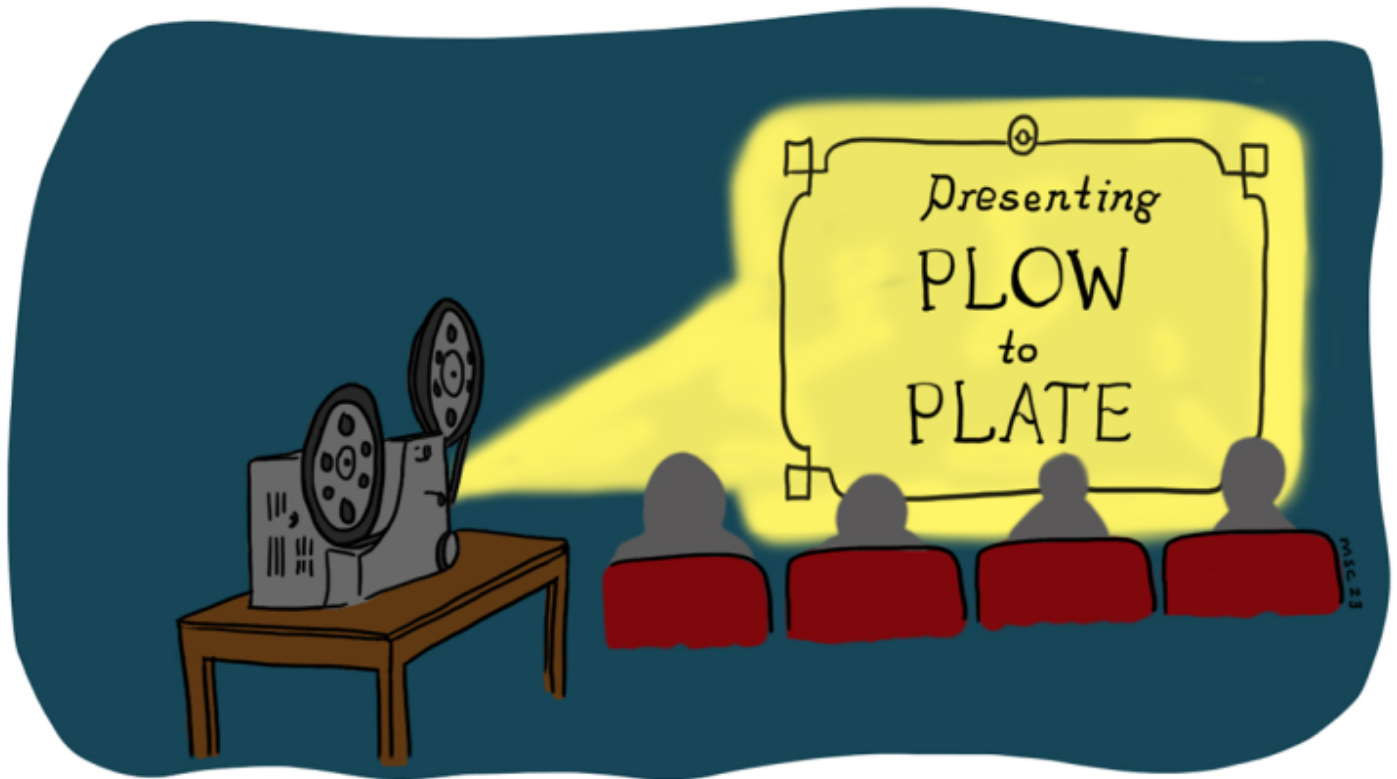


PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: "THE GUT MOVIE"

April 1, 2025



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.

