

Remember that in the Opener, they considered how people's food choices affect what and how food is produced. Have students name a couple of scenes in the film that relate to this idea. Pointing out that we could not give animals equal rights, because that might mean entitlement to citizenship, public education, or other things, ask students whether they think animals have a right to a certain quality of life.

Fast Food to All Food

1. How many of you have pets at home? Do your pets have the same rights as the people who live with you? What rights do your pets have? In what ways are your pets' rights limited? (For example, they may not be able to choose what or when to eat, or when and how to get exercise.)
2. Are there any rights that all animals should have?
3. If animals should have certain rights, do you think those rights also apply to animals we raise for food, like chickens or pigs? Are there any rights that these farm animals should have? If so, what are they?
4. How do you think farm animals should be treated? How do your ideas compare to what you saw in the film?
5. Richard Lobb of the National Chicken Council says in the film, "In a way, we're not producing chickens, we're producing food." What does this statement mean? Do you agree or disagree with it? How might this perspective affect the way that chickens are raised?
6. In the film, food science professor Larry Johnson says, "If you go and look on the supermarket shelf, I'll bet you 90 percent of [the products] would contain either a corn or soybean ingredient. And most of the time, it'll contain both."
7. Why might it be a problem that the majority of our food is made mostly from just corn and soybeans—so that nearly everything we eat contains them?
8. Many of us were surprised to learn that corn is so prevalent in our foods. Why do you think we were so surprised? Do you think the government and food producers have kept it a secret? Why don't more people know this fact?
9. Food labels actually do list corn-based ingredients, but not always in a recognizable way. How do you feel about ingredients being included in your diet without your knowledge?
10. Whose responsibility do you think it is to inform us about what is in our food?
11. Is it our responsibility to find out, the producer's responsibility to make it more clear, or both? Why do you think so?
12. People are responsible for informing themselves about what is in their food, what would help them be more informed? If producers are responsible, what would be the more effective ways for them to inform people?
13. 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?

A Cornucopia of Choices

14. "What can people do to be better informed about what is in the foods they eat?"

Unintended Consequences

15. You are a salesperson at the restaurant who sold the hamburger to Kevin's mom. Are you responsible?
16. You are the meat distributor who sold the meat to the restaurant. You weren't aware that the meat was contaminated. Are you responsible?
17. You are a worker at the meatpacking plant whose job is to cut the carcass. You are a good worker and follow the procedures set up by the plant. Are you at all responsible?
18. What about the federal court judges who said that the government doesn't have the authority to shut down a meatpacking plant that repeatedly fails contaminant tests. Should they be held partly responsible?
19. What about the people who started feeding corn to cows in the first place? Should they be held partly responsible?
20. Does this situation remind you of any other parallel situation where there are unintended consequences of people's actions? (For example, texting an important message in a hurry to a friend may have the unintended consequence of it being misinterpreted, or the use of gasoline-powered cars has had the unintended consequence of raising carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere.) What are some of the unintended consequences in that situation?
21. If any of these people didn't intend for Kevin to die, does that get them off the hook?
22. Imagine that you accidentally hit and killed someone while driving your car. You didn't mean to hurt the person and you are very sorry about it. Does that mean you are not responsible?
23. If a particular party is responsible for Kevin's death, what do you think the consequences or repercussions should be?
24. The mother says, "Sometimes it feels like industry was more protected than my son." What do you think of her words?
25. Who are all the parties involved that need to be identified? Which of them did we think were responsible, at least in part, for Kevin's death?
26. 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?

The Dollar Menu

27. 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? (For example, by eating less healthy food, low-income individuals have more health issues, are sick more often, require more health care, miss more days of work, and have lower job performance.) If not, how might we make healthy food available to everyone?
28. The film gives the impression that food is either cheap or healthy. Do you think it is true that food is either one or the other, or is this a false dichotomy?
29. In the film, the mother, Maria Andrea Gonzalez, says, "We're really tight from either paying for his [Alfredo Orozco's] medicine to be healthy or buying vegetables to be healthy." Which should she choose if she cannot afford both?
30. How have our government policies affected the types and costs of available foods?
31. How does the cheap price of processed food affect low-income families? Is
32. this fair?
33. Subsidies make certain foods cheaper than they would be otherwise. Without subsidies, how might low-income families afford food?
34. In the film, author Michael Pollan says, "We've skewed our food system to the bad calories, and it's not an accident." What does he mean by this?
35. With cheap food, it seems our society pays at both ends—at the production end with subsidy tax dollars, and at the consumption end with poorer health and lower productivity. Who benefits from cheap, fast food? Is it really cheap for everyone?
36. How might our government policies be restructured to allow more access to healthier foods? (For example, policies might educate people about healthful eating or give incentives to grow and buy fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other healthier foods.)
37. Do you think healthy eating should be a right, a responsibility, or a privilege?

