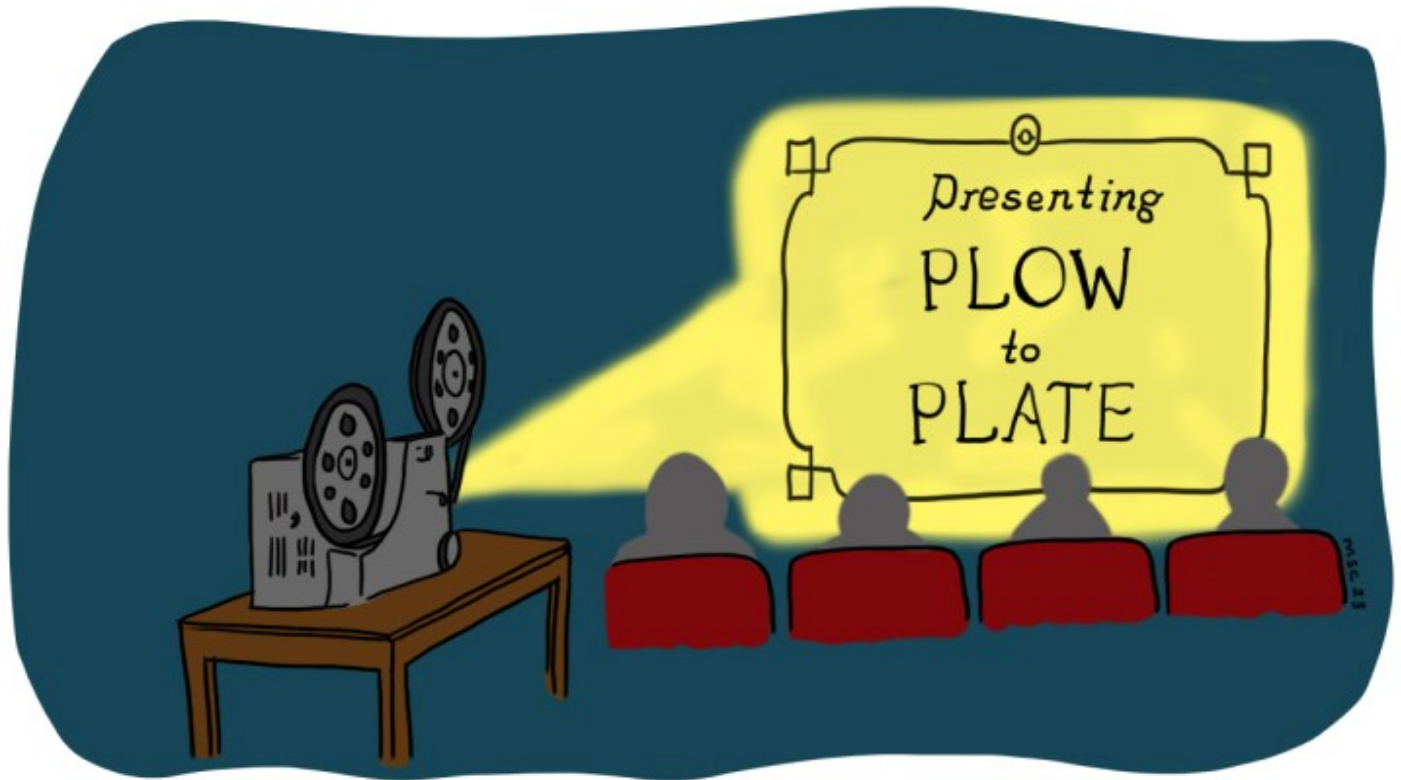


PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: SWEETGRASS

November 18, 2025



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 >

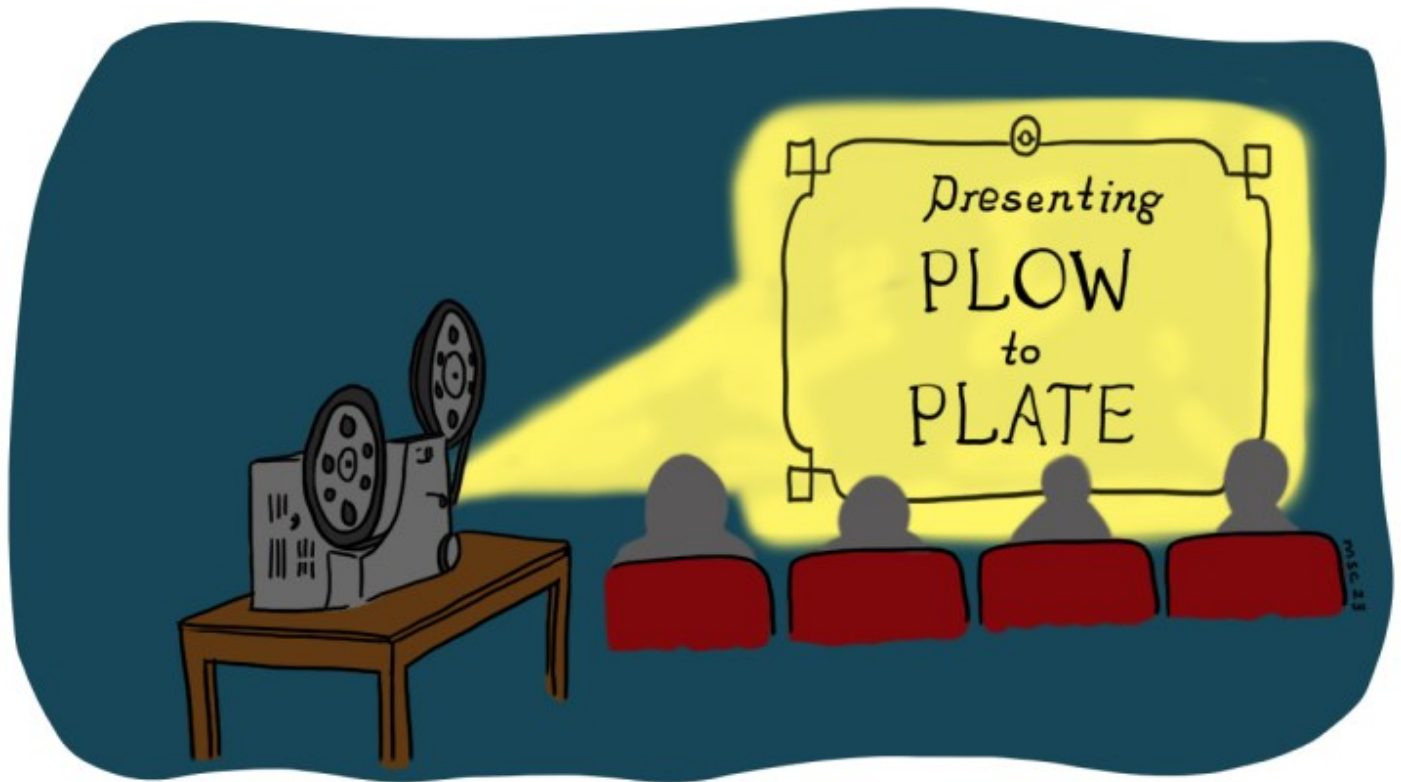
To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@gmail.com.

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.

PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: LEVIATHAN

November 18, 2025



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

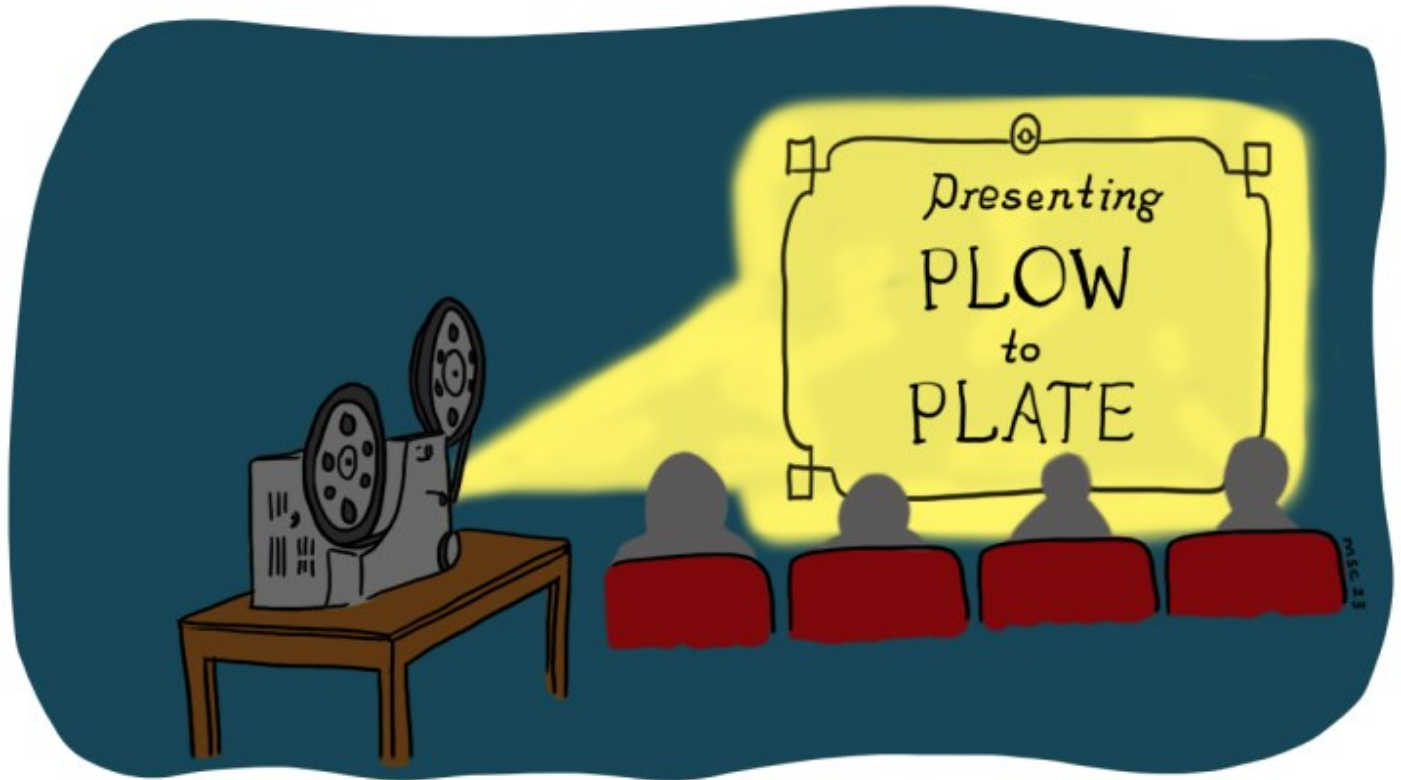
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PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: "BEYOND IMPOSSIBLE: THE TRUTH BEHIND THE FAKE MEAT INDUSTRY"

November 18, 2025



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 gen-

eration 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.