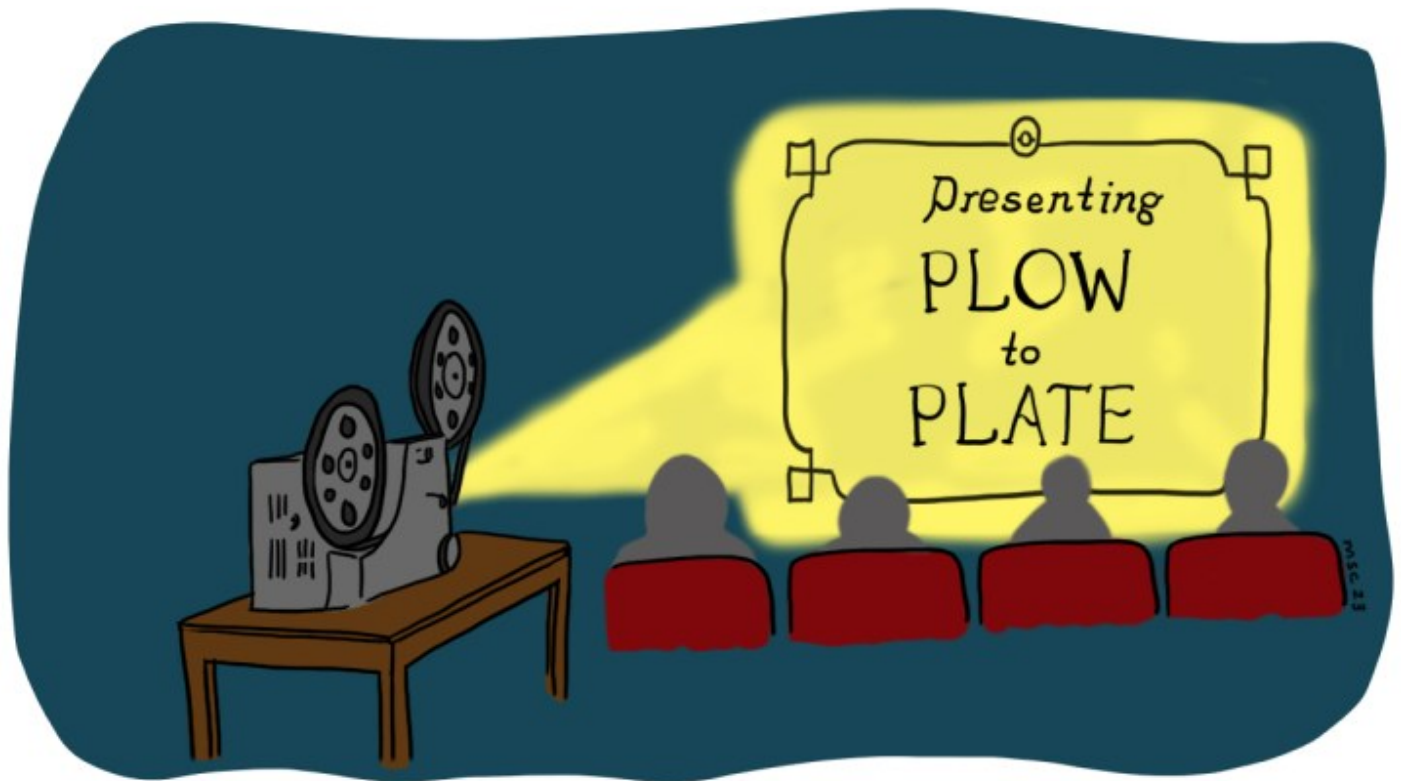
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The opinions expressed in the films screened in the Plow to Plate series are solely those of the filmmakers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the series' organizers or the Park Slope Food Coop.

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

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

April 1, 2025



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, dying 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 frequently 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.

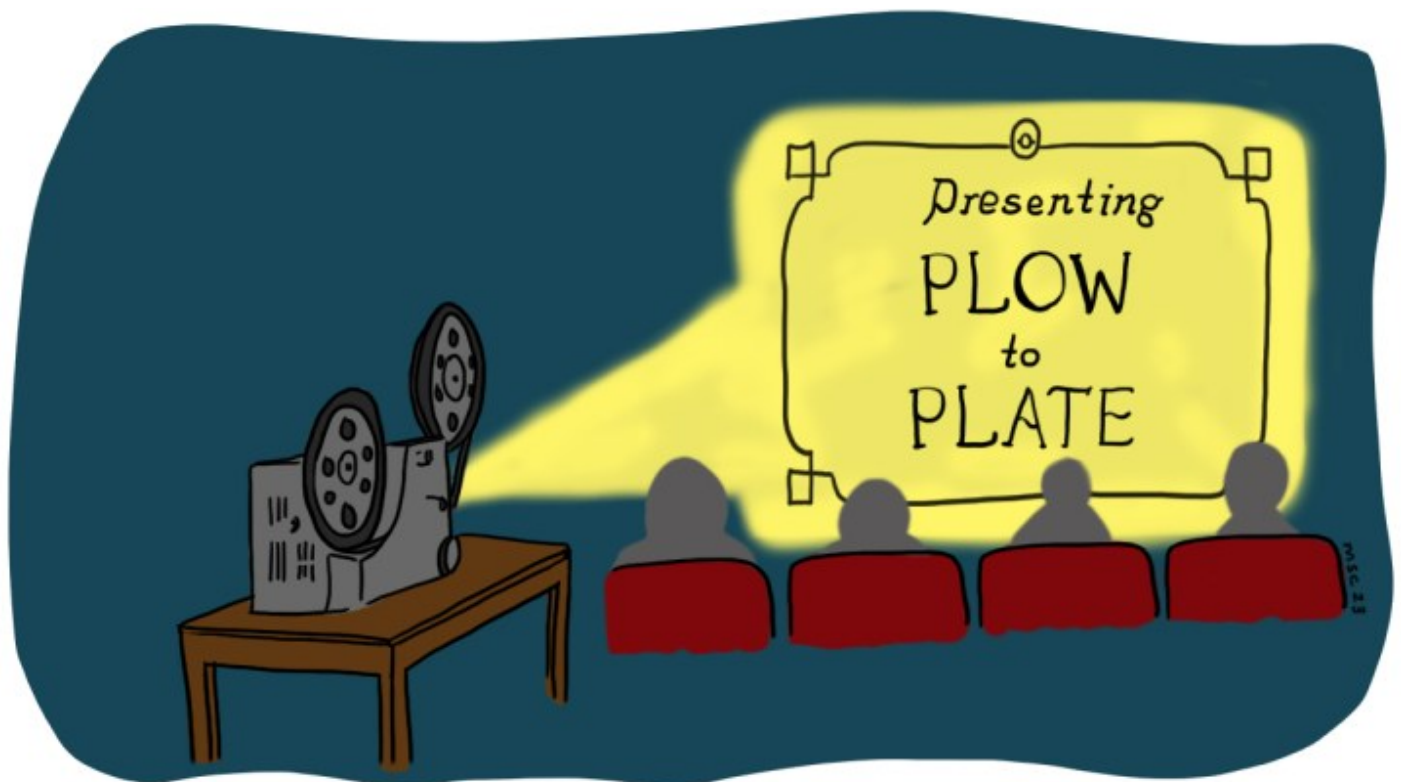
Screening link.

