

THE FIVE BEST FOOD FILMS OF ALL TIME

EFF Speech on Tuesday, March 21, 2017

By Chris Palmer

Mention plan for evening and EcoComedy winners at end and thank TNC.

As I've said before, this evening is pretentiously called "An Evening with Chris Palmer." The Festival asked me to do this event about 12 years ago, and I've been doing it annually ever since.

Tonight I want to talk about the five best food films of all time.

Now everyone please stand up, find someone you've never met before, and discuss for two minutes the best food films you've ever seen. Go!

Ask audience members for their ideas!

You may have noticed that I didn't give you much structure for this question.

Does food refer to nutrition, agriculture, factory farming, obesity, food waste, junk food, global food trade, or what?

Also, by *best* food films, was I referring to impact? Did the film influence consumers' purchasing decisions? Did policy makers take action to address, for example, the wretchedness of the standard American diet? Was there a lot of press coverage? Or by *best* food films, did I simply mean your favorite?

As you can see, selecting the five best food films is complicated.

Food is important to me for personal reasons. My father died of prostate cancer, and I have his genes. As I've researched and learned about cancer, I've become convinced that a plant-based diet is the best way to prevent prostate cancer. At the same time, a plant-based diet is one of the most powerful ways to fight climate change and to stop animal cruelty.

According to Dr. Michael Greger, Dr. Dean Ornish, Dr. Joel Fuhrman, and other leading physicians and research scientists, diets low in animal-based foods and high in plant-based foods are radically better for people's health, as well as for the planet.

Dr. Stephanie Felstein from the Center for Biological Diversity says that the evidence overwhelmingly points to the fact that nutritious food means less meat and dairy. The standard American diet is the number one cause of death in America. According to many scientists and doctors, more people die from what they eat than any other cause.

When I think about the best food films, I focus both on those with the most important message and those that had the biggest impact.

So what are the five best food films? In order to compile the best list possible, my colleague Elizabeth Herzfeldt-Kamprath and I wrote to seven leading filmmakers, conservationists, and humanitarians, all friends of mine, to ask them what they would select as the best films on food.

These folks included **Elizabeth Kucinich** producer of the film *GMO-OMG*, **Anna Cummins** the cofounder of 5Gyres, **Jamie Rappaport Clark** the President of Defenders of Wildlife, **Carl Safina** of the Safina Center, **Wayne Pacelle** President of HSUS, **Dan Matthews** SVP at PETA, and **Maryanne Culpepper**, the head of the Environmental Film Festival.

We received a variety of replies. Here is a compilation of clips from their recommendations, along with others that Elizabeth and I came up with during our discussions. Let's watch that now and see how many you can recognize.

Show about a 12-minute compilation of clips and trailers.

Okay, let's see who recognized any of those films. (*Call on audience members for their thoughts. Why did a particular film stand out for you? Why was it so memorable?*)

Those are all great films—let me quickly list them so you know what you saw in that compilation reel: *Fat, Sick, and Nearly Dead*; *Ingredients*; *The Harvest*; *Vegucated*; *Dive*; *Hungry For Change*; *Just Eat It*; *GMO OMG*; *King Corn*; *Forks Over Knives*; *PLANEAT*; *Spinning Plates*; *The Real Dirt on Joe*; *A Place at the Table*; *Food Matters*; and *Food Fight*.

But that compilation excluded my top five food films!

Let's show a clip from the number 5 food movie on my list. SHOW CLIP OR TRAILER of *Supersize Me*.

I start my list out with Morgan Spurlock's film, *Supersize Me*, because it was a groundbreaking film that truly changed the dialogue in our country around fast food. It brought attention to the obesity epidemic by proving that fast food is fattening, malnourishing, and unhealthy.

In the film, Morgan Spurlock only eats food from McDonald's for 30 days, and it is totally disgusting to watch what happens to him and how his body deteriorates.

Not only did this film force America to rethink the way they order and consume fast food, but it also forced McDonald's to remove the "super size" option off of its menu and include more advertising about being healthy and providing "healthy" options on its menu.

Take questions.

Let's show a clip from the number 4 food movie on my list. SHOW CLIP OR TRAILER of *Fed Up*.

Fed Up came to my attention from Anna Cummins, the co-founder of The 5 Gyres Institute. This film made me feel outraged at how corporations are pushing their unhealthy products on children and families. *Fed Up* focuses its narrative around several morbidly obese adolescents, their families, and their struggle to navigate nutritional labels and what they actually mean.

While the direct impact of this film is more difficult to define than *Supersize Me*, this film is part of the increasing discourse around refined sugar in our foods. The film takes on a variety of issues concerning kids and how they are consuming processed sugar, which the New York Times has called a poison.

Take questions.

Let's show a clip from the number 3 food movie on my list. [SHOW TRAILER](#) of *Food, Inc.*

Food, Inc. targets mass production of meat in America, criticizing big food companies for their mistreatment of animals and the unethical nature of factory farming.

Food, Inc. provides a visceral first-hand account of how chickens are fattened up and kept in the dark for their short lives to be processed for the supermarket, how cows are made to stand in manure all day long, and how corn is utilized as an ingredient in 80 percent of supermarket products.

A year after *Food, Inc.* premiered in 2009, President Obama signed the Food Safety Modernization Act, giving the FDA power to inspect high-risk facilities, test for pathogens, and order the recall of contaminated food. Even subjects in the film were influenced. Carole Morison, the chicken farmer who produced meat for Tyson's, has transitioned her operation to be certified Animal Welfare Approved, the country's highest standard for humanely raised farm animals.

Take questions.

Let's show a clip from the number 2 food movie on my list. [SHOW CLIP OR TRAILER](#) of *At the Fork*.

At the Fork is supported by Whole Foods and the Humane Society of the United States. We are screening it right here on Friday night as part of the EFF, and I warmly invite you to see it. It explores animal welfare on farms and the complex moral issues of raising animals for food, ag-gag laws, extreme confinement practices, and other characteristics of animal agriculture. It is very farmer-focused, which is refreshing.

Take questions.

Finally, let's show a clip from the number 1 food movie on my list. [SHOW CLIP OR TRAILER](#) of *Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret*.

Cowspiracy tops my list, and was suggested by many of my colleagues. It focuses on the link between greenhouse gases and the massive production of beef in our country. The film calls out environmental groups for not doing enough to address animal agriculture with its major impact on methane gas emissions.

Take questions

There are many films that were close contenders to get on my top 5 list, including all those I showed you earlier in that compilation reel.

All these films point out that there is a real disconnect between our food production and what is on our plate. I believe that the more we're educated about where our food comes from and how it is made, the better our society will be.

Another thing that struck me as I watched dozens of food films over the last six months preparing for tonight, is that many of them have the same message: eat more vegetables, more fruit, less sugar, and fewer animal products.

We need to know what we're putting in our bodies and how it was produced. In my view, the best food films are those that make it clear that eating is a moral act. We need to eat with a conscience. We need to eat clean.

The best food films are also those that are science-based, are character-driven, are story-driven, have a compelling take-away message, spur viewers to take action, and promote sustainable and healthy food production and consumption.

Films on food have a major role to play in this country in raising awareness and encouraging people of conscience to change their behavior and reform public policy.

Remember that the only reason to make a film is to change the world.

Thank you.