

Organic Connections

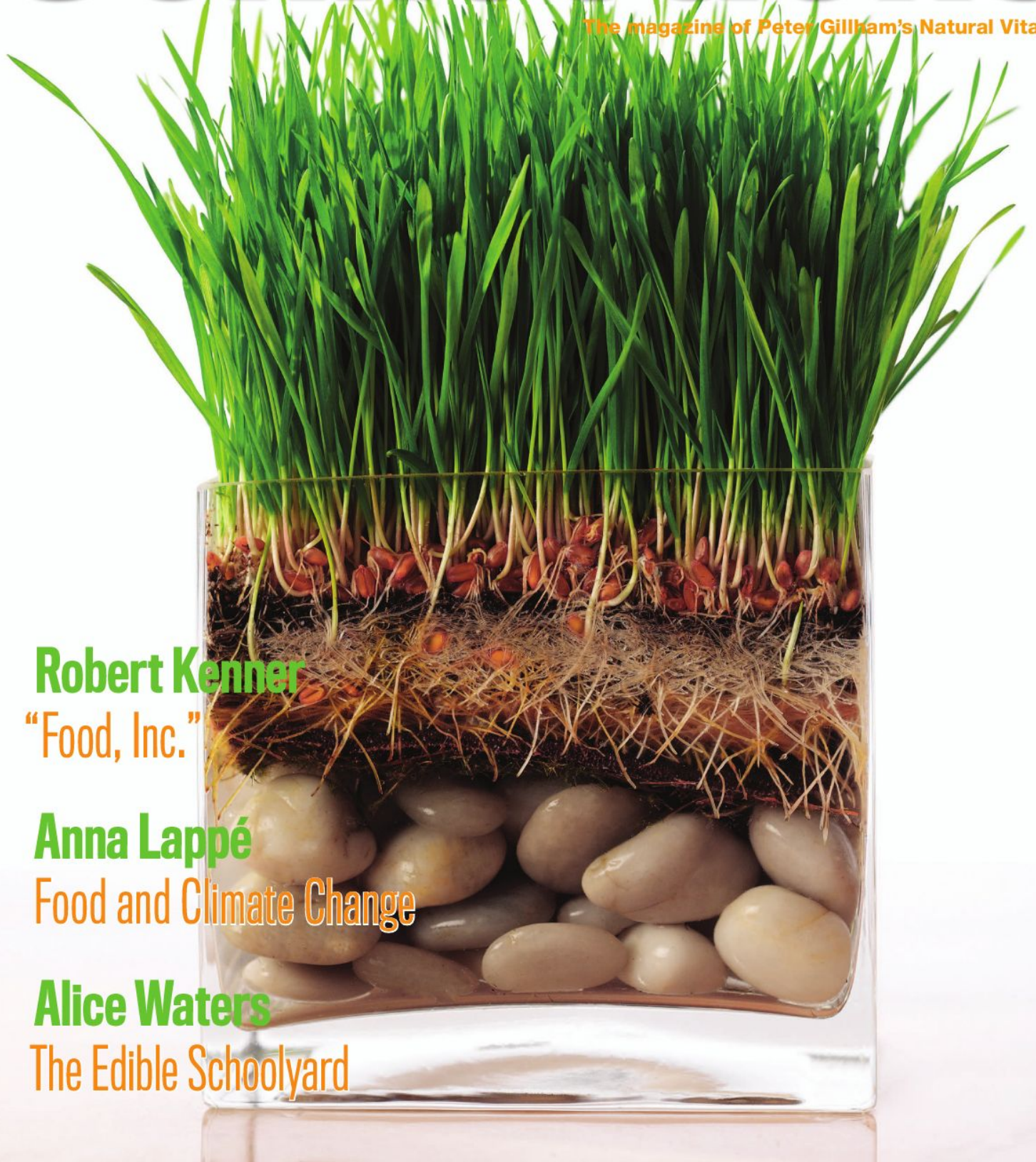
SEPT-OCT 2009

The magazine of Peter Gillham's Natural Vitality

Robert Kenner
"Food, Inc."

Anna Lappé
Food and Climate Change

Alice Waters
The Edible Schoolyard



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The good, the bad and the unsustainable

In this issue



To quote Charles Dickens, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times....” This seems quite applicable to the present state of affairs in our fair country. We are living in an age of both wisdom *and* foolishness.

I suggest that at the root of this dichotomy lies bad, or simply unworkable, technology. How do you know a technology is bad? By its observable results—not by its promises or “scientific” justifications. *Good* technologies lead us toward the best of times. *Bad* ones give us newspaper headlines and top stories on the 6 o’clock news.

We may have adopted bad technology for good reasons. And in most cases we probably thought it *was* good technology *at the time*. But results tell the story. If we’re getting bad results, then something needs to change—and odds are that the people reaping the bad tech profits aren’t going to be the ones to change things for the better.

Now that we’ve established that our addiction to fossil fuel is making life on this planet unsustainable, we need to shift over to *good*, sustainable technologies. That’s wisdom. To oppose it or cause unneeded delays is foolishness *at best*. Apply this to any less-than-optimum situation. Who is making positive changes? And on the other side of the dichotomy, who is using force to maintain patented profits and power to the benefit of the few and detriment of the many?

Often, pointing out what’s *not* working can lead us in a positive direction. Filmmaker Robert Kenner has done just that in his documentary *Food, Inc.*, which “lifts the veil on our nation’s food industry.” Author and speaker Anna Lappé has connected the dots between our eating choices and climate change. And renowned chef Alice Waters had taken local, sustainable organic food into the schoolyard to show how easily we can make positive changes *if* we really want to do so.

