is a feature-length documentary that offers a unique glimpse inside the highly secretive U.S. industrial food system, while exploring the very steep health and environmental consequences of seemingly cheap food.

This guide – a resource from the Ingredients for Change Campaign – can generate meaningful discussions about the film and help draw tangible connections between its complex themes and the specific food access and nutritional health issues that most impact many communities. It is meant to help audiences sift through these issues, understand their interplay with the sharp rise of obesity rates among children and adults, tell their own stories, and strategize pragmatic solutions that will engage and activate their communities.

While *Food, Inc.* only touches on obesity and food access issues per se, the film examines the many consequences that the country’s industrial food production has had on the American consumer. It is important during your post-screening discussions with community members to clearly connect some of these crucial themes – from the rise of agribusiness to government subsidies of commodity crops and the widespread availability of cheap junk food to obesity’s dramatic rise within the last 30 years.
We hope you will customize and localize your event in ways that encourage dialogue about realistic strategies for change and help advance plans to propel these conversations into advocacy and action. Depending on what you deem most effective, you can screen the film in its entirety or select the themed chapters that are most relevant to your audience. The guide is designed to accommodate either format. If you do screen the whole film, we recommend posing some overarching questions to your audience, in addition to more specific questions that seem most pertinent and stimulating.

Suggested uses for the film and the screening event:
- As a public awareness tool to prompt critical reflection of how the industrialization of food is exacerbating obesity and other health problems.
- As a motivational tool to inspire community members to get involved in local projects geared toward helping residents have healthier food choices.
- As an organizing and policy tool for your community to improve access to highly nutritious food and create healthier living and working environments.

WHAT FILM CAN DO

A well-orchestrated screening of a strong film can serve as a powerful organizing opportunity. But simply showing a film without facilitation or follow-up is generally not enough to further meaningful action. If an audience is inspired to reflect and act on the issues raised in the film – and is provided clear ways of taking action – a screening event can effectively mobilize members of your community to tackle crucial issues.

While your organization will decide on the specific desired outcomes of the event, the IFC Campaign’s objective is clear: to help further efforts in reducing childhood obesity and other nutrition-related health disparities in your community. When reviewing this guide in the planning process, please consider how best to harness the energy from your event and convert it into real change in your community.
The Problem Defined

Obesity is defined as an excessively high amount of body fat in relation to lean body mass. Obesity increases the risk of a range of potentially life-threatening illnesses in children and adults, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, asthma, and certain types of cancer. Body mass index, or BMI, is a measure expressing the relationship of weight to height (weight/height in inches x height in inches). Adults with a BMI of 25 to 29.9 are considered overweight, while those with a BMI of 30 or higher are considered obese. Children and youth at or above the 95th percentile for their age and gender are defined as obese, while children at or above the 85th percentile but below the 95th percentile are defined as overweight.

At the simplest level, obesity is caused by an energy imbalance – when people consume more energy (calories) through foods and beverages than they burn through physical activity and everyday body function.

Over the last 30 years, as cheap processed food has become a major part of the landscape, obesity rates have skyrocketed. The average American is now 23 pounds overweight, eats significantly larger quantities of meat, and consumes 250 more calories per day than s/he did 30 years ago. What was once a small exception has reached epidemic proportions, and obesity is now one of the nation’s leading preventable health problems. According to data taken between 2005 and 2006 by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, two-thirds of American adults 20 or older, and one-third of all children and adolescents, are obese or overweight. If this trend is not reversed soon, experts warn that today’s children will live sicker and die younger than their parents’ generation – for the first time in history.

The costs of treating obesity-related diseases in the U.S. have doubled in the last decade, with approximately $147 billion annually now spent on obesity-related care (more than nine percent of all U.S. medical expenditures). And while obesity affects people of every race, ethnicity, age, and class, lower-income communities can be especially vulnerable. These communities are often characterized by a lack of retailers selling affordable healthy food – sometimes referred to as “food deserts” – and access to safe public recreational facilities. Yet they typically have an abundance of fast food chains and convenience stores that offer highly processed, high-calorie foods.
While the information put forth here and in the film presents a rather gloomy outlook about our food system and diet-related health problems, the intent of the ingredients for change campaign (IFC Campaign) is as much to raise awareness of the issues as it is to encourage and inspire your community to find practical solutions and impact real change. It is important, when presenting these facts, to make sure that audience members leave the screening with a real sense of hope that concrete solutions do exist, and that creating a healthier community is well within reach. Like the successful fight against smoking and the tobacco industry, many of these health problems are preventable with a combination of smart changes in policies and community environments to encourage better eating and healthier lifestyles. While it is obviously shortsighted and unrealistic to urge people never to eat another fast-food hamburger or drink another soda, providing accessible, affordable alternatives is imperative so that the healthy choice becomes the likely choice.

In order to turn the tide on obesity, especially among children, individuals, communities, and governments need to understand the root causes of these issues as well as the most effective remedies – and take constructive action now.

