



Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health

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We all witness, in advertising and on supermarket shelves, the fierce competition for our food dollars. In this engrossing exposé, Marion Nestle goes behind the scenes to reveal how the competition really works and how it affects our health. The abundance of food in the United States--enough calories to meet the needs of every man, woman, and child twice over--has a downside. Our overefficient food industry must do everything possible to persuade people to eat *more*--more food, more often, and in larger portions--no matter what it does to waistlines or well-being.

Like manufacturing cigarettes or building weapons, making food is very big business. Food companies in 2000 generated nearly \$900 billion in sales. They have stakeholders to please, shareholders to satisfy, and government regulations to deal with. It is nevertheless shocking to learn precisely how food companies lobby officials, co-opt experts, and expand sales by marketing to children, members of minority groups, and people in developing countries. We learn that the food industry plays politics as well as or better than other industries, not least because so much of its activity takes place outside the public view.

Editor of the 1988 *Surgeon General's Report on Nutrition and Health*, Nestle is uniquely qualified to lead us through the maze of food industry interests and influences. She vividly illustrates food politics in action: watered-down government dietary advice, schools pushing soft drinks, diet supplements promoted as if they were First Amendment rights. When it comes to the mass production and consumption of food, strategic decisions are driven by economics--not science, not common sense, and certainly not health.

No wonder most of us are thoroughly confused about what to eat to stay healthy. An accessible and balanced account, *Food Politics* will forever change the way we respond to food industry marketing practices. By explaining how much the food industry influences government nutrition policies and how cleverly it links its interests to those of nutrition experts, this pathbreaking book helps us understand more clearly than ever before what we eat and why.

Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health Details

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From Reader Review Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health for online ebook

Tim says

The idea that profit-maximizing behavior by food companies might harm your health and your waistline is a more mainstream idea now than it was back in 2002 when Food Politics was first published. Skyrocketing obesity rates seem to have focused a lot of peoples' attention, and while there's no real consensus on what (if anything) we should do about it, corporate behavior is definitely on the radar screen. In one level it should be obvious that corporations exist to maximize profits and there's no law of physics that says what's good for the corporate bottom line is good for public health. Quite the contrary. However, as Marion Nestle makes clear, food companies are not quite the equivalent of tobacco companies, even if their tactics are similar. We still do need to eat, the challenge is to eat *better*, which is a subtler message than "Don't smoke, dummy."

Nestle touches on a wide-range of topics here: the Food Pyramid wars, lobbying, soda in schools, food supplement, techno-foods, etc. (See also her follow-up Safe Food.) The book can be a pretty dry in places and she resists the urge to demonize food corporations or simplify the issues at stake. She doesn't bring the writing style or conceptual gimmicks of a Michael Pollan. But she makes up for her lack of poetry in sheer overwhelming academic firepower. By all indications this is a researcher who has read every USDA Federal Register notice for the past several decades. She knows her stuff.

Katie says

Boy... if you have any conspiracy-theorist-leaning tendencies at all, this book will really get you going! I think most of us are aware of ties between food corporations and our government's food regulations and safety standards to some degree, but this book will show you just how deeply ingrained it all is. It really is kind of disturbing that the FDA and the USDA have responsibilities both to the health and safety of U.S. consumers, AND to the agricultural industry. Those are definitely a conflict of interest, and this book will show you how, in every which way, over the years. You'll never trust another food label again, and that's probably a good thing.

This was a pretty "textbook-y" book though, so unless you have a particular interest in this topic, it might put you to sleep in certain parts. There's a lot of info about laws and the workings of bureaucratic institutions, which is great info, but not exactly page-turning reading. But it's a very good source for those interested in this topic.

Jodi says

This book was a difficult read. The information about the history of each change to the food pyramid (something none of us should use as a dietary guide anyway) was particularly boring and tedious to get through. Much of the book was hard going to read and not written in an engaging or interesting way. It is dull, dull, dull. It has none of the intelligent writing style and ease of reading of so many other books I have read on this topic. The content of the book was also very problematic.