We *have* good technology with the wisdom of natural, organic and sustainable products, alternative healthcare options and green technologies. We have the potential to reconnect with nature and adopt practices that will not only remedy old problems we’ve created but also lead us into a new era of harmony as responsible stewards of our bodies, plant and animal life and the future of our planet.

Because you’re reading this magazine, I’m sure you want a sustainable America. Well, it’s up to you and me to reach out to our fellow citizens and share our good technology through the Internet, through our stores and practices and in our daily lives. We’ll get the America we want *and the best of times* when the majority of us truly demand it.

Ken Whitman
PUBLISHER

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or•gan•ic [ôr gan’ik]

denoting a relation between elements of something such that they fit together harmoniously as necessary parts of a whole: *the organic unity of the integral work of art* • characterized by continuous or natural development: *companies expand as much by acquisition as by organic growth*.

4 Robert Kenner

The producer/director of the documentary *Food, Inc.* goes behind the scenes to reveal the high cost of cheap food and what he had to go through to make this groundbreaking film.



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How does what we eat relate to climate change? Nationally known author Anna Lappé discusses the connection and how we can bring about change with both our forks and our mouths.



11 Alice Waters

The famous chef and owner of Chez Panisse talks about her Edible Schoolyard program and how it can bring our children into a new relationship with food and also create a new set of values we’re all going to need in order to live together on this planet.



NATURAL REVITALIZATION

A portion of the profits from the sale of *Natural Calm*® and *Organic Life Vitamins*® goes to our Natural Revitalization environmental action initiative addressing global warming, which helps fund **Conservation International** (www.conservation.org) and **Remineralize the Earth** (www.remineralize.org).

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Food, Inc.

The High Cost of Cheap Food

by Bruce Boyers



The twenty-first-century world has made us very accustomed to new technology. But there are times when our thirst for the latest in scientific solutions leads us to new problems we'd never imagined. We have seen how our appetites for electrical energy and big cars have led us to a worldwide fuel crisis and global warming. Now, as revealed in the new film *Food, Inc.*, the low-cost convenience of our industrialized food system, enthusiastically embraced by most of us for about the last 50 years, has had a number of consequences that we need to very quickly wake up to—and change.

It's been several years since I stopped eating fast food, and as a result of writing for *Organic Connections* this decision has been further cemented. I also shop for and buy organic whenever possible, and my wife has a vegetable garden. Even with

Congratulations for persisting and getting such a work onto the screen."

There was a bit of a pause, after which Kenner replied half-jokingly, "You can put that in the article!" He then got serious and said, "Thank you. It's not been easy."

The New Muckrakers

Food, Inc. didn't start off to be an exposé as such, although it became one. The film's producers have, unwittingly at first, followed in the footsteps of author Upton Sinclair, who, 103 years ago, wrote *The Jungle*, a shocking novel exposing then-current horrific practices within the meat-packing industry that ultimately resulted in the formation of the FDA.

Kenner's documentary shows that the last 50 years or so have seen tremendous changes in our society. With the formation of McDonald's as a catalyst, our ever growing appetite for convenience and low cost has resulted in the creation of vast quantities of standardized, inexpensive food, complete with the latest chemical sprays, additives, hormones, genetic modification and more. Part of the collateral damage in all this was that vast numbers of small farms were swept away, with huge food conglomerates buying up the land to create a uniform industrial agriculture to supply fast-food chains and supermarkets. This

have made "breakthroughs" in the breeding and raising of poultry, beef and pork that are inhumanely cruel to both animals and humans.

Many crops, such as corn and soybeans, have been genetically modified (GM) to be supposedly drought and pest resistant. This is very controversial. The American Academy of Environmental Medicine (AAEM) is calling for a moratorium on genetically modified foods and for physicians to urge their patients, the medical community and the public to avoid them when possible. The AAEM is also calling for long-term independent studies and labeling, citing serious health risks associated with GM foods, including infertility, accelerated aging and problems with the immune system and insulin regulation, as well as changes in major organs and the gastrointestinal system.

A recent AAEM position paper states: "There is more than a casual association between GM foods and adverse health effects. There is causation," as defined by recognized scientific criteria.

According to the Food Safety Monitor, a tracking tool of leading market research company NPD, consumers are increasingly concerned about food safety. Among Americans' top concerns in this area are salmonella, *E. coli*, trans fatty acids, mercury in fish and seafood, mad cow disease, high-fructose corn syrup, artificial growth

THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG IF, IN A FREE SOCIETY AND A FREE MARKET, WE'RE BEING DENIED INFORMATION. HOW DO YOU MAKE CHOICES IF YOU DON'T HAVE INFORMATION?

everything I already knew, I'm at a loss for words to describe the way I felt as the film's credits rolled. There were tears streaming down my face. At that moment I decided what I would say to the film's director, Robert Kenner, when I got my interview with him—which I did.

I said this: "Before I start the interview, I have to say that watching your film was, for me, quite a profound experience. I think every American should see this movie, and it should win every award imaginable.

was not farming as we once knew it. It is food manufacturing—or Food, Inc.

As is pointed out in the film, Madison Avenue still portrays a nostalgic image of food produced on pristine farms with pretty red barns and white picket fences. The truth—which considerable effort has been spent to block—is not pretty to look at, much less appetizing on any level.

As *Food, Inc.* progresses, we see that the actual scene has been cleverly hidden from the American public. Corporations

hormones in milk, genetically modified foods, foot-and-mouth disease, and meat and milk from cloned animals.

Freedom of Information?

For Kenner, making the film was a serious wake-up call. "The most shocking thing for me was when I went to a hearing on whether we should label cloned meats," he said. "I didn't even know there were cloned meats. And when the representative from

"More than a terrific movie—it's an important movie."
—Owen Gleiberman, *Entertainment Weekly*

YOU'LL NEVER LOOK AT DINNER
THE SAME WAY AGAIN



FOOD, INC.