“"We’ve skewed our food system to the bad calories. And it’s not an accident. I mean, the reason that those calories are cheaper is because those are the ones that we’re heavily subsidizing. … The problem is too many calories.” “

— Michael Pollan

Source: www.mymoneyblog.com

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“"My husband’s diabetic. … We’re really tight from either paying for his medicine to be healthy or buying vegetables to be healthy. So which one should we do?” “

— Maria Andrea Gonzalez, mother in Baldwin Park, CA

More About the Film

In *Food, Inc.*, the hit documentary from Participant Media, River Road Entertainment, and Magnolia Pictures, filmmaker Robert Kenner lifts the veil on our nation’s food industry, exposing the highly mechanized underbelly that’s been hidden from the American consumer with the consent of government regulatory agencies. The documentary shows how the food supply is now largely 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 the environment.

*Food, Inc.* explores how soft drinks and highly processed foods are responsible for America’s expanding waistline, and why these foods are so much cheaper and more accessible than fresh produce and other nutritional food sources. It encourages audiences to vote with their pocketbooks to change that paradigm. Featuring authors Eric Schlosser (*Fast Food Nation*) and Michael Pollan (*The Omnivore’s Dilemma*), along with forward-thinking social entrepreneurs, such as Stonyfield Farm’s Gary Hirshberg, *Food, Inc.* reveals surprising—even shocking—truths about what we eat, how it’s produced, and why it can make us sick.

For film information and to view the trailer: [www.foodincmovie.com](http://www.foodincmovie.com).

**Central themes in the film include:**
- The dominance of corn and other commodity crops in the U.S. food supply
- The growth of processed foods and the fast food industry
- The health, environmental, and social costs of industrial agriculture
- Food access and equity in lower-income communities
- Food-borne illness and food safety problems
- The rise of agribusiness and fall of the small farmer
- Organic agriculture
- The exploitation of food workers
- Animal cruelty

Film Themes and Discussion Questions

Depending on your audience and the logistics of your event, you can decide whether it makes sense to show the entire film (90 minutes), or just select chapters. This guide breaks the film into four main themes (with the corresponding film chapters noted) and provides a list of suggested discussion questions for each.

Under each theme, the following is provided:
- **The Facts:** Some background information about the topic.
- **Discussion Questions:** A list of suggested questions to use during or after the film to inspire conversations among your audience.
- **Small Group Activities:** One or more suggested interactive activities for break-out groups or individuals.
- **What We Can Do/Action Steps:** A list of suggestions – mostly selected from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s recommended strategies list – and real examples from across the country of effective community action. For these, we recommend leading a discussion with your audience about which actions would be most effective and realistic for your community to replicate. During the screening event, we also encourage your community to develop new ideas.
- **Definitions You Might Need:** A list of relevant terms defined.
**PRE-SCREENING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (SETTING THE TONE)**

Before showing *Food, Inc.* at your event, we recommend briefing your audience about the film and the IFC Campaign. Depending on timing and circumstances, it may also be useful to pose a few ice-breaker questions and activities that help frame the most relevant issues. It is often useful, in leading group discussions, to write down responses on a board. Some of these questions may be worth revisiting as you begin your post-screening discussion:

- What’s easier to find where you live: fresh fruit and vegetables or fast food and chips/soda? Why is that? Has it always been this way?
- How far from your house do you have to travel to purchase fresh food? How far do you have to travel to get to a fast food restaurant or liquor store?
- What, if any, are the biggest obstacles to getting healthy food in your community (e.g. cost, distance, time, etc.)?
- Think about the last three meals you ate. How is this food different from what your grandparents might have eaten 50 years ago?
- What are some of the most serious health problems in your community (prompt by listing a few potential examples)? Raise your hand if you have one, two, three, or more family members or close friends with diabetes (or who are very overweight, although the latter may be a bit too personal).
- Raise your hand if you’ve ever met a farmer or visited a farm? What image comes to mind when you think of a farm?
- What are some effective ways to address diet-related problems in your community?
- When people are unhealthy because of the food they eat and a lack of physical activity, who is responsible?

**POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**General questions for getting the conversation started after the credits roll**

- What characters and issues from the film will you remember most and why?
- What, if anything, in the film made you upset, angry, or confused? Are there parts of the film that you disagreed with?
- What issues in the film, if any, are ones that your community also faces?
- When people are unhealthy because of the food they eat and a lack of physical activity, who is responsible? (Same question from pre-screening)

“Everything we’ve done in modern industrial agriculture is to grow it faster, fatter, bigger, cheaper. ... Imagine what it would be if as a national policy we said we would be only successful if we had fewer people going to the hospital next year than last year. How ‘bout that for success? The idea then would be to have such nutritionally dense unadulterated food that people who ate it actually felt better, had more energy, and weren’t sick as much. You know, now see that’s a noble goal.”

– JOEL SALATIN, FARMER

“... There’s something that’s going on in the way that we live our lives and where we play and where we buy our food, in the types of food that we’re able to buy, that’s causing this epidemic.”