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

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

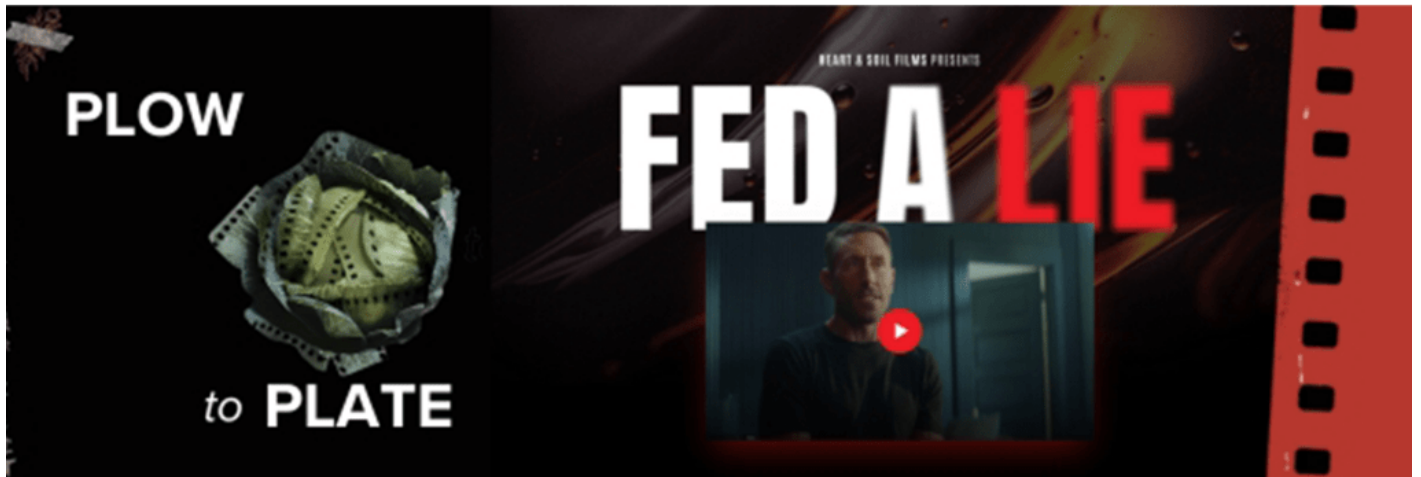
April 1, 2025



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 con-

sumers 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.

