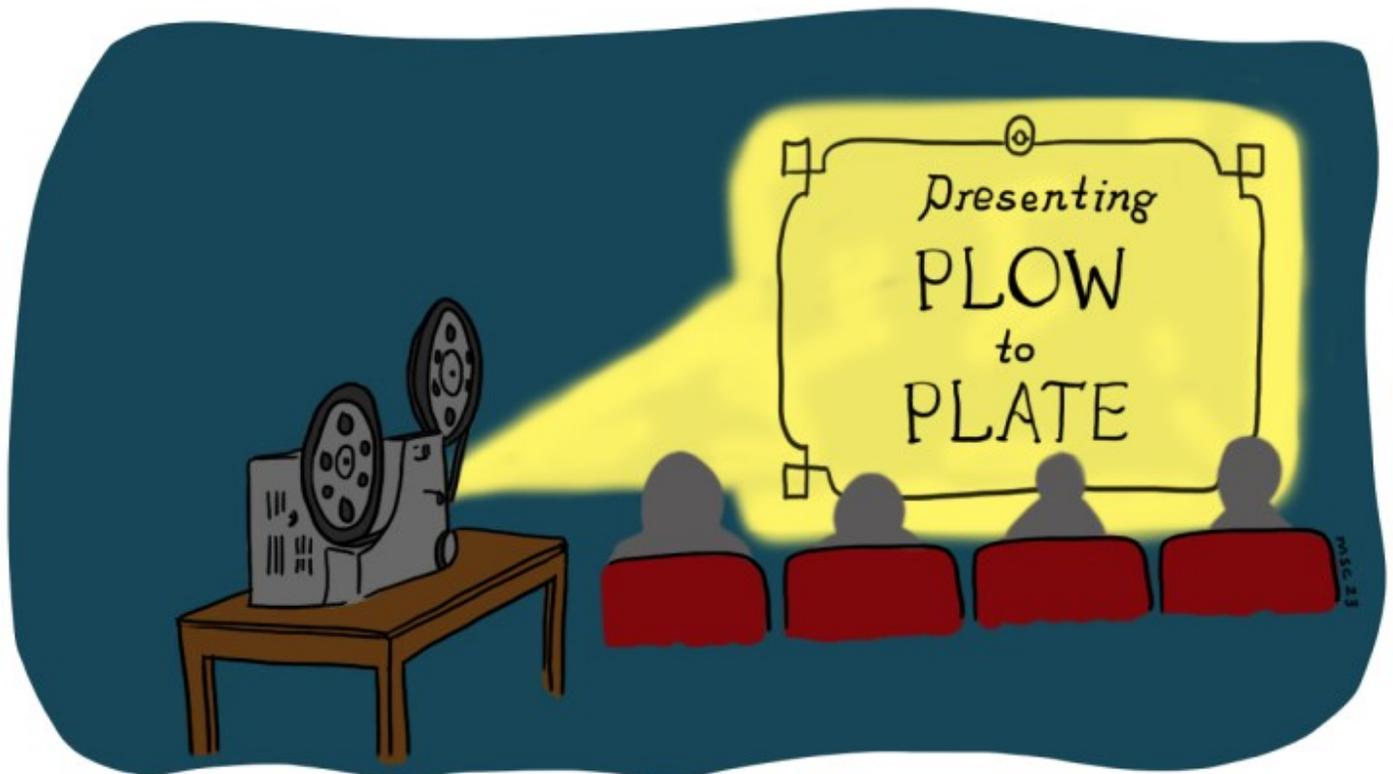


# PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: FRUITS OF LABOR

March 3, 2026



March 3, 2026

*By Adam Rabiner*

A drone shot above a farm. Below, people are picking strawberries. It looks like California. A conventional tableau. Another film about the exploitation of migrant labor. Yet the 18-year-old narrator is one of the people in the field—Ashley Solis Pavont tells us that she was born in the United States to a family of Mexican healers. So were her three younger siblings, all of whose names, like hers, start with “Ash.” Their mother, Beatriz, told them it symbolizes a meadow of trees with roots that establish the family here in the U.S. After that initial scene, the rest of the movie takes place in their crowded, rundown house shared with 12 other families; Watsonville High School, where Ashley is a senior; a shop where Ashley is trying to find the perfect graduation dress; a fruit processing plant where Ashley works the 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. shift; and other parts of town. This is not a film about migrants, but rather of a mixed-status family—an undocumented mother raising citizen children. Twenty-two years earli-

er, a deathly ill Beatriz was brought to the U.S. for urgent medical care and granted a temporary visa. In her fevered state, the nurses caring for her as she lay in her hospital bed appeared as angels.

Beatriz, a spiritual and religious woman, works seven days a week as a house cleaner. Since she is divorced and without financial support from her ex-husband, Ashley must also work to support the family. Ashley observes that her younger brother, 16-year-old Ashford, whose nickname is “Barron,” meanwhile, acts like a little kid, skateboarding, playing video games and hanging out with his girlfriend Ximena, who becomes pregnant by him. Ashley says that he lives in a fantasy world where all the burdens fall on women. While Beatriz encourages her eldest daughter to complete high school to get a better-paying job, she reinforces traditional patriarchal roles and expectations, magnifying Ashley’s challenges. Often too tired from her night shift to go to school, Ashley’s poor attendance jeopardizes her graduation.

*Fruits of Labor* takes place in 2018 in a more threatening America. There are no video news clips of I.C.E. raids, but Beatriz and Ashley nervously hover around an iPhone listening to reports of arrests, detentions and family separations. Fearing her deportation, Beatriz has Ashley designated as the legal guardian of her siblings. Despite this ominous backdrop, not every American institution is indifferent. Ashley’s high school teaches the history of the United Farm Workers Union and New Deal legislation that exempted domestic and agricultural labor from worker protections—a 12-year-old can legally work in the fields. Hanging from a wall are college and pre-college posters, and the school’s motto echoes Beatriz’s wishes, “Dream Big, Work Hard.” Teachers, guidance counselors and the principal are sympathetic and caring.

Ashley also has support from a girlfriend and a devoted boyfriend, Adrian, with whom she takes long walks in the countryside or along the shore, discussing matters such as their spirit animals and reincarnation. Ashley is thoughtful, intelligent, curious, articulate, self-aware and yet uncertain and scared. She’s a teenager who wishes her life could be more normal, like Ashford’s, but who has been prematurely thrust into an adult life of burdens and responsibilities. Her chosen animal is a turtle who just

wants to hide in its shell.

Like the family profiled, the film itself is steeped in spirituality. Time-lapse cinematography shows flowers blooming, and animations depict fruits ripening. Imagery of bees and Monarch butterflies suggests ancestral forces and cycles of nature (and perhaps the ties between the U.S. and Mexico, where the Monarchs make their arduous journeys). These forces also help to sustain.

Hanging in the Pavon home is a print of a red, white and blue American flag waving above the word "freedom." This is a family that loves America, even though some aspects of America do not appear, at this moment, to fully love them back. The country depicted in the film has two faces. One is foreboding, while the other is welcoming and encouraging. Like Beatriz long ago in her sickbed, this family chooses to see our better angels.

*Fruits of Labor* Tuesday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Please join the *Plow to Plate* mailing list by emailing [plowtoplate@gmail.com](mailto:plowtoplate@gmail.com) to receive a screening link.

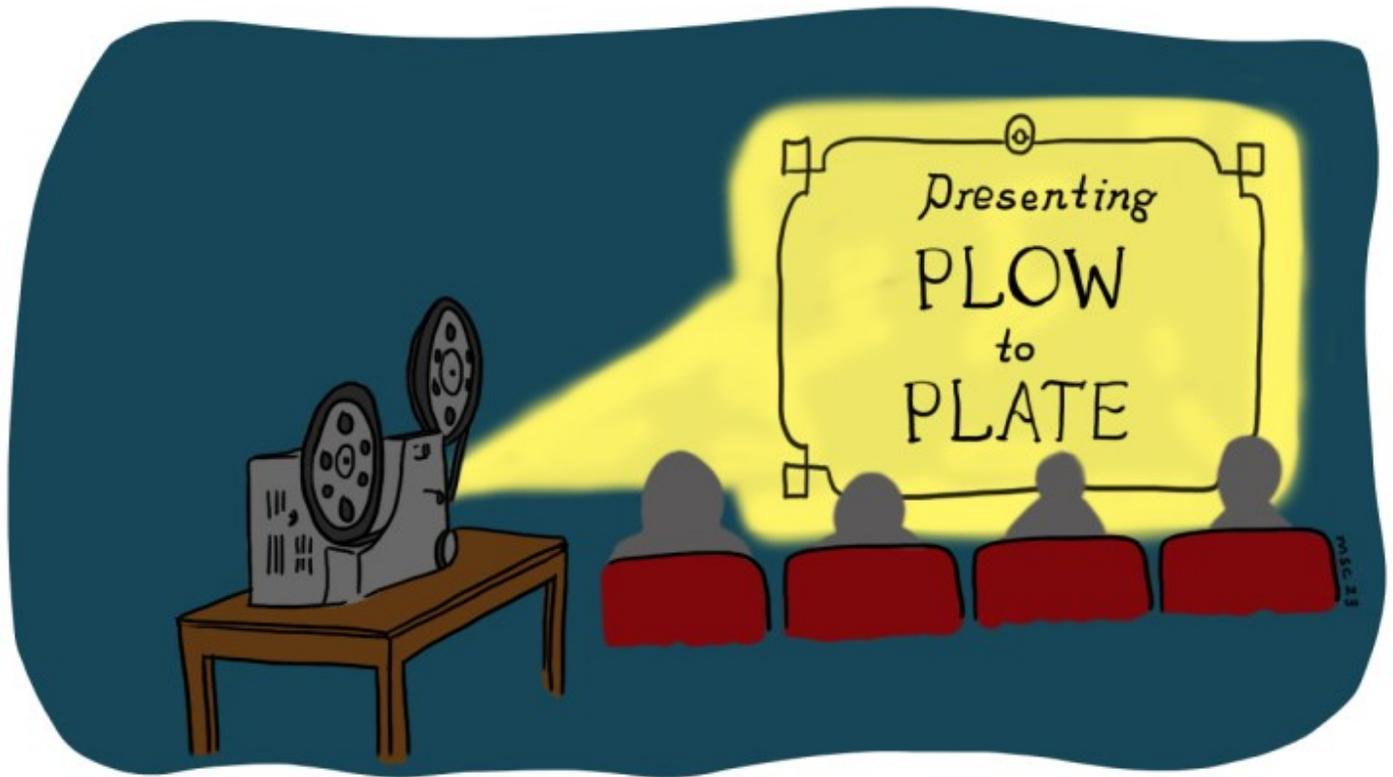
From October 2025 through March 2026, *Plow to Plate* is exclusively featuring films distributed by *Grasshopper Film*. Reversa Films produced *Fruits of Labor*.

*Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina.*

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PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: RODENTS OF UNUSUAL SIZE

March 3, 2026



January 20, 2026

By Adam Rabiner

*Rodents of Unusual Size* begins on Delacroix Island, Louisiana. A street sign on the left prominently announces: “Dead End.” Another, on the right: “End of the World.” But despite the area’s isolation and hardship, many die-hard Cajuns like fisherman Thomas Gonzalez refuse to leave this marshy swampland south of New Orleans. There is even an invasive species of giant rodent, originally from South America, known as the nutria, which positively adores the place. The film is the story of humans and nutria living together in an uneasy peace and equilibrium that constantly threatens to tip one way or another.

The nutria, a giant rat with two yellow buckteeth and webbed feet weighing up to 20 pounds, first came to Louisiana in the 1930s, when furriers transported them from Argentina, to breed with muskrats for their fur. This enterprise was initially lucrative. Fatefully, though, the nutria is thought to have escaped from their cages during a storm. They adapted well to the bayou, and hunters and trappers kept the population

in relative balance. However, in the 1980s, the animal-rights movement against fur caused the bottom to fall out of the market, and pelts lost their value. With no one hunting the nutria any longer, zero predators except alligators, and the ability to create a new litter every three months, the nutria population exploded from five to 20 million. In short order, they began eating up the swamps and causing massive harm to the delicate ecosystems, which went from verdant green vegetation to brown mud flats.

Louisiana created the Nutria Control Program, which offered a five-dollar bounty for each nutria tail turned in, with no limits. This program provided a lifeline to many local fishermen and fisherwomen. While most nutria hunters have no problem with exchanging tails for pelts, Bimbo Phillips, a native American from the Atakapa-Ishak tribe, continues the tradition of using the pelts for coats as his ancestors did.

