

Food Politics, 10th Anniversary Edition

Ancillary Materials

The Ancillary Materials for the 2013 Edition of Food Politics are intended to serve as a guide and a resource to graduate and undergraduate teachers.

They are organized by chapter.

Each chapter listing includes a quick summary, study questions, and suggested auxiliary materials.

The study questions are intended for study or discussion and are meant to inspire debate that engages the assumptions and conclusions of the book.

The outside materials (articles, videos, websites, and reports) are intended to provide help explaining key concepts, to illuminate elusive historical points, and to provide background information and reference materials.

Chapter 1. From “Eat More” to “Eat Less,” 1900-1990

Early in the 20th century, the goals of nutritionists, public health officials and the food industry were the same.

Americans did not consume enough calories or nutrients, and suffered because of it.

The message was simple and universal: “Eat more.”

By the end of the 20th century, however, Americans were eating too much. Now, the leading causes of death in America are associated with eating too much (and too much of certain things, in particular). The goals and messages of public health officials and nutritionists have become more complicated: eat more of some things, and less of others.

The goal of the food industry remains the same: eat more.

Study Questions

Question: How—specifically—has dietary advice changed over the course of the twentieth century?

Question: Why do government agencies have a hard time recommending that Americans eat less?

Question: Why do you think the government became involved in the business of dietary advice in the first place?

Question: What information about food and nutrition would you like to be publicly available?

Outside Materials

- Read: “Let’s Ask Marion: Are we getting bigger or is the obesity epidemic a big myth?”
http://livingliberally.org/eating/story_lets_ask_marion_are_we_getting_bigger_or_is_the_obesity_epidemic_a_big_myth_jan_25_2008_id820
- Watch this quick clip of Marion Nestle in: “Why do we overeat?”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qn8XjZQa5-0>

Chapter 2. Politics versus Science: Opposing the Food Pyramid, 1991-1992

The USDA nutritionists who developed the Pyramid worked hard to ensure its design was based on sound research, reviewed by experts, and understood by consumers.

The design made it obvious that some food choices were better than others.

It has been enormously influential.

Study Questions

Question: Were you previously acquainted with the Food Pyramid? When did you meet it? What did you know about it?

Question: From bottom-to-top, what basic concepts does the Food Pyramid teach?

Question: If the Food Pyramid has been so influential in American society, why do you think that Americans remain so confused about what (or how much) to eat?

Outside Materials

- Review the classic 1992 Food Pyramid.
<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/MyPyramid/OriginalFoodGuidePyramids/FGP/FGPPamphlet.pdf>
- Or allow Marilyn Manson to explain it in the 2002 song, “Food Pyramid”.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=8Dc6Gw0ZhyM
- See the Afterword to the 2013 edition of Food Politics for a description of the 2005 Food Pyramid, and watch Marion Nestle describe the utility of the 2005 pyramid.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wC0bNcs_5Mc
- Go to <http://www.choosemyplate.com> for the plate that replaces the pyramid, and see www.cnpp.usda.gov/MyPlate.htm for archived Food Pyramid materials. Marion Nestle describes the development of My Plate in the Afterword to the 2013 edition of Food Politics.

Chapter 3. “Deconstructing” Dietary Advice

Despite the fact that the basic tenets of dietary advice have remained unchanged since the 1950s— eat more plants, less animals, less junk—people remain seriously confused about what to eat.

Why is this?

In the first place, discussion of nutrition issues tends to focus on single nutrients rather than the bigger picture.

In the second place, food companies have pressured nutritionists and government officials to disguise the “eat less” message.

Study Questions

Question: What are some examples of how nutrition professionals or other health officials focus on single nutrients?

Question: What factors are left out of their messages?

Question: In a more perfect world, where the message to “eat less” was clear and undisguised, do you think that message alone would be enough to change American eating patterns?

Outside Materials

- Read the 2010 Dietary Guidelines.
<http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/DGAs2010-PolicyDocument.htm>
- Read “The Ethics of Food.”
http://www.realitysandwich.com/ethics_food

Chapter 4. Influencing Government: Food Lobbies and Lobbyists

Food companies use personal contacts and financial contributions to obtain favorable treatment by elected government officials.

Study Questions

Question: The food industry is certainly not the only industry to successfully lobby legislators and other elected officials.