A ROBERT KENNER FILM

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the meat industry said, 'I think it would be too confusing to the consumer to give them this kind of information,' I realized this happens time and time again.

"One major company that developed GMOs [genetically modified organisms] has said that these are great things; however, the company will do everything possible to stop you from knowing they're in your food. Or bST, the growth hormone for dairy cows: they'll do everything possible to stop you from knowing it's in the milk you're giving to your child—and this is a really powerful hormone. We could go on and on listing these things.

"There's something wrong if, in a free society and a free market, we're being denied information. How do you make choices if you don't have information?"

Kenner and his crew were blocked at every turn. Repeatedly throughout the film, when one or another unsavory aspect of food production is revealed, the companies behind these operations refuse to be interviewed. Not only that, but some of the farmers and workers who did agree to speak on camera had their jobs and livelihoods threatened by these corporations and in two cases lost them completely.

Free Speech Abridged

Along with his partners, Kenner was also faced with the so-called veggie libel laws—actual legislation that has been enacted to prevent public criticism of food products. "I think these laws were put into place after

could have said, 'Cigarettes are bad for your health,' because you would have damaged their profits. There are laws in 13 states that say you can't disparage food products. I think that's pretty amazing."

Oversight

One might wonder where the government has been in all this. There are agencies charged with protecting the public, but as revealed in *Food, Inc.*, oversight is often performed by many former executives of the same companies they are responsible for regulating.

"In finance, we had large, powerful corporations that were 'too big to fail,' that said they were better at policing themselves than the government would be," continued Kenner. "Ultimately, look what happened. They not only destroyed themselves, they brought all of us down as well. Here we have a food system that's not sustainable, and I'm just hoping we can enter into a conversation with all the producers so that we can make it sustainable."

The changes brought about by the techno-industrial food system have had a definite effect on the health of society as a whole. "We eat 300 more calories a day



than we used to," Kenner said. "In the last decade 64 percent of Americans have become overweight or obese, and one-third of all Americans are going to get early onset diabetes. The fact is that this very inexpensive food (we spend less on food than at any

and in case anyone was wondering if we have a health crisis, this should put any question to rest. In a recent report, the CDC stated that for children born in the year 2000, one out of three Caucasians and one out of two African Americans and Hispanics will develop diabetes.

Bringing the Changes

It would seem that the odds are stacked against trying to lead a healthy life in America today. According to the Organic



Trade Association, organic food accounts for only about 3.5 percent of all US food sales. That of course means that 96.5 percent is non-organic.

The USDA is now providing \$50 million in new funding for organic food producers—and the organic food industry is steadily expanding. At the same time, the US corn subsidy for 2006 was almost \$5 billion and nearly twice that in 2005. Note the disparity.

These corn subsidies are part and parcel of what is known as the Farm Bill—which until only a couple of years ago passed through Congress without so much as a cursory glance from an unsuspecting public. Beginning in 2007, however, the public began to take notice of—and raise their voices on—the billions in funding that help determine the direction of our food system and what most of us and our children end up eating.

It may only be a beginning, but it's a beginning nonetheless and one taken notice of in *Food, Inc.* "This film is ultimately

WHEN WE STARTED TO LEARN THAT THESE CIGARETTES WERE NOT GOOD FOR US, WE ACTUALLY WERE ABLE TO CHANGE THE LAWS. I THINK AS WE BEGIN TO LEARN ABOUT THIS FOOD SYSTEM, AND AS WE START TO OPEN OUR EYES, WE'RE GOING TO BRING ABOUT A CHANGE.

food makers saw what happened to tobacco companies," Kenner remarked. "They made it so they can sue you if you endanger their profits or you disparage a food product. If tobacco had had similar laws, nobody

time in history) has become very expensive. You don't see the costs when you go to the checkout counter."

Even the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have released an alarming prediction;

there to empower the consumer, to make you hungry for all the great things that are out there, those great choices," Kenner explained. "It's not to make you close your eyes at the horrible side; it is to make you

understand that we need the information because we want to make the right choices. And hopefully *Food, Inc.* will point you toward those good choices.

"We actually screened this film for some high-ups in the Obama administration, and they said, 'If there's a movement, we'll follow.' So I implore all your readers to let everyone else know that they can get out and vote three times a day through their breakfast, lunch and dinner choices—plus we also can make our voices heard with our regular votes. Ultimately we have to stop subsidizing food that's making us sick and start encouraging food that's going to make us healthy and make the planet healthy."

Down to Us

Kenner's statement actually brings responsibility back to where it really belongs—the consumers. For while it could be argued that we were deviously fooled into spending our hard-earned dollars into this food system, we still did it. If we hadn't, it wouldn't be here. So, in the end, it's going to have to be we the people that cause any change to occur. That is why it is not enough for the few of us to produce and sell organic products and to lead sustainable lives ourselves; we have to get this message out to everyone.

Responsibility certainly starts with reforming legislation—and there is much the seemingly lowly citizen can do. "We changed tobacco laws," said Kenner. "These, too, were huge, powerful corporations that were ultimately as tied into government as any sort of industry, and they were putting out incredible misinformation about the safety of their product—'These cigarettes are not bad for you'—and they had 'studies' to prove it. When we started to learn that these cigarettes were *not* good for us, we actually were able to change the laws. I think as we begin to learn about this food system, and as we start to open our eyes, we're going to bring about a change."