One of the essential questions posed by *Rodents of Unusual Size* is what economic value, if any, can we extract from the nutria today? Phillips may be on to something. *Righteous Fur* is a company whose mission is to bring designer nutria fur clothing to the contemporary fashion market. Their goal is to raise public awareness about coastal restoration while providing an eco-friendly alternative to traditional fur.

Louisiana has also promoted cooking and eating nutria. The government commissioned a study and has hired local and celebratory chefs to make nutria sausages, Slim Jims, hot tamales, gumbo and other locally popular dishes. The nutria has a lot going for it. The animal is a vegetarian that only eats roots; has a clean, grass-fed diet; is lean and is reputedly tasty. One chef said it is an excellent alternative to chicken breast and described eating it "like tasting Louisiana." That is quite an endorsement. However, the animal's aesthetics are a significant strike against it, hurting its promotion. After all, it looks like a giant rat. The nutria, in this respect, faces some of the same challenges that edible insects do in terms of mainstream acceptance among your average American consumer.

Another question raised by the film is how we should view this invader on our shores.

It is indisputably destructive to the environment. Though cute, especially when they are babies, nutria's aggressive nature toward everyone but their owners and high maintenance requirements make them poor pets. Yet they have been Louisianans' neighbors for about 100 years, and people there have become fond of them. They were the mascot for the New Orleans Zephyrs, a now-defunct minor league baseball team. The Louisiana Fur and Wildlife Festival features a nutria-skinning competition and a Fur Queen Beauty Contest. Some wealthy homeowners of a local golf community routinely steal and tamper with the traps set by the pest control specialist. They believe that showing kindness is a good example for children. Love them or leave them, the nutria is here to stay.

***Rodents of Unusual Size* Tuesday, February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2026 @ 7:00 p.m.**

Screening link: Visit our Upcoming Events page

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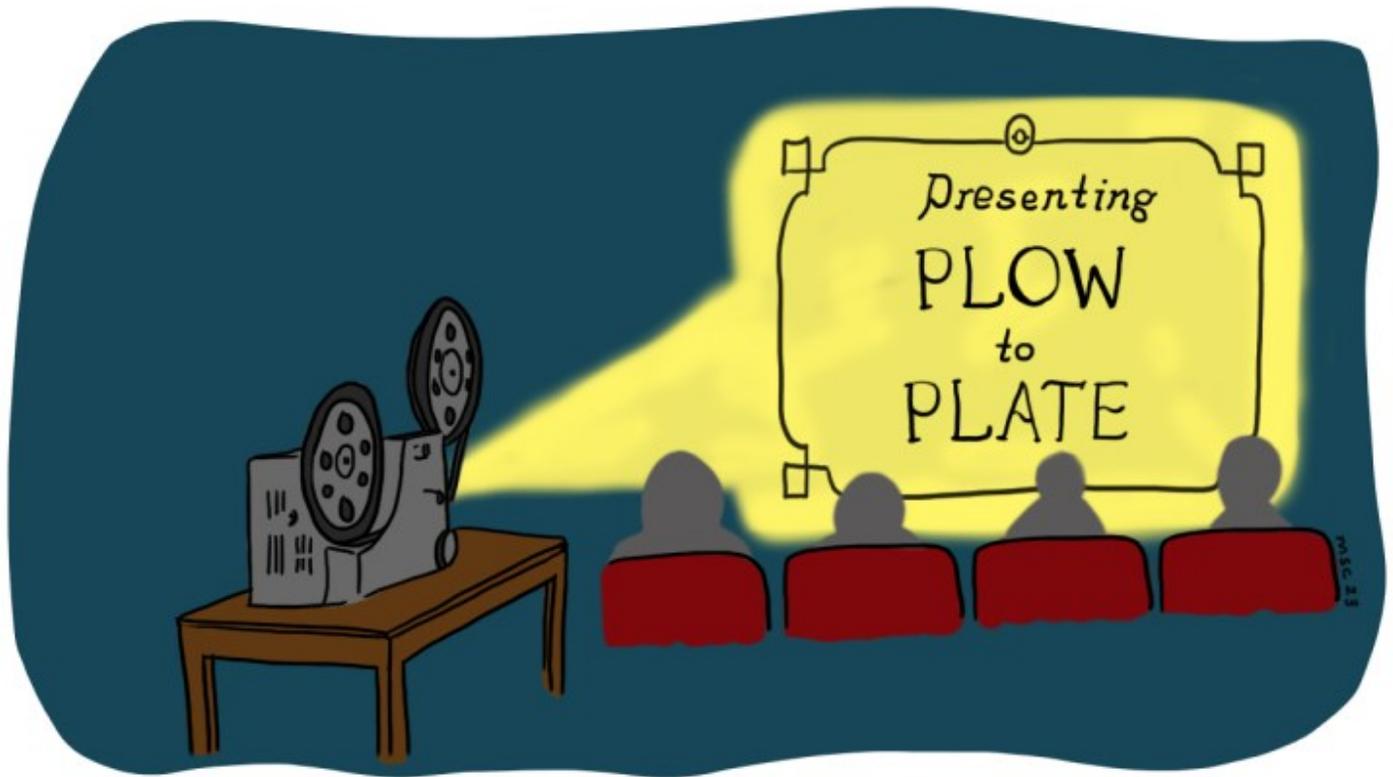
Note: From October 2025 through March 2026, Plow to Plate is exclusively featuring Grasshopper Film documentaries. *Rodents of Unusual Size* is a Tilapia Film distributed by Grasshopper Film.

*Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina.*

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PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: AGAINST THE TIDE

March 3, 2026



By Adam Rabiner

*Against the Tide* begins in silence and darkness. Against a black background, white credits sporadically appear. Forty-five seconds in, a very soft drone is heard, then, abruptly, a newborn baby's cry, and the camera starts to roll. The baby is cradled between the legs of an older woman, who is giving him a vigorous massage and blessing him, "Mother Sea, protect your son. My little angel. My baby." Later, the child is cleansed and purified with herbal smoke from a cast-iron cauldron as his grandmother implores, "Mother be kind to your child." The following scene shows the baby's young father, a traditional fisherman named Rakesh Koli, walking along a Bombay beach at dawn, as a singsong prayer intones, "Fear not! Fear not! Fear not! There's nothing to fear. Fear not! Tides turn, fear not. Winds howl, fear not. Tides turn, fear not. A Koli knows no fear. Remember you're a Koli. You fear nothing."

This third straight screening of a Grasshopper film follows the company's style of immersing viewers in the action without explanation or context. You are like that newborn babe, suddenly thrust into a world that is baffling to the point of near incomprehensibility. Who is this woman rubbing my body parts? Why are they dangling me

head down on top of a wood-burning brazier? But as for that infant, eventually the pieces naturally and organically begin to fall into place. You start building a vocabulary and an understanding of where you are and the people around you: what they do, their circumstances, and therefore yours, too.

That is the challenge and the beauty of Grasshopper films. They are immersive like no others. The subjects allow you into their lives and conversations like an eavesdropping fly on the wall. But they do not answer questions, opine or explain directly to the camera what they are thinking or feeling. They simply live and share their lives in all their messy detail. This is not a stint with Anthony Bourdain on *Parts Unknown*, but a deep dive into another unfamiliar world. It is like an anthropological or sociological textbook come alive.

You almost immediately meet Rakesh's good friend Ganesh Nakhawa, who is also a seventh-generation Koli fisherman. Unlike Rakesh, who is poor and owns a small traditional boat and fishes the "shallow sea," media-savvy Ganesh Nakhawa is middle-class and studied banking in Edinburgh, but returned to Mumbai (home of the Kolis), in India to found and become CEO of BLUCATCH, which oversees a small fleet of larger commercial ships. He fishes the "deep sea," has his own website and advertises his business with a bumper sticker and baseball caps bearing the Instagram logo and hashtag #TheLastfishermanofBombay.

Rakesh lives in a typical modest compound near the water without indoor plumbing, while Ganesh resides in a modern apartment in the city. Both are married, Rakesh to a woman of similar circumstances and Ganesh to the daughter of a prosperous businessman. Rakesh has children and Ganesh's wife becomes pregnant during the film. Despite these distinctions, they lead parallel lives. Both are dependent on the vagaries and bounty of the sea, which, due to overfishing, pollution and climate change, is becoming less generous. The lack of fish threatens both businesses, and they face similar challenges about where and how to fish, and whether to downsize. While Rakesh takes advice from his mother and the traditional wisdom of his ancestors, such as whether or not to fish during a monsoon, Ganesh relies on deep-sea maps

and multiyear satellite data on ship locations. Rakesh tells Ganesh he would be happier and more successful if he returned to his roots, without the debt, credit or pressures of his large-scale enterprise. Ganesh tells Rakesh to borrow one of his boats and try his luck outside the shallows, where he can catch tuna, mackerel, salmon and other large, valuable fish.

To describe this film in much more detail is to give away too much. I want the viewer to experience the movie the way it is meant to be, as it gradually unfolds, like the baby who, over the months of filming, acquires language and begins to solve the puzzle of his existence. As you do so, the film's title takes on symbolic and economic meanings in addition to its literal one, and you come to appreciate the exhortations to live without fear more fully. The movie left me teary-eyed, something a typical sociological text cannot achieve, but one that fine cinema is always capable of.

*Against the Tide* Tuesday, January 13, 2026, @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html>

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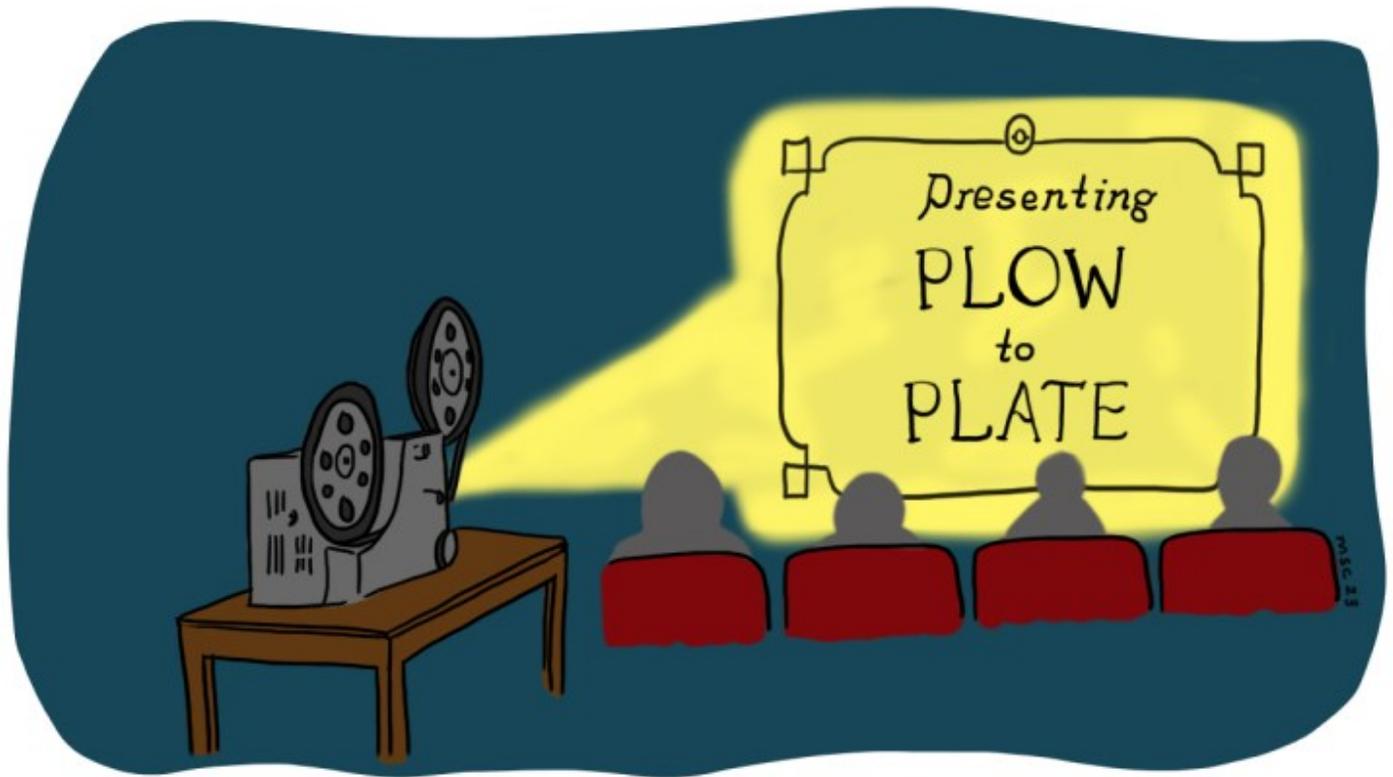
*From October 2025 through March 2026, Plow to Plate is exclusively featuring Grasshopper Film documentaries.*

*Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina.*

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PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: SWEETGRASS

March 3, 2026



*By Adam Rabiner*

*Sweetgrass* is a documentary about the Allestad family's final sheep drive, the last one hosted in Montana, in the summer of 2003. Directors Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor are visual anthropologists whose style of ethnographic filmmaking bears witness to this dying tradition and way of life without resorting to voice-overs or title cards. The camera observes the action and conversations, and while the cowboys and cowgirls may speak (or sing) to the sheep, horses or dogs, they never address the filmmakers.

