

## **Eating is an Agricultural Act**

Americans are constantly barraged with media; penetrating advertisements, coupons, displays, articles, movies, (not so subtly) sneaking into our life every day. The once simple decision of what to eat has quickly become an ever daunting task with each morsel we consume. With so many food options, brands, and diets, media “helps” facilitate the question of what to eat by placing the idea right in the forefront and explaining its benefits and (not as frequently) its consequences. According to Magna Director of Forecasting Brian Weiser, \$161 billion are spent on advertising each year. Of that overwhelming amount, around \$10 billion are spent solely on food advertising (Federal Trade Commission). This does not include every time a product is strategically placed in your favorite television program, or is talked about in that magazine you read at the gym, or is seen on your best friend’s t-shirt.

It is no question that media is powerful, and all Americans experience media in one way or another every day. Another daily occurrence -though more a necessity than an annoyance- is food consumption. My curiosity, though, lies where the two meet. As a food lover, Slow Food enthusiast, and a locavore, I am curious as to how people make their food decisions and the power media has had on the organic and local food movement. I am also curious how small scale local and organic farmers can increase their sales to create a better functioning and less environmentally detrimental food system.

I question the social movements of food consumption and how such a simple act as eating lunch went from: gathering vegetables and a pail full of milk, to bologna on *Wonder* bread, to a *Big Mac* with fries, and recently to the “healthy choice” of *Subway* sandwiches and fast food salads. I question where this movement has been and where it will take us.

“Eating is an agricultural act. Eating ends the annual drama of the food economy that begins with planting and birth. Most eaters, however, are no longer aware that this is true. They think of food as an agricultural product, perhaps, but they do not think of themselves as participants in agriculture. They think of themselves as ‘consumers.’ If they think beyond that, they recognize that they are passive consumers. They buy what they want — **or what they have been persuaded to want** — within the limits of what they can get. They pay, mostly without protest, what they are charged.”

Wendell Berry’s *The Pleasures of Eating*

I believe that if our world is to change for the better, then we, as Americans, as humans, must first change our processes of food consumption. For that, we must discover how to effectively share information and how to harness and control the power of media.

## **US Destruction via Food in the Last 100 Years**

It is no doubt that Americans are consuming more food in 2012 than any year in US history. New technology and farming techniques have undeniably been major contributors in this rise of food production. Growing food is much easier than it has ever been, and the increased yields per square unit are immense. But efficiency and increased amounts of food available are not the only culprits in this influx of food consumption: increased appetite, media usage, and industrialization have played major roles in our hungry manipulation.

### *Changing Food Trends*

The early 1900s were still simpler times of farming and hunting, with meals heavier in red meat and dairy than today (but also less processed foods and more vegetables). With the great immigration of the early 1900s brought new flavors to America: Italian, Jewish, German, Irish, etc. This was also the beginning of a processed food era. Foods like cereals, cookies, and cakes

were being made in factories and sold to Americans. Yet, still the proliferation of these foods was not great (digitalhistory).

The years between 1910-1945 showed less food consumption across the board due to the World Wars and the great depression. There was a huge reduction in the amount of protein consumed (typically the most expensive portion of a meal) and Americans shifted to making huge one pot meals to feed many on a small budget: chili, soup, pasta, etc. Foods like spam and crackers hit the shelves these years for both poor American citizens and soldiers in need of food that would not spoil.

World War II also brought food rations, meaning limited amounts of meat, sugar, butter, milk, cheese, eggs, and coffee. With a loss of foods and a loss of kitchen help (due to increasing poverty levels), many households began the switch to convenient processed foods. Though there was a switch to these processed foods, there was also an urban garden movement promoted and advertised by the US government to encourage people to grow vegetables for themselves and their neighbors:

“The government encouraged Americans to plant Victory Gardens...The vegetables from these tiny plots of land, or sometimes larger cooperatives tended to by several families, helped to fill out compromised dinners. Reflecting the times, women’s magazines of the day featured recipes for fresh vegetables, while the vegetable sections of popular cookbooks fattened.”

Leites Culinaria

The 1950s, as everyone knows, was an era of “money can buy happiness.” Consumerism and advertising was on the rise, and so was the food movement towards convenience foods. National highways (or as I like to call them Food Destruction Highways) were being built and the shipment of food across the country became easier than ever. The 1950s was a baby boom for not only Americans, but for American fast food businesses; McDonalds, Burger King, and KFC were all born and raised into healthy thriving businesses. Television was on the rise, and

commercials proliferated households with ideas that housewives needed to step out of “traditional” roles, opting for prepared food to “free” themselves from the kitchen and purchased appliances to make their lives “easier.” TV dinners, fish sticks, and cake mixes, were favorites of American housewives, and set much of the stage of what was to come in the future.