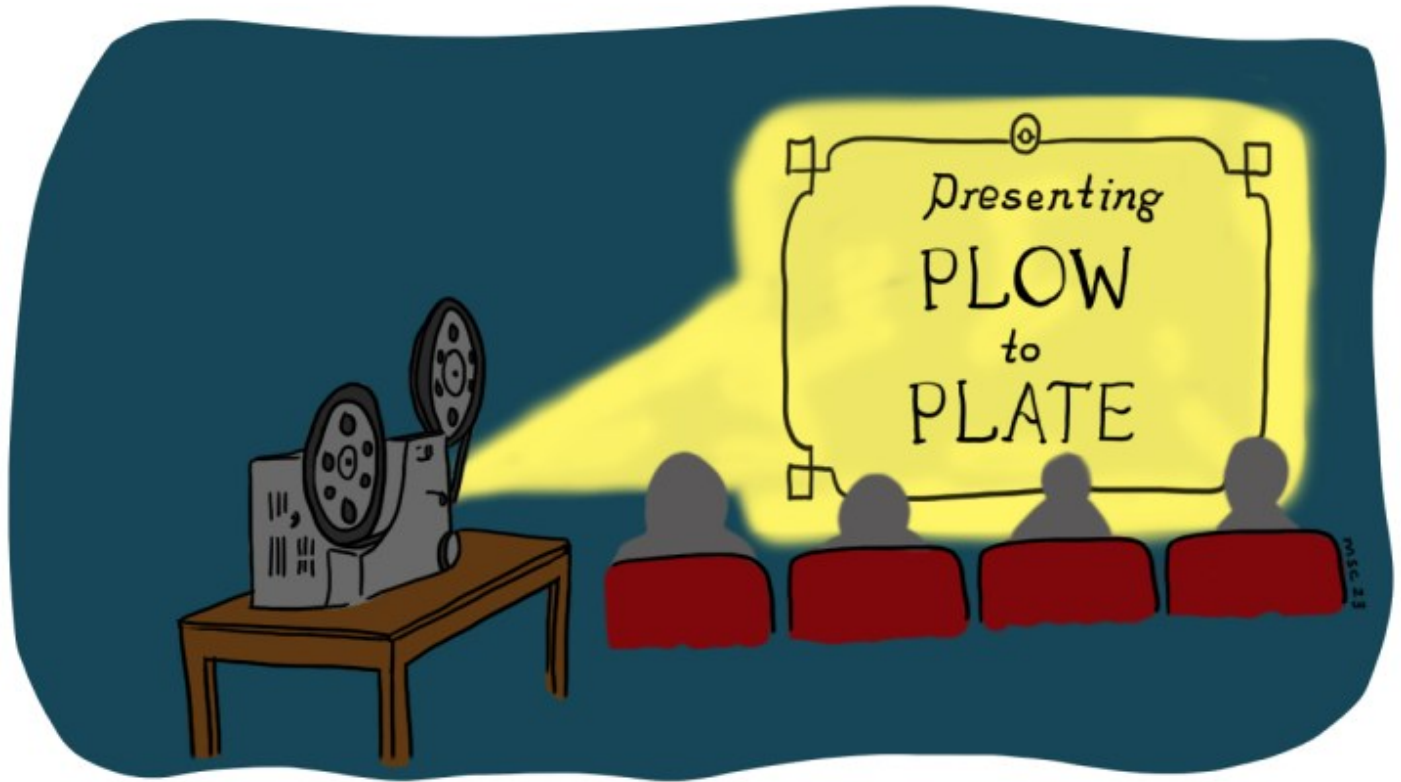
Screening link for *Beyond Impossible*.

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

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

PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: FAT: A DOCUMENTARY 2

November 18, 2025



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 parti-