While sheep still graze public land and cow-people still exist, the social scientists captured the end of an era and way of life. When John Ahern and Pat Connolly drive their 3,000 sheep into the mountainous Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness, first steering the flock down a rural town's saloon-lined main street like an animal parade, it's a journey that four generations of their ancestors partook in.

AS CONSUMERS OF WOOL OR MEAT, WE ARE FAR REMOVED FROM THE ANIMALS.

OUR SWEATER OR LAMB CHOP IS SIMPLY A COMMODITY TO BE PURCHASED AND ENJOYED.

They are aided by some modern-day technology—walkie-talkies, cell phones, flashlights, and telescopic rifle scopes—but at its core, the trip is the same it has ever been. Their main tools and companions are their horses and sheepherding dogs. They cook over a heavy, cast iron, wood-burning stove, build fires at night to warm themselves and carry a white cloth lean-to tent, supported by wooden branches and rope, that looks like something the Donner Party might have packed. Despite the few amenities, the odyssey remains as physically grueling and dangerous now as before.

As consumers of wool or meat, we are far removed from the animals. Our sweater or lamb chop is simply a commodity to be purchased and enjoyed. Not so for the humans in *Sweetgrass*. Their relationship is deeper and more complex. Though we see them helping to deliver a baby, assisting a newborn to latch on to a nipple or even hand-feeding milk to a lamb via a tube and straw, these animals are decidedly not pets. They are intimate, grappling with them while shearing their wool or straddling them to rustle to a particular pen. But while the farm dog is named Coco and a horse is called Jake, the sheep are numbered and marked with green paint.

The relationship between the humans and sheep ranges from affection, tenderness and protection to outright rage and frustration. In an early scene, before departing on their 150-mile trek to the mountainous pasture lands, one rancher says to a lamb, as he carries him to his mother, “Well, junior, we’ve got to find you some milk. Come here. Oh Lordy, Lordy. There you go.” A bit later, you see a man dressing another young lamb in a custom-fit wool sweater to keep him warm.

THIS SCENE, MORE THAN ANY OTHER, REVEALS THE IMMENSE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL CHALLENGES THAT THIS VOYAGE ENTAILS AND WHY, ULTIMATELY, IT IS BECOMING A THING OF THE PAST.

On the other hand, in a later scene, already deep into the trip, worn down, exhausted and injured, a cowboy fires off curses that would earn this film an R rating. He screams at his wards, telling them they can “eat shit and die,” then calls his mom from a hilltop for consolation. He tells her his dog can’t walk and won’t leave camp, his horse is ribs and bones, his knee is popping, it’s bullshit, the sheep are ornery, and he’s miserable. He is at the end of his rope, on the edge of tears. You feel sorry for him. This scene, more than any other, reveals the immense physical and mental challenges that this voyage entails and why, ultimately, it is becoming a thing of the past.

Before getting off the phone with his mom, Pat tells her that he doesn’t want to grow to hate the mountains. Majestically beautiful when filmed from a distance, their steep slopes, which the sheep love to climb and must be wrangled back from, are forbiddingly dangerous. *Sweetgrass* is gorgeous to behold. It’s obvious why so many cowboy westerns are set in Montana. An image of the two men riding horseback on the crest of a hill at dusk, like shadows, or a morning mist lingering over the precious sweetgrass may stay with you long after you are done watching the movie. And a big part of the film’s soundtrack is the sheep’s conversations. The baas, bleats, mehs, and other bleeping sounds may ring in your ears for some time.

*Sweetgrass*, Tuesday, December 9, 2025 at 7 p.m.

Screening link >

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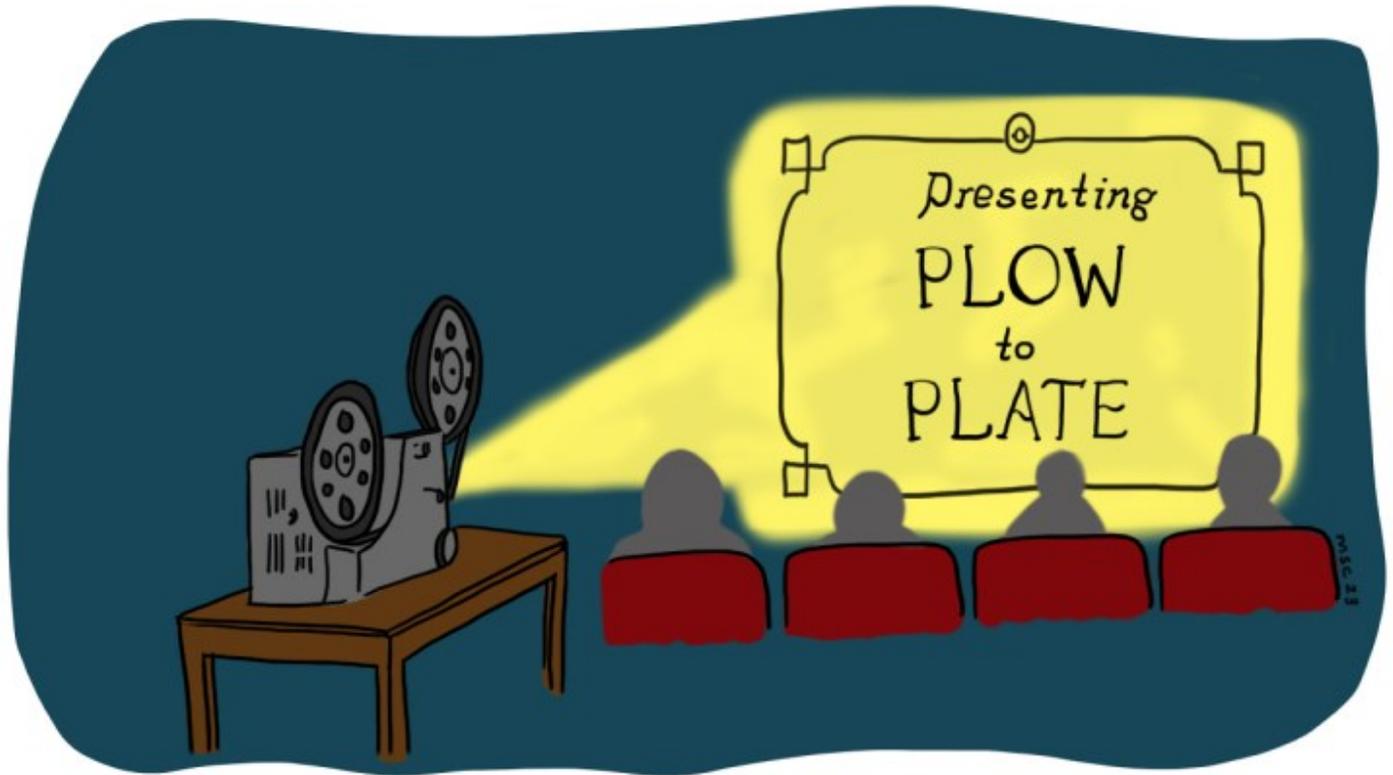
*From October 2025 through March 2026, Plow to Plate is exclusively featuring Grasshopper Film documentaries.*

*Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina.*

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## PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: LEVIATHAN

March 3, 2026



October 28, 2025

*By Adam Rabiner*

Any film that begins with a quote from the book of Job, (“He maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like a pot of ointment,”) and is titled after the biblical sea monster Leviathan—a symbolic representation of chaos, evil and spiritual enemies—is likely to be a punishing experience. Sure enough, the first words I jotted down as I watched this documentary about a commercial fishing boat off the coast of New Bedford, Massachusetts were: groan, creak, seasickness, clanging chains, waves, unsteady, dizzying, factory clamor, dark, rust, night, unsteady, splash, shouts and murmurs and finally silence. You are beginning to get the picture.

The opening scene is pitch dark, the beginning of another working day (or night)

aboard the boat. Burly men with beards and tattoos labor beside one another, not talking except for the occasional barked command or instruction. And when they speak, their voices are drowned out by the wind or mechanical, metallic banging. You can't really make out what they are saying, or even what language they are speaking. The primary sounds come from hydraulic motors, the unfurling of nets and ropes, the waves, the wind, the seagulls and the straining nuts and bolts of the boat. At the fifteen-minute mark, the camera literally plunges into the gurgling bubbly ocean, offering another similarly disorienting perspective.

The nets haul up the bounty of the sea, whatever it offers, a giant shark (itself a seeming leviathan) or smaller glistening fish that twist and flop around until the grim men in galoshes and raincoats, some smoking cigarettes in the rain, gather to cut their catch into pieces with sharp knives, spilling fish blood and guts onto the sloshing floor. The men know their jobs and routines, deftly slicing up stingrays with machetes or shucking shells.

Taken together, all these images and heavy industrial sounds evoked memories of the spaceship in Ridley Scott's *Alien*, a rusty vessel, out of this world, menacing and deadly and inhabited by tired men in a merciless yet strange (and sometimes beautiful) landscape. Other films that came to mind at various points were *Jaws* and Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*.

Grasshopper Film, a distribution company dedicated to the release of independent, foreign and documentary film, listed *Leviathan* under the category "Food Studies." The work tells a truth about our food that you will not find in the sanitized presentation in the aisles of our supermarkets, or even, for that matter, our local fishmonger. This truth involves the fateful moment that these massive bulging nets, fish poking through their holes, offer up their bounty. The fish make the ultimate sacrifice, their heads efficiently lopped off and discarded back into the sea through a portal where flocks of hungry seabirds fly in formation for scraps. Incessantly working, the men sacrifice too. In one extreme close-up, it captures a fisherman's weathered face in all its glorious wrinkles, scars, and visible pores.

In another excruciatingly long scene, the camera focuses on an overweight man sitting alone in the dining room, at 1:07, (a.m. or p.m., it hardly matters, as time does not seem to mean much on this boat) trying to listen to a news broadcast while fighting off exhaustion, coughing occasionally, until he finally succumbs and nods off in front of the TV.

With its vertiginous cinematography and soundtrack of real noise, you are at times on the boat, in and under the water, flying with the scavenger birds. You are in the center of the storm, in the midst of all the dynamic, swirling, twirling, harsh and chaotic forces. You are hurled and tossed around, blown by the wind and swept up by the sea. Yours is every perspective. You are the enduring men, the vanquished, doomed fish, the ravenous birds. You are the hunted and the hunters, the predators and the prey. You are drowning, suffocating, suffering. You are the sky, the sea, the ship. You experience it all. Indeed, you are Job.