The 1960s, with the immergence of the counter culture, were a strange mix of hyper consumers of processed and fast foods, along with a strong oppositional movement towards natural and slow foods:

“The late ’60s brought social unrest, growing tension over the Vietnam War and hippies with an unquenchable hunger for unprocessed, proletarian food made from scratch. Derogatorily referred to as granola-crunching, Birkenstock-wearing kind of folk, they eschewed anything prepackaged and began making their own products such as fresh bread, peanut butter, tahini and hummus. Eventually even the most establishment-entrenched conservatives became curious. While it may have been a novelty to travel to the local cooperative to pick up fresh bean sprouts and gawk, it wasn’t long before some of the more adventurous traded in suits for tie-dyed T-shirts and opened restaurants. Regular items on the menu were vegetarian chili, guacamole, gazpacho, zucchini bread, lemon bars, carrot cake and, of course, granola.”

Leites Culinaria

The 1970s were much like the 1960s, a continuing and more radicalizing spectrum of the food market. On one side: growing fast food, sugar, and fat consumption. On the other side: a radical movement of farm to school movements, back to the basics cooking and living, and increased desire for whole foods.

“The counter culture did not have much good to say about whiteness, whether in foods clothes, or politics. As one underground newspaper put it, “Don’t eat white, eat right, and fight.” Whiteness meant Minute Rice, Cool Whip, instant mashed potatoes, white sugar, peeled apples... and of course, Wonder Bread. Wonder Bread came in for special attack because it was so symbolically rich. Long advertised as the builder of strong bodies in eight ways, Wonder was the best selling brand. A first cousin by corporate marriage to that other expression of tasteless modern culture, the Twinkie, Wonder Bread’s manufacture could be taken to represent the white flight of the 1950s and 1960s.”

Warren Belasco: *Food and the Counter culture: A Story of Bread and Politics*

The latter end of the spectrum was a minority of Americans and did not reflect the majority values at all. That minority though, pioneered particularly by Alice Waters, reintroduced seasonal, local, and natural ingredients. Advertisements for fast food were becoming more clever and prevalent with ads posted on every billboard, baseball game, and amusement park. The majority of those who resisted these advertisements (counterculture) were resisted by society, so they made no real impact.

The biggest changes in American food consumption, though, happened within the last 30 years. The media of the 1950s had told housewives they needed more convenience and freedom, increasing the sales of processed foods. Building on that concept in the 1980s, businesses used media to push *low fat*, *nonfat*, and *low calorie* foods onto the American people, leading society to believe that these foods would benefit them and keep them from joining the majority of overweight and obese Americans. By the late 1980s, “the fat density of home foods had declined to 36.4 percent of total calories from fat, compared with 38.7 percent for away from home foods” (USDA). Low fat milk and other dairy increased by nearly 10 percent from the 1970s to the 1990s, while whole milk decreased nearly 15 percent.

From the 1980s to today, this low fat/ low cholesterol diet has continued to skyrocket. Americans are now eating 57 more pounds of meat per year than in the 1950s, but the amount of red meat (“high” fat) has decreased while the amount of poultry (“low” fat) has increased dramatically. The consumption of eggs (“high” cholesterol) has also decreased by nearly 33 percent. All of these drops are due to recent scare tactics by media about fat and cholesterol’s affects on the body. The 1980s also brought the famous nonfat fat alternative, *Olestra*. This was a joyous event and wonderful product for American consumers until realizing the negative side effects on the body, ultimately causing *Olestra*’s demise.

While Americans have cut their fat consumption at home, sugar and refined grain consumption reached an all time high in 1999. To this day, consumers are now eating well over the recommended amount of grains per day according to the Food Guide Pyramid, yet, only about 7 percent of citizens meet the whole grain requirement. With the invention of High Fructose Corn Syrup in the 1970s, caloric sweeteners consumption has increased 39 percent from the 1950s to present

“In 2000, each American consumed an average 152 pounds of caloric sweeteners, 3 pounds below 1999’s record average 155 pounds. That amounted to more than two-fifths of a pound—or 52 teaspoonfuls—of added sugars per person per day in 2000. Of that 52 teaspoons, ERS estimates that Americans wasted or otherwise lost 20 teaspoons, resulting in an average intake of about 32 teaspoons of added sugars per person per day. USDA recommends that the average person on a 2,000-calorie daily diet include no more than 40 grams of added sugars. That’s about 10 teaspoons, or the amount of sugar in a 12-ounce soft drink. Sugar—including sucrose, corn sweeteners, honey, maple syrup, and molasses—is ubiquitous and often hidden. In a sense, sugar is the number one food additive.”

