PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES: PLANT PURE NATION

February 28, 2024

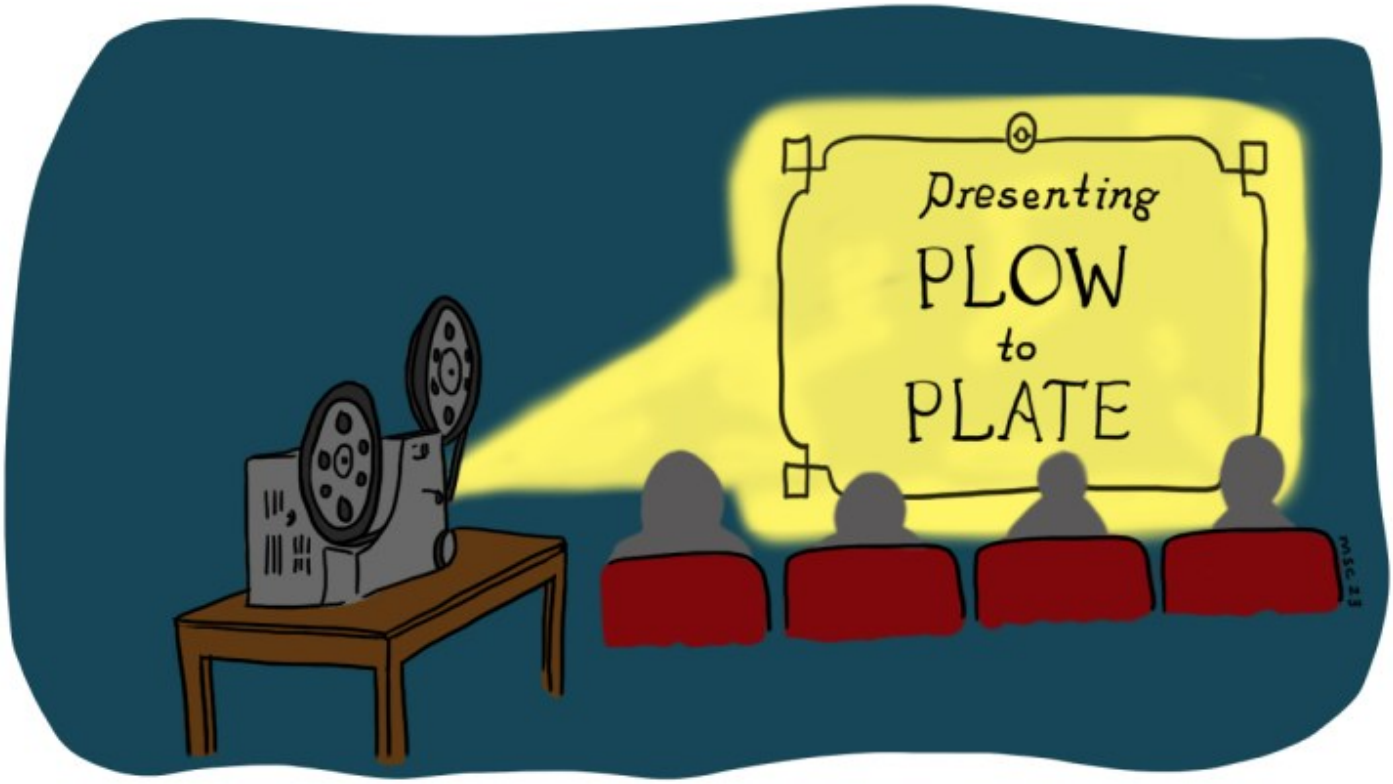


Illustration by Maggie Carson

By Adam Rabiner

Plant Pure Nation (2015) serves as a companion film to February's feature, *From Food to Freedom* (2023). Writer and director Nelson Campbell is on the same mission—attempting to be the Johnny Apple Seed of the modern whole-food plant-based nutrition movement, along with his famous father, Dr. T. Colin Campbell.

Both films take a rigorous scientific approach to proving the benefits of the vegan diet. In last month's film, a crew of type 2 diabetics dined for ten days on a strictly controlled diet while living under the same roof. In this film, a series of similarly structured jump-starts were conducted, but the participants picked up their meals from a central location to take back to their homes. In theory, this may have allowed for more cheating, but pre- and post-medical testing showed that even under these less strict conditions, people lost weight, lowered their cholesterol and reduced their medications.

Despite these similarities, the films are complementary rather than redundant. *Plant Pure Nation* focuses much less on the human drama of those taking part in these jump-starts but rather grounds itself in the political drama of simply trying to spread the good news and healthy benefits of plant-based eating, in barbecue-loving states like Iowa, Kentucky and North Carolina (sometimes referred to as the stroke belt), where agricultural interests hold a lot of power. Nelson Campbell's evangelism is often met with the question, "Why haven't I heard this before?" *Plant Pure Nation* attempts to provide that answer.

The answer, as Nelson discovers, is in political interests and pushback. This should not have surprised him, as his family has been experiencing this for decades. The film goes back fifty years to a 1977 McGovern Committee report that highlighted Dr. T. Colin Campbell's research into the relationship between disease and diet. Back then the meat, egg and sugar industries, along with the Salt Institute, actively undermined the nutrition committee's goals, portraying Dr. Campbell and his supporters as "puritanical do-gooders."

In reaction to this, Dr. Campell published his now-famous bestseller, *The China Study,* to get the word out to the masses directly since he was being stymied at the top. His son's films are drawn from the same populist model of direct engagement. But Nelson, like his father, first attempted to work within the political system.

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At the request of state Representative Tom Riner, a Democratic member of the Kentucky House of Representatives, Nelson tried to craft House Bill 550, which would have funded a demonstration project on the benefits of a plant-based diet. At first, the bill had strong support, but the reality of politics set in behind closed doors, as agricultural lobbyists, the Kentucky Farm Bureau and other special interests under-

mined it. However, just as the powers that be could not silence his father, Nelson decided to conduct his pilot project anyway, starting in rural Mebane, North Carolina.

It was around this time that Nelson came up with the name, Plant Pure, which to him denoted nature, clarity and cleanliness. As he assembled his group of sixteen from a cross section of the community—a politician, a business executive, a journalist, and two local cattle farmers (a husband and wife)—the themes and talking points came into clarity. This experiment was not only about eating better, but about taking control away from the hands of industry and government. It was about independence, freedom and liberty. It involved bottom-up control, not top-down authoritarianism.

These five consecutive jump-starts, each a bit larger and more complex than the previous, eventually led Nelson back to Kentucky, where he and Tom Riner hoped to insert a finding of fact about plant-based nutrition into the record. Yet even this modest proposal forms the basis of a nail-biting political drama. While some legislators are clearly in favor, others are more skeptical. One asks if the word “meat” can be appended to the list of good foods which include vegetables, fruits, grains, legumes and nuts. Dr. T. Colin Campbell had been asked not to come; and Nelson has been relegated to the balcony.

Following the vote, you can see why Nelson Campbell, like his dad, is taking the message directly to the people. The rally for the *Plant Pure Nation* is underway.

Plant Pure Nation, March 12, 2024 at 7 p.m.

Screening link

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@mail.com.