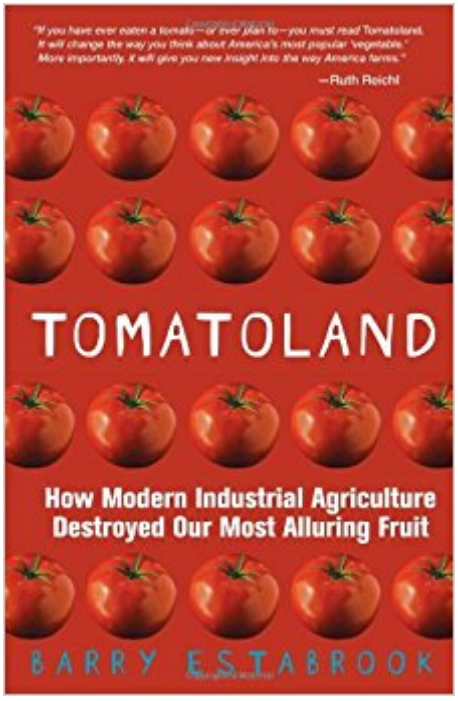
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Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit



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Synopsis

First paperback edition of the New York Times best-seller. Ã Â Based on a James Beard award-winning article from a leading voice on the politics of agribusiness, Tomatoland combines history, legend, passion for taste, and investigative reporting on modern agribusiness and environmental issues into a revealing, controversial look at the tomato, the fruit we love so much that we eat $4 billion-worth annually.2012 IACP Award Winner in the Food Matters categorySupermarket produce sections bulging with a year-round supply of perfectly round, bright red-orange tomatoes have become all but a national birthright. But in Tomatoland, which is based on his James Beard Award-winning article, "The Price of Tomatoes," investigative food journalist Barry Estabrook reveals the huge human and environmental cost of the $5 billion fresh tomato industry. Fields are sprayed with more than one hundred different herbicides and pesticides. Tomatoes are picked hard and green and artificially gassed until their skins acquire a marketable hue. Modern plant breeding has tripled yields, but has also produced fruits with dramatically reduced amounts of calcium, vitamin A, and vitamin C, and tomatoes that have fourteen times more sodium than the tomatoes our parents enjoyed. The relentless drive for low costs has fostered a thriving modern-day slave trade in the United States. How have we come to this point?Estabrook traces the supermarket tomato from its birthplace in the deserts of Peru to the impoverished town of Immokalee, Florida, a.k.a. the tomato capital of the United States. He visits the laboratories of seedsmen trying to develop varieties that can withstand the rigors of agribusiness and still taste like a garden tomato, and then moves on to commercial growers who operate on tens of thousands of acres, and eventually to a hillside field in Pennsylvania, where he meets an obsessed farmer who produces delectable tomatoes for the nation’s top restaurants.Throughout Tomatoland, Estabrook presents a who’s who cast of characters in the tomato industry: the avuncular octogenarian whose conglomerate grows one out of every eight tomatoes eaten in the United States; the ex-Marine who heads the group that dictates the size, color, and shape of every tomato shipped out of Florida; the U.S. attorney who has doggedly prosecuted human traffickers for the past decade; and the Guatemalan peasant who came north to earn money for his parents’ medical bills and found himself enslaved for two years.Tomatoland reads like a suspenseful whodunit as well as an expose of today’s agribusiness systems and the price we pay as a society when we take taste and thought out of our food purchases.

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Customer Reviews

"[A] thought-provoking book." ---Publishers Weekly --This text refers to the MP3 CD edition.

James Beard Award-winning journalist Barry Estabrook was a contributing editor at Gourmet magazine for eight years, writing investigative articles about where food comes from. He was the founding editor of Eating Well magazine and has written for the New York Times Magazine, Reader’s Digest, Men’s Health, Audubon, and the Washington Post, and contributes regularly to The Atlantic Monthly’s website. His work has been anthologized in the Best American Food Writing series, and he has been interviewed on numerous television and radio shows. He lives and grows tomatoes in his garden in Vermont.