USDA’s *Profiling Food Consumption*

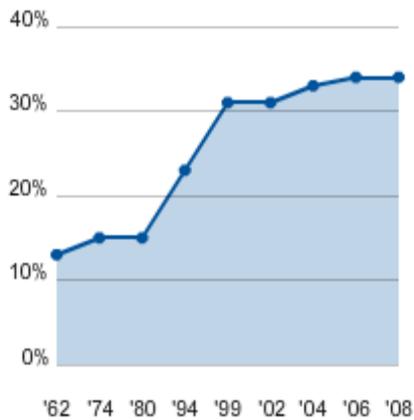
Though America is one of the highest food consuming nations in the world, citizens spend the least percentage of income on food for the home: US 5-7 percent, Canada 10 percent, UK 11 percent, Philippines 50 percent (slowfooditalia).

Present day US food consumption is an incredibly jumbled mixture of different ideologies and powers. The consumption of soft drinks is up and milk down. Caloric sweeteners have slightly decreased since the 1990s. *Subway* has been voted number one fast food restaurant in the United States two years in a row. People are concerned with pink slime and High Fructose Corn Syrup, yet still continue to eat fast food and conventionally grown foods. Organic foods, farmers markets, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) are on the rise. The Slow Food organization has gone international. But what does this all mean? Is America finally shifting its eating process back to an agricultural one? Has media tricked society once again (like the Olestra

of the 1980s) into thinking something is healthy? Will media continue to help this movement of organic and local products?

### *Changing American Bodies*

Percentage of obese adults over time:\*



Percentage of obese kids, ages 6-11, over time:\*

There is no debate that Americans are more overweight today than any time in history. Currently, Americans are consuming more food and hundreds more calories per person than pre-1970s (USDA). The National Center for Disease Control (CDC) shows that obesity rates were fairly stable and low (about 15 percent) until about 1980s where the percentage skyrocketed (see chart), rising about 46 percent from 1980 to 2008. There has been a recent plateau in obesity rates over the past 10 years, showing some signs of

(not quite direct) improvement and a possible nutritional knowledge increase. As Donna Ryan, president of the Obesity Society, summarizes it, “it may have plateaued for now, but to level off at 34 percent obesity is no great achievement. It's still very, very alarming” (Hellmich).

With the rise in obesity comes an obvious rise in diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. Nutritional diseases are costing Americans 147 billion dollars a year in medical bills according to the CDC.

Specialized diets are on the rise in America as well. According to a report from the market-research group Packaged Facts, sales of gluten-free products in the United States have grown by an average of 28 percent over the past five years. The vegan, vegetarian, pescatarian, sugar-free, gluten-free, organic, Mediterranean, Adkins, raw food, 100-mile, and cleanse diets

have affected American citizens, as well as media and producers. Body awareness has risen, but information is numerous, skewed, persuaded, confusing, and statistical, making it difficult to know what is right from wrong. But when media is there to “help,” the most influential (advertisements, product placement, etc) often misguides and deceives citizens into consumption.

## **Roles and Effects of Media**

After reviewing the history of food trends in America, it is undeniable the power of mass media on food consumption. The question is “which of these media sources is most and least effective in portraying this information?” and “what forms of media must Americans use to stop the rise of obesity, nutritional negligence, environmental degradation, and to increase the sales of organic and locally produced food?” Two areas of media I have analyzed for their help and hindrance are educational and commercial communication. Educational includes: books and documentaries, and news sources and blogs; while commercial includes: magazines, and television programs and advertisements.

### ***Educational: Books and Documentaries***

Books and documentaries have historically played important roles in both the spread of information and been catalysts of incredible movements. *The Communist Manifesto*, *The Origin of Species*, and *Common Sense* have all caused remarkable shifts in societal movements including taboo questioning of the government, lifestyles, and religions.