More importantly, though, it also comes down to a consumer's everyday life. As Michael Pollan wrote in "Why Bother?"—his excellent contribution to the *Food, Inc.* companion book: "For us to wait for legislation or technology to solve the problem of how we're living our lives suggests we're not really serious about changing—something our politicians cannot fail to notice. They will not move until we do. Indeed, to look to leaders and experts, to

WE EAT 300 MORE CALORIES A DAY THAN WE USED TO. IN THE LAST DECADE 64 PERCENT OF AMERICANS HAVE BECOME OVERWEIGHT OR OBESE, AND ONE-THIRD OF ALL AMERICANS ARE GOING TO GET EARLY ONSET DIABETES. THE FACT IS THAT THIS VERY INEXPENSIVE FOOD (WE SPEND LESS ON FOOD THAN AT ANY TIME IN HISTORY) HAS BECOME VERY EXPENSIVE.

—ROBERT KENNER

laws and money and grand schemes, to save us from our predicament represents precisely the sort of thinking—passive, delegated, dependent for solutions on specialists—that helped get us into this mess in the first place. It's hard to believe that the same sort of thinking could now get us out of it."

"We can change the system; there are lots of great choices and there will be many more," Kenner concluded. "Hopefully *Food,*

Inc. will encourage people to take part in those good choices."

Get everyone you know to see the film. To help sell them on the idea, you can send them to the *Food, Inc.* website where they can watch the movie trailer. Once they've seen it, they can return to the site to find out how they can simply but surely start taking action.

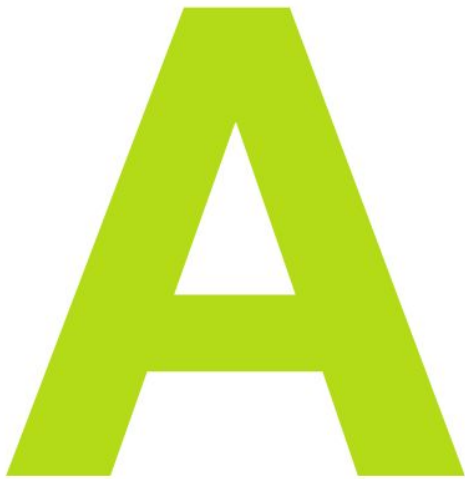
Here's to a healthy, sustainable food system for us all.



Anna Lappé

Food Choices That Combat Climate Change





Anna Lappé is a national best-selling author and sought-after public speaker, well known for her work on sustainability, food politics, globalization and social change. In addition to having been featured in the *New York Times*, *Gourmet*, *O: The Oprah Magazine*, *Domino*, *Food & Wine*, *Body + Soul* and many other publications, she is also a regular guest on nationally syndicated radio and appears frequently on television, from PBS to the CBC in Canada and Fox News. Anna currently hosts *The Practical Guide to Healthier Living* for MSN and is a co-host of the public television series *The Endless Feast*.

She has two published books—*Hope's Edge: The Next Diet for a Small Planet*, written with her mother, Frances Moore Lappé, and *Grub: Ideas for an Urban Organic Kitchen*, co-authored with chef Bryant Terry.

Anna viewed the recent release of the breakthrough documentary *Food, Inc.* as a milestone. "I think it's a fantastic film," she told *Organic Connections*. "I just saw it recently in Brooklyn, and the audience was really captivated by it. I feel that what the movie accomplishes so well is exactly as [*Food, Inc.* co-producer] Eric Schlosser says early in the presentation: the work that he really sees himself doing is lifting the veil around our food systems. The film does a very powerful job of showing all of us the inner workings of where food comes from and who and what are being harmed in the process—workers and eaters, animals and the environment."

Coincident with the release of *Food, Inc.*, a companion book was published under the same title, containing interviews with and essays from film producers and other

significant individuals bringing about changes in our food system. Anna Lappé contributed an excerpt from her forthcoming new book (due March 2010) in a chapter entitled "The Climate Crisis at the End of Our Fork."

Food Production and Climate Change

If you haven't heard of a connection between food production and climate change, it's largely due to the fact that the bulk of public information on climate change came from Al Gore's 2006 documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*. Unfortunately, very little was contained in that film about the food industry.

It is only in the last few years that Anna herself made the connection between food production and climate change. "One of the triggering moments in my making these associations was reading a United Nations report called *Livestock's Long Shadow*, published in 2006," Anna said. "Based on their analysis and study, the authors of the report estimated that livestock production, both the intensive kind we see in *Food, Inc.* as well as livestock in developing countries, is responsible for about 18 percent of the total global greenhouse gas emissions. To give you some perspective, that's more than all transportation—airplanes, cars and other methods—combined. That study was a big wake-up call for me, and I wanted to better understand the reasons for this and what we can do about it. That research developed into my upcoming book."

For centuries, livestock have been a vital part of sustainable food systems, supplying both meat and farm labor. Throughout history they have provided many benefits, including aeration and fertilization of soil. Modern livestock production, however, has put an end to traditional practices, making way for the factory-like processes described in *Food, Inc.* Using such methods, there is simply too much waste to cycle back through the system. Not having sufficient oxygenation, this waste emits methane and nitrous oxide gases. Methane is also released by the animals themselves, and now that science has found methods of growing enormous numbers of livestock with shorter life spans, these giant populations heavily contribute to pollution.

Overall, climate-change factors from the food industry are many. There are the emissions created by industrial farming processes such as fertilizer production,

as well as carbon emissions produced by trucks, ships and planes as they transport food around the world. Among the main sources of the food system's impact on climate are changes in land use and effects caused by contemporary agricultural practices. Anna's research has found that the entire food production system is responsible for over a third of the total global warming effect.

The Differences We Can Make

"We hear a lot about our ecological footprint," Anna stated, "that is, the environmental impact of our choices, like what type of car we drive and what kind of house we live in and what choices we make on a daily basis that affect the environment. But there's also what I call the ecological 'foodprint'—in other words, the environmental impact of the food choices we make."