The Fast Food Nation for the alluring Tomato. Despite a flagging and longer than needed second section, this book is an outstanding look at the tomato and at how modern agriculture has ruined the fruit, err.. no vegetable.The tomato we eat has undergone several changes. It is larger. It is rounder. It is redder. It is longer lasting. It doesn’t taste like a tomato. It is less nutritious than the tomato. It is grown in places where a tomato should not be grown. Compared to the tomato from fifty years ago, "According to analyses conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 100 grams of fresh tomato today has 30 percent less vitamin C, 30 percent less thiamin, 19 percent less niacin, and 62 percent less calcium than it did in the 1960s. But the modern tomato does shame its 1960s counterpart in one area: It contains fourteen times as much sodium."This then is a book about the tomato, and how it has changed over the last hundred years or so. The change includes changes to the tomato

itself, and everything that touches or is touched by the tomato - the places where it is grown, the people who grow it, the chemicals and toxins that bathe the tomato, the stores that sell it, the scientists who are hard at work to revive the tomato, and where we may go from here.This book can be seen as divided into three parts. The first is a look at the history of the tomato, and how modern industrial farming has reduced it to a round, tasty looking, long lasting, pesticide-laced tasteless industrial product. The second part is a look at the industrial farms of Florida where, shockingly, modern-day slavery thrives, and where farm workers live in worse than dilapidated conditions. In the third part the author goes in search of optimism - from researchers trying to undo fifty years of damage to the tomato and trying to breed a tastier tomato that can still be grown profitably, to small, independent farmers trying to grow the good old tomato the good old way, organically, profitably, and equitably - where farm workers are paid decent wages and sometimes even health benefits.The history of the modern tomato goes back half a millennium or more."Botanists think that the modern tomato's immediate predecessor is a species called S. pimpinellifolium that still grows wild in the coastal deserts and Andean foothills of Ecuador and northern Peru. ... S. pimpinellifolium fruits are the size of large garden peas. They are red when ripe and taste like tomatoes [location 217]...Selecting plants that produced larger fruits, or fruits with differing shapes and colors, pre-Columbian farmers created tomatoes that resembled most of the varieties available today. When HernÃƒÂ¡n CortÃƒÂ©s conquered the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan (now Mexico City) in 1521, tomatoes had become an important part of the indigenous dietMost of the tomatoes in the United States are grown in the sunshine state of Florida. The state least expected to grow tomatoes. "...the majority of the state's tomatoes are raised in sand. Not sandy loam, not sandy soil, but pure sand, no more nutrient rich than the stuff vacationers like to wiggle their toes into on the beaches of Daytona and St. Pete.""If it were left up to the laws of botany and nature, Florida would be one of the last places in the world where tomatoes grow. Tomato production in the state has everything to do with marketing and nothing to do with biology....And although Florida's sandy soil makes for great beaches, it is devoid of plant nutrients. Florida growers may as well be raising their plants in a sterile hydroponic medium. To get a successful crop, they pump the soil full of chemical fertilizers and can blast the plants with more than one hundred different herbicides and pesticides, including some of the most toxic in agribusiness's arsenal. [location 122]"So you have Florida as the tomato state of the union. Where the vine is green and as are the tomatoes, till they are gassed with ethylene. Where the soil needs to be fumigated with methyl bromide ("one of the most toxic chemicals in conventional agriculture's arsenal") - a substance that depletes the ozone layer, where the crop then needs to be protected from "at least twenty-seven insect species and twenty-nine