san. 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, understanding 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 bellicose 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 8th, 2025 @ 7:00 p.m.

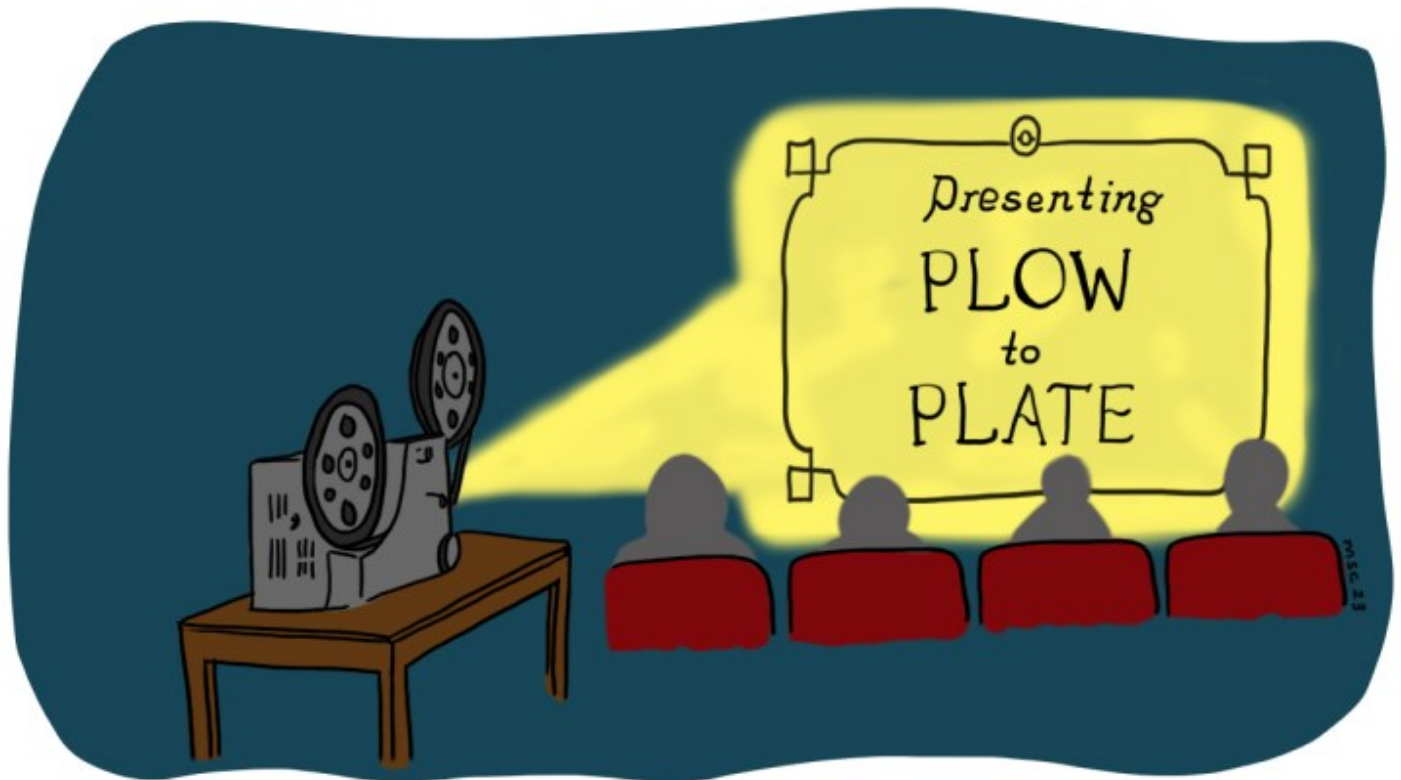
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PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: FOOD COOP: THE MOVIE!

