

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES

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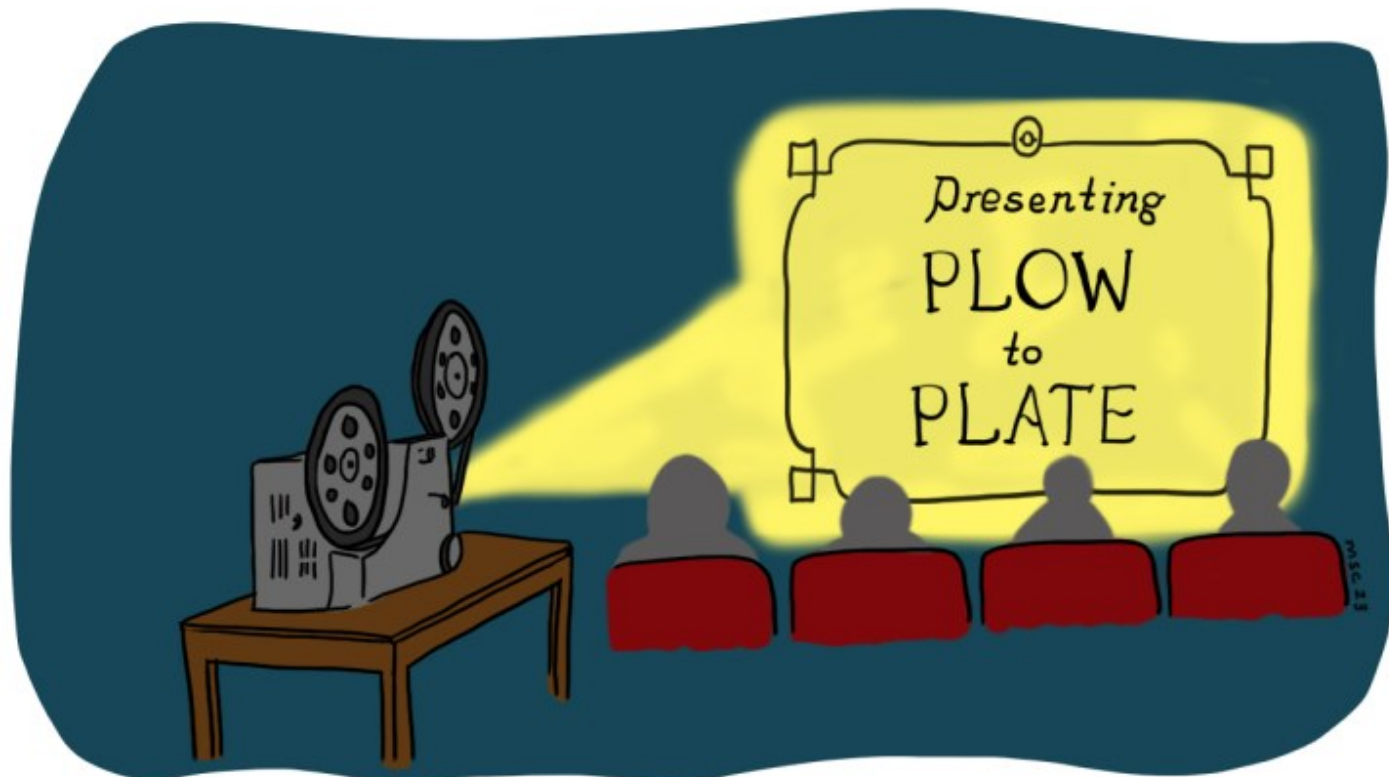


Illustration by Maggie Carson

Obesity and Corporate Greed—What the U.S. Can Learn From Its Southern Neighbors

By Adam Rabiner

Not since screening *Weight of the Nation* has Plow to Plate focused on obesity. Yet this public health issue continues to worsen. And while our former spotlight focused on the U.S., March’s selection presents a more global context—an outbreak of “Globe-sity”—and shows that we can learn from public health solutions being implemented in Mexico, Chile, Peru and by our other southern neighbors.

The figures are frightening: Currently, there are 2 billion overweight or obese people in the world, and by 2030, there will be 250 million children alone, in this condition. In the United Kingdom, two-thirds of men and women are obese, and the rates are climbing. Obesity is worse now than it was in the past, and the problem has spread to ev-

ery country in the world.

In popular culture, and for a while even in the scientific community, the problem was attributed to high-fat foods. Remember when we were all afraid of oil and meat and butter? Corporations responded by creating whole new “low-fat” processed foods made tasty by subbing in loads of sugar, corn syrup, refined flours and other ingredients. Far from being healthier, these foods were high in calories and not satiating. Rather than solving health and weight problems, they made matters worse.

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Food companies such as Nestlé, Kellogg's, Unilever, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Dannon, and others were pushing the narrative that weight-loss was simply a matter of calories in, calories out. Which meant move more, go for a run, hit the gym, take a Pilates course, get off your bum and go for a walk, stick to your diet—a simplistic and physiologically wrong message that absolved them of any responsibility for the mess they were creating. Go ahead and have your super-sized soda, just burn it off afterwards. What they did not and do not tell you is that you have to spend hours on a treadmill for your little indulgence. So, in our ignorance of the science, we are led to believe that our extra pounds are our fault. We are fat because we lack willpower, we cannot stick to a diet, we are lazy and weak and make poor food choices. No. This is a manmade tragedy attributable to collective, not individual, failures. The whole world has become obesogenic; it's a global phenomenon.

Corporations have gone to great lengths to protect and grow their \$500 billion in sales, notably in their marketing and advertising, frequently targeting children, on television, through their smartphones, on billboards and through packaging. The corporate giants have also fought reform with armies of lawyers who oppose food labels or legislation—for example bills that would make it illegal to sell super-sized sugary soft drinks. Do you remember when Bloomberg was branded a scold when he tried to

do this in New York City? A great deal of corporate money helped to promote that image of a Nanny State.

But, as powerful as the corporations are, people and communities are figuring out ways to fight back. A teenage girl is leading a youth movement against the poisoning of her community via social media, spoken word poetry and viral videos. A Southern pastor is suing the Goliaths for false advertising when they claim there is no link between their products and the high rates of diabetes in their communities—it is no coincidence that the vast majority of “scientific” studies that fail to correlate the two are funded by the industry itself whereas the ones that establish a connection are mostly independent.

These battles are beginning to pay off. In 2016, San Francisco, like NYC, also declared war on sugary sodas but won by levying a revolutionary tax on them. Mexico, which had seen its sales of fruits and vegetables decline by 30% and its bean sales reduced by 50% over a twenty-year span, also succeeded in taxing soda as well as junk food. Consumption of these products subsequently declined dramatically, and South America went from being the top consumer of these products to fourth place. A senator in Chile led the anti-obesity revolution there. He was called a devil and faced death threats, but against all odds passed a “right to know” food law in 2016, with easy-to-understand labeling and bans on advertising aimed at children.

Obesity is not a foregone conclusion.

Obesity and Corporate Greed, March 14, 2023 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com/events/>

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