Yes, there is some good information in this book about different ways food companies have tried to skew

public opinion about what is healthy and what is not. But unfortunately in this book for every myth busted or interesting fact about bias given, the author reinforces one or two or more other at least as harmful myths or pieces of shocking nutritional misinformation.

The assumption that a low-fat, high-carb, low calorie and preferably vegetarian diet is the healthiest for everyone and that research supports this assertion, really permeates every part of this book. It isn't questioned in any way whatsoever. But this assumption is very wrong.

If aiming for a low-fat, high carb and low-calorie diet makes you feel awful, hungry and ill - as it does for many of us - and has impeded your attempts to maintain a healthy weight, this book is probably best avoided or at least read with a huge grain of salt when it comes to the dietary advice given.

This book says junk food is fine so long as your portions are small and not too high calorie, eating saturated fat increases your heart disease risk, eating according to the food pyramid gives you all the nutrients you need (!), a low salt diet is best, the FDA is a science-based agency that should be given more power than they have already(!), to lose weight you just need to eat less and move more - all of which I would strongly disagree with based on information and research in lots of far better researched books.

One example of the authors' shocking ignorance is when she comments that trans fats raise the risk of heart disease as much as and perhaps even more than saturated fat. She actually says that saturated fat may be worse for you than trans fat! This despite the fact that trans fats are an unnatural fat that has a well-documented and quite shocking negative effect on health, and saturated fat is the sort of natural fat that our ancestors ate, and that we evolved to eat and need to eat to be healthy. Anyone that lists trans fats and saturated fats as equally dangerous should set your alarm bells ringing!

The Danish government banned trans fats and rates of heart disease dropped dramatically. Trans fats contribute to allergies, inflammation, heart disease and obesity, and many other health conditions. Trans fats are unnatural fats. When we consume trans fats our bodies are unable to synthesise them properly and so abnormal cells are formed. There is no safe level of trans fats. Even small amounts can have dramatic effects. If trans fat were to be banned in the US, it is estimated that 275 US lives would be saved each day.

Some saturated fats have anti-cancer benefits. Saturated fats have anti-bacterial and anti-viral properties and saturated fats such as coconut oil are an important part of a healthy diet. We need to eat them to be healthy. Saturated fat sounds scary and gluggy and is often described as 'artery clogging' and 'not heart healthy' but the truth is very different. Saturated fat isn't saturated by some sort of horrific 'glop' but by hydrogen! The same element that is in water. Don't believe all the anti-saturated fat and cholesterol hype. Those myths continue purely because of the interference of vested interest groups in science.

For far better information on fats see Know Your Fats by lipid expert Mary Enig PhD, or The Great Cholesterol Con, Ignore the Awkward, and so on.

The section on supplements is unspeakably bad and it is very clear the author has done very little research in this area. There is a small grain of truth in some of the comments. For example, it is undoubtedly true that a lot of claims are made about supplements that are just not true, but it is misleading to not also note that supplements can have enormous benefit if given at the correct doses and that this is backed up by a lot of solid research. The information given here is beyond skewed and extremely selective, not to mention based on flawed studies which do not at all reflect what nutritional experts are actually recommending. It is not at all the reasonable and educated overview of this topic that it claims to be. It is really outrageous that someone can make such claims considering the safety record and effectiveness of basic vitamin and mineral supplements and it really worries me the effect that such ignorant and fanciful claims can have on peoples health and their ability to treat disease.

If I had listened to 'flat Earth' nonsense like this my severe neurological disease would still be worsening, and not slowly improving month by month as it is now; after 10 years or more of slow deterioration.

Dr Abram Hoffer explains that we need about 45 different nutrients in optimal quantities. He also explains that no nutrient works alone, and that an enzyme reaction that needs three different nutrients to take place, requires all three nutrients and so no one nutrient should be considered more important than the other.

Some nutrients can be obtained in reasonable amounts in food, while others will sometimes or always require the use of supplements to ensure optimal levels. It is not true as some claim that the optimum levels of all nutrients can be obtained through diet alone.