November 18, 2025



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>

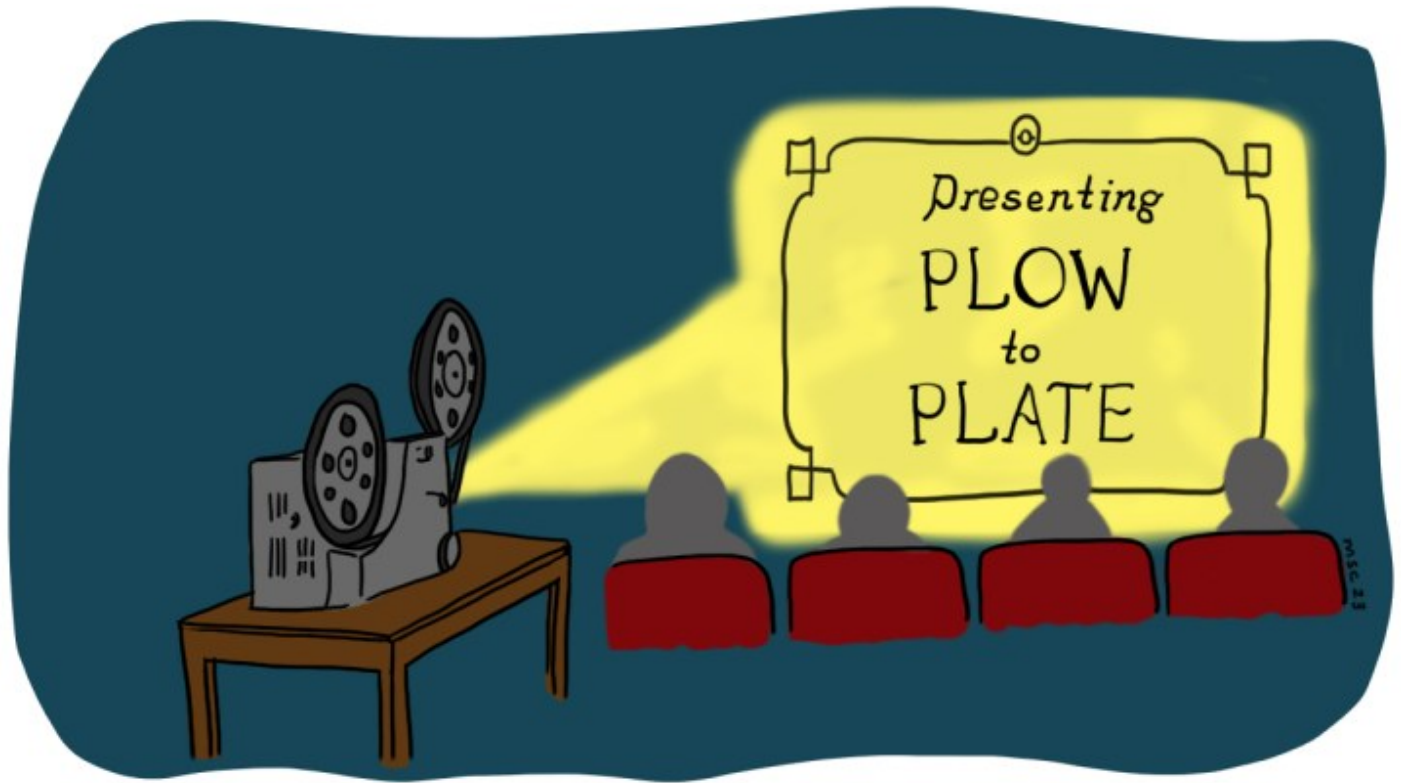
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Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and child Ana.