– ROSA SOTO
THEME 1
WHY IS THE CORN SO CHEAP?: A LOOK AT OUR CURRENT FOOD SYSTEM

Corresponding chapters:
•  Film Intro
•  2 (A Cornucopia of Choices)
•  4 (The Dollar Menu)
•  5 (In the Grass)

The Facts
•  U.S. farmers plant more than 90 million acres of corn each year, according to the National Corn Growers Association. Our country is currently the number one corn-growing nation in the world, with more acres devoted to it than any other crop. We produce more than 12 billion bushels of corn annually, up from four billion in 1970.
•  Enhanced breeding techniques and chemical fertilizers have made corn an incredibly productive, high-yield crop. But less than one percent of this is the sweet corn we can actually eat. Most of it is field corn - a commodity crop that’s bred for its high starch content and harvested when kernels are hard and inedible.
•  Field corn is the main ingredient in most livestock feed. It is also chemically processed into some of the most common ingredients in the typical American supermarket. From breakfast cereals, syrup, margarine, and baby powder, to glue, batteries, and fuel ethanol, the number of products that contain some form of corn-based ingredient is astounding.
•  The typical American meal of a cheeseburger, fries, and shake includes several corn-based ingredients: the patty (corn-fed beef), the cheese (corn starch), the bun (high-fructose corn syrup), the ketchup (high-fructose corn syrup and corn syrup), the fries (corn oil), and the shake (corn syrup solids and cellulose gum).
•  It wasn’t always like this. Starting in the 1960s, food scientists discovered how to develop a large number of corn-based byproducts, including a low-cost sweetener known as high-fructose corn syrup. Recognizing corn as a hearty raw material, the U.S. Department of Agriculture began in the 1970s offering direct payments – or subsidies – to farmers who grew more corn. Over the last decade, the federal government poured more than $50 billion into the corn industry.
•  The result: dramatic production increases across the country and a large drop in corn prices as the crop suddenly flooded the market. Between 1970 and 2007, corn production increased by nearly 40 percent, according to the USDA. Supermarkets suddenly were – and continue to be – filled with corn-based, high-calorie processed food products that contain little nutritional value but are generally much cheaper than fresh fruits and vegetables.
•  As a result, U.S. consumption of fats, oils, and sugars has risen dramatically in the last 30 years, as has consumption of meat (made more affordable because of the corn diet). In the same period, obesity rates have also risen dramatically.
Discussion Questions

- Should junk food be more expensive and healthy food cheaper? If that happened, do you think people you know would eat healthier foods (or would they just pay more for the same stuff)? What other steps might be necessary to get people eating healthier diets?
- What kind of food is most readily available in your community? What are the biggest obstacles to eating healthy food where you live? How easily can you find such food in your community?
- Author Michael Pollan says that government subsidies of corn and soy products are the reason why soda is so much cheaper than broccoli, and he links cheap soda to obesity and other nutrition-related health problems in this country. Do you agree that there is a link with obesity? Why or why not?
- What are some positive and negative impacts of cheap, processed food in your community? What are some impacts on health in general and, specifically, on obesity?
- Make a list of the meals you ate in the last two days. Which of them contained processed foods? Which had raw or cooked fresh vegetables or fruit? Which meals were more expensive? Where did you eat them? Which did you enjoy eating more?
- How much do you know about the ingredients in the packaged or processed foods you buy? How often do you read the labels? Are they easy to read, and do you trust them?

What We Can Do/Action Steps

- **Start a school garden program with curriculum that teaches students about food production and nutritional cooking.**

  **Example:** In 2006, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Edible Schoolyard program began at two public charter middle schools in New Orleans. The program includes a campus organic garden, and integrates gardening and fresh seasonal cooking into the school’s curriculum, culture, and food programs. Students are involved in all aspects of tending the garden—along with preparing, serving, and eating the food. Once a month, students sell produce and other products from the garden at an outdoor farm stand.

- **Increase the availability of affordable, healthy food in school cafeterias, community centers, government worksites, and other public institutions.**

  **Example:** In 2008, New York City became the first major city in the U.S. to set nutrition standards for all foods sold or served in city agencies, including schools, senior centers, homeless shelters, child care agencies, after-school programs, correctional facilities, public hospitals, and parks. The standards require agencies to include two servings of fruits and vegetables in every lunch and dinner, phase out deep frying, lower salt content, serve healthier beverages, and increase the amount of fiber in meals.*

- **Tax sodas and other “junk foods.”**

  **Example:** A growing number of policy leaders and medical experts are pushing for a federal soda tax. They believe that such a tax could decrease consumption and have a significant impact on obesity rates. According to several studies, increasing the price of sodas and other sugar-sweetened drinks by 10 percent would result in an 8 percent to 10 percent decrease in consumption. A small number of states have taxes on soda, including Arkansas and Missouri. San Francisco is considering levying a tax on sodas sold in retail outlets and would be the first such city to do so.