Supplements are necessary, for the following reasons:

- * The soils used to grow our food are often very depleted.
- * The levels and types of toxic pollution and toxic chemicals we are exposed to are vastly higher now than they were in the past (which requires far higher levels of nutrients than were necessary in the past, to deal with them).
- * Many nutrients in food are fragile and only remain fully intact when food is picked and then eaten immediately. Storing foods for long times and heavily processing foods can dramatically lower nutrient levels in the food and may destroy some nutrients entirely; for example, oranges have been found to contain between 100 mg of vitamin C and 0 mg of vitamin C, each.
- * The high levels of sugar in the diet of many people is also problematic as sugar is an anti-nutrient.

Supplements are necessary and eating well is also important. As Dr Sherry Rogers writes, 'What you eat has more power over disease than any medication your doctor can prescribe. Food is awesomely powerful.'

It is also important to be aware that the more ill you are, and the more stress your body is under the higher your nutritional needs will be. A person can need many times more vitamin C when ill than they need when they are well, and these higher doses just cannot be gotten from food.

More helpful information on intelligent supplementation is included in books such as Detoxify or Die, Orthomolecular Medicine for Everyone: Megavitamin Therapeutics for Families and Physicians, Primal Body, Primal Mind: Beyond the Paleo Diet for Total Health and a Longer Life among others.

Far better books than this one which set out a diet that is all about health and disease prevention and treatment as well as weight management, and are far better researched and well written, and also include some information about food politics, include: Eat Fat, Lose Fat: The Healthy Alternative to Trans Fats, Primal Body, Primal Mind: Beyond the Paleo Diet for Total Health and a Longer Life, Deep Nutrition: Why Your Genes Need Traditional Food, Perfect Health Diet: Four Steps to Renewed Health, Youthful Vitality, and Long Life, The Primal Blueprint: Reprogram your genes for effortless weight loss, vibrant health, and boundless energy and others. Fast Food Nation is great too.

Many of us have got fat and ill eating exactly the way this book recommends. Low fat and low calorie diets which include some junk foods and lots of highly processed foods just don't work for so many of us. If it works for the author and some others that is great, each to their own, but for many of us this is not helpful advice and is incorrect. We need to eat real foods and focus on food quality - rather than just endlessly calorie counting. That misses the point completely.

Luckily there are lots of really wonderful diet and nutrition books available today as well as lots of other good books which discuss the politics of food and the tactics of junk food manufacturers to influence public opinion and government policy.

Jodi Bassett, The Hummingbirds' Foundation for M.E. (HFME)

Marissa says

This book is definitely worth the read for an understanding of how FDA recommendations and warnings (or lack thereof) came to be. Interesting, there's no mention of the often-weak science that led to the preferred recommendations, but that's a different topic addressed by other books. Nestle takes it as a given, but the political aspect is still worth challenging, even if she fails to challenge other things.

I love that she cited the history of the Nestle company (unrelated to the author) marketing infant formula in poor countries, to the horrific detriment of babies.

Frank says

Food Politics as a fairly deep study of the politics of the food industry in the United States. The book can best be categorized as text book caliber in both look and feel. Despite the in depth research, the author, Marion Nestle (no relation to the food corporation), does her best to make the information accessible and understandable to both the professional and the casual reader alike.

To be fair, you shouldn't read this book casually. I am not a food professional but I have read on the topic extensively and thus found the content of this book extremely informing. You would do better to read other less weighty topics of food business before taking this one on as a casual reader.

The political, legal and industry jargon can be intense and long winded at times and may turn off someone with only a mild interest in the topic. However if the topic of the food industry in the US is right up your alley so is this book. It is thoroughly informative and educational. I'm quite certain this book is used in college level classrooms across the country.

Anne Green says

Described as an "engrossing expose" of the food industry in the US, the book is an account of the unscrupulous practices pursued by those with commercial interests in marketing food, interests which it is claimed outweigh any real sense of responsibility for the health and well-being of consumers. Based on the premise that the food industry is motivated by selling more more more, regardless of whether it's nutritious or beneficial, the book contains many revelations about what's been described as "Big Food".