diseases", where the "... conventional Florida farmer has a fearsome array of more than one hundred chemicals at his disposal" to combat these pests, and where "thirty-one different fungicides" are used to keep the leaves green and spotless. All of this adds up to more than eight million pounds of "insecticides, fungicides, and herbicides" applied to tomato fields in the state of Florida in one single year - 2006.So is methyl bromide harmful? And what about other cocktail of pesticides and chemicals? Like "endosulfan, azoxystrobin, chlorothalonil, methamidophos, permethrin trans, permethrin cis, fenpropathrin, trifloxystrobin, o-phenylphenol, pieronyl butoxide, acetamprid, pyrimethanil, boscalid, bifenthrin, dicofol p., thiamethoxam, chlorpyrifos, dicloran, flonicamid, pyriproxyfen, omethoate, pyraclostrobin, famoxadone, clothianidin, cypermethrin, clothianidin, cypermethrin, fenhexamid, oxamyl, diazinon, buprofezin, cyazofamid, deltamethrin, acephate, and folpet." you mean? Well... methyl bromide can "... kill humans after brief exposure in small concentrations. Sublethal doses cause disruptions in estrogen production, sterility, birth defects, and other reproductive problems".That is pretty nasty. What kind of birth defects are we looking at? These are the babies born to women who worked on Florida tomato farms:"Carlitos, as they called him, was born with a rare condition called tetra-amelia syndrome, which left him with neither arms nor legs. About six weeks later, a few cabins away, Jesus Navarrete was born to Sostenes Maceda. Jesus had Pierre Robin Sequence, a deformity of the lower jaw. As a result, his tongue was in constant danger of falling back into his throat, putting him at risk of choking to death. [location 716]...Two days after Jesus was born, Maria Meza gave birth to Jorge. He had one ear, no nose, a cleft palate, one kidney, no anus, and no visible sexual organs. A couple hours later, following a detailed examination, the doctors determined that Jorge was in fact a girl. Her parents renamed her Violeta. Her birth defects were so severe that she survived for only three days. [location 720]"Is that severe enough? One would think so. These are ghastly birth defects that are the result of exposure to chemicals used in tomato farms in Florida. So why would such dangerous working conditions be allowed to persist for the workers who toil in these tomato fields? Surely law and regulations would step in. Here’s where the story takes a decidedly depressing turn. "In the chilling words of Douglas Molloy, chief assistant United States attorney in Fort Myers, South Florida’s tomato fields are "ground zero for modern-day slavery." Molloy is not talking about virtual slavery, or near slavery, or slaverylike conditions, but real slavery." [location 153]. "Florida officials take a what-we-don’t-know-won’t-hurt-us approach to enforcing pesticide application laws and recording instances of farmworkers being exposed to chemicals while on the job." But using slave labor on tomato farm workers is not new. "By 1860, just before the start of the Civil War, 44 percent of Florida’s 140,000 residents were slaves. When that system abruptly ended in 1865, cooperative

local sheriffs obligingly arrested gangs of African American men, typically on bogus vagrancy charges, and rented them out to landowners in "convict lease programs," a good deal for both the municipality collecting the fees and the farmers. [location 1470]Slaves have been replaced by immigrant and migrant, itinerant workers. Workers who have little knowledge of the law, are mostly in debt, and are commonly illegal immigrants and therefore very susceptible to abuse by their employers. Their living conditions are appalling, to say the least. Sample this:"Dominguez swept his hand in a gesture of invitation into a bedroom. It housed five twin-bed mattresses. Three were flat on the floor with no space between them. Two rested on four-by-eight-feet plywood sheets suspended from the ceiling on chains. The room was covered in T-shirts, jeans, ball caps, running shoes, and a collection of cheap backpacks and luggage. The bathroom was at the end of a short hallway. Barely bigger than an airplane lavatory with a curtainless metal shower stall, it served ten men who came home each day hot, dirty, and anxious to bathe. The sink was stained black. The toilet lacked a seat. The kitchen consisted of a Formica-topped table and four mismatched plastic-upholstered chairs with grayish stuffing protruding from slashes. A saucepan containing something brown and hard rested on one of the burners of an apartment-size stove. A stainless steel sink was set into a counter that no longer had drawers or cupboard doors. A steady dribble of water ran from the faucet, and the door to the badly rusted refrigerator would not close. A single bulb dangled from a cord attached to an open electrical box in the ceiling, and two fans waged a noisy but futile battle against the heat and humidity. [location 1768]"This - a look at the plight of the tomato farm worker - forms the middle and the most substantial section of the books. It takes a detailed and long look at their conditions and efforts by groups to provide better and safer working conditions for these workers. This however is also the section that goes on and on and on. While interesting in its own right and probably deserving of a separate book in itself, I started to wonder if the labor employed on tomato farms was the main focus of the book. But just as I started to despair, the book moved on to other aspects of tomatoland.So why is the tomato in so much trouble? The single biggest reason, the blame, has to be the tomato itself! It is a difficult fruit to please. Or more correctly, it is a difficult fruit to grow. It is difficult to balance the twin needs of taste and toughness. The tomato’s skin has to be tough enough to withstand being plucked, packed, transported, and then placed on shelves in supermarkets - sometimes thousands of miles away. "The structure of a tomato also makes breeding for both taste and toughness a difficult balancing act. The gooey part of a tomato, called locular jelly, has most of the all-important acidity. The pericarp tissue, the walls of a tomato, give it strength and some sweetness, but no acidity. The harder a tomato is, the more bland it is likely to taste." [location 2385]. Longevity is prolonged by keeping it cold. Chilling the