***Leviathan*** – Tuesday, November 11, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. on Zoom

Screening link – <https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html>

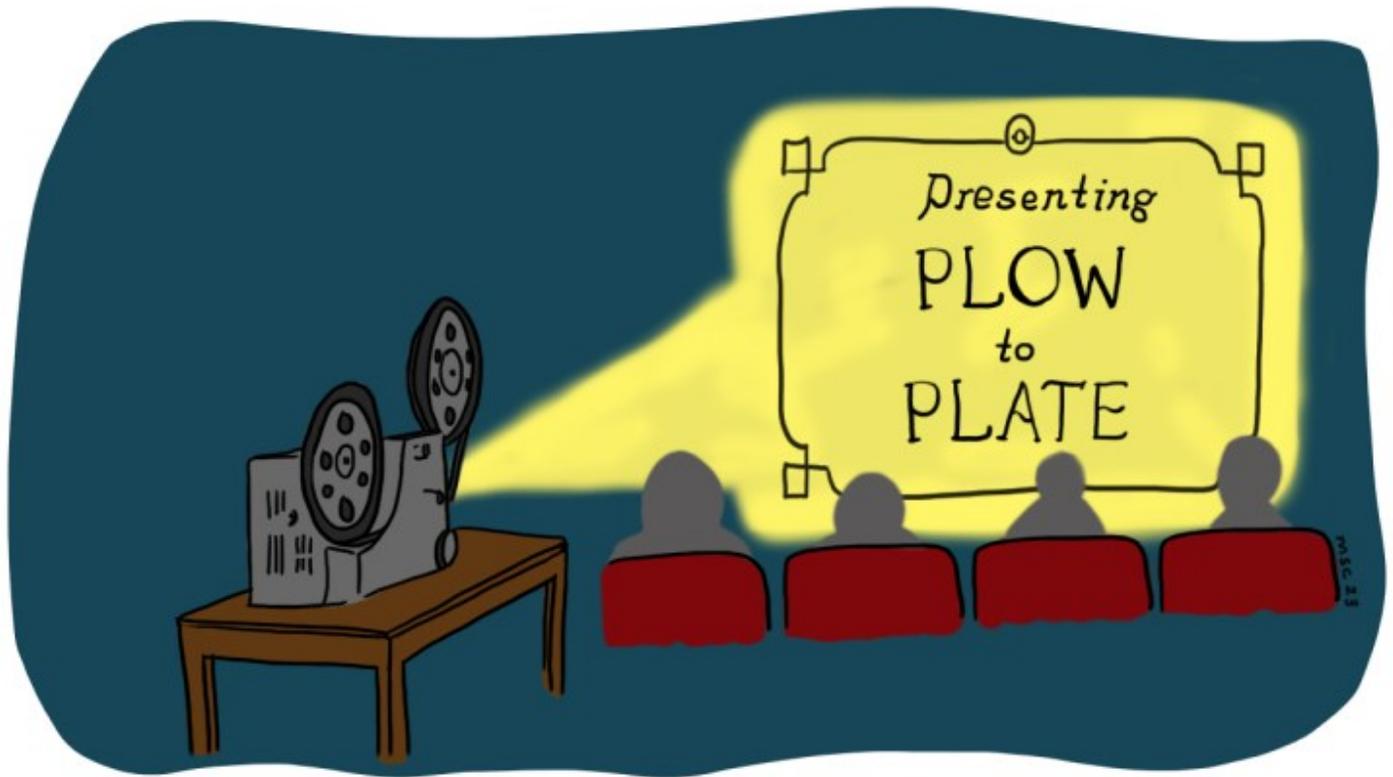
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*Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina.*

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PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: “BEYOND IMPOSSIBLE: THE TRUTH BEHIND THE FAKE MEAT INDUSTRY”

March 3, 2026



August 26, 2025

By Adam Rabiner

The host of the documentary *Beyond Impossible*, Vinnie Tortorich, is a bit of a tough guy. Squarely facing the camera at close range, he's a no-nonsense straight talker who's occasionally droll but delivers a serious message. He's fed up with radical vegans, doctors like Dean Ornish who prescribe high-carb, low-fat diets and give the meat a bad name, and transnational policymakers seeking to curb beef production and create a global eating plan. He politely invites many of these adversaries to an honest health debate, but all of them demurred to appear in his film.

Let's cut to the chase and hear what Vinnie says is a good diet: First, eat anything with a single ingredient. Steak? Check. Zucchini? Go for it. Dairy? No problem. Impossible Burger? No way. With a list of at least 20 proteins, oils, binders, flavorings, vitamins and minerals, and other substances, Tortorich rightly classifies this as an ultra-high-processed food to be avoided. These synthetic meat substitutes are now endorsed by McDonald's, Burger King, Pizza Hut, Pepsi, and even meat companies, like

Tyson, not because these corporations suddenly care about their customers' health, but because there is money to be made.

Tortorich dislikes kale but is happy to place a stalk of broccoli beside his porterhouse steak. Cut out carbs, sugars, and grains, eat more red meat, drink more milk, use butter not margarine, avoid seed oils, love fruits and vegetables and for God's sake, exercise. It's what we used to call a well-balanced, omnivorous diet.

*Plow to Plate* has presented films advocating different approaches to the ideal diet. Many tell us everything we have ever been told is false, we are being fooled and I am just as confused as everyone else. Questions abound. Part of the problem of figuring out how to eat healthily is that most scientific studies, even gold-standard clinical trials, show correlation, not definitive causation. Despite this, newspaper headlines usually mislead readers into believing X causes cancer. A specific industry may fund a study, which raises the question of a potential conflict of interest.

THERE IS A GROWING UNDERSTANDING AND CONSENSUS THAT VEGANISM DOES NOT NECESSARILY EQUATE TO HEALTHY.

Smokers and drinkers are more likely to eat red meat. Conversely, vegetarians often exercise more and have a stronger focus on well-being. Less healthy processed meats like salami, which includes chemicals, sugar, nitrates, and nitrites, are sometimes lumped with regular old steak. A study involving hamburgers may combine the bun, cheese, condiments, and toppings with the patty. How do you explain why most of the attendees of Woodstock in 1969 were more athletic and thinner than the next generation of fans at Woodstock 1999? What about the hundreds of thousands of new devotees of the ketogenic diet who are demonstrably losing weight on a diet almost exclusively of meat, fat, and dairy? Is that healthy?

Despite these contradictions and the need to approach dietary claims skeptically, I

see consistency in the almost universal rejection of fake and artificial processed foods in favor of more complex, complete and digestible, naturally occurring real bioactive whole foods. Impossible and Beyond Burgers initially hit the aisles as tasty and popular vegan alternatives but have lost some of their initial glow. There is a growing understanding and consensus that veganism does not necessarily equate to healthy. (Oreos are vegan, after all.)

Besides health claims, *Beyond Impossible* also addresses arguments about the environment and animal cruelty. I won't repeat every refutation Tortorich makes and will leave it to the viewer to seek out the film on YouTube. But he does a good job of countering the notion that cows are an invasive and destructive methane-spewing species primarily responsible for global warming due to out-of-control greenhouse gases. He also points out that even the most die-hard vegan will unwittingly ingest insects (and sometimes even small mammals) that get caught up in modern combines. The film concludes with truly shocking and disturbing videos involving foraging wild boars. "There is no free lunch," Tortorich proclaims. That statement, at least, appears to have an unequivocal ring of truth.

*Beyond Impossible* was screened in February.

Screening link for *Beyond Impossible*.

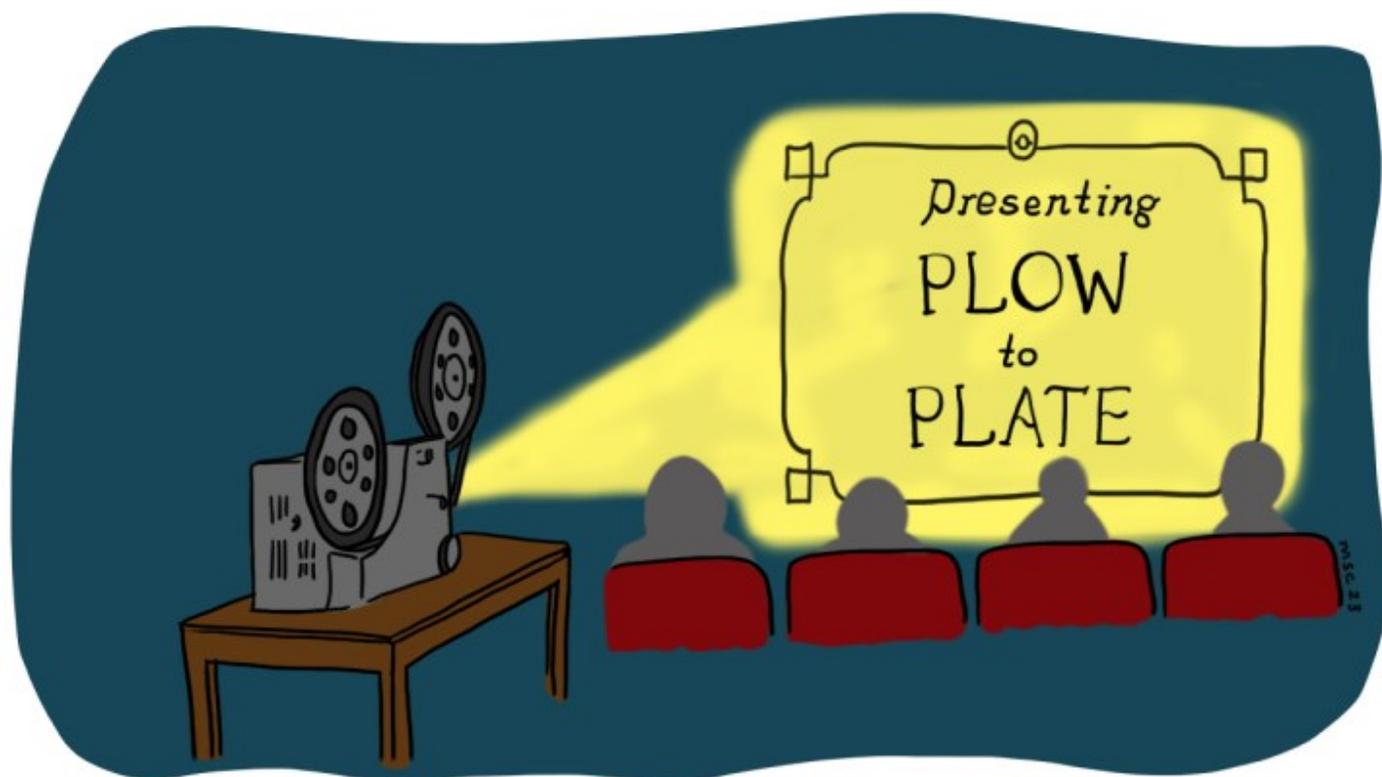
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*Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and child Ana.*

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PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: FAT: A DOCUMENTARY 2

March 3, 2026



June 24, 2025

*By Adam Rabiner*

Vinnie Tortorich, fitness trainer to the stars, podcaster, speaker, author and filmmaker hosts this second installment of *Fat: A Documentary*. But he is less angry here than in *Beyond Impossible: The Truth Behind the Fake Meat Industry*, screened in February. You might even say he is sympathetic. The film begins by acknowledging the constant media stream of different and often conflicting claims about food, health and nutrition. The steady barrage of information, blame and never-ending cycles of fad diets have “Flooded the Zone” and left even so-called experts confused. So where does that leave us?

Tortorich’s calmer tone here is intentional. He’s trying not to be polemical or too partisan. He notes that many of the nutritional battles waged over the years have been based not on sound science and empirical evidence but on group ideology, politics, tribalism and almost religious fervor. So, he aims to be rational, reasonable, unders-

tanding and ultimately persuasive. He's happy that the pendulum has begun to turn with acceptance of the high-fat, low-carbohydrate keto and paleo diets. Tortorich assembles a crack team of allies to reinforce his basic message that butter, cheese, eggs, certain oils and meat (even fatty hamburgers and steaks), belong in a healthy diet. These include researcher and journalist Nina Teicholz, author of *The Big Fat Surprise*, and many doctors who buck the establishment.

Teicholz and the cardiologists, family physicians, psychiatrists and practitioners of internal medicine and nutrition science are convincing, even as they defend so-called "bad" trans fats. One primary argument is that these fats were indicted by bad science, namely inappropriate epidemiological studies conducted at the Harvard School of Public Health by Professor Walter Willet. These are long-term longitudinal studies of individuals who self-report on their eating habits. The responses to these surveys have been found, however, to not always be reliable. More damning is that the best these studies can claim are associations, which is weak evidence far different from established cause and effect. To prove causation, hypotheses must be subject to more expensive randomized, controlled clinical trials which can often take two years or longer to complete.

The problem with epidemiological studies is that it is impossible to disentangle all the variables that affect health. Eating well is just one factor in an overall lifestyle that includes not smoking, exercise, maintaining a healthy weight, responses to stress, an active social life and the love and support you have in your home and from your community, etc.

**"YOUR GOOD INTENTIONS ARE STOLEN, I'M JUST HERE TO HELP YOU GET THEM BACK."**

*VINNIE TORTORICH*

Besides the documentary's indictment of the science behind the vilification of fat and the demonization of meat, it also makes some interesting ancillary points. The film observes that meat has long been associated with a "warrior ethos"—virility and masculinity—and that the anti-red meat movement began in the 1970s at the same time as the emergence of the peace movement. *Fat: A Documentary* also points out that it was about this time that obesity rates began to escalate.

Another fascinating sidenote relayed by Teicholz is that the various campaigns asserting that tropical oils are unhealthy—namely coconut and palm oil—stem not from any hard evidence but rather from commercial interests and trade wars launched as early as the 1920s between competing industries.

At the end of the day, I have mixed feelings about the more measured and less belligerent Tortorich. He is gentle and less combative; he appears to want to win you over with reason, rather than pick a fight. He has a definite point of view but does not want to come across as a religious zealot or kook like his predecessor Robert Atkins was accused of being and whose 1972 book *Dr. Atkins' Diet Revolution* had people saying, "It'll kill you."