- **Provide incentives for local corner stores to sell affordable healthy food.**

  **Example:** In Hartford, the second largest city in Connecticut, there is only one supermarket. In response, the Hartford Food System led the Healthy Food Retailer Initiative, in which store owners who agree to switch five percent of their shelf space from junk food to healthier items get assistance with direct marketing and grassroots publicity that helps distinguish their stores in a very competitive climate. To remain in the program, owners must switch another five percent of their shelf space to healthy foods each year. Starting with six stores in 2006, more than one-quarter of all stores selling groceries now participate in the program.

Small Group Activities

- At the beginning of the film, Michael Pollan says: “The way we eat has changed more in the last 50 years than in the previous 10,000.” Describe a standard dinner that your grandmother might have eaten 50 years ago. How was it different from what you eat today? Is it still possible to eat the way that she once did?
- Create a local/seasonal fruit and vegetable chart. (That is, if you only ate food grown within 100 miles of where you live, what could you buy/grow during each season of the year? If unclear on what produce is “seasonal,” just take your best guess based on what you’ve seen at farmers markets and on local farms.)

Definitions You Might Need

- **U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)**: The federal agency that executes government policy on farming, agriculture, and food.
- **Agricultural subsidies**: USDA payments to farmers and agribusinesses meant to supplement their income and influence the cost and supply of crops they produce.
- **Farm Bill**: A major bill that Congress debates and passes about every five years that sets the course of U.S. farm and food policy, including crop subsidies.
- **Commodity crops**: Crops like corn, soy, wheat, and rice that are common raw ingredients in our food supply. Farmers typically receive subsidies for these crops, which keep the cost of them low.
- **High-fructose corn syrup**: A highly processed corn byproduct that is typically used as a sugar substitute and, since the 1970s, has become a very common main ingredient in processed foods and beverages, including soft drinks, yogurt, and salad dressing.
- **Processed food**: Raw harvested crops or slaughtered animal products that have been engineered and transformed into new food products, often with the intention of increasing their marketability and shelf life. Soda, chips, candy bars, cereal, hot dogs, and TV dinners are all common examples.
- **Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act (CNR)**: Federal legislation that authorizes all public school meal and child nutrition programs, including the National School Lunch Program. The current act, which expired in September 2009, is currently up for reauthorization and will play a large role in determining nutritional standards of foods served in public schools across the nation.
**THEME 2**  
**FOOD (IN)ACCESS: A FOCUS ON NUTRITION DISPARITIES AND DIET-RELATED HEALTH PROBLEMS**

**Corresponding chapters:**  
- 1 (Fast Food To All Food)  
- 2 (A Cornucopia of Choices)  
- 4 (The Dollar Menu)  
- 9 (Shocks to the System)

“You can find candy that’s cheaper. You can find chips that are cheaper. The sodas are really cheap. Sometimes you look at a vegetable and say, okay, well, we can get two hamburgers over here for the same amount of price.”  

— MARIA ANDREA GONZALES, MOTHER FROM BALDWIN PARK, CA

**State-Specific Prevalence of Obesity Among Adults Aged ≥ 18 Years, by Race/Ethnicity**

**The Facts**  
- Currently, the federal government spends roughly $35 billion each year subsidizing commodity crops, making them so cheap and abundant that food producers have found a wide range of uses for them, such as hydrogenated oils, high-fructose corn syrup, animal feed, and fuel.
- Because of this, the lowest cost options at the grocery store are often highly processed foods made up of refined grains with added sugars and fats that are filled with empty calories and have little nutritional value. Like most fast food meals, they are so cheap because they contain at least one main ingredient that is heavily subsidized by the government.
- This explosion of cheap but generally unhealthy food has had the greatest impact on lower-income families with tight spending budgets. While the real price (adjusted for inflation) of soda has fallen 33 percent over the last 30 years, the real price of fruit and vegetables has risen more than 40 percent.
- Such price differences have forced many families to adopt a diet of mostly calorie-dense, fat-rich foods that lack greater nutritional value.
- Today, nearly two-thirds of all adults in America and one-third of children are either obese or overweight, making us the heaviest nation on earth. One of every three Americans born in 2000 will contract diabetes—a rate that is even higher among African Americans, Latinos, and American Indians.
- If this trend is not reversed, experts warn that today’s children will live sicker and die younger than their parents’ generation—for the first time in history.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Behavioral Risk Factor System, United States, 2006-2008
Discussion Questions

• Is obesity a significant problem in your community, especially among children?
  Do you think most people understand the health risks of being overweight or obese?

• Maria Andrea Gonzalez, says: “We’re really tight from either paying for his [the father’s] medicine to be healthy or buying vegetables to be healthy.” Can you relate to the dilemma that her family faces? What would you recommend they do when deciding what foods to buy?

• Is it true that food can only be either unhealthy and cheap or healthy and expensive? Does it have to be one or the other? What are some ways to make healthy food available and affordable in your community?

• Do you think talking to kids and adults about food and nutrition, like health educator Rosa Soto was doing in the movie, is an effective strategy to get people to eat healthier diets? Are there groups like that in your community? Where else can these conversations take place? What are other helpful strategies?

