

## ‘Food, Inc.’: An Undercooked Documentary With Simply Too Much on Its Plate

Submitted by [Ebeth](#) [1] on June 19, 2009 - 1:11pm

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – The side effect of a well-executed horror film is lack of sleep. The side effect of a well-executed documentary on corruption of our food supply is lack of appetite. Personally? I left “Food, Inc.,” went straight to lunch and had a big ole’ fried-chicken salad.



Businessmen in “Food, Inc.,” which is a Magnolia Pictures release.

*Photo credit: Magnolia Pictures*

This statement about my salad is not said out of any sort of support for a meat-eating versus non-meat-eating lifestyle. One’s beliefs about these things are a right and are to be respected.

The statement about my salad is made merely to point out that this documentary from Robert Kenner (director of “Two Days in October”), Eric Schlosser (author of “Fast Food Nation”) and Michael Pollan (author of “Omnivore’s Dilemma”) about the “behind the scenes” of the American food supply fails to make immediate change.

It’s certainly not that some of the information and images presented in “Food, Inc.” aren’t disturbing. They are. From cows crippled by maltreatment, pigs knee deep in their own feces and chickens toppled by genetic altering to a mother’s grief over a son lost to E. coli contamination, the film delivers in small doses what is expected in such an undertaking.

However, amid those dashes of disturbing images lies an undercooked documentary with simply too much on its plate.



The 93-minute film attempts to cover the spread and creation of bacteria and illness within the food system, the maltreatment of animals, genetics gone wrong, problems with cost, political corruption, corruption within the food manufacturers, depletion of nutrition, death and legal ramifications due to tainted food, problems with technology, patenting issues, organic versus corporate farming, problems with marketing, etc. A film series with a more in-depth look into each of these important topics may have been a better approach.



The Orozcos in "Food, Inc.," which is a Magnolia Pictures release.

*Photo credit: Magnolia Pictures*

The lack of focus and lack of genuine substance given to almost all of these issues leaves the moviegoer fidgety and uncomfortable in their cinema seat and suddenly reminiscent of a particle-board junior-high school desk.

Unfortunately for this film, one of the most valuable elements of education is learning to separate fact from bias and to seek proof in the form of evidence. "Food, Inc." seems to cloud the presentation with a whole lot of bias and little proof.

For example, in the opening sequence, the filmmakers are working to convince the audience that large producers of chicken (namely Tyson and Purdue) are not only mistreating animals (and their workers) but also breeding bacteria in unhealthy conditions. They do so by repeating verbally and with text on the screen that Tyson refused to let them film a chicken facility with one of its farmers (Vince Edwards) and then refused to make a statement on film (as did Purdue).



Troy Roush in "Food, Inc.," which is a Magnolia Pictures release.

*Photo credit: Magnolia Pictures*



To have something on tape, the filmmakers then interview a farmer, Carole Morrison, who was let go from Purdue due to her facilities not being modernized. They follow her with cameras as she removes dead birds in her facility from the crowded live ones.

Both segments are simply an example of “evidence” supporting nothing. They’re inflated air time. Businesses choosing not to comment or appear in a film out to demonize them is not proof of wrongdoing (nor is it vindication).

Morrison’s angry bias is clear and, for obvious reasons, this footage can say little about the processes in Purdue’s contracted facilities (since she is no longer with the company). One wonders what kept the filmmakers from stopping the executives – Michael Moore style – in front of their offices to seek actual reactions.

Much more reliable research should be and needs to be done to support or refute many of the insinuations made by the film. There are many obvious holes in the information presented.



Barb Kowalczyk in “Food, Inc.,” which is a Magnolia Pictures release.

*Photo credit: Magnolia Pictures*

An additional example of failure in the filmmaking revolves around the team’s meetings with Joel Salatin of Polyface Farms. Taken directly from their Web site, Polyface prides themselves on their “non-industrial food production oasis” and raising their animals with space to graze and feed naturally in an eco-friendly manner. If one chooses to eat meat but cares about animal rights, this situation is as close as one can get to ideal.

However, much of Salatin’s argument for non-industrial meat processing is made as the audience watches the team kill and butcher the chickens. For those not used to the process (i.e. most of the American public), this disturbing visual overshadows much of the positive discussed.

“Food, Inc.” is not a total loss, though, as it does touch on many valid points. Healthy and organic foods being too costly for the average consumer is a genuine concern that warrants change. Further steps should be taken to ensure safety from pesticides, bacteria and illness. Industrial food processing and marketing of unhealthy foods have gotten out of control. Political reform – including removal of people with clear bias from positions protecting the American public – should occur.

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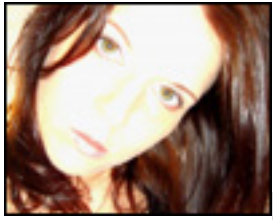
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Within “Food, Inc.,” we hear yet another cry for the reinforcement of animal rights. One aches at images of baby chicks born into a world where they’re immediately slammed about by machinery.

One of the most disturbing images from the film is a conscious cow locked in a large device, which frames a hole created in the cow’s side that leads directly to its insides. There is little explanation for why this is done as a full-fisted man digs into the cow and prods at its stomach. PETA?

Successful in snippets as an "introductory film" to those with little knowledge of animal rights or nutrition issues, "Food, Inc." proves to be regurgitation (of information) to those already familiar with healthy eating practices. Imagery from the film will best find its home played in front of Congress or in the classroom but will hopefully (despite its rush) resound within the general public. As a film, "Food, Inc." with its "too much, too little" approach leaves much to be desired.

*"Food, Inc." from director Robert Kenner opened on April 3, 2009 at the Wisconsin Film Festival, in limited cities on June 12, 2009 and in Chicago on June 19, 2009. "Food, Inc." is rated "PG" for some thematic material and disturbing images.*



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