This approach has its merits. *Fat: A Documentary* does a great job of challenging orthodoxy, cancel culture and self-censorship against the dominant hypothesis. It makes a strong case that the experts are misleading us. Tortorich ends the film by saying, "Your good intentions are stolen, I'm just here to help you get them back." If that means a guilt-free second slice of bacon, I'm all in. But I also miss the entertaining Vinnie Tortorich who some call "America's ANGRIST Trainer."

*Fat: A Documentary 2* Tuesday, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html>

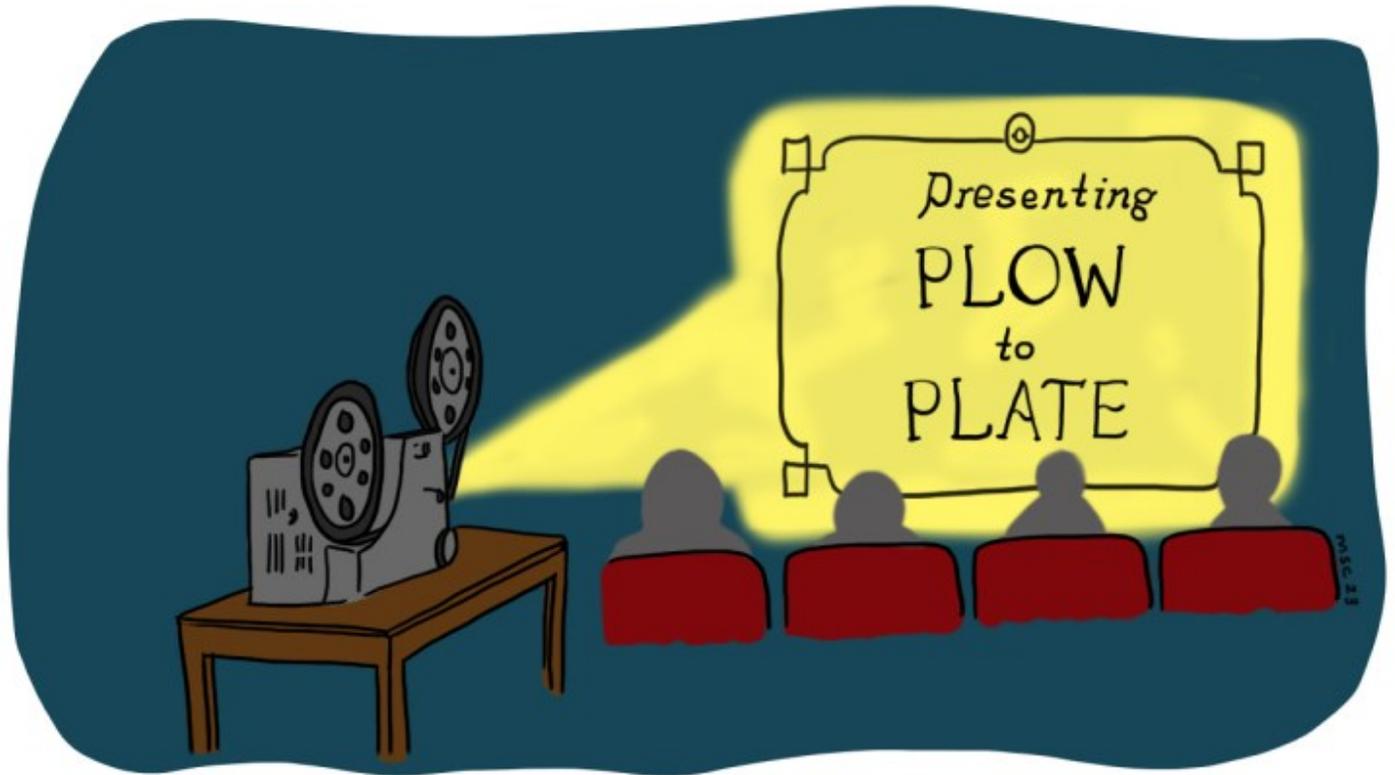
To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to [plowtoplate@gmail.com](mailto:plowtoplate@gmail.com).

*Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and child Ana.*

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## PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: FOOD COOP: THE MOVIE!

March 3, 2026



June 3, 2025

*By Adam Rabiner*

The Park Slope Food Coop is as well-known as its iconic green and red “EST 1973” neon sign. With over 17,000 members, it’s a successful food cooperative, recognized for quality products, low prices, industry-leading metrics and, perhaps most famously, its founding principles of cooperation and a unique member-based work model. This almost one-of-a-kind standing drew the attention of filmmaker Thomas Boothe who profiled our beloved shopping haven in his 2016 film, *Food Coop*.

*Food Coop's* quirky, informal, spontaneous and familiar tone and personality often reflects its subject. Little of the film is formally scripted. The movie's verisimilitude will immediately be obvious to members intimately acquainted with the sights and sounds of 782 Union Street: the traffic noise and sirens, the beeping machines, the crowded aisles and the long checkout lines.

Tom Boothe highlights the unique volunteer culture by walking around and asking workers, "Can I ask you a question, what do you do for a living?" A stocker teaches pre-school, a guy breaking down boxes in the basement is an animator, another at checkout is in social services. There's a psychoanalyst and a pair of filmmakers. Some of these faces, like founder Joe Holtz, may even be familiar to you.

*Food Coop* is also very much a Brooklyn film. A worker with a walker shift, the head of the Working Families Party, is interviewed heading into equally recognizable territory down Union Street to 7th Avenue then towards Flatbush Avenue. In another scene, a bicyclist, disappointed by his local deli and Key Food, pedals to his home in nearby Gowanus recounting how the Coop helped him meet fellow foodies. A food activist takes us to Bedford Stuyvesant, a food desert, where she contrasts the Coop's merchandise and prices with those of a local bodega where a moldy lemon costs \$.50. A couple welcomes us into their home in what appears to be Windsor Terrace or Kensington, displaying their week's shopping and contrasting how much less each item is than at Whole Foods.

**FOOD COOP DEPICTS A UNIQUE INSTITUTION WHOSE MESSINESS AND DIVERSITY  
HAVE INSPIRED A PASSIONATE AND DEDICATED COMMUNITY**

The camera also ventures into the Coop's more hidden spaces, offering discoveries for members only familiar with the shopping floor. We visit a cheese packing squad in the basement grooving to the mix, *Music to Process Food By—Volume 43*. We spend time with a worker in the frigid and claustrophobic dairy cooler. We also learn some

surprising things, for example, long-time apple supplier Amy Hepworth does not put a dollar amount on her invoices but leaves it to a General Coordinator to be fair or that organic chocolate does not necessarily mean better quality.

*Food Coop* jumps around, alighting upon things familiar to members. It features interviews with bulk and cheese buyers, office staff, childcare workers and a couple who do composting. We see new members being briefed at their orientation and choosing which squad to work on. The film examines the workings of the Disciplinary Committee, the Environmental Committee's campaign to eliminate plastic bags and the Coordinators' resistance to this proposal. It tags along with Dan, a squad leader, and his beleaguered team during a closing shift at the height of the holiday season on Christmas Eve. We follow a shopper heading home by subway and bus, a nearly two-hour trip, undertaken, understandably, only once a month.

What kind of crazy person schlepps bulky grocery bags halfway across New York City by public transportation, even if only ten to twelve times a year? *Food Coop* depicts a unique institution whose messiness and diversity have inspired a passionate and dedicated community willing to go to just those great lengths.

*Food Coop*

Tuesday, June 10, 2025 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html>

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to [plowtoplate@gmail.com](mailto:plowtoplate@gmail.com).

*Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and child Ana.*

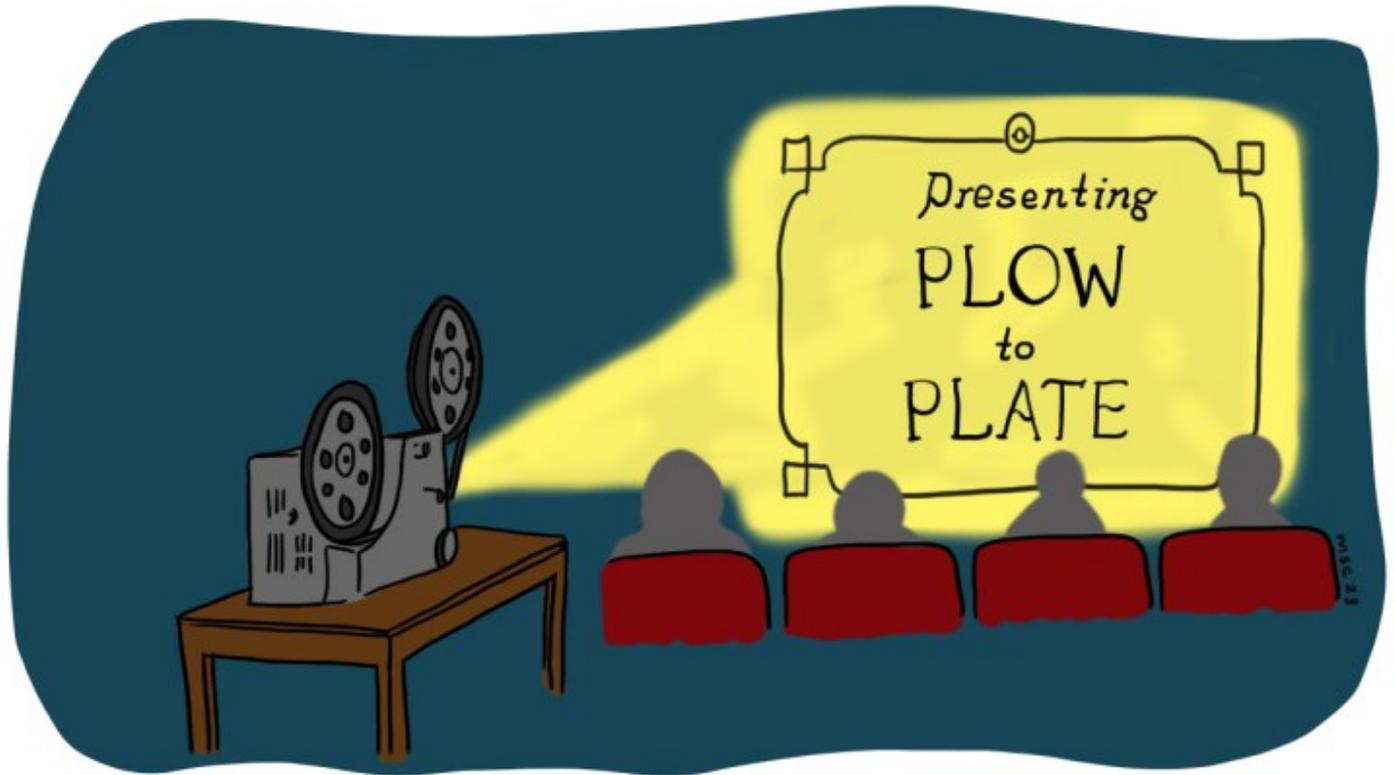
**Author's Note:** A slightly lengthier version of this review appeared in the January 31, 2019, issue of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*. *Food Coop* was originally screened as Part of

the *Plow to Plate* series on February 12, 2019.

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## PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: FOOD COOP: THE MOVIE!