• CEO of Stonyfield Farm organic yogurt, Gary Hirshberg, states in the film: “The consumer does not feel very powerful, but it’s the exact opposite. When we run an item past the supermarket scanner, we’re voting for local or not, organic or not.” Do you think this statement is true for you? Do you have these choices to make?

• Should there be taxes on soda and junk food the way there are on cigarettes? What are some reasons for and against this?

Small Group Activities

• On-the-spot recipes: Come up with three cheap, quick, healthy meals that use local, or readily accessible ingredients and NO processed foods.

• Should healthy eating be a right, a responsibility, or a privilege? (If feasible, place three signs in different corners of the room for each category, ask the audience to go to the corner they think is right, and then have them discuss with each other and present their argument to the group.)
What We Can Do/Action Steps

Create community farmers markets, farm stands, or mobile markets that offer fresh, affordable produce to residents.
Example: Five days a week, the Peaches and Greens truck drives through the streets of lower-income neighborhoods in Detroit. Set up as a mobile grocery store, the truck offers subsidized fresh produce to families on public assistance, homebound seniors, and residents who don’t have direct access to well-stocked grocery stores.

Improve geographic availability of supermarkets in underserved communities.
Example: The Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative is a state program that increases the number of supermarkets or other grocery stores in underserved communities across Pennsylvania. The initiative provides financing to supermarket operators that plan to operate in these underserved communities. It has become a model for communities nationwide committed to combating obesity and improving food access.

Make fresh produce more affordable to lower-income communities.
Example: The New York City Department of Health operates the Health Bucks Program to make fruits and vegetables more affordable to residents with food stamps. For every five dollars in food stamps spent at farmers markets, individuals receive a two-dollar Health Bucks coupon that can be redeemed at more than 30 farmers markets citywide.*

Improve transportation links to healthy food sources.
Example: In Hartford, CT, an Advisory Commission on Food Policy studied the local food system and launched an initiative to improve bus service routes to grocery stores and to reduce food prices in lower-income communities. The commission created a special cross-town bus route that cut travel time in half for residents to reach the city's only major supermarket.*

Restrict the number of fast food restaurants in your community and attract more businesses that serve healthier food.
Example: In 2008, the Los Angeles City Council approved a one-year moratorium on any new fast food restaurants in a lower-income area of the city where rates of obesity and other nutrition-related health problems are high. The measure was intended to encourage restaurants serving healthier foods to move into these neighborhoods.

Empower youth to take leadership on food access and healthy lifestyle campaigns
Example: The Youth Photovoice Project, launched in 2007 by the Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP), trains youth in the San Joaquin Valley to research and take photos of their own community environments, define health problems, and identify opportunities and solutions for healthy food access, safe play, and recreation. Participants become health advocates, and their work has been presented to key stakeholders and decision makers throughout the region.


Definitions You Might Need

- **Obesity**: A medical condition in which excess body fat has accumulated to the extent that it may have an adverse effect on health and lead to reduced life expectancy. An adult is considered obese when his/her body mass index (BMI), a weight and height ratio, is greater than 30 (or roughly 20 percent over ideal weight). Obesity increases risk of many diseases including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain types of cancer.
- **Diabetes**: Diabetes is a chronic (lifelong) disease marked by high levels of sugar in the blood. Type 2 diabetes, one form of this condition, is directly linked to obesity. A diet of refined carbohydrates (i.e. most processed foods) can lead to insulin spikes in the bloodstream and is a common cause of diabetes. Type 2 diabetes used to be called adult-onset diabetes until the recent dramatic increase of diagnoses among children.
- **Food desert**: A community or neighborhood with little or no access to fresh, nutritious foods.
Ingredients for Change Campaign: Community Action Guide

THEME 3
FARM OR FACTORY: A FOCUS ON INDUSTRIAL AGRICULTURE

Corresponding chapters:
• 1 (Fast Food to All Food)
• 5 (In the Grass)
• 7 (From Seed to Supermarket)

The Facts
• America’s modern food system is designed to produce, process, and distribute enormous quantities of food as cheaply as possible. Since national food shortages during World War II, production levels have been consistently increased through the use of agricultural technologies like chemical fertilizers, pesticides, genetically modified seeds, and animal growth hormones and antibiotics.
• While these innovations – aided by generous government crop subsidies – have succeeded in producing an abundance of cheap food, there have also been significant consequences: nutritional health (obesity, diabetes), consumer safety (increases in salmonella, E. coli, and other foodborne illnesses), environmental quality (water and air pollution), and workers rights.
• Many of the iconic small family farms that were once so common throughout the country have largely been overtaken by huge industrial factory farms owned by large corporations. While prices for commodity crops like corn and soybeans have remained constant since about 1970, costs for fuel, seed, fertilizer, equipment, and land have risen steadily, wiping out many small farms and transforming the majority of U.S. agricultural operations into big businesses.
• There were roughly seven million farms in this country in 1930. By 2000, that number dropped to two million farms. Some of these farms are huge industrial operations, and now about three percent of all farms produce roughly three-fourths of the nation’s farm output.
• While most food used to be locally produced, the average meal now travels 1,500 miles from where it was produced to your plate.
• Industrial farming also helped pave the way for the rapid growth of the fast food industry, which relies on a constant supply of cheap meat and commodity crops. To meet demand, CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations) have emerged, wherein animals are packed together as tightly as possible. They are commonly fed corn and other cheap crops that are not part of their natural diet and typically administered growth hormones and antibiotics to prevent illness.
• The industrial food system uses 19 percent of all fossil fuels in the U.S. – more than any other sector of the economy. 10 million tons of chemical fertilizers are used to grow industrial corn in the U.S.; 23 million tons are used for all crops. These fertilizers, coupled with massive amounts of animal waste from feedlots, have resulted in major air and water pollution problems, and caused significant health problems within communities near industrial farming facilities.
• A United Nations study found that the ranching and slaughter of cows and other animals generates, globally, an estimated 18 percent of total greenhouse-gas emissions induced by humans.
What We Can Do/Action Steps

