

Local Culture

Fresh, Ana Sofia Joanes, 2009.

A review by Katie Fick, Augustana College.

We need to vote with our forks as consumers. We also need to make our agricultural policies support the kind of food system we want—support farmers who are growing organic food or local food, not just big corn and soy farmers.

—Michael Pollan

For someone like me, who occasionally falls victim to the convenience, low price, and wickedness of unrecognizable foods with names that often end in “-os” (Cheetos, Doritos, etc.), the movie *Fresh* was exactly the wake up call I needed. This movie reminds us that every dollar we spend in a grocery store or farmer’s market is like a ballot; when I buy the \$1.49 eggs that come from industrial agriculture instead of the organic, cage-free eggs available at my local HyVee, I am sending a message. I am saying that I am perfectly content with the ill quality of the food the industrial agriculture system produces, the damage it causes to the environment, and the miserable lives of the animals in it. In fact, I’m probably saying something like, “Go ahead and dump as many baby chickens out into that barn as you possibly can! Moving and breathing are overrated anyway! I’ll be here with my \$1.49 to keep you in business!”

The movie takes viewers on a tour of this country’s farms: the good, the bad, and the sickening. While it may be geared towards those who are newer to the issues of sustainable agriculture, the value of fresh food, and the problems with industrial agriculture, it sheds light on specific farms and actual people behind America’s food. Instead of merely overwhelming the viewer with disturbing footage from industrial farms, it provides several stories of successful farmers who are practicing sustainable agriculture across the country. The movie reminds us that the rules of this game are simple and nature-derived: nature hates monocultures. Animals like to move. Cows do not eat meat or corn.

This movie convincingly counters the arguments that organic food is not cost-effective and cannot feed the world. For example, one sustainable farmer, Joel Salatin (some may know him from Michael Pollan’s *Omnivore’s Dilemma*), said he makes 60 times more per acre than his neighbors who run industrial operations. Another interviewee in the movie said we have the research now to prove that medium-sized organic farms are more cost-effective than large-scale industrial ones. The movie also follows a pig farmer who used to run an industrial operation, went through a personal nightmare because of it, decided to exterminate his herd, and started over with a smaller,

Local Culture

more mobile—and therefore healthier—herd. He saved thousands of dollars his first year without the drugs and vet bills.

The movie also addresses the argument that organic, fresh foods are not available to everyone yet. They are still too expensive for some people, and others do not even have access to them in the first place. *Fresh* gives us a peek at one of the solutions to this pervasive problem: Growing Power, an organization that teaches city dwellers about growing their own food and provides fresh, organic produce to urban areas such as Milwaukee and Chicago. The film showcases the positive energy and fellowship involved in Growing Power. We see people eating fresh food together, learning about compost worms, and taking home seeds and plants.

I for one will go to HyVee armed with what's left of the gift card my dad bought during his last visit (bless him!) and a renewed sense of responsibility to use my buying power to cast the right kind of votes. Sure, local and organic foods may cost a bit more, but as Pollan reminds us in this movie, that's because they're worth more.