March 3, 2026



June 3, 2025

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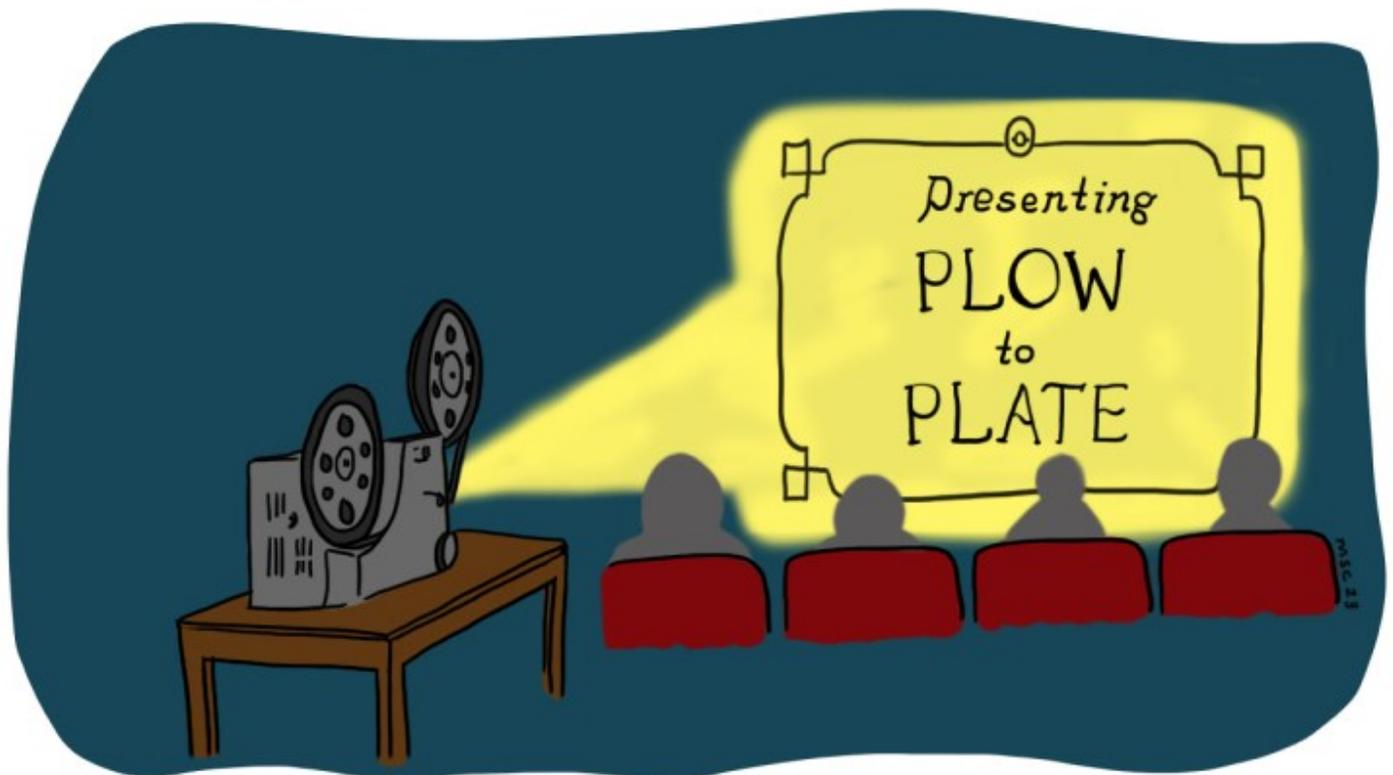
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## PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: LET THEM EAT DIRT: THE HUNT FOR OUR KIDS' MISSING MICROBES

March 3, 2026



April 22, 2025

*By Adam Rabiner*

Bacteria are everywhere and have been here long before we were. They built this world; we are reliant on them. They outnumber the stars in the galaxy and the cells in our body. The microbiome, numbering 35–40 trillion bacteria cells, mostly in our intestines, emit chemicals and fight pathogens. They are referred to as “another organ,” and are now recognized as beneficial, boosting the immune system and warding off autoimmune diseases such as food allergies, diabetes, intestinal disorders and

infections. Thousands of beneficial and symbiotic species of bacteria, protozoa, viruses and fungi help with digestion, processing vitamin K, brain development, blood coagulation and other bodily functions. While humans are genetically 99 percent alike based on our DNA, the individual makeup of our microbiomes sets us apart and makes us unique.



# Let Them Eat Dirt:

*The Hunt for Our Kids' Missing Microbes*

MICROBIAL MOVIES, LLC. PRESENTS LET THEM EAT DIRT: THE HUNT FOR OUR KIDS' MISSING MICROBES  
FEATURING BECKY WORLEY B. BRETT FINLAY MARIE-CLAIRE ARRIETA JACK GILBERT EDITOR CHRIS BROWN  
PRODUCED BY RIVKAH BETH MEDOW BRAD MARSHLAND CHRIS BROWN BECKY WORLEY  
WRITTEN BY BRAD MARSHLAND BASED ON THE BOOK BY B. BRETT FINLAY, PhD AND MARIE-CLAIRE ARRIETA, PhD  
DIRECTED BY RIVKAH BETH MEDOW AND BRAD MARSHLAND

Although only a small handful of microbes are pathogens responsible for disease, there remains a lingering prejudice against germs. *Let Them Eat Dirt* argues that in attempting to vanquish the harmful bugs, we have also eliminated many beneficial ones. As a result, our grandparents had better microbiomes than we do. The film lays out in a systemic way the suspected causes of our weakened microbiomes and suggests ways to reverse the harm.

The first and most important suspect is the American lifestyle of cleanliness and hygiene. The American preoccupation with hand sanitizers, antimicrobial cleaning products, air purifiers and other products has left us over-sensitized compared to much of the rest of the world. The film contrasts us with Ecuadorian kids who walk around barefoot, exposed to animals like goats, cows, pigs and chickens. These children are less susceptible to diarrhea, even though they're exposed to intestinal parasites. They are largely healthy despite their income disadvantages. Similarly, children who grow up on American farms have less asthma than those who live in the cities because their microbiomes are more likely to have four specific beneficial bacteria, according to the view of some experts.

Another suspect is C-sections. These procedures bypass the largest transfer of vaginal and fecal microbes from mother to child in the crucial first hundred days. Studies have shown that children born by C-section are at greater risk for obesity, allergies and asthma. A third suspect is the overuse of antibiotics. These powerful drugs can damage the human immune system because they kill the good with the bad. Eighty percent of antibiotics are fed to livestock, and they are overprescribed, with one study finding that 30-50 percent of all prescriptions are inappropriate.

A fourth culprit is diet. Breastfeeding is of great value in building up babies' microbes. Whether the complex molecules in breast milk or the physical act of suckling on the nipple, this is the baby's "first vaccine" and "natural antibiotic." One mom encourages her young children to eat vegetables by telling them, "You have a zoo in you," and you must feed it.

Once most of the suspects are identified, *Let Them Eat Dirt* offers solutions. It does not actually encourage dirt eating but does discourage germophobic tendencies. Wash your hands after handling raw chicken, but don't stress over the five-second rule if you drop something on the floor. Get your good microbes from fermented foods, not from unregulated probiotic pills.

One promising scientifically tested and validated solution is next-generation probiotics. Scientists are developing futuristic medicines that will manipulate the microbiome to rebalance ecosystems and target specific pathogens in the hope of eliminating antibiotics.

Advanced fecal transplant is a procedure dating back thousands of years to restore microbial health to the colon. Another promising procedure undergoing trial pilot studies is vaginal seeding—swabbing a C-section baby with vaginal fluids.

The film encourages viewers to use antibiotics wisely, elect to have a C-section only if medically necessary, breastfeed, urge their kids to follow a healthy diet and let their children play in the dirt. In our overreaction to dreaded diseases of the past, we have gone too far. We should not be scared if our kids play outside and get dirty. We should embrace that love of life, the skin-to-skin contact, human touch, breathing the air. It is both healthy and liberating.

*Let Them Eat Dirt* Tuesday, May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html>

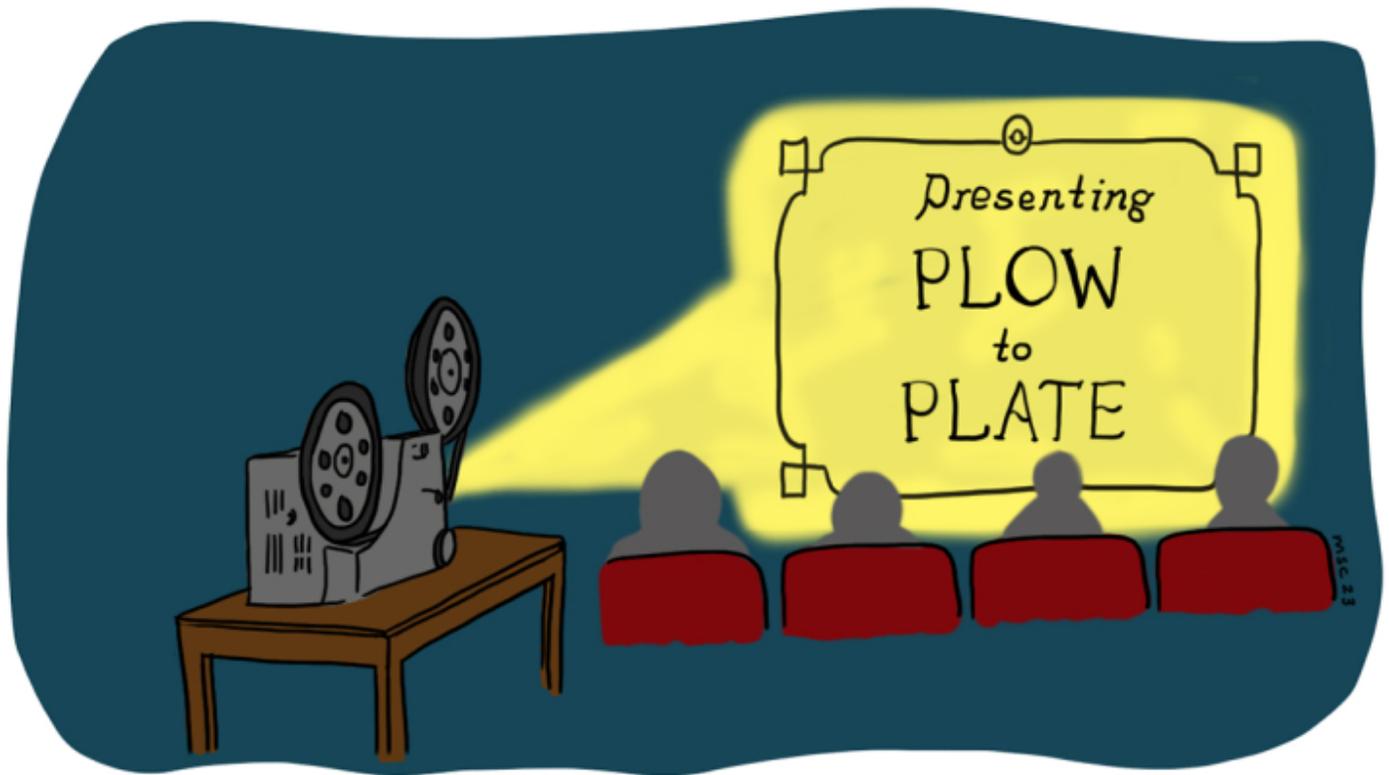
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## PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: "THE GUT MOVIE"

March 3, 2026



April 1, 2025

*By Adam Rabiner*

Kale Brock, the journalist, researcher, and star of *The Gut Movie*, has the perfect name for a film about the human biome, diet, and health. Whatever you think of the leafy green vegetable, Kale is a genial guide. Young, blond, handsome, and enthusiastic, he usually has a happy smile on his face, even when having his own poo analyzed or literally picking up deposits left by others from the ground (more on that later).

THE SCIENCE OF THE HUMAN MICROBIOME IS OFTEN FAST AND FURIOUS AND NOT EASILY FOLLOWED WITHOUT PRESSING PAUSE.

Much of this topic was covered in our previous screening, *The Invisible Extinction*. To summarize: the human microbiome is the collection of all microorganisms (bacteria, archaea, fungi, and viruses) that live inside our bodies. It's been found to be crucial to human health and wellness. If the microbiota is diverse and balanced, all is well. But if it becomes less diverse, or unbalanced, often because of overuse of antibiotics but also because of poor diet, the result can be leakage of toxins into the body, inflammation, and a wide range of diseases.

The science is often fast and furious and not easily followed without pressing pause. But it's easy to get the gist. Part of Kale's interest stems from his overuse of antibiotics as a kid suffering from a chronic chest infection. Though he has a decent microbiome, it's below average in a variety of ways. The central premise of the film is to see if a totally different diet—more nature-based, less processed—can improve its multiplicity.

To test this hypothesis, Kale must get out of his native Australia and comfort zone. He decides, much to the benefit of this film, to visit the San people, indigenous hunters and gatherers who have lived in the Kalahari Desert in Namibia for 20,000 years. Unexposed to modern foods and medicines, the San have terrific microbiomes. Will a week hanging out with them change Kale's gut?

The sojourn with the San really makes the film. The cinematographer, freed from cramped offices and face shots, lets loose with gorgeous framing of the African landscape and the people and animals that inhabit it. And as a former Peace Corps volunteer who served as a beekeeper in the Central African Republic after college in the late 1980s, I relished every interaction of Kale with his hosts.

Fortunately, one young San, who is 31 but looks like a teenager, speaks English and serves as Kale's translator. On treks throughout the week, he teaches Kale the names of different tubers, berries, nuts, melons, edible roots, and legumes, many buried in the ground out of sight: for example, a starchy, fiber-filled bush potato. After almost a week of gathering, the Sans finally take Kale hunting, and even assign him the lead at one point, though he has only just learned how to silently stalk prey and shoot a poisoned arrow. It turns out that due to the difficulty of snaring an antelope, meat is a rare treat for the mostly vegetarian San.