Increase the amount of nutritious, locally produced food in school cafeterias.

Example: In 2005, Jefferson Elementary School, in Riverside, CA, launched a farm to school salad bar program that provides a daily salad bar stocked with a variety of locally grown produce from two family farms located within 30 miles of the school. This is an alternative to the standard hot lunch. Based on its success, the school district has expanded the program to four additional elementary schools.*

Limit demand for unhealthy food by restricting advertising, especially in schools.

Example: In 1999, San Francisco County passed the Commercial Free Schools Act, which prohibits the San Francisco Unified School District from entering into exclusive contracts with soft drink or snack food companies, and restricts advertising of commercial products.

Increase opportunities for consumers to purchase affordable, locally produced food.

Example: The Food Trust’s Farmers Market Program operates a network of 30 farmers markets serving more than 125,000 customers in Philadelphia, PA. Many of these outdoor farmers markets are located in neighborhoods underserved by supermarkets, grocery stores, and other fresh food outlets. All of the markets accept food stamps.*


- Over the past 30 years, meatpacking companies have consistently lowered wages, sped up production, and grown exponentially larger through consolidation. The Smithfield plant, depicted in the film, processes 32,000 hogs each day, or 2,000 per hour. Just five companies now control more than 80 percent of the beef-packing market and 66 percent of the pork market.
- Because of this industrial system and the use of corn-based feed, meat is now much cheaper and fattier than is used to be. The average American consumes significantly more of it – roughly 200 pounds per year – which has directly contributed to rising obesity rates and other nutritional health problems.
- As author Eric Schlosser says in the film: “In the 1970s, there were literally thousands of slaughterhouses in the United States. And today we have 13 slaughterhouses that process the majority of beef that is sold in the United States.” Through this system, he notes, one hamburger can contain meat from thousands of different cows. These changes have profoundly affected the work force. What was once a good-paying position is now one of the lowest-wage jobs in America – and also one of the most dangerous.

Discussion Questions

- What comes to mind when you think of a farm? What was your reaction to the industrial farms in the film?
- Richard Lobb of the National Chicken Council says: “What the system of intensive production accomplishes is to produce a lot of food on a small amount of land at a very affordable price. Now someone explain to me what’s wrong with that?” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
- This system of meat production may make meat less expensive to buy, but the film suggests there are “hidden costs.” What do you think are some of these costs – particularly related to health and obesity – and which ones might have a direct impact on you?
- Union organizer Eduardo Pena says: “We want to pay the cheapest prices for our food. We don’t understand that that comes at a price.” What does he mean by this? Is it something that we, as consumers, should be thinking about every time we go shopping?
- Would you pay more for food produced through means that better protect workers and treat animals more humanely?

Small Group Activities

- Create a food bill of rights for your family (be sure to explain what this means). What are some factors you think should be guaranteed in the way your food is produced (rights of workers/animals, use of chemicals, foods produced locally, etc.)?

Definitions You Might Need

- **Industrial agriculture/factory farming**: The industrialized production of livestock, poultry, fish, and crops to produce the highest output at the least cost.
- **CAFO**: Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations are industrial agricultural facilities where animals are raised in closely confined areas meant to maximize production and minimize land use. An average CAFO can contain more than 1,000 head of cattle, or tens of thousands of chickens or pigs. Rather than grazing in fields, animals are largely inactive and fattened as quickly as possible.
- **Genetically Modified Organism (GMO)**: An organism whose DNA has been altered using genetic engineering techniques. GMO seeds are engineered to possess desirable growing traits like durability, rapid growth, and resistance to pests and herbicides.
THEME 4
OTHER FOOD OPTIONS: A LOOK AT ALTERNATIVE FOOD PRODUCTION SYSTEMS

Corresponding chapters:
• 5 (In the Grass)
• 6 (Hidden Costs)
• 9 (Shocks to the System)