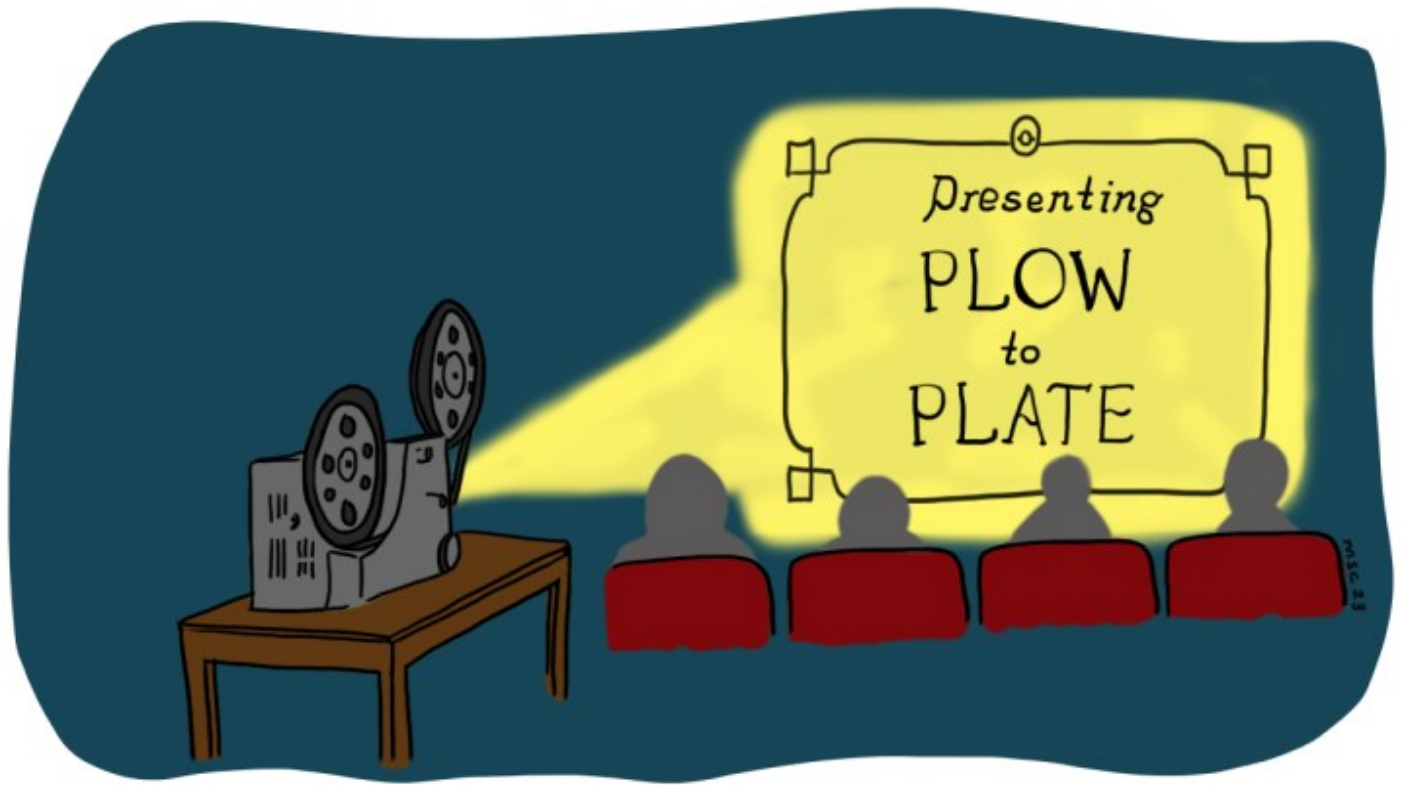
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Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and child Ana.

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

April 1, 2025



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 multifaceted 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

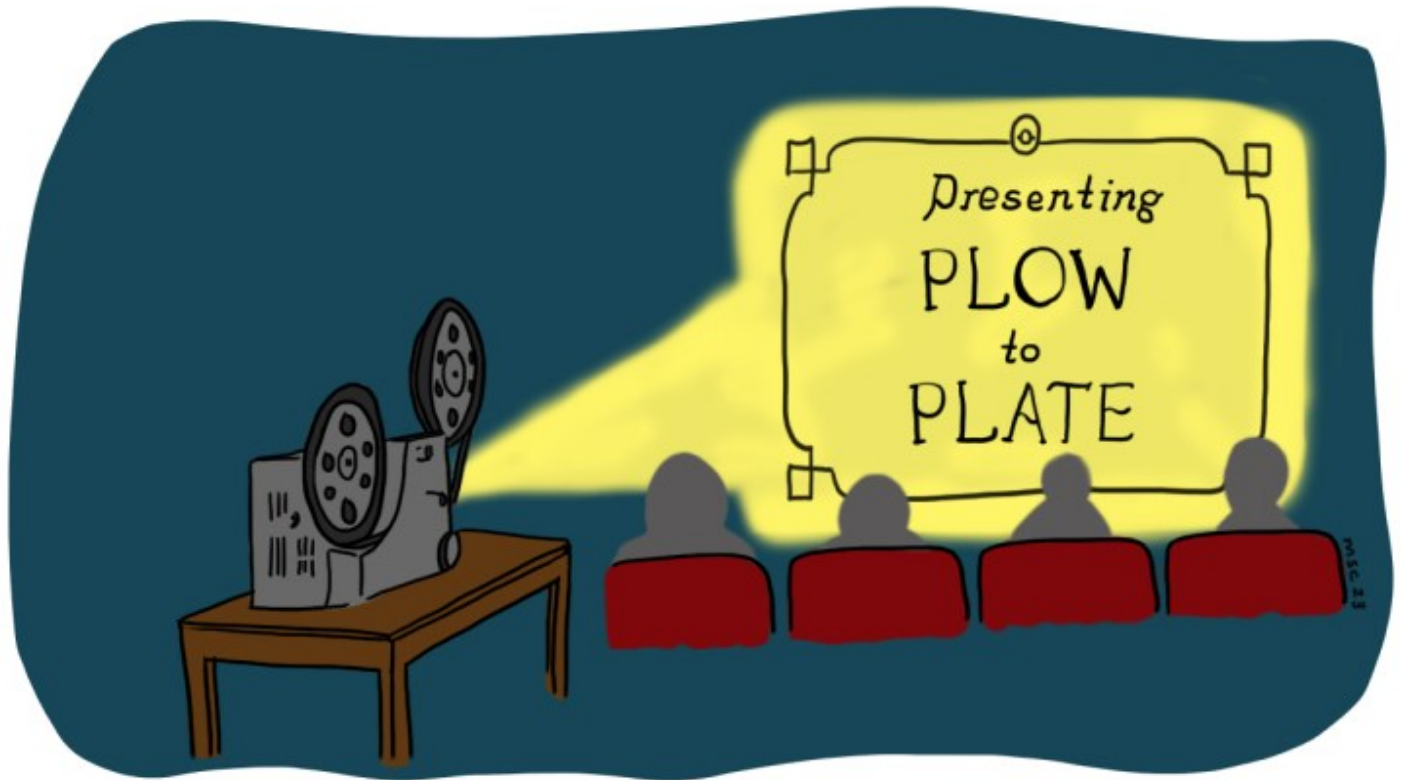
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Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and child, Ana.

PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: KITCHENISTAS

April 1, 2025



By Adam Rabiner

November 5, 2024

The opening frame of the documentary *Kitchenistas* shows an older person's hand penciling a new entry into a well-worn, dog-eared and stained notebook containing family recipes. Once completed, just past the one-minute mark, it reads: "Octubre 3, 2020. Empanadas de carne pollo—para la película de las Kitchenistas." Then abruptly the screen flashes, "One Year Earlier" and we are off to 2019 and the inauguration of the 16th generation of the seven-week nutrition education course, "Kitchenistas 101," comprised of mostly Latina and Caribbean women, embarking on the first class, "Cooking for Salud." Was this intriguing tease of an introduction simply a clever way of rolling some screen credits? Only toward the end of the movie, when the footage is shown once again in fuller context, do you realize that these simple images capture the thematic heart of the film.

The class is taught at the Olivewood Gardens Learning Center in National City, California, a lower-income area south of San Diego, whose main drag of fast-food restaurants is the hallmark of a food desert. Years ago, “Cooking for Salud” began as a gardening and nutrition class for children but evolved into an adult-oriented program as moms wanted to learn to cook the foods their kids were getting excited about. In an interesting twist, the program now spans multiple parent-child combinations. For example, tenth-generation Monica is mother to sixth-generation Esperanza.

THE MANTRA IS THAT EATING HEALTHY SHOULD BE EASY, DELICIOUS, NOT EXPENSIVE AND DELICIOUS.

Most of the Kitchenistas, which in Spanish translates as “professionals in the kitchen,” enter the class knowing how to cook. However, many of them are immigrants from Mexico or other Central and South American countries and are unfamiliar with how prepare some of the ingredients. In addition, many are employed and leading modern lives with limited time for making meals, so the class teaches fundamental skills and abbreviated recipes, whether a student has ten minutes or a full day to dedicate to scratch-made cooking. The mantra is that eating healthy should be easy, delicious, not expensive and delicious.

But the class is about much more than simply cooking. Kitchenistas are schooled in the five pillars of wellness: 1) sleeping, 2) eating, 3) exercise, 4) connecting with people and 5) being mindful. Many attend class wearing traditional clothing and jewelry from their countries of origin. A Guatemalan Kitchenista shows off a necklace of seemingly identical cloth dolls and says of the figures, “They are not like us, we are like them. What happens to one, happens to the rest. Though of different ages, education, and stories, we love each other and have adopted one another as sisters.”

The Kitchenistas learn from others too. They host a visit about culinary medicine from Dr. Sabrina A. Falquier Montgrain (a ninth-generation Kitchenista herself), Joe Pastry

and guest chefs Angel and Angel from Tecate, Mexico (Honoring My Culture), where they learn about guajillo, ancho and Mexican chiles. They take the third pillar of wellness seriously. When not cooking they practice breathing, yoga, tai chi and movement. Indeed, they view what they are doing as a revolutionary movement.

The Kitchenistas perform demonstrations in schools and community centers where people come to hear what they have to say. They take the “Heart Healthy Tacos” show on the road to Imperial Beach, CA and the “Cooking Mindful Mushrooms” class to San Diego. They teach an off-site “Cooking for Salud” to the United Women of East Africa and testify at city council meetings where they advocate for community-wide changes in policy.

The closing credits inform that, as of December 2020, more than 275 Kitchenistas had graduated from the “Cooking for Salud” program. Kitchenistas have become elected officials, nonprofit leaders, small business owners and neighborhood mentors. They advocate for healthy food solutions and traditions to change communities and transform lives.

THE FILM SHOWS THE TIES THAT BIND MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS, PAST AND PRESENT, WHERE WE COME FROM AND WHERE WE HAVE ARRIVED. IT ALSO POINTS THE WAY TO WHERE WE NEED TO GO.

Can you see now the images of the beaten-up family recipe book and wrinkled, pencil-wielding hand and how they resonate with sisterhood, family, sharing and tradition? The film colorfully conveys how the Kitchenistas have learned to become professionals in their communities and families, planting seeds, promoting healthier and better lives, melding the modern with the traditional. The film shows the ties that bind mothers and daughters, past and present, where we come from and where we have arrived. It also points the way to where we need to go.

Kitchenistas on Zoom Tuesday, November 12th, 2024 @ 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.