In the Grass

38. In the film, union organizer Eduardo Peña says, "We want to pay the cheapest
39. price for our food. We don't understand that it comes at a price." Do you agree or disagree with him? What evidence do you see in the film that led you to agree or disagree? What evidence do you see in your life that informs your position as well?
40. How would you compare the slaughtering of the chickens by Polyface Farms to the slaughtering of the Smithfield hogs? How do the workers' conditions compare?
41. You've seen in the film how the production of some of the meat we eat affects the workers involved in the production. It portrays these people as having no choice because farmers in other countries can no longer farm as a result of our food system. Assuming it is true that there aren't local people to do this work, do you think companies have the right to recruit foreign workers to come into the country, as you saw in the film? What do you think of that?
42. What alternative might the companies have if they can't find local people to do the work?
43. If you think it is okay for companies to recruit foreign workers this way, what might be the repercussions of that?
44. Keith Ludlum in the film says, "They have the same mentality toward workers as they do toward the hogs." What do you think of this statement? If it is true, how might that influence the treatment of both workers and hogs?
45. Slaughterhouse workers may earn as little as \$8 an hour to do the work shown in the film.³ For how much money would you be willing to do this work? What else might you demand?
46. If you would require a large amount of money to do this work, how would the company meet your demand? How would they cover the additional cost? If you say that no amount of money would be enough, what alternatives would the company have, since people like you will not do the work?
47. When a person chooses to eat meat, who else does that decision affect?
48. What might people do to make sure that their eating meat does not harm other people or animals?
49. Author Michael Pollan uses the phrase "Vote with Your Fork" to mean that consumers have the ability to influence companies by what they choose to eat.
50. Is there a way as a group, school, or town that we could possibly influence this situation?
51. Whether or not you think illegal immigration (or the influx of undocumented workers) is a problem, how is illegal immigration connected to the food we eat?

Hidden Costs

52. 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. What kinds of consumers do you think these products are geared for? How do you think those consumers might react to learning that the products are actually made by big corporations?
53. As the film suggests, small companies and producers are often bought out or taken over by very big companies. What might be the implications of that—both positive and negative?
54. 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?
55. Walmart's dairy purchaser says that Walmart and other companies react to what the customers want. How might individual purchases affect Walmart's dairy offerings? Can you think of any situation where companies should not provide what the customer wants?
56. 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?
57. As portrayed in the film, cost and efficiency drive our current food system. Should price be the most important force behind our food industry? Why or why not? How might our food system change if it was driven by other values, like health or environmental sustainability?
58. Some people seek out organic food and some follow a vegetarian or vegan diet. What other examples can you think of where people make food or consumer choices based on their values?
59. Yogurt company executive Gary Hirshberg says that Walmart started selling organic yogurt not because of a "moral enlightenment," but for economic reasons. Do you think economics is a good enough reason by itself for companies to make changes that affect our society? Why or why not?
60. What do you think of Gary Hirshberg's statement that "nobody can challenge the fact that a sale of another million dollars to Walmart helps to save the world"? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

From Seed to the Supermarket

61. 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?
62. How does this situation compare to downloading music from "free" sites?
63. How does it compare to the Microsoft monopoly case in which Microsoft was accused of having an unfair competitive advantage when it required consumers to buy both its Web browser and computer operating system together?
64. Intellectual property can be defined as creations of the mind—such as music, art, writing, inventions, symbols, images, designs, or names—that have commercial value. In our country, these things are legally protected and cannot be sold or used without the permission of the owner. Do you think people should be able to own an idea? Why or why not?
65. Saving seeds from each year's crop is a tradition farmers have followed for thousands of years. Think of a tradition that has been in your family for a long time. What if you could no longer have this tradition because someone now legally claims it as theirs?
66. Why might we care whether Monsanto or another company owns the DNA in seeds?
67. Do you think it is fair that the one farmer had to settle (say he was guilty) because that was cheaper than trying to fight Monsanto's lawsuit? Why or why not?
68. The film includes an image of Lady Justice holding scales, with the side that is able to put the most money on the scales depicted as the winner. What do you think of that image?

The Veil

69. Should a company have the power to decide what information to give consumers about the food it produces? Why?
70. 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? Why or why not?
71. Thinking back to the Opener, how would information about a food raise or lower your fear of it?
72. In the film, author Michael Pollan says, "I think that one of the most important battles for consumers to fight is the right to know what's in their food and how it's grown." How does his position compare with the California Farm Bureau's position?
73. Can you name different consumer products that have warning labels about their use or safety (cigarettes, alcohol, appliances, games, and so on)? What impact, if any, do you think these labels have?
74. Health experts recently called for warning labels on energy drinks, pointing out the effects of "caffeine intoxication"—a syndrome that can cause anxiety, insomnia, gastrointestinal upset, tremors, rapid heartbeat, and even death. Would a warning label affect whether or not you buy energy drinks? Why or why not?
75. How effective are labels in helping consumers make decisions about their food? What might be more effective?

76. What do you think about Oprah being sued for saying she wasn't sure if she wanted to continue eating hamburgers, as described in the film? What do you think about a law that prevents you from saying something negative about a particular food item?
77. In the film, Barbara Kowalczyk appears to be afraid to say how her eating habits have changed as a result of her son's death, and she does not reveal the source of the meat that killed him. What do you think of that?
78. 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?
79. Who do you think should have the power to decide food policies, laws about food safety, and other food-related matters?

Shocks to the System

80. 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?
81. Yogurt company executive Gary Hirshberg states in the film, "The consumer does not feel very powerful, but it's the exact opposite. When we run an item past the supermarket scanner, we're voting for local or not, organic or not." What does he mean by this statement? Do you agree or disagree with it? Why or why not?
82. Aside from the supermarket, in what other arenas can individuals and groups make an impact on our food system?
83. As portrayed in the film, our food system has become very mechanized as a way to cheaply and efficiently provide vast quantities of food. Would it be possible to feed the hundreds of millions of people who live in our country without this kind of industrialized food system? If so, how? If not, what might we do to avoid the problems that seem to come with it?
84. 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? What other goals might we have for our food system?
85. 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? Why do you think that?
86. 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? Why or why not?
87. Which do you think would be a more effective way to change people's food choices: changing policy or informing the public about health benefits and environmental impacts? Why do you think so?
88. What are other things we can do—either individually or collectively—to encourage our families, our friends, or others around us to make changes in their lives toward food that is more healthful and environmentally sustainable?