Those choices are more important than one might think at first glance. If someone shops at the regular supermarket, cutting back on meat and dairy products is one way to bring about a change, simply because of the high environmental impact made by common meat and dairy production. Beyond that, buying food that has been locally and sustainably grown creates a tremendous effect: you are taking a big bite out of the polluting practices in the prevailing system of both growing and transporting food.

Choices in food purchasing not only affect climate change positively, they affect nutrition as well. "Our own government tells us to eat lots of fruits and vegetables," said Anna. "The sources of this produce, however, are very important. I think there's been growing public awareness for some time about the environmental and personal health costs of choosing chemically grown fruits and vegetables. There's also greater awareness that the chemical pesticides used in unnatural farming are not good for the water, for ecosystems, for the workers that get poisoned every year, or for our bodies."

As with the raising of livestock, there is also a substantial climate-change factor with the growing of produce. "Part of it has to do with the fact that so many chemicals on our farmland are petroleum based, so there's that fossil fuel connection," Anna explained. "Or they are grown on large-scale industrial farms that have very intensive irrigation facilities, and again there's the

fossil fuel connection. We are also shipping those fruits and vegetables great distances to get to us—again a fossil fuel connection. So it really isn't a question of just choosing more fruits and vegetables, but also where they are coming from. For those of us for whom it is possible, it means making that conscious choice of local and organic as much as we can."

Another way that all of us can make a difference is by speaking out and voting. "In addition to the effect we can create with our forks, we can also bring about a change with our mouths," continued Anna. "Much of the reason that our food system takes such a heavy toll on our climate has to do with the policies that are in place, which are really resulting in an unsustainable system. Many of those policies were examined in *Food, Inc.* from the aspect of environmental and social welfare issues. I think we can layer on top of that an argument for climate change as well. The policies that are letting our large factory farms emit so much pollution are ones that we as involved citizens can be raising questions about. We should be getting active and really letting our officials know that there

is a connection between food and global warming, and that the food policies we have in place need to reflect this understanding."

Genetic Modification

One controversial trend in modern food production is that of genetically modifying crops. Interestingly, while food conglomerates are creating a substantial amount of climate change through their practices, one of their main defenses of GMOs (genetically modified organisms) is that they will withstand that very climate change.

"There is a complete chapter about GMOs in my new book, intended to dispel the whole myth connected with them," Anna said. "The main allegation we hear from the biotech industry is that genetically modified foods are going to be the key to a changing climate and a stable future because these foods are more drought resistant or more flood tolerant. I was really curious to explore the truth of these statements, and the more I dug into it, the more I realized that, first of all, they are just claims; there's absolutely no evidence so far that we're really seeing new crops deliver on those promises.

"Secondly, we're noticing a lot of very negative consequences which aren't theoretical that are actually happening today. We are seeing an expanding number of weeds that are herbicide resistant. Growth of GM crops has really spread the use of one particular brand of herbicide. Overspraying of this one product has led to overresistant weeds, which necessitates farmers spraying even more, creating a negative cycle of greater and greater use of herbicides on farmlands. Another concern is the contamination of non-biotech crops with biotech varieties, and yet another is the impact of GM crops on biodiversity; we need to have a broad variety of crops that can thrive in the face of climate change.

"I also discovered in my research that we have on Earth today organic agri-ecological systems that are really tapping into how nature works as opposed to coming up with new chemicals or engineered seed that's going to attack nature. We can have highly adaptive, highly drought resistant crops within those systems. In my book I discuss studies that were done with skilled small-scale farmers in Ethiopia; within these agricultural communities, farmers were able to see incredible

yield jumps in their crops, despite the fact that there is still very little rain. And this is occurring without the farmers having to pay astronomical amounts of money to a seed company or a chemical company half a world away. So to me the 'logic' of the biotech companies can be dismantled pretty swiftly by looking at the false promises from the industry, by looking at the negatives from the current use of biotech in agriculture, and finally by looking at the examples that we have around the world of the regenerative possibilities of agri-ecological farming, which don't bind farmers to seed or chemical companies."

Our Future

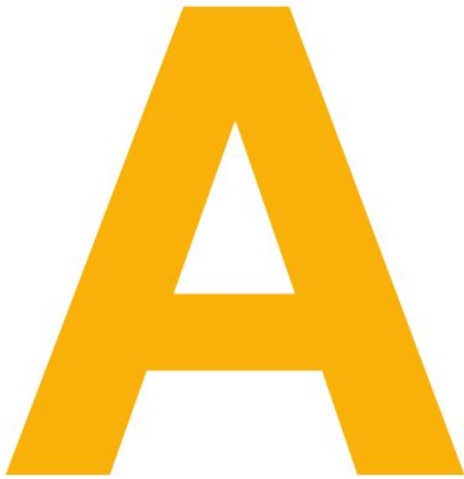
Despite the problems evident in today's food systems, Anna is quite optimistic about the future.

"In my opinion, we have no choice now but to move toward sustainable production, get off our addiction to chemicals, stop our habitual use of fossil fuels in the farming system, and really shift away from the intensive animal factory farming that we see in *Food, Inc.*," Anna concluded. "Many times when I say that, I get a response like, 'Oh, but you're so naive to think that we can move in that direction and still win or still feed the world.' I believe what we're really seeing now, especially with this understanding of climate change, is that essentially we can't feed the world *without* moving in this direction. The FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations] just came out with new numbers showing that as many as 1 billion people are going hungry on this planet—up about 150 million from only a year and a half ago. We know with the current system that we aren't feeding the world, and I would argue this is further evidence that we really need to follow a different path.