Many books have arisen from individuals questioning our food system and the problems with the industrialized food system. One of the first to ever talk about such a thing, in a more

broad sense, was Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854). He was a pioneer of all things sustainable in a world of individuals who sought quite the opposite. The Industrial Revolution was in full force, and yet, Thoreau chose to pursue a life of self-sufficiency and simplicity. Though most of the book focuses on politics, economy, and everyday musings, he does spend a portion exemplifying the importance of food cultivation and questioning the necessity of meat-eating. He was a great influence on the transcendentalist movement of the time and continues to influence people of the importance of being connected to the world not separate from it.

Over the next 100 years, books on industrial agriculture were few and far between, and not many made very strong impacts. That was true until the Green Revolution, reigning from the 1940s to the 1970s, when agricultural technologies such as pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, irrigation projects, and genetically modified (GMO) foods came to change the way we would farm forever. One woman saw the destruction and the negative impacts of this new technology on the environment and in the health of all living organisms. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) is widely believed to have helped catalyze the environmental movement of the 1960s. *Silent Spring* is less of critique and more of a strong warning for all Americans about the horrible and detrimental effects of pesticides.

“Over increasingly large areas of the United States, spring now comes unheralded by the return of the birds, and the early mornings are strangely silent where once they were filled with the beauty of bird song.”

Rachel Carson

She describes a world where the chemicals and pesticides had killed all the birds and many of the animals; the eerie silence of a spring with no living things. DDT was the main chemical pesticide she cautioned against.

“Silent Spring took Carson four years to complete. It meticulously described how DDT entered the food chain and accumulated in the fatty tissues of animals, including human beings, and caused cancer and genetic damage. A single application on a crop, she wrote, killed insects for weeks and months, and not only the targeted insects but countless more, and remained toxic in the environment even after it was diluted by rainwater. Carson concluded that DDT and other pesticides had irrevocably harmed birds and animals and had contaminated the entire world food supply. The book's most haunting and famous chapter, "A Fable for Tomorrow," depicted a nameless American town where all life -- from fish to birds to apple blossoms to human children -- had been "silenced" by the insidious effects of DDT.”

Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC)

Her work caused her much trouble in her own life; lawsuits and threats were common issues for her. These problems, though terrible and heart wrenching, really help to exemplify the impact her writing had on society's view of industrial agriculture. In 1972, DDT was banned and Americans had a new sense of the vulnerability of the environment to human intervention (NRDC).

Since Rachel Carson's groundbreaking book, the environmentalist movement has bore an incredible diversity of writers, ideologies, and research. Author and speaker Wendell Berry has written many essays about the harmful effects of big "agri-business" and the steep decline of small scale farms starting in the 1970s. He is a great opponent to mechanical and industrial agriculture and its damaging effects to the environment. In 1977, Berry published *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, calling for Americans to get back to rural roots and embracing the beauty of being a good neighbor, farmer, and environmentalist.

“Without regret, with less and less interest in the disciplines of thrift and conservation ... our present agriculture wastes topsoil, water, fossil fuel, and human energy... We are eating thoughtlessly, as no other entire society ever has been able to do... No matter how urban our life, our bodies live by farming; we come from the Earth and return to it, and so we live in agriculture as we live in flesh”

Wendell Berry

Through his in-depth research and insightful rants, Berry has inspired many recent authors. One of those, who has gained great fame in the last five years, is Michael Pollan.

Michael Pollan has written numerous books on the importance of eating outside of industrial agriculture; coming back to the Earth, not eating foods “your great grandmother wouldn’t recognize as food,” not eating food with more than five ingredients, etc. He has completely taken Americans by storm and opened the eyes of many ill-informed citizens. One of his most critical food exposures has been about High Fructose Corn Syrup (HFCS). Pollan’s thorough research about the harmful effects of HFCS on the environment (the over production of high yield high pesticide corn) and on the body (higher levels of sugar consumption leading to obesity and diseases) has significantly affected the sales, production, and use of the substance in many processed items. Though Pollan’s position against HFCS was more about Americans high sugar consumption and how society should eat less sugars in general, he has really gotten backlash about the syrup and caused much controversy. Corn farmers and HFCS producers have retorted against the claim; even creating commercials to promote it and compare it to other sweeteners. The HFCS industry has even made a shift to calling the product “corn sugar” and the campaigns are running rampant, even creating a webpage to “inform” the public about the myths and facts:



“Myth: High fructose corn syrup is to blame for obesity and diabetes.  
Reality: Nope. There is no scientific evidence that high fructose corn syrup is to blame for obesity and diabetes. In fact, the U.S. Department of Agriculture data shows that consumption of high fructose corn syrup has actually been declining while obesity and diabetes rates continued to rise (see chart). Around the world, obesity levels are also rising even though HFCS consumption is limited outside of the U.S. Many other factors contribute to rising obesity levels including changes in lifestyle, diet and exercise and are unrelated to HFCS.”



