

Food, Inc. – What do YOU think?

1. The video raises the issue of animal rights. How do you think farm animals should be treated? How do your ideas compare to what you saw in the film? Richard Lobb of the National Chicken Council says in the film, “In a way, we’re not producing chickens, we’re producing food.” Do you agree or disagree with that? How might your perspective affect your food choices? How do you feel about the power that large food companies seem to have over farmers?
2. Do people have the right to know what is in their food? Whose responsibility do you think it is to inform us about what is in our food? The movie points out that cows and farm-raised fish, which are not biologically suited to eating corn, are now given a modified diet that is based on corn. Do you think people’s diets have been modified in a similar way? How do you feel about the possibility of your food being modified without you being aware of it?
3. Do we have the right to assume that our food is safe? If so, who do you think should be responsible for ensuring its safety? Who’s responsible for Kevin’s death? (Be specific) The mother says, “Sometimes it feels like industry was more protected than my son.” What do you think of her words?
4. Should access to healthy food be a right for everyone? The film gives the impression that food is either cheap or healthy. Do you think that is an accurate statement? Would it be okay with you that healthy food is only available to people who can afford it? If so, what might be the consequences of that - both to individuals and society? If not, how might we make healthy food available to everyone? How does the cheap price of processed food affect low-income families? Is this fair? How might government policies be changed to allow more access to healthier foods?
5. Some claim that we cannot feed the world’s population using sustainable farming practice. Considering the differences between the small farm and the large Smithfield farm, what do you think? When deciding what to eat, how much should we consider the workers who pick, process, and transport it? In the film, union organizer Eduardo Peña says, “We want to pay the cheapest price for our food. We don’t understand that it comes at a price.” Do you agree or disagree with him? What might people do to make sure that their eating meat does not harm other people or animals?
6. Farmer Joel Salatin in the film says, “We’re willing to subsidize the food system to create the mystique of cheap food when actually it’s very expensive food.” What might he mean by that? Should price be the most important force behind our food industry? Does it matter to you which food companies produce your food? In the film, we see that Stonyfield Yogurt is now owned by Groupe Danone, Tom’s of Maine by Colgate, Kashi by Kellogg, and Burt’s Bees by Clorox, which are all large corporations. Considering the kinds of consumers these products are geared for, how do you think those consumers might react to learning that the products are actually made by big corporations? Why might corporations continue marketing the small companies’ products under their original labels, as we saw in the film? What do you think of that practice? Walmart’s dairy purchaser says that Walmart and other companies react to what the customers want. How might individual purchases affect a company’s choices? How might we change our food system to make it driven by other values, like health or environmental sustainability?

7. Should companies be able to own the DNA contained in plant seeds? From Monsanto's perspective, it is expensive to develop new seeds like these, and the seeds save farmers time and enable them to produce more soybeans. What might be the consequences - both positive and negative - of the company owning the genetic information in the seed? How does this situation compare to downloading music from "free" sites? Monsanto has been criticized for suing farmers who are found saving seeds or having seed blow into their field. How might you argue in favor of Monsanto on this allegation? Do you think it is fair that the one farmer had to settle (*i.e.*, admit he was guilty) because that was cheaper than trying to fight Monsanto's lawsuit? Why is Monsanto bringing these lawsuits?

8. Should a company have the power to decide what information to give consumers about the food it produces? In the film, Noel Kramers of the California Farm Bureau says that the bureau is against labeling because it "creates unnecessary fear in the consumer's mind." Do you agree with this reasoning? In 2011, the government changed the regulations on the labels required on energy drinks but not requiring the inclusion of the health risks (anxiety, insomnia, gastrointestinal upset, tremors, rapid heartbeat, and even death). Would a warning label affect whether or not you buy energy drinks? How effective are labels in helping consumers make decisions about their food? What might be more effective? In 1998, Oprah was sued for saying she wasn't sure if she wanted to continue eating hamburgers (this statement related to mad cow disease). What do you think about a law that prevents you from saying something negative about a particular food item? An argument could be made that people who have been in the industry are knowledgeable about that industry. What are the pros and cons of them becoming regulators working for the government?

9. What individual or collective actions are you willing to take to improve our food system, and what would be their impact? What kinds of actions have you taken before to make a change at home, at school, or in the community? What was effective? What wasn't? Would it be possible to feed the 7 billion people on Earth without the kind of industrialized food system portrayed in the film? If so, how? If not, what might we do to avoid the problems that seem to come with it? In the film, farmer Joel Salatin asks us to "imagine what it would be if as a national policy we said we would be only successful if we had fewer people going to the hospital next year than last year." What changes would need to happen for this to be a reality? Author Michael Pollan points out in the film that "to eat well in this country costs more than to eat badly. It will take more money and some people simply don't have it. And that's one of the reasons that we need changes at the policy level so that the carrots are a better deal than the chips." If healthful, environmentally sustainable food were to cost less than other food, do you think people would eat more of it? There is plenty of research showing that healthful food makes people feel better, have more energy, and stay well. Do you think if more people knew about this research, they would make different food choices even if it cost more?