Marion Nestle, as a Professor of Nutrition, Food Studies & Public Health at New York University, is eminently well qualified to tell the story. In addition to a string of academic achievements, honours and awards, she is a prolific writer in the field of diet and nutrition, has been influential in advising government and has participated in many strategic research studies. She knows what she's talking about, she's done her research and she has the facts and statistics to back up every statement she makes.

Whether you live in the US or not, the book makes alarming reading. Powerful industries are not only manipulating the nutritional choices of consumers but influencing government agencies to make decisions that are not based on sound scientific evidence.

Because it describes the history and development of food politics in the US, much of which involves bodies,

agencies and regulations different from those in Australia (and does so in exhaustive detail), I found it somewhat heavy going. However I'm not naive enough to think similar agendas aren't being pursued here and if you care about such things, it's a book worth reading.

David says

Food is indeed political. At least this is a message that I'm being hit with a lot recently. Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution on TV, a show that takes on America's bad eating habits and tries to change them, also documents an incredible amount of resistance to this change. "We don't wanna sit around and eat lettuce all day!" says the local radio show host in Huntington, West Virginia (a city which, according to the Centers for Disease Control, is the unhealthiest city in America). It seems that people will eat their crap food, earnest and well-meaning English chef be damned.

So it goes. In the context of what is wrong with the food industry, corporate America, Government and human attitude, Marion Nestle's Food politics is a must-read. Everyone must eat to survive, but there is a fundamental battle between the Eat Less and the Eat More camps. What we need, Nestle stresses, is an Eat Less mentality, but every day and on many fronts, we are encouraged to Eat More. While what is best for people is a rational diet (preferably full of non-processed food, as Jamie Oliver tirelessly advocates on the TV program) and exercise (Eat Less), the food industry, in collusion with marketers and Government do everything in their power to sell more product, and therefore encourage more consumption (Eat More).

If only it stopped there.
This book shows:

"How the food industry uses lobbying, lawsuits, financial contributions, public relations, advertising, partnerships and alliances, philanthropy, threats and biased information to convince Congress, federal agencies, nutrition and health professionals and the public that the science relating diet to health is so confusing that they need not worry about diets: when it comes to diets, anything goes."
--p. 358.

As Food Politics shows, there is simply a broad range of issues with the food industry that affect every single one of us: dubious health claims for products, "food pyramids" that are skewed toward consuming meat than is good for us, and armies of lawyers and a shit-load of money for any corporation who needs to mow down opposition to their goals which are often in conflict with public health.

Your Libertarian self may sneer at these conclusions. We have free choice to eat what we want, you'd say. You'd be correct. But if Food Politics and Jamie Oliver shows nothing else, it is that options for eating healthy are much less plentiful than options for eating crap. It doesn't matter if our poor diets and lack of exercise are literally killing us via heart disease and other avenues. No--to many, our diets are written off as "personal choice." But the options for eating well are far overwhelmed by the options for eating poorly. If you don't believe that, then you should count the number of fresh fruit stands on the interstate and then compare that to the number of fast food chains.

Food Politics is eye-opening, though not always fun to read--it takes less of a position than you might think, given the topic. Although its essential theme is about how the production and distribution of food is run by a scary consortium of people who do not have public interest at heart, it doesn't have the "gotcha" moments that make reading, say Al Franken or Michael Moore so much fun. Food Politics is more textbook-like,

presenting the information and letting the reader draw his own conclusions. It does not ask for our anger, but it certainly supplies a reason for it. This book belongs in the library of anyone who needs a reason to support locally grown food, or to have their eyes opened to the fact that when it comes to diet, food is very political indeed.

Emily Kirik says

This book was well written and informative. However, since it was written in 2002, food science and nutrition has changed considerably since then, but I can attest that the ultimate “food politics” principles are the same. It would be interesting to read an updated account of such food policy practices today. I enjoyed the section on supplements the most, and I found the school lunch policies section the least intriguing. I felt the tone of the book was supportive of more government regulation on food practice and critical of big business.