FOR KALE, THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT HIS WEEK IN THE NAMIBIAN DESERT, EATING UNFAMILIAR FOOD DUG UP DIRECTLY FROM THE SOIL, HAS DONE WONDERS FOR HIS GUT.

Kale finally broaches the topic of collecting stool samples. The slightly mystified and bemused Africans must deliberate before finally giving their consent. At first Kale tries to explain how to capture the sample themselves in tiny test tubes, but he eventually realizes that the unpleasant task will have to fall on him. He good-naturedly accepts this responsibility.

The audience should enjoy the moments with the Sans. They are joyful doers, makers, deeply in touch with the land and their environment in a way that most of the rest of humanity is not. Materially poorer, they nevertheless appear happy in their small community following their ancient ways. And they are healthy. Lean, athletic, flexible, and spry, even into their old age, they dance and display impressive athleticism and endurance.

For Kale, the good news is that his week in the Namibian desert, eating unfamiliar food dug up directly from the soil, has done wonders for his gut. Upon retesting, the range of organisms living there has multiplied. Kale's sojourn has proven that diet can have a beneficial effect. He has some great news for his Ted Talk audiences. And a

collection of terrific photos too.

The film will be screened on Zoom: *The Gut Movie* Tuesday, April 8, 2025 @ 7:00 p.m.

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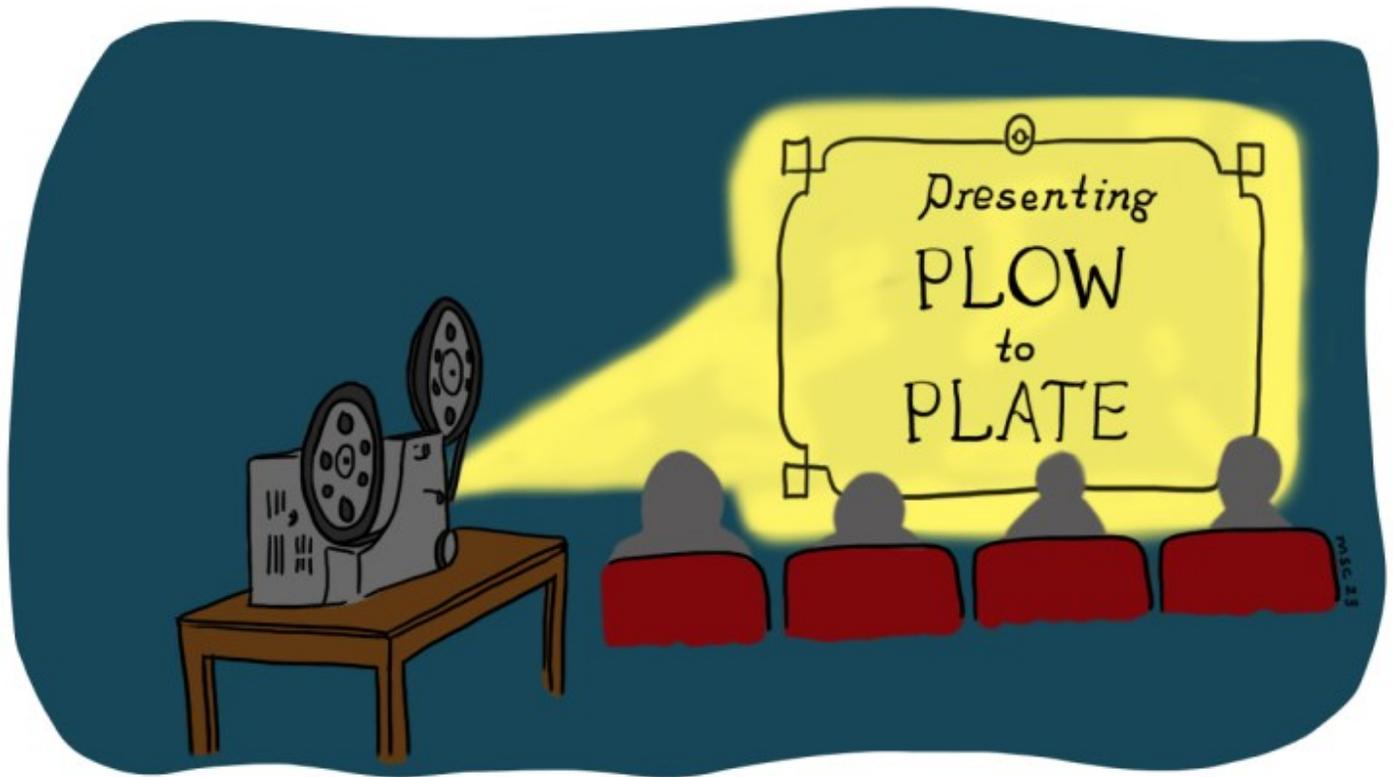
The opinions expressed in the films screened in the Plow to Plate series are solely those of the filmmakers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the series' organizers or the Park Slope Food Coop.

*Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and child Ana.*

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PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: RED GOLD: THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE TOMATO INDUSTRY

March 3, 2026



February 18, 2025

By Adam Rabiner

Like many *Plow to Plate* titles, *Red Gold* purports to reveal some dire hidden secrets. Yet, unlike General Motors CEO Roger Smith who famously evaded Michael Moore in *Roger & Me*, here tomato traders, suppliers and middlemen freely discuss the industry, tomato titans boast of their accomplishments and factory managers are all too eager—even proud—to show off their facilities to French film-maker Jean-Baptiste Malet.

Though Malet's thorough examination of the industry is interesting, and reveals some unsavory practices, he does not find a smoking gun. What he does highlight, if not so much reveal, is that the tomato industry operates under the inexorable laws of globalized capitalism which means, of course, that some people get massively rich, others are found expendable and lose their livelihoods, a great many are exploited in the fields, and that consumers should follow that wise dictum, "caveat emptor."

The central paradox that drives Malet's years-long investigation was why a Chinese company was investing in French tomatoes. After all, tomatoes are not a typical part of the Chinese diet. The answer appears to be a combination of economic opportunism, industrial policy and control of the Uyghur people and the Autonomous Region Xinjiang. The area attracts laborers from China's poorest regions where a husband-and-wife team may earn 25 to 50 Euros a day picking and bagging tomatoes, depending on the field's yield. Child labor is also not uncommon.

On the other end of the spectrum Liu Yi, or General Yu, has been appointed by Xi Jinping, to turn China into a global leader in production of tomato concentrate, or red gold, which, like crude oil, can be further refined into tomato sauce, paste, ketchup and other branded products. Beginning in the early 2000s, China has emerged to join the U.S. and Italy as one of the big three producers. How it got there is another one of Malet's dirty little secrets. Essentially China struck a deal with Italy which agreed to supply machinery, technology and training in exchange for raw exports for a period of five years. Both countries were enriched by this bartering agreement and neither country is blameless in hoodwinking unsuspecting consumers. Italian suppliers attempt to disguise the fact that their raw material comes from China with brand-names like Gino's and green, red and white can labels resembling the Italian flag. And the Chinese eventually create their own brand, Gina's, with a similar label to compete head-to-head selling "Italian Style" sauce.

Malet films one Chinese manufacturer using soybean fiber as a thickener. The floor manager claims the government allows additions of the substance to 20 percent, though Malet cites information that in some cases the additives can be as high as 55 percent. This is done not simply to thicken the sauce, but to lower the costs and increase the profits. The importers and distributors are in on the game, but the end consumer is fooled. This is a far cry from the 1800s practices of diluting milk with water, dyeing it, spiking it with formaldehyde to preserve it or adding pureed calf brains to make it creamier. But it is still dastardly.

There is one revelation in the film worth noting. Value investor Warren Buffet is fre-

quently portrayed as humble because he lives in a modest home bought decades ago and does not collect luxury cars. But he did not become one of the world's richest men by accident. In 2013 he acquired Heinz and a year later shut down a plant in Leamington, Ontario that employed about 1,000 of the City's 28,000 citizens and had been operating for four generations since 1909. He subsequently closed five plants and cut 7,400 jobs, a quarter of the company's workforce.

By now, few people believe that unbridled capitalism is a good thing. While we may be impressed by highly efficient automated factories, we rightly are wary of robots, computers and AI potentially taking away our jobs and livelihoods. It is good to press pause and consider the negative effects of economic globalization. But the film's main takeaways are a bit more prosaic: Carefully read your labels and buy fair trade if you can.

Red Gold Tuesday, March 11, 2025 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link.

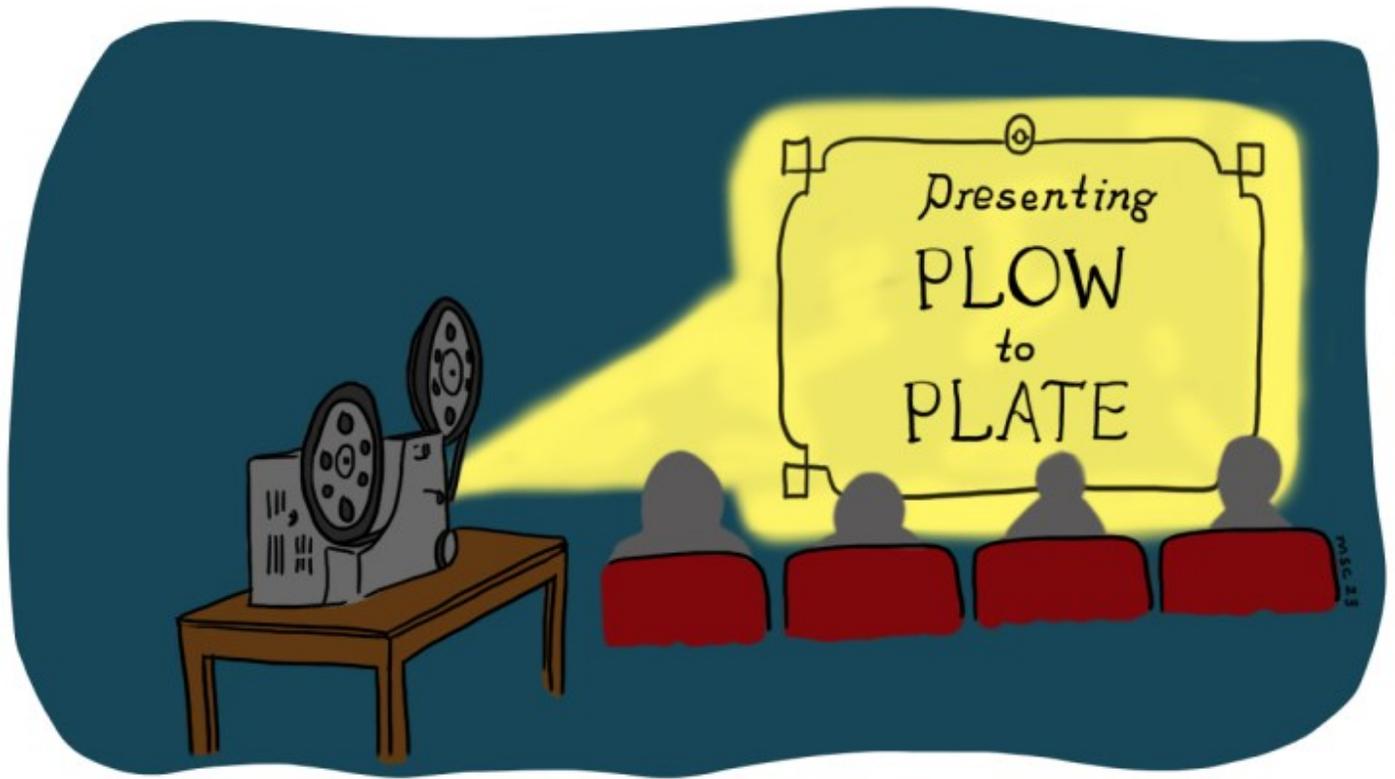
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PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS 'FED A LIE: THE TRUTH ABOUT SEED OILS'

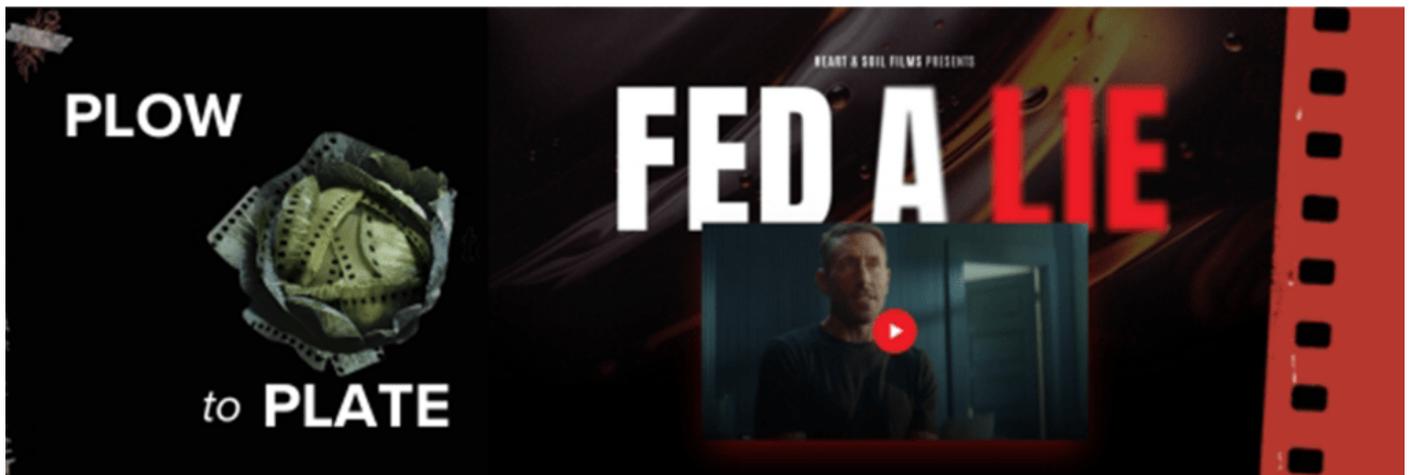
March 3, 2026



January 7, 2025

*By Adam Rabiner*

For some time, my daughter Ana has been interested in diet, health and nutrition, and I noticed her influence when she joined my wife and me on shopping trips to the Coop. No longer could we buy Oatly, our favorite brand of oat milk. Similarly, certain brands of crackers and cookies were suddenly verboten and our family now had an affinity for ghee, avocado and coconut oil. What was going on? Unlike her parents, Ana, perhaps subject to influencers on TikTok, was tuned into the anti-seed oil movement, the theme of film *Fed a Lie*.



