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Diet For A Dead Planet: How The Food Industry Is Killing Us



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Synopsis

A harrowing indictment of industrial agriculture's threat to the future of food and the environment. As mad cow disease hits hard in the United States and bird flu roils the Asian poultry markets, the issue of food safety has never been more stark. According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 75 million Americans fell sick last year from the food they ate. Christopher D. Cook's riveting and timely investigation takes us beyond Fast Food Nation to explain why our entire food system is in crisis. Corporate consolidation of farms and supermarkets, high-tech drives to increase productivity, misplaced subsidies for exports, and inadequate regulation have all combined to produce a grim harvest. In these pages we encounter fruit and vegetables laminated by crop spray, slaughterhouses that transport illegal immigrants to the United States to butcher diseased meat for less than the minimum wage, and the near-extinction of American family farms. Yet, Cook argues, there is another way: Sales of organic food nearly tripled to $13 billion in 2001-2002. Farmers' markets and food cooperatives are burgeoning across the nation, and the slow food and food justice movements have become part of the mainstream. The eloquence and concision of Diet for a Dead Planet will spur the campaign still further. Food-borne pathogens cause up to 30 million human illnesses, and as many as 9,000 deaths, in the U.S. each year Agriculture dumps nearly 500,000 tons of pesticides —many of them known carcinogens —on our food each year American farms produce more than 1.3 billion tons of animal waste annually —5 tons for every U.S. citizen For every dollar consumers spend on food, 81 cents goes on marketing with just 19 cents to the farmer Farm subsidies in the United States and European Union total nearly half a billion dollars a day The average food item in the United States travels 2,000 miles from farm to table

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Customer Reviews

The "toxic cornucopia" of big agriculture is pilloried in this populist manifesto. Journalist Cook offers a nauseating recap of familiar charges: factory farming serves up pesticide-laden produce; the horrifying mills of high-density feedlots and hog and poultry sheds produce meat laced with hormones and antibiotics but still tainted with lethal bacteria; pesticide, fertilizer and manure runoff pollute air and water; immigrant meatpackers are paid paltry wages and physically ruined by inhuman line speedups. The heart of the book is an analysis of agricultural economics straight out of an 1890s Grange hall. Cook laments the destruction of family farms by a corporate "octopus" of agribusiness giants and parasitic middlemen who squeeze prices for farm products and inflate them for highly processed convenience foods on the store shelf, abetted by government farm subsidies that encourage overproduction and favor big producers. Cook's objections often seem to be to aimed at modernity itselfÃ¢â ¬â •to the same forces of technology-driven, mechanized productivity that have industrialized the nonfarm economy. He doesn't explain how, without legions of housewives to make meals from scratch, we can do without food-processing middlemen nor why his program of returning to small family farms will curb abuses of animals, workers, consumers and the environment better than firmer government regulation of large-scale agriculture. His indictment is compelling, but his nostalgic remedy isn't fully persuasive. Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

A powerful and provocative indictment of the food industry. If you eat, read this important book! -- Jim HightowerArmed with Cook's compelling expose, we don't have to be victims. -- Frances Moore LappeChristopher Cook helps us rethink the very ethical and environmental principals that ought to guide our approach to food. -- Jeremy Rifkin

This is a well-written and well-researched description of the economic problems ailing contemporary American agriculture, and of the deleterious effects mammoth-scale corporate farming is having on the environment. The author is an experienced investigative reporter and an unashamed proponent of sustainable agriculture and the ever-dwindling "family" farmer representative of traditional crop cultivation in the United States. As such, Diet For A Dead Planet is a bit of a polemic and firmly in the camp of other books critical of the relationship between agricultural economics and modern food

production, such as Eric Schlosser's Fast Food Nation. Needless to say, Cargill and Archer-Daniels Midland executives are not going to be enamored of Diet, but any citizen concerned about the state of farming in the US, and its effects on public health and environmental well-being, would do well to read this book.Cook organizes his topic into three sections, dealing with food quality and safety; the business and economic aspects of modern agriculture; and environmental consequences of profligate pesticide use and "factory" farm effluents. Each section contains several chapters with extensive footnotes. The chapters are obviously targeted for a general audience, and as a consequence are very readable without overwhelming the reader with statistics and technical jargon. In particular, I found the chapters on the evolving history of American agriculture offered a concise but informative account of a complex and often tumultuous subject. Other chapters on such diverse subjects as the "mad cow" crisis, the continuous deposition of toxic pesticides in water supplies, and the travails of workers in high-throughput slaughterhouse operations, are all eye-opening to one degree or another.Cook ends the book with a admonition to the public: unless we actively choose to support organic / sustainable farm operations, our health and the welfare of the environment we live in are not going to improve. Rather than simple hectoring, however, in the last segment of the book he provides an extensive listing of whole-food organizations and advocacy groups dedicated to helping us change the way we eat and consume natural resources. There is of course an element of "better to light one candle" rhetoric here; even Cook is not so naÃƒÆ'Â Â ve as to think that tomorrow will see the US converted to any kind of enormous vegan commune. But his hope is that after reading Diet some of us will devote a bit of thought to the hows and whys of our eating habits, and in this, I think he is as realistic as any "muckraker" can be.

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

Prompt and as promised

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

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

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