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



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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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.

Christopher D. Cook's latest book *Diet for a Dead Planet* offers the American public with a wake up call view of the food industry today. As an investigative journalist, he gives a complete overview of the socioeconomic and political ills facing food production. He begins the supermarkets and ends with the global agricultural market. Cook inspects the multifaceted complexities which have arisen due to cheap labor, often exploited and without healthcare. He also depicts the plight of migrant workers, processed food, and pesticides manipulatively spread over crops with the able assistance of government subsidies. The findings are thorough, compelling, and difficult to ingest at times. However, they are warranted as he introduces authorities to backup his claims. The statistics Cook presents are real, yet harsh. Yearly, 75 million Americans are sickened by the food they eat, while

an estimated 67 million birds are killed by the millions of pounds of toxic agricultural pesticides sprayed on crops. Meanwhile, farmers that remain take home only about 19 cents per food dollar spent by the average consumer (this is in comparison to 37 cents in 1980 and 47 cents in 1952) according to Cook. Cook closely examines every branch of the food industry. In doing so, he reaches a necessary reason for change. The socioeconomic, environmental, and political injustices currently practiced weigh heavily on America's well being. Within each chapter, he goes into great detail explaining, expanding, and scoping the historical difficulties and how they adversely impact today's food industry. Beyond that conclusion, Cook explains that unless a new solution, specifically changing how food is "made", Americans will continue to spiral downward.

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