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES

April 1, 2025

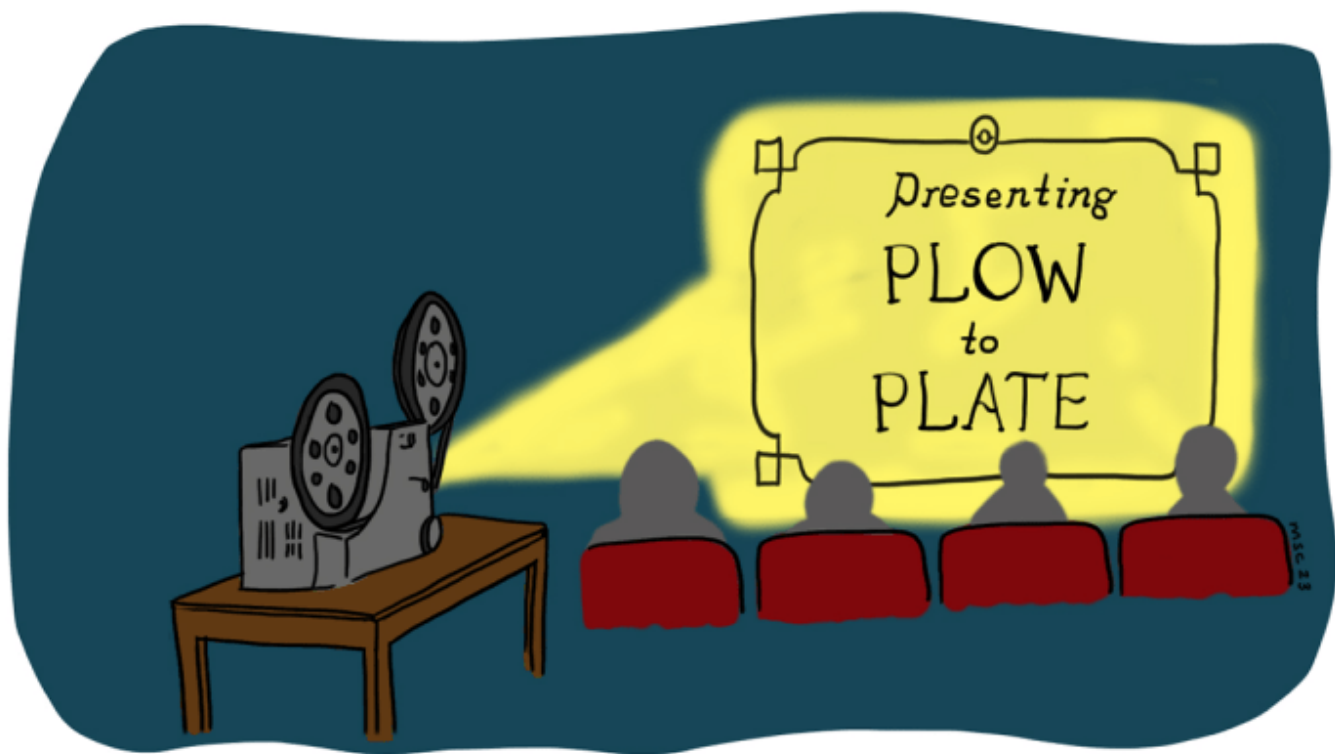


ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

PET FOOLED: THE SHOCKING TRUTH ABOUT THE PET FOOD INDUSTRY

By Adam Rabiner

September 4, 2024

Let's just say that the documentary *Pet Fooled* is brought to you by *Plow to Bowl* rather than *Plow to Plate*. Never in our long-running series have we presented a film on what we feed our pets, although we have discussed whether cows are grass or grain fed. Yet *Pet Fooled* builds on the series' commitment to unveiling the less than savory aspects of an industrialized, corporatized and profit-driven food system. What plagues the pet food industry are the same problems that bedevil the system designed for our eating—namely, false and misleading packaging, monopoly power and consolidation, weak or non-existent regulation and a focus on profits over health.

It's really not shocking therefore to learn that our pets suffer from many of the same maladies that we do: obesity, allergies, autoimmune issues and diseases such as diabetes. The main reason for this is that many of the pet food formulations are not biologically appropriate. Dogs and cats are carnivores. A cat's favorite meal is a freshly killed mouse. And dogs evolved from meat-eating wolves. In fact, every animal has a unique diet best suited for it. Worms eat dirt; hummingbirds thirst for nectar. Serve a snake a salad and it will hiss at you as it slithers away into a hole where it will choose to starve to death. Yet, many pet foods are packed with carbohydrates. One beautifully designed package listed the following top unnecessary ingredients: ground yellow corn, chicken byproduct meal, corn gluten meal, whole wheat flour and animal fat. Another leading dog-food brand with all organic brown rice, oats, millet, barley, sorghum, peas and potatoes is described as "fabulous quality ingredients...if you were a goat."