Irene says

I actually didn't finish this book, which for me is a very rare thing. I got about 3/4 of the way through but then had to stop and return the book to the school library, where it was about 3 months overdue already! One of the reasons I checked the book out was because no one else ever had, though, so I doubt the book was missed. I thought the beginning was very good and everything was explained in terms simple enough to understand, but by the end my interest was dragging. Also, I had those AP English books to read at the same time and it's hard to get back into this book when weeks go by before I have time to read for myself again! The information about food guide pyramids of the past was invaluable, and I'm so glad I read it. Although it is a bit outdated and so doesn't say anything about the new food guide pyramid, the one with all the vertical lines that I hate, I now understand why they changed it and how the food industry uses this new pyramid to promote their foods, which are usually bad for you. I find myself reading labels more often too and I spent some time in the supplement aisle of the grocery store looking at labels. I also focused on the fine print in the Osteo-Biflex commercials because they're on all the time and saw not only the required statement that it can't be used to prevent, treat, diagnose, etc. any disease, but also saw what Nestle was talking about when she explained how supplement companies don't need proof their product works: Osteo-Biflex's claim it improves joint function within a week was based on two human trials using subjective research methods! This book is easily related to my own life and I have become a smarter consumer because of it.

Virginia Messina says

Published by the University of California press, this reads a lot more like a textbook than popular literature and it can be a little bit of a chore to plod through. But for anyone who wants to understand the politics behind nutrition advice, it is absolutely *the best* book to read. Nestle, who is well-known among health professionals for her experience and perspectives on the politics of food and nutrition, does an amazing job of covering the history of dietary guidance in the United States. She's very much an insider and doesn't hesitate to reveal the impact that the food industry has had on the recommendations made by both government and the food industry.

Amy says

This information in this book is priceless. It is shocking how the food industry functions, and our society seriously needs to start thinking for themselves, instead of buying into all the propoganda the media is throwing our way, if we ever want to be healthier and prevent more obesity and chronic disease. HOWEVER...this book definitely reads like a text book. It is not an "easy" read. It is slow going for me, but I value everything I've read. I highly recommend Michael Pollan's "In Defense of Food" as an alternative or supplementary reading that is much easier and faster to read. This book is very important, though. As a teenager, I had a medical condition that caused me to gain weight, and now I've spent years trying to stay ahead of all the news about what to eat and what not to eat. It's so confusing, and it changes every day! Over the past 6 months, I've learned to use my own knowledge,instinct, and common sense in choosing what foods I eat. I've started ignoring everything I read and hear in the media, and guess what? I've lost over 40 pounds already!

Anastasia says

I have to be honest . . . it took me ages to finish this book. It was a tough read, but I am so glad I stuck with it because it was so illuminating. I have been so hoodwinked by the food industry and I am astonished by how much goes on that we all do not know about. I feel so much better informed after having read this tome. Kudos to Dr. Nestle for her brave work. Truth!

AJ says

I wasn't expecting to learn much from this book, having already poured through books like Fast Food Nation, The Omnivore's Dilemma, School Lunch Politics The Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare Program, Organic, Inc. Natural Foods and How They Grew and Toxic Sludge is Good For You Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry, but I feel that this book has a lot to offer above and beyond what other books discuss about food politics.

Although at times the book can get a bit hard to follow in all of the nuanced policy decisions made by the FDA and USDA, it still packs a pretty solid punch. Marion Nestle does a great job exposing exactly how the food industry has slowly, but surely, gotten its way with food policy decisions and has done a great job of making the FDA a pretty powerless government entity.

A large portion of this book details how the supplement industry came to be able to label products making health claims with little or no scientific basis whatsoever, and how this has led to food products following suit. (Case in point: "healthy" Froot Loops with fiber, and also grams of sugar.)

This book is a recommended read for anybody interested in food, how it is marketed, regulated and sold.

Ashley says

Book club pick for June 2015

Lexie Stoneking says

I have this thing that once I start a book, I have to finish it. I don't know what it is, possibly some OCD, but no matter how much I dislike the book I will finish it.