tomato below 50F also destroys its taste - "reduces the fragrant volatile chemicals that are all-important in giving the fruit its distinctive flavor". If you pick a tomato when it is ripe it will spoil long before it makes it way to the grocery store in far away lands. If you pick it when still unripe it looks green and unappealing. So scientists conjured up a way to give the tomato a red appearance even as the tomato was unripe - by gassing it with ethylene, a "gas that plants produce naturally as a final step in maturing their fruits"In summary, I think this book is a sort of Fast Food Nation for the tomato. While Fast Food Nation is a tour-de-force, Tomatoland still engages, educates, and shocks - it is a must-read. Highly recommended.

This very informative book gives the reader a huge eye opener regarding how modern agriculture is producing food for markets. I understand now why tomatoes and other vegetables are so tasteless. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to understand the problems agriculture has with production and why so many farmers have given up farming. It also explains a lot about how unsafe so much of our produce is to eat.

This was a required book for a nutrition class at my university. I am highly interested in any topics related to the food industry, agriculture, large corporations, and nutrition. This book had so much good information, and the way it was written really helped to engage me as a reader. It is told more as a narrative, and I kept wanting to read more and more. It really opened my eyes to a lot of the terrible, unfortunate conditions that many members of the American workforce are subjected to, and how this is blinded from the public. I would really recommend this to anyone who is interested in current problems in our global food system.

Probably more than you ever wanted to know about tomatoes! But, this author deftly uses the story behind the tasteless, factory farmed tomato to educate about a host of issues very important to even none tomato lovers. Pesticide and deadly fumigant use, including methyl bromide and methyl iodide, which are deadly for humans, and potent ozone destroying chemicals, are widely used in the growing of tomatoes in Florida. Birth defects caused by pesticides which have been indiscriminately applied to fields where workers are carelessly exposed. Slavery and indentured servitude reminiscent of the treatment of African Americans in the south before the end of Jim Crow. The history of the original tomato plants found in South America, and how we have arrived at the tasteless, monotonous, cardboard-like fruits we call tomatoes today. Workers struggles for fair treatment and pay, fought stubbornly by the big tomato conglomerates who care little about more

than profits. And the success of the Coalition of Immokalee farmworkers in gaining respect and fairer pay for the hard work they perform under frequently unhealthy conditions. The final chapter introduces us to a farm that grows tomatoes so sought after, they sell out everyday their entire pickings. Picked ripe from the vine and to market the next day. No picking green and "ripening" with gas for these tomatoes. They taste like tomatoes you might grow in your backyard! It can be done. This is an indictment of big Ag, especially in Central Florida. Fascinating for all those who care about quality food raised chemical free, bursting with flavor.

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