Even the animal parts are problematic. By-products are what's left over after an animal has been slaughtered and all the edible parts removed for human consumption. They consist of every piece and part imaginable. In other words, "mystery meat" of

unknown quality or grade. These by-products, ground up and blended with synthetic vitamins and minerals, are obtained from slaughterhouses, but can also include dead animals from farms, ranches, maybe even zoos.

There are other problems. Kibbles, otherwise known as dried pet food, exacerbate dehydration in cats and dogs and contribute to kidney problems. The words on packages do not actually mean what most people think they do. For example, “dinner, nugget and formula” must contain up to 25% actual meat. However, “with” may contain only 3% meat. And “flavor” may contain little to no (0%) meat, yet the package might contain an image of a fresh steak. Similar deceptions apply to words such as “natural” and “organic.”

A lot of this deception was revealed in 2006 because of a major product recall and congressional hearings resulting from a mysterious illness afflicting dogs caused by melamine, a deadly chemical used to make plastic. Subsequently, between 2007 and 2013, dog deaths and illnesses were associated with chicken jerky tainted with trace elements of antibiotics produced in a single factory in China.

The negative attention that thrust the industry into the spotlight created an opening for Blue Wilderness, which developed into a billion-dollar brand, to offer ostensibly healthier, grain-free and more biologically appropriate foods, though a lawsuit filed by Purina later revealed that the upstart company, Blue Buffalo, mislead consumers and engaged in false advertising when it claimed it used no animal byproducts.

Today, many passionate animal lovers have founded and launched pet food companies that form the basis of an alternative industry. Many of these visionaries enthusiastically and transparently talked about their products with the film makers. As for the five main conglomerates, they have gauged consumer sentiment and branded their own newer formulations; however, their spokespeople remained more secretive about the sourcing of their ingredients.

The bottom line is that today there are plenty of options for the educated consumer

and animal lover, whether it is the newly popular raw food craze, or the glut of gently-cooked, human-grade options delivered frozen monthly to your door (shout out to my dog Sparky's favorite—The Farmer's Dog). There is no longer a reason to be fooled. Read labels. You can also make your own dog food like my veterinarian friend does. Though, if you are like me, that is going a bit too far.

"Pet Fooled," September 10, 2024 @ 7:00 p.m.

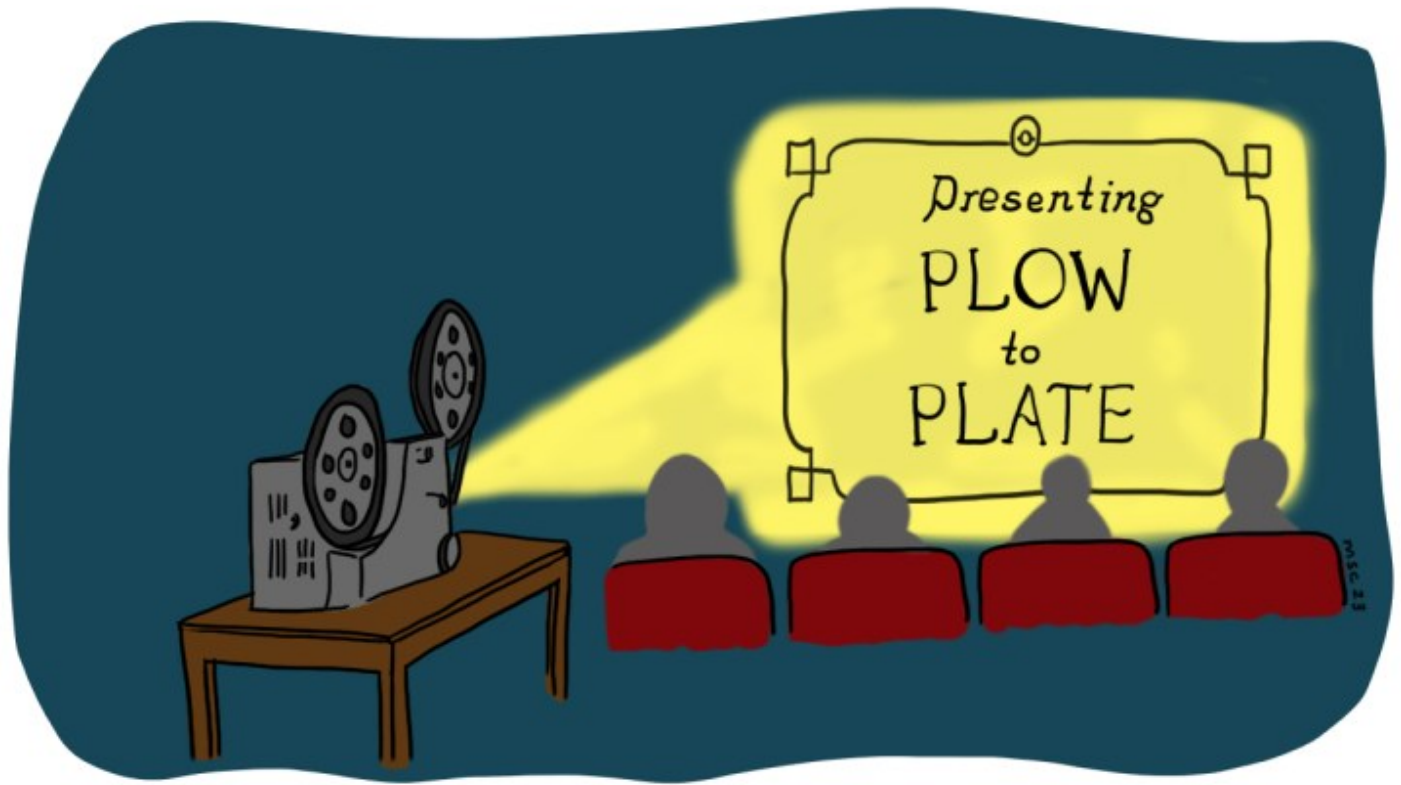
Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com/events/>