**Consider all three types of sugar.**

Use chosen carbohydrates, beta sugars and Zeta sugars. Over the past several years, Zeta sugar has been getting ground. Today, corn sugars represent 20 percent of the market. Conventional media reports that corn sugars will have an even greater share of the sweetener market. This is incorrect.

**Better economy:** Over the long haul, areas where sweetener processing is low as they are now, corn has proved to be the best response.

**Better reliability:** Corn is a 100 percent domestic crop, not dependent on foreign sources.

**Better variety:** Available in a wide variety of sugar combinations ranging from pure dextrose to fructose-rich syrups. There is also the right cost value combination for your particular application.

**Better acceptance:** Consumer research shows individual corn-derived sweeteners are preferred on food labels.

For more information on how our products can benefit your business, contact us at 1-800-368-3636 or visit our website at [www.cornproducts.com](http://www.cornproducts.com).  
 International Phone: Engineering Dept., New Jersey 07032  
 Or call 800-368-3636, 9:00am-5:00pm, (NJ) 908-368-3636

**CornProducts**  
 SWEETENERS & PHOSPHATES

“Myth: High fructose corn syrup is not natural.  
 Reality: Wrong again. High fructose corn syrup is made from corn, a natural grain product and is a natural sweetener. High fructose corn syrup contains no artificial or synthetic ingredients or color additives. It also meets the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s requirements for use of the term ‘natural.’”

SweetSurprise.com

These attempts to rekindle the once great relationship Americans had with HFCS shows signs of the immense impact Pollan’s books were able to have on the food mentality of society.

Pollan, along with authors such as Barbara Kingslover of *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, and Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon of *Plenty*, have sprung a recent and incredible uprising of individuals doing local and 100-mile diets. These authors have encouraged people to eat closer to home, trust their neighbors, eat seasonally, and learn to preserve.

Jessica Prentice, chef and co-founder of the restaurant cooperative Three Stone Hearth in Berkley, California, created and coined the term “locavore” in 2005 when describing her mission and food values to a reporter (West). Since then, “locavore” was chosen as the Oxford Word of the Year in 2007, and in 2009, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary added the word to their collection and defined locavore as one who eats food grown locally whenever possible. This term that started in a small local article has ballooned and caused quite an impact on society. Books and authors have had an incredible influence on society and the food system.

In the past five to ten years, documentaries have also played huge roles in informing individuals of the importance of organic food. Debuting in 2008, *Food Inc.* caused quite a stir for many Americans, learning for the first time about the monopolization of the food (and especially

meat) industry, the prevalence of corn and soy in American diets, and the power of the food monopolies on USDA policies and regulations. For many Americans, the movie opened their eyes to the use of pesticides, the problems associated with contamination, and the treatment of animals in CAFOs. This documentary also included many well-known authors and speakers, making the information all too real and impossible not to believe; authors such as Eric Schlosser (*Fast Food Nation*) and Michael Pollan (*Omnivores Dilemma*).

One major contribution of this film was the exposure of the seed and GMO tyrants known as Monsanto. Monsanto had been terrorizing our food system and our farmers for years, yet many individuals not actively involved in producing food knew very little about the monopolization and even less about the



problems that arise when using GMO seeds (such as “super weeds”). Recent grassroots groups have popped up such as SayNoToGMO and big business producers have now been forced to switch to non-GMO products to continue selling their products to the masses (e.g. Silk Soymilk). The NON-GMO Project began in 2005 and has gained much publicity and praise since the film (and other such films) has been released.

In 2009, as a response to the film, fast food chain *Chipotle* changed its entire mission statement and began to prepare and purchase food in a much different way. *Chipotle*’s “Food With Integrity” mission states, “Food with Integrity is our commitment to finding the very best ingredients raised with respect for the animals, the environment, and the farmers.” The business claims that it sources local and organic produce when it can and uses livestock that has not been given hormones. All of this effort spawned from the chain owner’s reaction to *Food Inc.*

### ***Educational: News sources and Blogs***

News sources (including television, newspapers, educational magazines, and radio) have always been at the forefront of debates and new information, including the controversy between organically and conventionally grown food. Any and all new information is printed the minute the research is made public. There seems to be no regard in newspapers for the long-term validity of the information as long as it is new and interesting. I have found that rarely do news organizations “break” food stories, but merely wait until the information is presented to them.