Except for this book.

I found this book to be interesting, but so deep and dry that I avoided reading it. I should have know that this book wouldn't be a great pleasure read considering it is used as a textbook here at Iowa State University. I really did find some of the material interesting. It was enlightening and fascinating to learn that the ADA (now AND) isn't exempt from the influence of the food industry. As a senior in college studying dietetics, I naively thought that the Academy would remain unbiased and be a stable source of completely reliable information. This book, what little I actually read, taught me that I need to be cautious about all information and complete my own research before taking anything at face value.

I really waffled back and forth about finishing this book. Usually, any time I contemplate whether or not I should stop reading a book I always feel very guilty. But I didn't this time. This book was really a drag to read. I had it for 2 weeks and was barely even 150 pages, which is strange for me when I usually finish books within a couple days. I decided that it wasn't worth my time to force myself to read this book when I really couldn't appreciate the information that was being presented. And plus, I just really want to go back to reading fun books again.

I feel it isn't fair if I were to give this book a rating due to the fact that I didn't actually finish it. Without knowing the whole story, I can't accurately rate the book.

Marilee says

This is a subject that I am passionate about. We need to rethink the way food is produced and sold in our country. The U.S. government is being influenced by big companies, making unhealthy, processed food more accessible and affordable. I didn't realize how difficult congress is making it for the FDA to actually be productive. Americans (and much of the world) have an obesity problem due to corporate greed. The book mostly talks about what is broken in our system, but the last chapter does talk about what we can do to fix it and gives a little hope by showing the progress we have made in the last few years. I wish I knew what I could do to help.

Leran Minc says

I tried to keep in mind the importance of this book when it first came out in 2002 in the pre-Omnivore's Dilemma world. At that time no one had written such a comprehensive book about the influence of corporations on government and how that impacted what we consider safe or desirable to eat.

Reading this in 2017 and 2018 there are many sections that seem obvious to anyone who has even leisurely read about food policy or watch several of the popular food documentary. However, it still struck me as impressive the depth and breadth of Nestle's research and the unique insider perspective she provides.

For the serious student or practitioner of food politics I think this book is still absolutely necessary, but it's dense and lengthy so for the more casually interested this might not be the book for you.

Trevor says

There is really only one thing driving the food industry – the hunger for more profit. This is such an obvious fact that it hardly needs to be restated, however, it is best to keep obvious facts at front of your mind. This particular fact tells us a lot about what is wrong with food today.

As hard as it is to believe food is incredibly simple. We need food to give us energy and to provide us with nutrients. So, if we were to be rational in our eating we would eat food that is balanced with our energy needs (the energy we need to use during the day would be matched with the energy we gain from eating food) and we would gain that energy from a range of nutrient-rich foods. That is, we wouldn't get all of our energy from, say, sugar as this has no nutritional value. As Michael Pollin says, 'Eat food, not too much, mostly plants'. It isn't exactly a hard message.

Nutrition science has been telling us this simple message about food for 40 years – so why is it that people seem to be so confused about dietary advice? Well, that is when it pays to follow the money.

The food industry makes most of its money from elaborately transformed food. Let's do this according to the second law of thermodynamics. We need energy. We get that energy from food. Our food gets its energy from the sun. We can't get our energy from the sun directly. We can either get our energy from plants or from animals that eat plants or from Frankenfoods (processed with added this and that). The second law says that each step along this process will reduce the energy that is available – feeding plants to animals we intend to eat wastes energy when compared to the energy we could have had just by eating the plants in the first place. This is why it is an incredibly bad idea to eat tuna. Tuna eats other fish – and so is two steps up from the direct source of energy. The collapse of the tuna industry is fairly inevitable on thermodynamic principles alone. Naturally, we will continue to pretend not to notice this law until it is too late, but that is beside the point of this current review.