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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November 18, 2025



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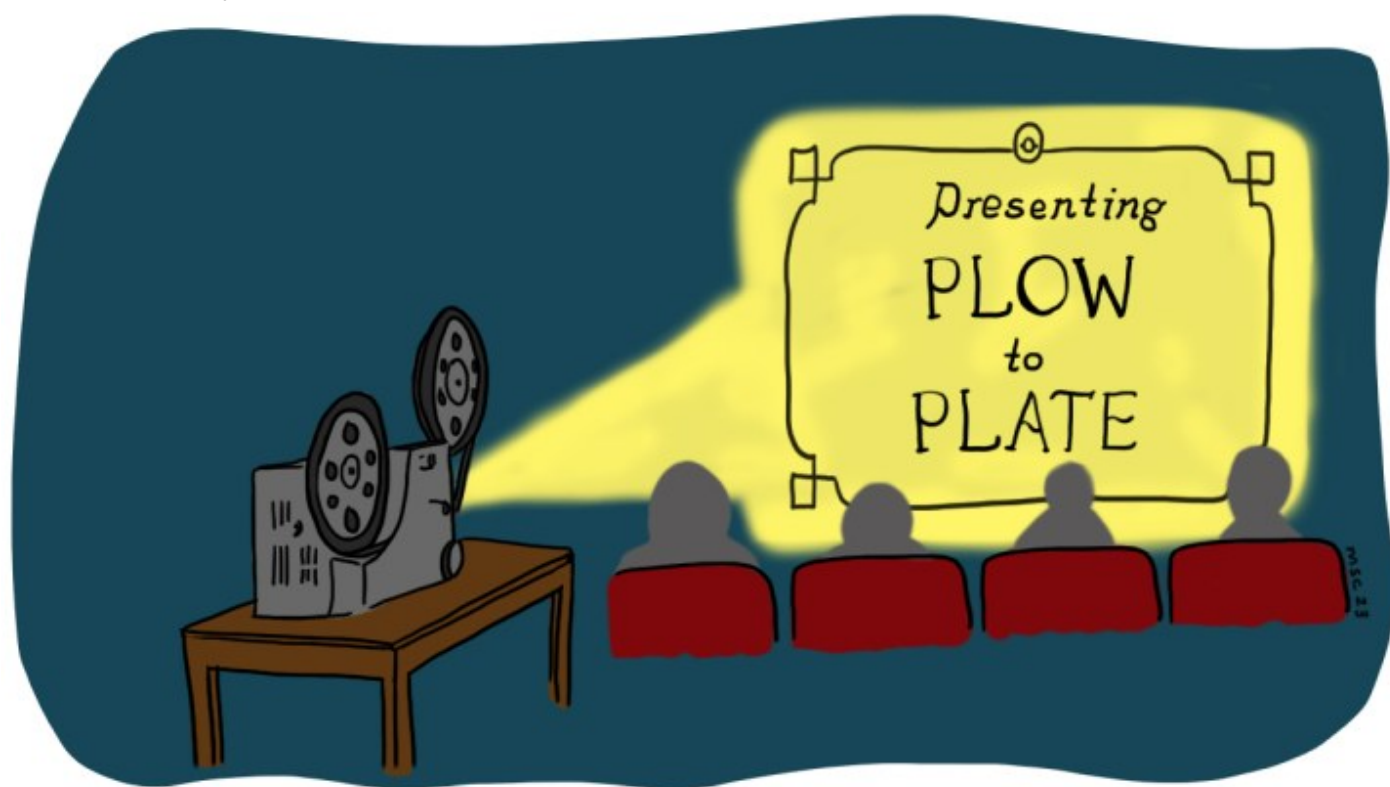
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PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: LET THEM EAT DIRT: THE HUNT FOR OUR KIDS' MISSING MICROBES