News sources often follow the latest food trends, reporting on what is most popular and often causing “food scares” or “food hypes.” This kind of reporting can easily help, as well as completely destroy, a movement in a matter of days. Reports on Mad Cow Disease, Salmonella, and Botulism have informed people of the importance of raising and processing food in sanitary ways, but the results of the communication are often skewed; instead of explaining to individuals that eating meat not raised in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) can increase the health and decrease the likelihood of disease, people are often just discouraged from consuming any beef in fear of Mad Cow Disease. For example, in 2008, during the largest recall of beef by Westland/Hallmark Meat Company, the *New York Times* wrote articles in two different manners: the Humane Society exposing the scandal behind the tainted meat, and how to make the industrialized system cleaner. There was no talk about downsizing CAFOs, or going to pasture raised cattle.

“The video was embarrassing for the Department of Agriculture, as inspectors are supposed to be monitoring slaughterhouses for abuse... amid a sharp increase in the number of recalls tied to a particularly deadly form of the E. coli pathogen. There were 21 recalls of beef related to the potentially deadly strain of E. coli last year, compared with eight in 2006 and five in 2005. No one is quite sure what caused the increase, though theories include the cyclical nature of pathogens and changes in cattle-feeding practices caused by the ethanol boom.”

New York Times “*Largest Recall of Ground Beef is Ordered*” (Feb 2008)

The article claims that “no one is quite sure” of the issues and rise in disease, yet multiple studies had been done and have continued to be done in regards to the density issues in CAFOs. The article is more concerned with the “tyrants” behind the crime and what their feelings are. It is also a criticism of the government, but offers no important or critical information to the American people. The *Washington Post* wrote almost identical articles.

The most recent food scare reported is the exposure of the Pink Slime. Whistleblower Gerald Zirnestein (former scientist at USDA) informed the nation of the controversial Pink Slime (a highly processed filler used in ground beef and other meat products) in early 2012, spawning an outbreak among unknowing Americans (Avila). Many were outraged and disgusted at the idea of this Pink Slime, and industries were forced to do away with it in their products. Most articles explain the process by which the Pink Slime is made and how many big businesses (like *McDonalds* and meat packing companies) are doing away with it, but these articles do not explain how it could be avoided in the first place. The articles could have described that Pink Slime could have been avoided by buying locally and organically, instead they report on how *McDonalds* will not use Pink Slime anymore, so America should not fear, because they will still be able to buy their *Big Macs*.

“Soon afterward, McDonald's and other fast-food companies discontinued their use of it. Major supermarket chains including Kroger and Stop & Shop vowed to stop selling beef with the low-cost filler. West Des Moines, Iowa-based Hy-Vee initially said it would stop selling beef with the product in its 235 stores, but then reversed course, saying it would carry beef with the product but identify it so consumers had a choice.”

USA Today “*Pink Slime Controversy...*” (May 2012)

The articles did help in a way though; Cargill meat packing company saw “80 percent of its customers for finely textured beef disappear after the controversy erupted in March” (Ellis), proving that Americans truly do listen to the news and react strongly to its information.

“Cleaver's Market in Sioux Falls, S.D., saw a 25% increase in its in-house ground beef sales, manager Tyler Honke said. Sioux Falls resident Laura Goodhope is a regular at Cleaver's. She says the meat is fresh and, with beef ground on site, she doesn't have to worry about what's in it: "I think the quality is immeasurably better."

USA Today

Much of the real research and news collection power lies with independent journalists and bloggers. Much of the latest breaking information about food has come from blogs and their associated activist groups. *Mercy for Animals* was one of the first blog sites to expose the disturbing cruelty of cows and other livestock in CAFOs, and bring awareness to the public sphere. The *Times Magazine* science blog “Ecocentric” has a lot more to say regarding animal cruelty, organic foods, and pollution, than in its printed articles.

Many interesting blog articles I have found question the recent upsurge of purchasing organic foods, stating that people are so engulfed in purchasing organics that they are buying food from farther away in order to keep from by conventional.

“...here's another technical point that Whole Foods fails to mention and that highlights what has gone wrong with the organic-food movement in the last couple of decades. Let's say you live in New York City and want to buy a pound of tomatoes in season. Say you can choose between conventionally grown New Jersey tomatoes or organic ones grown in Chile. Of course, the New Jersey tomatoes will be cheaper. They will also almost certainly be fresher, having traveled a fraction of the distance. But which is the more eco-conscious choice? In terms of energy savings, there's no contest: Just think of the fossil fuels expended getting those organic tomatoes from Chile. Which brings us to the question: Setting aside freshness, price, and energy conservation, should a New Yorker just instinctively choose organic, even if the produce comes from Chile? A tough decision, but you can make a self-interested case for the social and economic benefit of going Jersey, especially if you prefer passing fields of tomatoes to fields of condominiums when you tour the Garden State.