"However, I think we are moving in this direction very fast. I've had the privilege of traveling to farms in South Korea, India, Brazil, Poland, Kenya and France, and all around the world I have seen for myself the emergence of this really inspiring environmentally sound way of raising food and of creating food systems. I've also seen it emerging across our own country. That is what is giving me hope."



For more information, please visit www.takeabite.cc, Anna Lappé's website dedicated to the link between our diets and climate change. Also stop by www.smallplanet.org, the organization Anna co-founded with her mother, Frances Moore Lappé.



Alice Waters

The Edible Schoolyard

which locally grown organic ingredients are lovingly served.

The Edible Schoolyard Program

The Edible Schoolyard began 13 years ago when Alice, driving daily between

her restaurant and Berkeley home, noticed Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School, which she described as “a run-down collection of sad old concrete buildings with peeling paint and a hard blacktop playground. Countless windows lay broken with no money to fix them, and a few lawns grew long and wild

Alice Waters, iconic chef and creator of California Cuisine, now brings us a remarkable and profound view of our future. It is a place called the Edible Schoolyard, where students of all ages not only are taught about growing sustainable, healthy crops, but they actually plant, raise and harvest them, right on their school grounds. With such a program in cities across the US, public school students will actually graduate into the world with firsthand knowledge of sustainable agriculture and what it means to share tasty, nutritious meals at the table with friends and family.

“I’ve seen it myself: when kids grow food themselves and cook it, they all want to eat it,” Alice told *Organic Connections*. “And it could be anything from kale and garlic to little salads or chickpeas. They feel empowered by the circumstances of it. They like the taste and they like serving their friends. That’s a truth I have discovered. If you engage children in a positive way and if you make them something delicious and it comes with care, they want that.”

The Edible Schoolyard program has become Alice’s top priority in a life filled with many amazing accomplishments. Her Berkeley, California, restaurant, Chez Panisse, is legendary for having introduced California Cuisine. President Bill Clinton, when he was in office, once dropped by for dinner with a large contingent of Secret Service agents. Through her restaurant, television appearances, articles and books, and also through her function as an international governor of Slow Food, Alice Waters has been at the forefront of bringing the world to a table at



I THINK OF THE **EDIBLE SCHOOLYARD** AS THE WAY TO BRING CHILDREN INTO A **NEW RELATIONSHIP** WITH FOOD AND A **SET OF VALUES** THAT WE ARE ALL GOING TO NEED IN ORDER TO **LIVE ON THIS PLANET TOGETHER.**

in the rainy season and then died and dried yellow in the summer.”

She conducted an interview at the time with a journalist visiting her restaurant, and in that interview she brought up the idea of using vacant lots and other unused land as places for growing crops. She pointed out the local school as an example of how *not* to use land. A few days after the article appeared, she received a handwritten note from the school’s principal. He agreed with much of what she had said and invited her over to the school to perhaps find a way to help.

Alice went for the visit, and during her tour she verbally envisioned a garden where students could grow and harvest wholesome food. She also had the idea that the school could open up a new kitchen to teach students how to cook the food they were growing, and even a cafeteria for sharing it with their classmates. Leftovers could be recycled right back into the soil as compost.

The first reaction of the principal was to laugh out loud. But when he realized that Alice was quite serious, and when she volunteered her personal help for the project, he had to try and get the concept through a resistant school board and parent-teacher association.

The principal succeeded, and one by one the barriers to the project were knocked down. The project grew and grew. Local farmers, including suppliers to Chez Panisse, donated trees and crops. Landscape architects and gardeners pitched in as well.

The account of how the garden was eventually created—and how at first the school and then the entire community pulled together to bring it all about—is an amazing story detailed in Alice Waters’ book *Edible Schoolyard*. To this day that garden continues, staffed year after year by students coming up through the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Alice’s vision came true in its entirety: food from the garden is prepared in a special kitchen and served to the student body, who seem to never get enough of it.

Beyond Berkeley

While the garden at MLK Middle School continues to thrive, new ones have begun sprouting up all over the country. If Alice has her way (or, as those who know her might say, *when* she has her way), it will happen at every school in the US.

“I think of the Edible Schoolyard as the way to bring children into a new relationship with food and a set of values that we are all going to need in order to live on this planet together,” Alice explained. “So we are very involved with making models that people can walk into. We made the one in Berkeley, but that’s in Berkeley and it’s for an older group of kids. I think it’s very important that we reach kids when they’re little, so I’m also talking about preschool and kindergarten. We should feed all of our children in school and do it for free. I sort of see this as a stimulus package that deals with preventative medicine, sustainable farming and bringing the children into a sense of their culture, back to their senses. We’re working on an affiliate project in New Orleans that’s been going for a couple of years, and there’s one in North Carolina, one in Los Angeles, and one going to be built in Brooklyn.”

It’s not only a sense of food to Alice, but a sense of community. “I think that this is a universal idea. I’m not talking about anything new—people have been living and eating together since the beginning of time. But I mean eating what’s local and seasonal, and feeding children things that are delicious, and cooking these with family and friends. Being close to nature and celebrating traditions of the table—these are meaningful things in everybody’s life. And I just think we have lost our way and we need to come back there, because that’s where we learn how to take care of the land. We learn to be good stewards and we learn to cook for ourselves, nourish ourselves, and sit there at the table and communicate with one another.”

Free School Lunches

In addition to the Edible Schoolyard program, Alice has been championing a school stimulus package that would provide a free healthy breakfast, lunch and snack for every student in US public schools. “It has not yet been adopted, but it should be,” Alice said. “We’re paying with the health of the nation, and instead we need to pay up front. I think that putting more money into school lunches is a step in the right direction, which we hope to accomplish this fall. There are issues of diabetes in children and obesity as well, and these medical emergencies are not being addressed.”