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Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and two children, Elan and Ana.

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES: SUSTAINABLE

April 1, 2025



By Adam Rabiner

In this time of false narratives and misinformation, it is something of a balm to find a movie with a straightforward title, *Sustainable*, which is exactly as it says it is: a documentary that explores in all its nuances precisely what this word means in the context of the food system. The film does this, in part, by answering the major questions that news reporters ask when reporting a story: who, what, where, when, how, and why? Beyond answering many of these basic questions with short stories and explanations, the film follows one major narrative: a year in the life of Spence Farm outside of Chicago.

SUMMER IS AN EXPLOSION OF GREEN, SUNLIGHT, LONG DAYS, SHORT NIGHTS, INTENSITY AND BOUNTY.

The farm, founded in 1830, is now run by Marty Travis, a seventh-generation farmer; his son, Will; and his wife, Kris. Marty narrates the film and describes the feel of each

season: Spring is a time of energy flows and rebirth marked by baby plants emerging from the soil and tree buds sprouting from branches. Summer is an explosion of green, sunlight, long days, short nights, intensity and bounty. Fall forecasts the end is near and that the game is over once the ground freezes; it is also a time of abundance. In winter, the main imperatives are keeping warm and ensuring the animals are well fed.

To Marty, the main characteristic of sustainability is the relationships he cultivates and the connections he makes. There are many. Most immediately, he's blessed to work closely with Kris and Will on the farm. Extending from there, he delivers his food to over 30 Chicago restaurants. He considers the chefs to be his friends. To him, it is about "more than rutabagas, more than selling."

Marty also organized a farming cooperative with his neighbors, Stewards of the Land, to plan and sell their products through a single collective channel. Deemed a "visionary leader" by some, he invites his chef friends to his farm for teachable moments. He is an avid student of those he can learn from, such as his friend Greg Wade, a young and talented commercial bread maker, or Gary Reding, a consultant with Advancing Eco Agriculture, a company focused on promoting proper and balanced plant nutrition and soil health.

These "alternative," or non-conventional, agricultural practices and beliefs are a hallmark of sustainability. Reding explains that plants have immune systems, just like animals, and those with strong systems can better resist pests, which target the weaker and compromised plants. But, according to John Kempf, a self-taught Amish farmer and the founder of Advancing Eco Agriculture, before we can have sustainable agriculture, which requires healthy soil, we need to have regenerative agriculture, as too much of the land is too damaged.

MARTY SAYS THAT HE HOPES TO HAVE SPENCE FARM CONTINUE TO FLOURISH, NOT FOR SEVEN FUTURE GENERATIONS, BUT FOR 70.

Just as plants, like humans, have immune systems, they also have relationships, including with molecules in the air and chemicals and microbes buried at their roots in the soil. In an animated segment, the film presents carbon sequestration clearly and straightforwardly. Plants take carbon dioxide from the air into their leaves and turn it into a sugary liquid, which they exude into the soil, where it feeds microorganisms.

If the soil is not destroyed by tillage or chemicals, the carbon becomes part of the microorganisms' molecular structure, potentially for generations. This long-term thinking and perspective is a hallmark of sustainability. Marty says that he hopes to have Spence Farm continue to flourish not for seven future generations but for 70.

If, for Marty, the hallmark of "sustainable farming" is his various relationships, the movie fleshes out the phrase in all its complexity and meanings. Other notable words and concepts the film covers include local, seasonal, small-scale, healthy, organic no-till, traditional, non-conventional, community-oriented, regenerative, fruits and vegetables vs. commodity-based, diversity vs. uniformity and monocrops, cover crops, chemical-free, nitrogen fixation, natural, externalities, soil health, moisture retention, variety, seed preservation, compost, subsidies, scalability, yield vs. quality, culture, way of life, efficiency, ethics, seed preservation, genetic diversity, nutrition, carbon sequestration, resiliency and quality of life.

Perhaps the word *sustainable* gains meaning through time spent selecting fruits and vegetables in the produce aisle of the Park Slope Food Coop or chatting with a seller at the Grand Army Plaza farmers' market. The word is variegated, but the film *Sustainable* is a good place to contemplate what the word truly means to you.

Sustainable July 9, 2024 @ 7 p.m.

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

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