Slate “*Is Whole Foods Wholesome?*” (Mar 2006)

This kind of information, though possibly hindering the organic food movement, is important to consider. The direction are food system needs to go is a combination of purchasing organically

and locally grown foods, and these kinds of forward thinking bloggers are a crucial part of correctly informing the American people.

### ***Commercial: Magazines***

Magazines are very complicated instruments of relaying information because of their “educational meets advertising” qualities. Many magazines -especially women’s and men’s health and lifestyle articles- are a mixture of communicating scientific research and statistics, while selling the products of their advertisers and financial supporters. This can be especially misleading in conveying which foods are important and nutritional, while forcing consumerism. Many lifestyle magazines present foods for a “diet” so the only nutritional information given is calories and grams of fat or carbohydrates. The food is seen merely as a source of weight loss and not as a nutrition-bearing item. For example, *Fitness Magazine*’s organics and health section of 2012 boasts a “Healthy Food Awards: Best Breakfast Bars” section, claiming that the “70 percent organic bar” *Luna Bar Chocolate Dipped Coconut* “contains 35 percent of the 1,000 milligrams of calcium you need in a day, plus vitamin D” at 190 calories. This bar sounds so appealing, being at 70 percent organic, but fails to mention the processing it takes to make the bars and the distance each ingredient and bar had to travel. Magazines are great at taking popular information like organics and convenience, and selling products that seem to be the best option for health and the environment.

These magazines often promote “magic” or “wonder” foods that do “amazing things.” Food hypes such as Acai berries and coconut water often cause mass consumption without real necessity, and these types of food items have to travel much further than many other nutritional foods that can be obtained.

“Coconut water can be something of an acquired taste, but Vita Coco gives it broader appeal with this blend of acai and pomegranate. You still get all the benefits of the electrolyte-packed coconut water (twice the potassium found in a banana), but thanks to the fruit, it tastes a bit more juice-like, while still managing to be super refreshing.”

Fitness Magazine “*What We’re Sipping On This Week*”

This kind of information often forces people to believe that without the product they will not be able to get adequate amounts of nutrients, or they may eliminate fresh fruits and vegetables and replace them with these products. Also, the meal plans often set forth by these magazines pay little attention to seasonal and local food options, but expect people to buy an assortment of tropical and fresh foods, though the article may be presented in winter when all that may be available are root vegetables and hearty greens. Recipe and food magazines seem to pay more attention to seasonal foods and offer recipes to use these foods. This may be more related to tradition and holidays than an actual commitment to local and seasonal foods.

Though magazines may not be exemplifying the importance of organic and local foods, their presence and impact on their audiences are strong. According to the Pew Research Center’s study on the State of News Media, of the top 25 circulating magazines, about half are food related or have a food section in them. Meaning that food articles in *Glamour*, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *The Oprah Magazine*, among others, are all widely read (these four magazines combine have a circulation of over 11.5 million) and could have profound impact on their readers.

### ***Commercial: Television Programs and Advertisements***

There are two very prominent ways in which television portray food: product placement and product discussion in programs, and advertisements.

Product placement, also known as embedded marketing or branded entertainment, is the act of placing a product in a context that does not include an advertisement as a sort of subliminal image to viewers. According to a Broadcasting & Cable report, “two thirds of advertisers employ ‘branded entertainment’ with the vast majority of that in commercial TV programming.” As a rule of thumb in regards to food, product placement will almost always be promoting a processed item of some kind; a can of *Coca Cola* in hand, a bag of *Doritos* on the coffee table, a box of *Chex* in the open cupboards. *Coca Cola* is constantly in front of the judges of *American Idol* and *Subway* sandwiches are often a meal for the contestants on the *Biggest Loser*. As previously mentioned, *Subway* has become the number one fast food choice for Americans, and shows like the really help to promote this ideology.

Sometimes, the product may even be written into the script. For example, in the classic American film *ET* the young boy lures the alien to him by throwing *Reese’s Pieces* around, or in the comedy *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*, the name of the product is right in the title and the talked about constantly throughout the film. According to the 1982 *Time Magazine* article *Dividends: How Sweet It Is*, “sales of the peanut butter-flavored candy shot up 65 percent in June after the release of *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*.” Product placement is undoubtedly a powerful tool in increasing sales of food items. Seldom, whole food items, like a basket of fruit, can be found in TV programs.