The medical industry, which eventually has to treat the casualties of non-nutrition, is starting to take notice. One of the sponsors of the Edible Schoolyard program is, believe it or not, Kaiser Permanente. “It’s great when healthcare organizations like Kaiser start to promote preventative medicine and talk a lot about the quality of one’s life, because they don’t see how they can take care of everybody who’s going to be sick,” Alice stated. “That’s where we have to go.”

Alice sees the problem—and its potential solution—in the light of a program that occurred some 46 years ago. “It has been done before, when President Kennedy put physical education in the schools because we weren’t physically fit. We spent lots of money then. We built tracks and gymnasiums and hired teachers and made it part of the curriculum of every school in this country. We now have a huge need to teach gastronomy and ecology, and we need to feed all children because we don’t want childhood hunger to be an issue for why children aren’t learning. We need school reform and this brings it along with feeding the children.”

The Larger Issue

With all the world’s problems at the moment, such as climate change and the economy, how does Alice see the problem of proper nutrition for children—and everyone, for that matter—stacking up?



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"We need food for our survival," said Alice. "And we need to protect the planet because that is the source of our food. It is unimaginable to me that people could think about global warming without talking about food, because 40 percent of the emissions—the bad kind—come from the wrong sort of farming, ranching and distribution of food around this planet. So if we were all to be asked to support the people who take care of the land, to buy our food carefully with intention, I think we could make a dramatic difference. Because once you get into that place of farmers' markets and communities that care about nourishment, you begin to make different decisions about everything you do. It teaches you a different set of values. And so I may end up walking to the farmers' market instead of driving my car to the supermarket. I bring all my bags to

pick up the groceries; I don't use any of the wrappings in the farmers' markets—I just put the vegetables right in my basket. All of these are contributors to the big picture. And I think it's the easy and delicious way to help people understand deeply the frightening possibilities of global warming and to feel empowered to do something about it."

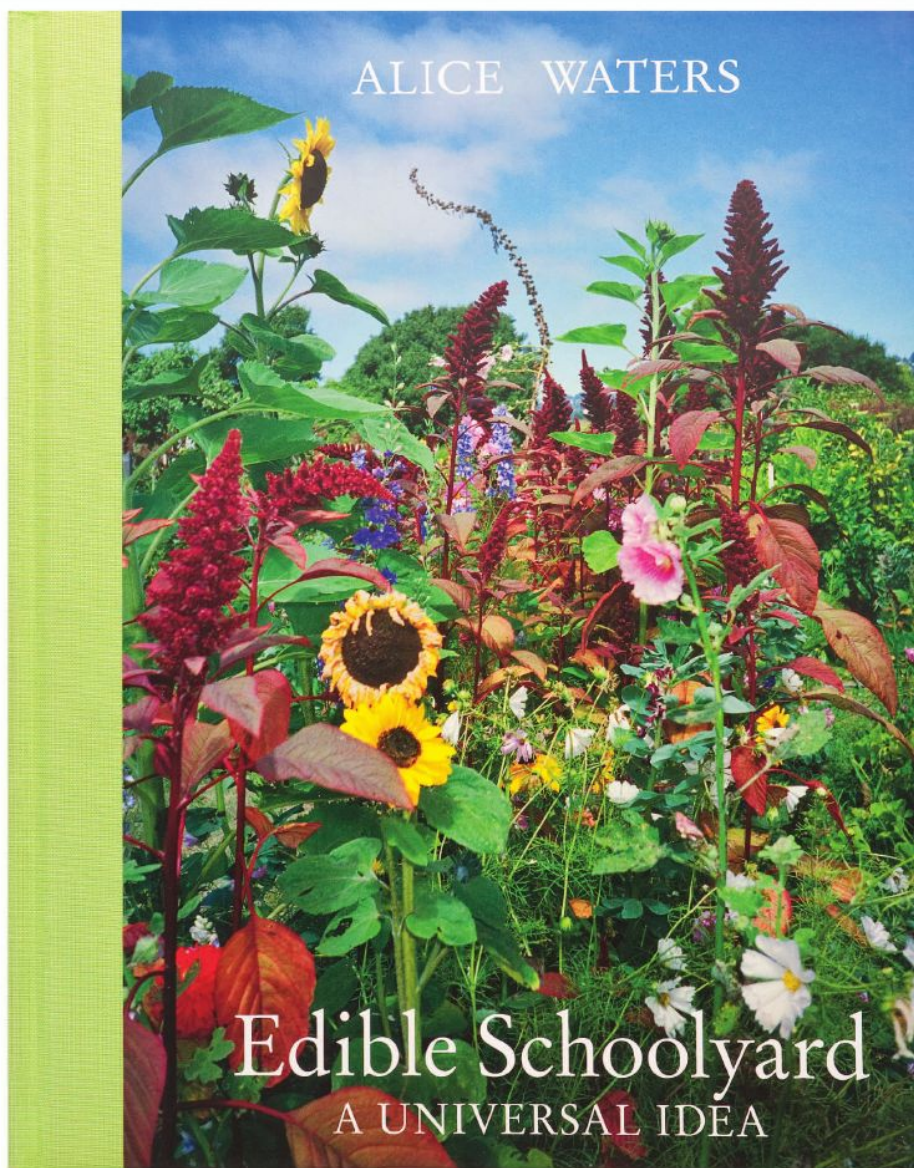
Alice sees a great deal of positive change occurring today, beginning right at the top of our own government. In March of this year, assisted by Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and a group of local fifth graders, Michelle Obama broke ground on the south lawn of the White House to plant that esteemed institution's very first organic vegetable garden. "I think that Michelle Obama putting her shovel in the garden with a lot of children is probably the first time that we've taken the *ie* out of *foodie*," Alice said. "We've all of a sudden started to look to the land and connect where our food comes from. I really believe that the president and his family care about how we eat as a nation, and maybe we're moving slowly toward that ultimate decision to feed all children at schools."