The Facts
• While farmers worldwide have been producing food without the use of man-made chemicals or genetic engineering since the dawn of agriculture, the modern organic movement began relatively recently as an alternative to the nitrogen fertilizers and pesticides that were being increasingly used in conventional agriculture. It gained traction in the 1960s and 1970s in response to growing public concerns that agricultural chemicals were polluting water and causing serious environmental and health problems.
• Organic farmers use natural fertilizers and traditional pest control methods instead of chemical pesticides. Organic meat and eggs are produced from animals that are given organic feed and access to a minimum amount of outdoor space. Until fairly recently, organic foods were still on the fringe, representing only a tiny segment of the food market. They were produced primarily on small farms and from independently owned businesses.
• As the demand for (and profitability of) organic products dramatically increased over the last two decades, the industry has expanded significantly, attracting large mainstream food producers and retail outlets into what is now a $46 billion market.
• Some say this growth is a good thing, as it means thousands of acres of farmland converted to organic production and less overall use of pesticides and GMOs, as well as more humane treatment of animals.
• But others fear that the increasing involvement of large corporations will result in a weakening of organic standards and a failure to uphold the original environmental and ethical food production principles on which the movement was founded. Organically certified products are generally more expensive and often unavailable in lower-income communities.
Discussion Questions

• If you had the option, would you purchase meat and vegetables from a small farm like Joel Salatin’s? What are the pros and cons of buying from him? How much more money would you be willing to pay for meat or a dozen eggs produced this way than what you normally spend at the store?
• Do you think it’s important to know how and where your food is grown and produced? Are there ways to find out this information?
• Salatin asks us to “imagine what it would be if as a national policy we said we would be only successful if we had fewer people going to the hospital next year than last year.” What are some major changes that would need to happen for this to be a reality? What other goals should we have for our food system?
• Are there projects in your community that make your local food system healthier?
• Gary Hirshberg, the CEO of Stonyfield Farm organic yogurt, says: “When we started out, you know, we were a seven-cow farm. We wanted to prove that business could be part of the solution to the globe’s environmental problems and, at the same time, we had to prove that we could be highly profitable.” What is your reaction to this philosophy? What are the potential benefits and consequences of working with a business like Walmart?
• What is your opinion of Walmart and other large retail chains that are generally able to sell food and goods at very cheap prices? Do these stores have a positive or negative impact in your community?

Small Group Activity

• Brainstorm and create a guide to nutritious “good” food in your community: Where can you buy it (be specific), how should you choose what to buy, how can you do it on a budget, etc.?

Definitions You Might Need

• Organic agriculture: A form of agriculture that uses little to no synthetic fertilizers or pesticides, and relies on crop rotation, compost, and biological pest control.
• Local food systems: An alternative to the industrial food system, these are part of an effort to help consumers know the source of their food and to support regional economies by buying directly from local growers and producers. Local food systems reduce the shipping distance between producer and consumer, thereby minimizing environmental impact.
Obesity Fast Facts

- More than two-thirds of U.S. adults are obese or overweight. The adult obesity rate alone is 34 percent, compared with 15 percent in 1980.
- Nearly one in every three children and adolescents in this country is overweight or obese. In the last four decades, the obesity rate for ages six to 11 has more than quadrupled, from 4.2 percent to 17 percent. In that same period, the obesity rate for ages 12 to 17 has more than tripled, from 4.6 percent to 17.6 percent. Even among ages two to five, the obesity rate is now 12.4 percent.
- Obesity prevalence differs by racial and ethnic groups:
  - Among adults, 35.7 percent of non-Hispanic blacks are obese, compared with 28.7 percent of Hispanics and 23.7 percent of non-Hispanic whites.
  - Among youth ages two to 19, 38 percent of Mexican Americans are obese or overweight, compared with 34.9 percent of non-Hispanic blacks and 31 percent of non-Hispanic whites.
- Medical costs of treating obesity-related problems were estimated at up to $147 billion in 2008 – more than nine percent of annual U.S. medical spending, compared with 6.5 percent in 1998.
- An obese older teenager has up to an 80 percent chance of becoming an obese adult.
- Overweight and obese children are at increased risk for serious, chronic health problems, including diabetes, heart disease, stroke, hypertension, asthma, sleep apnea, and certain types of cancer.
- Thirty-one states now have adult obesity rates exceeding 25 percent, and four states have adult rates of 30 percent or higher.
- Mississippi, the poorest state in the nation, has the highest rates of obesity and overweight: 32.5 percent of adults are obese, and 44.4 percent of children are obese or overweight.
- Seven of the 10 states with the country’s highest obesity rates also have the highest poverty rates.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Trust for America’s Health, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity
**Food, Inc.**
Film website with links to trailer and action campaigns:
www.foodincmovie.com
Participant Media’s action website, with links to campaigns, resources, and blogs:
www.Takepart.com

