

Entertainment Weekly for El Paso • Juarez • Las Cruces

what's up

Volume 11, No. 1 September 23-29, 2009

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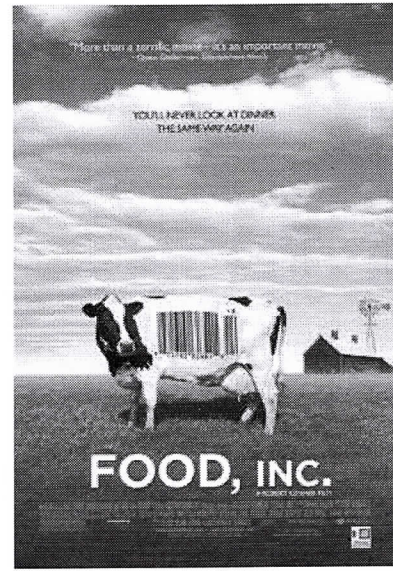
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'FOOD, INC.'
makes you think
By Cheri Pearson



Just as Upton Sinclair's novel, "The Jungle," implemented social and political change, the new documentary, "Food, Inc.," could be a modern-day catalyst for motivating Americans to vote with their pocket books against the monopoly of corporate industrialized farming.

This documentary, which shows Friday and Saturday as part of UTEP's Cinema Novo film series, isn't just for the socially conscious. It is for every parent who worries what's being marketed and fed to their children, every individual who is diagnosed with diabetes and anyone brave enough to educate themselves on why a system sells them a bag of chips more cheaply than a bunch of apples. Most importantly, it is for those who want to take control back one bite at a time and implement change as consumers.

supermarket without gore and scare tactics. It provides an eye-opening look at farmers, corporations, politics, immigration and health issues surrounding our food industry - from ammonia-cleansed beef filler to the Senate floor.

Segment after segment uncovers appalling facts. For instance, four companies control 80 percent of the meat industry and if farmers do not adhere to their demands, they lose contracts. Chickens are raised in 45 days for slaughter and cows, animals that aren't naturally inclined to digest corn, are forced to consume it because it is cheap. Farm bills are focused on commodities crops and the government has been riddled with officials who protect those interests. FDA funding has been reduced; there were about 50,000 food safety inspections in 1972, while there were only 9,000 conducted in 2006.

These are just some of the points upon which Robert Kenner's documentary touches. You sense the fear of farmers bullied by Monsanto. You feel the pain of the mother who lost her toddler to E. coli. You get disgusted with a government that protects industry over individuals. You understand why diabetes will eventually affect one in three Americans. You witness how American meat packers actively advertised and recruited in Mexico and bussed immigrants in after NAFTA drove the Mexican farmer out of business.

To protect you from being overwhelmed, Kenner sprinkles "Food, Inc." with organic farmers like Joel Salatin, whose picturesque Virginia farm embodies what we can support. He adds social entrepreneurs like Gary Hirshberg, the CEO of Stonyfield, who speaks of making an environmental impact by getting Wal-Mart to carry their organic yogurt. Wal-Mart claims it was an easy decision based on what the customer wants and makes sense economically because the organic market is growing over 20 percent annually.

Ultimately, that is where "Food, Inc." encourages the consumer to make a change. Like David against Goliath, instead of slinging stones, we can vote with our forks by buying from companies that treat workers, animals and environment with respect, shopping locally at farmer's markets and growers' associations, and by supporting policy level change against industry's irresponsible behavior. If we the people demand, market will deliver. For that message and the education the film imparts, this documentary should be essential viewing.