Reaching John Q. Public

While all this is going on, there are still numerous average citizens who yet seem oblivious of the need for natural food and good nutrition, who carry on supporting industrialized fast food and cheap supermarket produce transported from far-distant locales. To try and wake them up, some of us loudly preach, some stage protests, others write books and articles, and yet others attempt to get the message across through television, radio and even music.

In her very unique and ingenious way, Alice sees the problem being solved with a simple, very direct yet very effective approach. "I've thought about this a lot," she said. "I believe the most effective way of waking people up is just to cook for them. I think that we need to cook very simply and seasonally and really gather those people at the table. I did a project in Washington a few years ago, and we invited senators and congressmen to the table and we cooked from the garden and from the farmers' market. They stayed at the table and they had a conversation. That's the easiest way to do this."

See you at the table, Alice.



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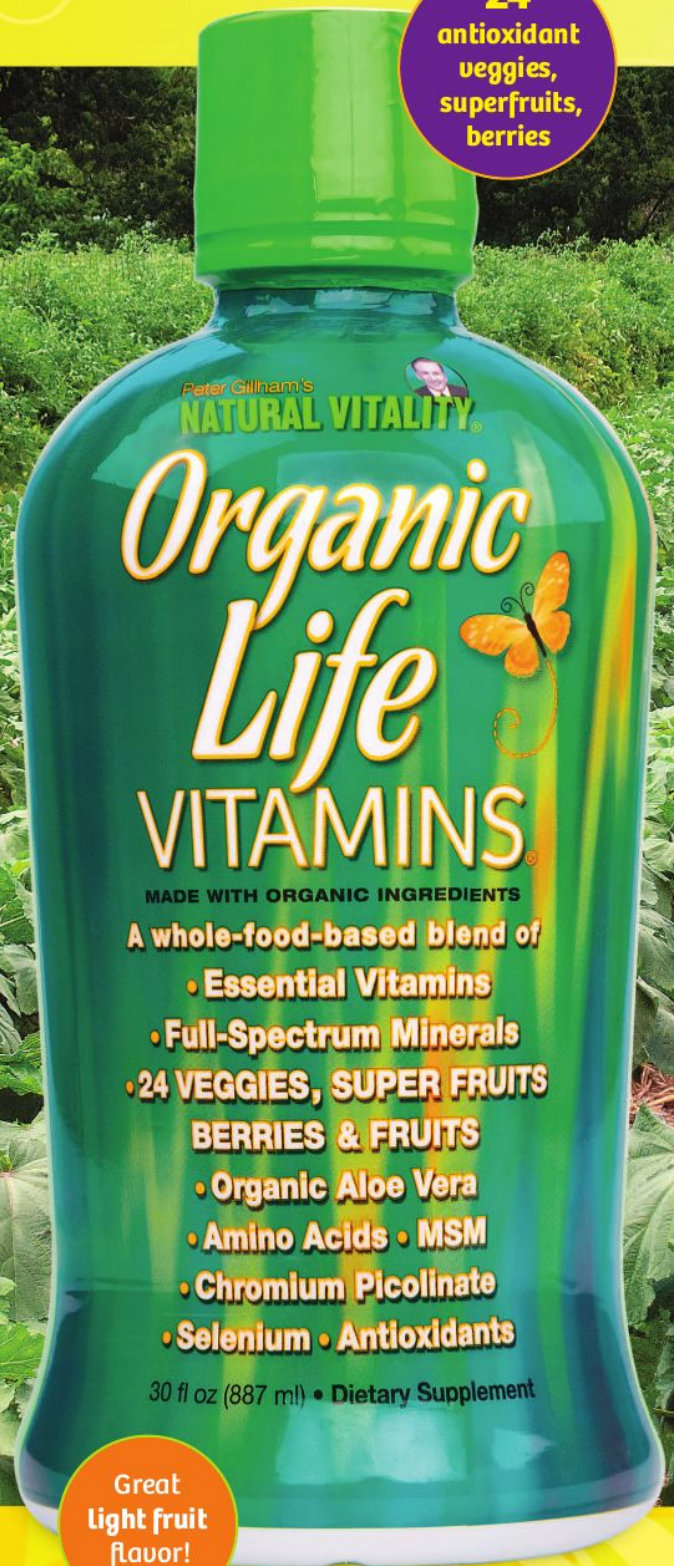
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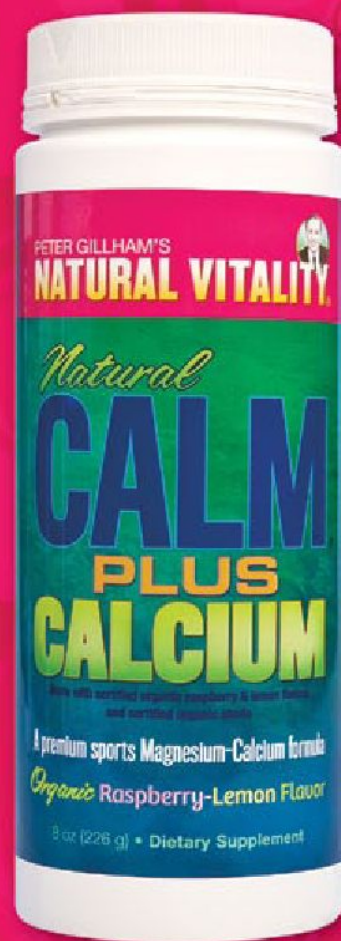


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