The lesson here is that we should probably get much more of our food from plants than from animals on a simple energy-saving basis alone. We should also do this because the more food is transformed the worse it tends to be for us. Meat is not as healthy for us as vegetables and processed foods are worse again. These messages have been the core advice of most science in the area for a very long time. The problem is that science has no sway in our society, mostly because our society is based almost exclusively on making money.

This is particularly true in the USA where most of the examples in this book are drawn. It is a story that is chilling and also nearly unbelievable. It is the story of how a nation is being poisoned in the name of industry rights to maximise profits. Of how children are being manipulated through the unethical use of psychological research that is used to encourage them into eating poisons. This is not a story with a happy ending, in fact, it is hard to see how these things can ever improve in the US – and we in Australia seem very keen to waddle our way down exactly the same path.

The food industry peddles certain half-truths to allow themselves to continue to push more food down the gullets of a mostly confused public. And why are the public confused? Well, that again is due to the food industry which repeatedly says that there are no such things as bad foods (all foods can form part of a healthy diet) or even better foods, that nutrition advice needs to be matched directly to the individual and can never be general, that diet is terribly complicated, that obesity is an exercise problem, never a dietary one and that

any advice to eat less of any food is always bad advice.

Food is 'protected' in the USA by the USDA (that is Department of Agriculture – if there was ever a nutritional agency in a more conflicted position I would love to see it, it is like having the lung cancer agency controlled by the tobacco growers association). There was an interesting line in this book about the advertising campaign designed to encourage people to eat more fruit and vegetables in the US having less money for its ads than any single chocolate bar and by a factor of between 50 and 100 to one.

Science knows you should reduce the total amount you eat, reduce or eliminate sugar and salt from your diet and reduce the amount of fat you eat. But any of these messages cannot really be made in the US as the industry would never allow it. When USDA has sought to say any such scientifically trivial statements industry has howled and forced politicians to apply pressure so as to have these statements toned down – sometimes so that they end up saying the exact opposite.

There is then a very amusing instance in this book made around the supplement industry. You see, they need to be able to make health claims or no one will buy any of their products. You know, Gin Sing improves memory or Echinacea stops you getting colds. The USDA wanted to control some of the more spurious health claims associated with these various snake oils, but was prevented under the US First Amendment rights of corporations. And then if supplement companies can make up health benefits of flower petals or plant roots or whatever (even if the products they sell barely contain even trace amounts of these substances) then why can't food companies (who sell the same stuff in their food products) not make the same spurious claims?

You need to think about this. Scientists are prevented from stating clearly proven health facts about foods, but industry is allowed to make spurious health claims with virtually no scientific evidence supporting them as a matter of their 'freedom of speech'. If you needed proof of a system out of control ... well.

Many of the companies involved in producing food in the US are also tobacco companies – Phillip Morris's name is mentioned more than once in this book. They use the same tactics to prevent limits being put on their Frankenfoods that they have used in opposing controls around smoking. With nearly identical health effects.

And then there is the marketing to children, particularly school children via Channel One (we'll buy your school televisions if we can pump 8 minutes of compulsory viewing into your school per day – 2 minutes of which will be advertisements) and Pouring Rights (where Coke or Pepsi have exclusive rights to all soft drinks sold in a particular school district). Imagine a country that allows the greedy to have access to their children so as to convince them to eat poisons solely so the greedy can become even more wealthy. It is beyond belief.

This has been one of the best books I've read on food. I can whole-heartedly recommend it.

Darren says

At times you might be forgiven for thinking that surely food can be left free of politics, when so much else in the world is tied up with political string. Sorry, but politics plays a big place here too!

Whether it is public policy and politics dictating what we should eat and drink on health grounds, or should that be "health" grounds, geopolitics with us being encouraged to favour produce from country X instead of country Y for various reasons or just plain business politics, with companies lobbying politicians to help

further their own means, food and politics are tied together. Depressing reading, for sure, but this book provides a good non-hectoring read of this subject in a tenth anniversary edition of a classic work.