*Fed a Lie's* central contention is that highly polyunsaturated Omega-6, seed and vegetable oils are manufactured processed foods harmful to human beings. They cause linoleic acid (LA) to build up in our bodies and cells; a pro-oxidative, inflammatory, toxic and nutrient-deficient process that drives cell stress and death. Oils pressed from corn, soybeans, sesame seeds, peanuts, cotton and grapeseed must be heated, refined, bleached, deodorized and oxidized. Cotton seed oil was originally a replacement for whale oil used strictly as a lubricant for machinery. In 1911, Procter & Gamble (P&G) wanted to sell it as a food and created a fake lard they branded as Crisco. This was the first instance of a vegetable oil marketed to be consumed by humans as a replacement for butter, lard and tallow. Margarine was cheaper than butter, so consumers were happy. In 1948, P&G donated \$1.7 million to the American Heart Association, a small and sleepy organization, after which consumers were led to believe that vegetable oils were healthier than animal fats.

*Fed a Lie* relies heavily on certain statistics to make its case against seed oils. Several graphs are displayed throughout the film. One shows that the total calories consumed per person per day between 1999 and 2018 remained steady at 2,500 but during the same period, obesity climbed from 30% to 42%. Other charts show similar growth in

various chronic diseases, which were exceedingly rare in 1900 but grew steadily thereafter, after the introduction of seed oils into the American diet. Notably, during the 20th century, when all these bad health results were trending, the consumption of saturated fats remained steady. The consumption of vegetable fat surpassed animal fat for the first time in the mid-1960s.

Today, an American consumes an average of three to five tablespoons of seed oil per day through a cornucopia of products: salad dressings, cakes, fried foods, and bread. These concentrations are equivalent to consuming 60 to 70 ears of corn or two pounds of soybeans, which is humanly impossible and evolutionarily inconsistent. *Fed a Lie* posits that seed oil consumption is the greatest change in history to man's diet. Certain populations like the Maasai warriors of Kenya and Tanzania, whose diet still consists largely of milk, meat and blood, and the Tokelauans, whose South Pacific diet consists largely of coconut, fish, tuber and fruit, have virtually no heart disease, diabetes or obesity.

*Fed a Lie* concedes that replacing saturated fat with seed oils lowers LDL—or “bad”—cholesterol but argues that this has not diminished death rates due to heart or other diseases. The film bolsters its case by claiming that Ancel Keys' influential 1958 Seven Countries Study, which purportedly showed lower rates of heart disease among populations that consumed less saturated fat, was flawed due to cherry-picking certain countries over others. The film argues that scientists and clinicians need to zoom in and look at the quality of every individual study on this topic rather than zoom out and take the averages.

One can argue that correlation is not the same as causation and therefore dispute the central message and warning of *Fed a Lie*. Yet the film is not preachy, and it's difficult to argue with its suggestion to shop the supermarket's periphery for whole, natural “ancestral foods” such as meat, fish, nuts, fruits, tubers, and vegetables rather than its middle aisles to avoid the hidden seed oils in the many “food-like substances” that are boxed, canned, labeled, and packaged.

Shortly after watching, I visited my pantry for corn tortilla chips bought during my last shopping trip to the Coop two weeks earlier. Mysteriously, even after all this time, the bag remained unopened. I noticed it contained safflower and/or sunflower oils. Though I had not read the label until then, Ana surely had. Time to try another brand.

*Fed a Lie*: Tuesday, January 14, 2025 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html>

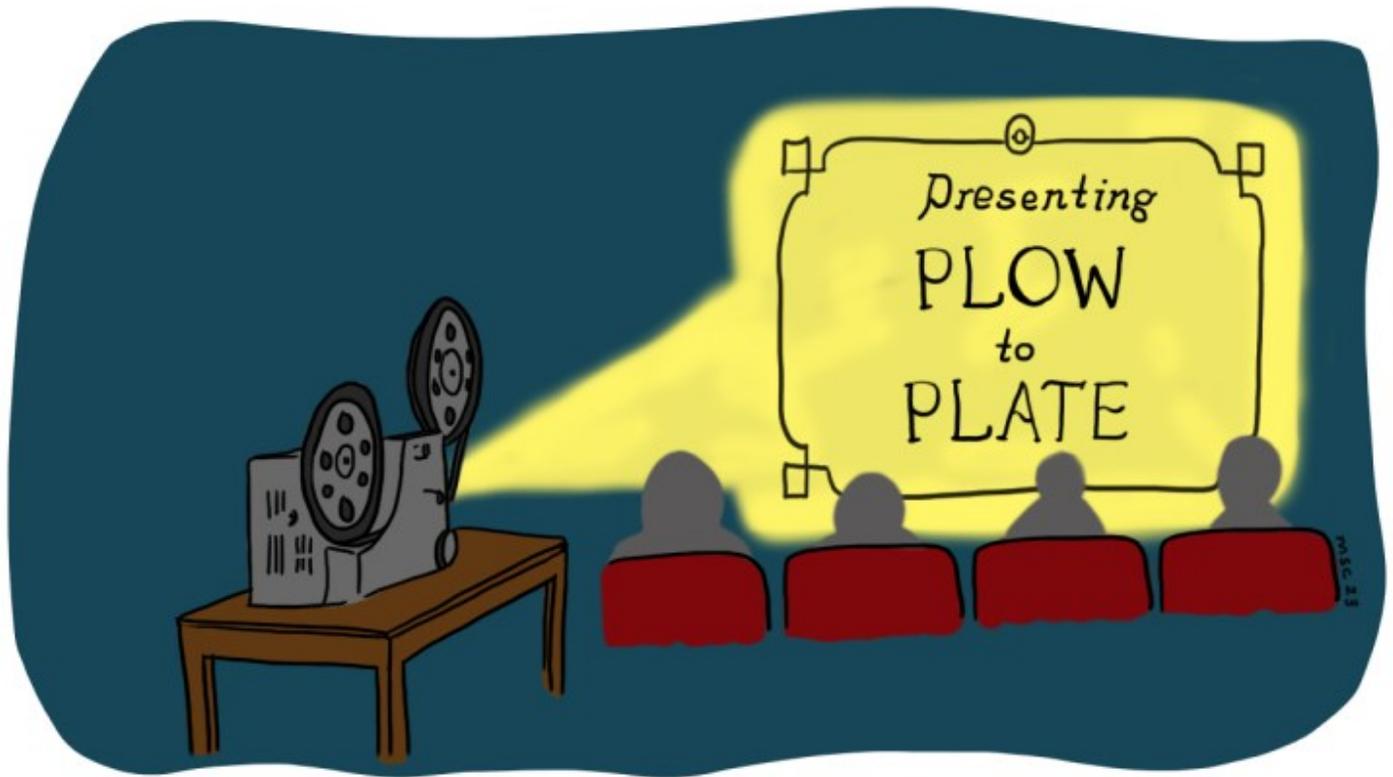
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PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: A HARD AND FAST (AND FAMISHED) FILM

March 3, 2026



By Adam Rabiner

November 26, 2024

Plow to Plate has spilled plenty of ink explaining how processed foods have contributed to unprecedented levels of global obesity and related diseases. We've also presented views on alternative healthier diets, whether they be protein- or plant-based. *Fasting: The Healer Within* takes a different tack. The film, which was co-directed by Sinclair Fischer-Gray, Saxon Fischer-Gray, Tyler Tolman and Lindsay Guerrero, is about the absence of food, and what it does to the body and mind over time.

These effects are seen in Sinclair and his younger brother, Saxon, as they embark on an incredibly ambitious 20-day water fast followed by a 20-day fruit-juice fast. Sinclair's primary motivation is to heal his body from a ruptured disk sustained playing rugby. The injury left him with chronic knee, neck, back, and leg pain. Saxon is a healthy 26-year-old who comes along for moral support.

Before the two Australian brothers embark on their adventure, the film sets the stage

with a cast of characters who explain the benefits of fasting, give the brothers advice and discuss their blood chemistry. We meet Joe Cross, a fellow Aussie, who healed himself through fasting and made the 2011 documentary *Fat, Sick, and Nearly Dead*. Dr. Alan Goldhammer, who runs a fasting clinic in Santa Rosa, California, explains how fasting is an ancient physical and spiritual healing practice. The most important and influential talking head is the person who introduced Saxon to fasting: his mentor Tyler Tolman, who runs a retreat in Bali, Indonesia. Tyler best articulates the multi-faceted aspects of fasting, discussing its religious overtones and themes of purification, holiness and communing with oneself and nature. He also digs into the physical and scientific sides of the equation. Tolman believes that just about any disease can be healed through fasting.

*Fasting: The Healer Within* balances the technical and biological with the spiritual. The brothers who anchor the film are also game to flush out the toxins from their bowels using colonic machines, as well as shed their childhood traumas and other repressed emotions through a technique called “rebirthing.” Biochemical processes like autophagy, autolysis and ketosis share time in the film with discussions of energy flows and other naturopathic concepts.

It is no wonder that Saxon and Sinclair use every conceivable practice or ritual to help them through their fasts. By day six, living in a trailer in the shadow of Mount Warning in New South Wales, they are already tired, hungry, uncomfortable and bored. They are boosted by a sign on the wall that reads, “You’re Supported & Loved” and occasional phone calls with their mom. Saxon misses the warmth and love of taco night with his family and writes an affirmation in his journal: “The harder the day, the deeper the detox.” Both are already struggling, weak, sad, lonely, craving food, experiencing stomach aches and at wit’s end while trying to remain positive. A good attitude proves difficult to maintain when there is no food to serve as a distraction, and little to hide behind as old insecurities creep to the surface and tell them that they are not good enough to pull this off.

Watching this up-close portrait of the brothers’ shared hardship reminded me of the

History Channel's show *Alone*, in which survivalists vie to be the last man or woman standing in a harsh natural environment—with no food and a handful of tools. Saxon and Sinclair do not face down a severe winter or a menacing grizzly bear but they experience the same mental anguish and physical transformations (each one loses 26.5 pounds in twenty days). I wish we saw more of the day-by-day vlogging during the fast.

On day 21, after the water fast, you have never seen two people relish and appreciate a giant glass of watermelon juice more than these two brothers. Finally, the film moves on to the denouement which covers the proper way to conclude a serious fast. It's shown during a family reunion in Bali with Tyler and their parents and siblings, and two post-fast follow-ups—one eight months later, and a final conversation between the brothers three and a half years afterwards.

Despite the discomfort and difficulty, they agreed that the experience under Mt. Warning was life-changing and provided great memories. The pair learned about their minds and bodies and the art and science of fasting. More importantly, they discovered that genuine healing is an ongoing everyday endeavor.

*Fasting: The Healer Within*, Tuesday, December 10th, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. on Zoom

Screening link: <https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html>

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to [plowtoplate@gmail.com](mailto:plowtoplate@gmail.com).

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