Cooking and food competition programs are currently some of the most watched programs on television. Michael Pollan wrote in a New York Times article *Out of the Kitchen, Onto the Couch*, “The Food Network can now be seen in nearly 100 million American homes and on most nights commands more viewers than any of the cable news channels.” So far, the Food Network has shows that boast the importance of fresh food, but none of the American

shows delve deeply into the importance of organically or locally grown foods. Canadian Food Network though, has developed the show *Manic Organic*, which has had great success with its Canadian viewers. *Manic Organic* is about a Canadian organic farmer who delivers his fresh produce to local restaurants, and occasionally helps out in the kitchen.

Jamie Oliver's *Food Revolution*, airing for the first time in 2010, was a reality television show dedicated to giving back to schools, creating organic school gardens, and raising awareness about childhood obesity. The show was canceled in 2011 due to the lack of commercial support and poor viewer ratings, though the campaign remains strong in its online presence (dailymail). The tricky nature of these organic food shows is apparent and producers seem wary to create a show of this nature.

Television advertisements, the most powerful and influential media source, are the biggest issues in the fight against conventional and fast foods. Fast food's incredible oligopolies and immense amount of money have created an advertising force that many cannot compete against. For example, "the \$11.26 billion spent on advertising by the food, beverage, and restaurant industries in 2004 dwarfed the mere \$9.55 million spent on communications for the federal and California '5 A Day' programs to encourage eating 5 or more servings of fruit and vegetables each day" (CPEHN). The "5 A Day" Program is part of a federal budget, does not directly promote organic or local, and is still struggling to compete with the big fast food businesses. But for people to begin to understand the importance of local and organic foods, they must first understand the importance of eating whole, unprocessed foods. Even this "low" budget plan by California (about \$4.5 million) helped increase vegetable and fruit consumption by 0.3 percent in two years (CPEHN). As of 2004, with a national budget of \$4.85 million, "the percentage of Americans who knew they should eat '5 A Day' has increased nearly five-fold-

from 8 to 36 percent- since [the] program began in 1991.” This shows that even small-scale budgets (ones that could be practiced by small-scale farmers) can be affective over time.

## **Conclusion**

Books and documentaries are undoubtedly capable of changing lives and altering ideologies. They have done so and continue to do so throughout history. The only downfall for the use of information distribution through books and documentaries is the time commitment and the search individuals must do to obtain the information. Unlike advertisements and newspaper articles, books and documentaries take hours to finish and must be sought after.

Newspapers and magazines are very important tools in spreading information rapidly, but a crucial aspect of utilizing news sources is to make sure the information is presented in an accurate way and to not cause food “scares” or “hypes.” Stressing the importance of organic food is great, but not at the expense of having it shipped from thousands of miles away. The delicate nature of news sources means creating a delicate way of presenting information so that it can not be skewed and is easily understood.

Newspapers are definitely the fastest and most efficient way to spread information; however, I believe that television will ultimately play the largest part in creating and sustaining a food movement towards eating locally, seasonally, and organically. The constant subliminal and conscious messaging that Americans are exposed to for around six hours a day help to facilitate every decision we make (NielsenRatings). If American television producers were forced to take the *Doritos* out of the hands of the actors and inserted carrots, or if Food Network programs exemplified their use of organic and local produce, or if local programming gave up its fast food commercial advertising spots to local farmers, then, only then, would Americans be engulfed in the world of wholesome nonconventional food.

To create a real, fast, and immense switch from conventional, to only organic, to local and organic, all media sources will have to be involved and the governmental will have to take some control. There will have to be a cap on the amount of money spent or airtime on nonorganic and nonlocal foods so that the smaller farms will be able to compete in such a fierce marketplace.

If this is not possible, then the next option for small organic and local farmers will be to use nontraditional methods of advertising and help promote their fellow neighbors and advocates to become involved in the issue: encouraging these individuals to write books and zines for all audiences, creating more blogs, creating social media sites, becoming more present on the internet, advertising with free local sources, using more word-of-mouth and “buzz” marketing, and getting children involved in farm events. The difficulty (and, in a way, ease) of promoting local and organic food is that the marketing will be place specific; what may work for one city, may not work for another. The budgets will, and can be, much smaller than a national marketing plan and can be more focused and community specific.

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