The food industry is big business and yet this academically-minded book does a good job in opening our eyes to what is actually going on in the wider world, without it sounding like there is a conspiracy behind every door. Written from a U.S. perspective the reader should not, however, be under the misapprehension that things are only an "American problem". It is just that perhaps their own country is less open and thus more things are hidden out of view. Will you be able to look at things again in the same light?

Making food is big business and we are encouraged to consume more than we need. Cutting costs to maximise profits often leads to the food that we eat is not necessarily good for us. Convenience foods sound oh-so-convenient until you notice the chemical soup that often accompanies them. There is a reason why various "corners can be cut", totally legally, that maximise profits and waistlines alike. Ah, but there are pesky government regulations that get in the way of free trade and protect the customer, aren't there? Well, yes, there are regulations but the idea for these regulations doesn't just come from thin air. Big companies with vested interests invest heavily in lobbying, strong-arming weaker countries and elbowing smaller competitors out of the way. It sounds paranoid but nonetheless...

Through this book you will get a much more informed picture of what is going on. You still might be powerless to change things but a better informed consumer can at least attempt to mitigate change even if they cannot influence it. Things are only going to get worse as technological advances are realised. Already the world is aware of GM (genetically modified) food and the pros and cons of this, but more and more foodstuffs are coming via a laboratory and they are not there just to make things cheap and tasty. Far from it..

A great index is provided at the end of this very thought-provoking book and, for those who either doubt the veracity of what they are reading or who wish to learn even more there is a fanatical amount of notes and further reading citations as befits a serious academic work. However it must be stressed that this is an accessible book for the "average reader" but you would be best to set aside some quality time to read and digest its contents. Prepare to be shocked, amazed and possibly sickened by what you read. Tobacco and "Big Pharma" are already painted as villains in many sections of society and, at the time of writing this review, the food industry is under scrutiny in Europe for the criminal mislabelling of horse meat and passing it off in the food chain. After reading this book you might start to wonder what the next scandal will be and wonder just how it has been allowed to get to this stage...

Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health, written by Marion Nestle and published by University of California Press. ISBN 9780520275966, 534 pages. Typical price: USD29.95. YYYYYY.

// This review appeared in YUM.fi and is reproduced here in full with permission of YUM.fi. YUM.fi celebrates the worldwide diversity of food and drink, as presented through the humble book. Whether you call it a cookery book, cook book, recipe book or something else (in the language of your choice) YUM will provide you with news and reviews of the latest books on the marketplace. //

Mark Hartzler says

If I had to paraphrase and summarize Nestle, it would be that you would be very wise to question every single thing you put in your mouth. Why exactly are you eating that particular item? Is it because it is "healthy" or "good for you", or because it is convenient and tastes good? The American food industry most

certainly does not want you to eat less for heaven's sake. They desperately want you to eat more.

You are being marketed to folks. Even for a cynical person, it is hard not to feel depressed at the state of the food industry. If you see the words "USDA Approved" plastered on the box, remember that is the minimum standard. Only 3% rat droppings, but not 1% more because then it wouldn't be USDA approved. Yum. (See the FDA "Defect Levels Handbook") What about if you see the term "Heart Healthy" on the label? Sorry; trademark owned by the American Heart Association. The food product had to pay for that "certification". Plus, after the initial payment, the food product has to fork over an annual renewal fee if they want to keep using the label. She characterizes sweetened breakfast cereal as "sugar with vitamins".

Special scorn is reserved for the regulatory agencies and our pitiful Congress for actively working against the public interest on behalf of the food industry.

This book was published in 2002, and it is showing its age. There are frequent references to Philip Morris and RJ Reynolds owning majority shares in many food companies which are no longer the case here in 2017. I should add that if you want to become a star on "My 600 lbs Life", that is entirely up to you and I respect everyone's right to eat what they want. Still, that does not diminish Professor Nestle's greater points about how the food industry influences our food and general health choices. It is scrupulously documented and footnoted. When Nestle meticulously documents the various failures of deregulation, it really is not open for serious rebuttal because the regulatory capture is completely documented.

Recommended with the caveat that it is (somewhat) dated, much of the material should be already familiar to readers, and it is often technical. 4 stars.