November 18, 2025

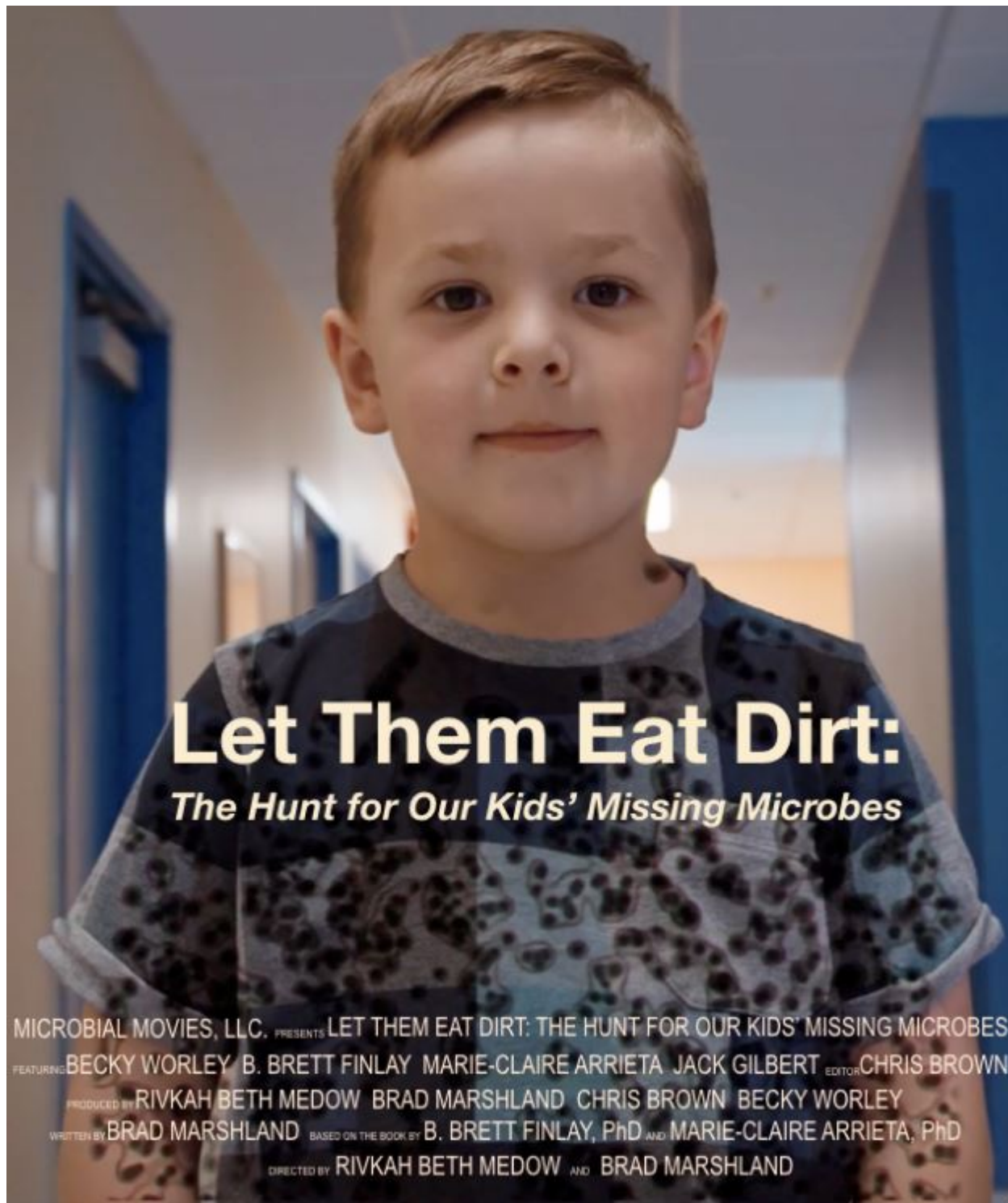


April 22, 2025

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 or-

gan,” 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.



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 probiotic-

s. 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 13th, 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.

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