**Obesity/Prevention Information, Studies, Fact Sheets**
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention map and racial disparities:
www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/trends.htm
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation links to studies, programs, and additional resources on childhood obesity and obesity prevention:
www.rwjf.org/childhoodobesity
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity facts, news, resources, and events:
www.revseychildhoodobesity.org
F as in Fat 2009: A state-by-state obesity analysis and policy recommendations:
www.healthyamericans.org/reports/obesity2009/
BMI calculator for adults and youth:
www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi
The Washington Post obesity health effects interactive graphic:
www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/health/childhoodobesity/obesityeffects.htm
Center for Science in the Public Interest childhood obesity rates fact sheet:
Time Magazine “Fat Five” interactive site:
www.time.com/time/covers/1101040607/fatfive/5.htm

**Community Action/Best Practices**
CDC recommended community strategies and case studies:
Leadership for Healthy Communities Action Strategies Toolkit:
Promising Strategies for Creating Healthy Eating and Active Living Environments:
Case studies of healthy communities:
www.activelivingbydesign.org/sites/default/files/HEdLessons_from_communities_FINAL2.pdf
Pennsylvania’s Food Trust Fresh-Food Financing Initiative:
www.thefoodtrust.org/php/programs/supermarket/campaign.php
Steps for starting a community garden:
www.communitygarden.org/learn/starting-a-community-garden.php
United States Department of Agriculture food security grant program:
www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/food/in_focus/hunger_if/competitive.html
Tips for starting a farmers market:
www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/EC/EC-739.pdf
Farm to School programs:
www.farmtoschool.org
USDA’s Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food:
www.youtube.com/usa

**Books**

**Additional Resources**

**Food, Inc. Film-Related Resources**

U.S. Health and Human Services Physical Activity Guidelines:
www.health.gov/paguidelines

**School Lunch/Nutrition Policy, Resources, Background**

Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act fact sheet:
Interactive cafeteria nutrition activity:
www.foodincmovie.com/hungry-for-change-cafeteria.php
Center for Science in the Public Interest school nutrition standards fact sheet:
CSPI school meal recommendations:
Soda tax analysis:
www.rwjf.org/files/research/20090715beveragetaxresearchbrief.pdf
New York Times soda tax article:
Graph showing changing costs of soda versus changing cost of fresh fruit and vegetables:
www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2009/05/20/business/20leonhardt.graf01.ready.html
CDC guide to eating fresh fruits and veggies, with interactive recipe tools:
www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov
Inexpensive, nutritious food recipes:
www.cookforgood.com

**Community Action/Best Practices**

CDC recommended community strategies and case studies:
Leadership for Healthy Communities Action Strategies Toolkit:
Promising Strategies for Creating Healthy Eating and Active Living Environments:
Case studies of healthy communities:
www.activelivingbydesign.org/sites/default/files/HEdLessons_from_communities_FINAL2.pdf
Pennsylvania’s Food Trust Fresh-Food Financing Initiative:
www.thefoodtrust.org/php/programs/supermarket/campaign.php
Steps for starting a community garden:
www.communitygarden.org/learn/starting-a-community-garden.php
United States Department of Agriculture food security grant program:
www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/food/in_focus/hunger_if/competitive.html
Tips for starting a farmers market:
www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/EC/EC-739.pdf
Farm to School programs:
www.farmtoschool.org
USDA’s Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food:
www.youtube.com/usa

**Books**
## Acknowledgments

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active Voice Staff</th>
<th>Participant Media Staff</th>
<th>Guide Contributors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ellen Schneider</td>
<td>John Schreiber</td>
<td>Zaldy Serrano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</td>
<td>EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, SOCIAL ACTION &amp; ADVOCACY</td>
<td>DESIGN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Green</td>
<td>Jeff Sakson</td>
<td>Sarah Treuhaft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAMPAIGN COORDINATOR, GUIDE WRITER</td>
<td>VICE PRESIDENT, PUBLICITY</td>
<td>SENIOR ASSOCIATE, POLICYLINK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maikiko James</td>
<td>Christina Lindstrom</td>
<td>Debbie Zambetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROGRAM COORDINATOR</td>
<td>MANAGER, SOCIAL ACTION CAMPAIGN DEVELOPMENT &amp; OPERATIONS</td>
<td>COPY EDITOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Moretti</td>
<td>Sarah Newman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPERATIONS MANAGER</td>
<td>RESEARCH MANAGER, SOCIAL ACTION &amp; ADVOCACY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaady Salehi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROGRAM DIRECTOR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Active Voice uses film, television, and multimedia to spark social change from grassroots to grass tops. Our team of strategic communications specialists works with mediamakers, funders, advocates, and thought leaders to put a human face on the issues of our times. We frame and beta-test key messages, develop national and local partnerships, plan and execute high profile, outcome-oriented events, repurpose digital content for web and viral distribution, produce ancillary and educational resources, and consult with industry and sector leaders. Since our inception in 2001, Active Voice has built a diverse portfolio of story-based campaigns focusing on issues including immigration, criminal justice, healthcare, and sustainability. [www.activevoice.net](http://www.activevoice.net)

Participant believes that a good story well told can truly make a difference in how one sees the world. Whether it is a feature film, documentary or other form of media, Participant exists to tell compelling, entertaining stories that also create awareness of the real issues that shape our lives. [www.participantmedia.com](http://www.participantmedia.com)

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