Question: And their activities are not illegal.

Question: Is there anything about the food industry that makes their actions particularly problematic?

Outside Materials

- Do you want to know who is giving money to your representatives? Visit the Federal Election Commission's website.
<http://www.fec.gov/disclosure.shtml>
- Once there, click on "Search the Disclosure Database".
http://www.fec.gov/finance/disclosure/disclosure_data_search.shtml

Chapter 5. Co-opting Nutrition Professionals

Food companies support a wide variety of academics, researchers, and professional societies.

Perhaps most disturbingly, nutritionists are one of the professions to receive a great amount of food industry support.

Study Questions

Question: How does "lobbying" academics and professionals differ from lobbying government employees?

Question: Marion Nestle suggests that a solution to the co-optation of nutrition professionals might be to "identify the extent of conflict between the goals of food companies and the goals of individuals or professional societies, to balance risks and benefits, and to disclose all sponsorship relationships no matter how seemingly benign."

Question: What steps (if any) do you think that nutrition professionals, consumers, and food companies should take to minimize the effects of food industry influence in the nutrition profession?

Question: Do you think that there are any other parties that ought to be a part of your suggested solution? If so, why?

Outside Materials

- Read And Now A Word From Our Sponsors, by Michele Simon.
http://www.eatdrinkpolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/AND_Corporate_Sponsorship_Report.pdf

Chapter 6. Winning Friends, Disarming Critics

Food companies also lobby non-elected government officials.

The food industry and their lobbyists woo regulators and other appointees and officials with favors, gifts, assistance and general attempts to be useful and friendly, with the goal of creating favorable impressions of particular products and assuring a healthy environment for sales of their products.

One result of this kind of lobbying is the use of government power to forcibly create coalitions among food industry members to promote certain products—such as beef, pork, dairy products, or fruit.

Study Questions

Question: One might argue that food producers have as much of a right as anyone else to harness the power of the U.S. federal government for their own ends.

Question: However, how ought we to balance the right of food producers to have the government help promote their products with the rights of ordinary American citizens to obtain accurate nutritional advice and healthy food products?

Outside Materials

- Watch Marion Nestle in “What was it like working at the Department of Health?”
<http://bigthink.com/videos/what-was-it-like-working-for-the-department-of-health>
- Watch a classic example of what check-off programs fund in the commercial, “Beef. It’s What’s for Dinner.” (2000)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVNklFj3p8M>
- For the “modern” version see “The Beef Checkoff”-funded website.
<http://www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com/>
- Or get to know “Beef. It’s What’s For Dinner.” on Facebook.

Chapter 7. Playing Hardball: Legal and Not

Food companies seek to protect and grow their profits.

At times, they make use of a number of questionable tactics.

Among them are the habits of suing private citizens for “trash-talking” particular foods, and conspiring to fix prices.

The former is technically legal, the latter is not.

Study Questions

Question: What role should the government play in each of these activities (price-fixing and libel lawsuits), and why?

Question: Would you consider the actions of the food companies and industries in the activities described in this chapter to be ethical?

Question: Do you think food companies ought to act ethically?

Outside Materials

- See this brief essay on how food disparagement lawsuits have a chilling effect on the open discussion of public health issues.
“Win or Loose, Dissing Food Can Be Costly”. By Ronald K.L. Collins and Jonathan Bloom. March 8, 1999, National Law Journal.
<http://cspinet.org/foodspeak/oped/winorloss.htm>
- The Center for Science in the Public Interest maintains a list of states with food disparagement laws.
<http://cspinet.org/foodspeak/laws/existlaw.htm>

Chapter 8. Starting Early: Underage Consumers

Food companies spend extraordinary sums of money to beguile even the youngest children into buying their products (or pestering their parents to do so).

Meanwhile, kids today have high levels of cholesterol, high blood pressure, and frequent cases of type-2 diabetes. These are all problems stemming from excessive caloric intake.

Food marketing to kids is only one of the influences on the dietary habits of kids, but it is particularly troublesome since it often targets the youngest and most impressionable kids.

Study Questions

Question: Parents are certainly responsible for what their kids eat.

Question: Is anyone else? Who ought to be responsible for what is offered to kids in public schools?

Question: Can you think of at least three reasons why the dietary habits of children are in any more significant than the dietary habits of adults?

Outside Materials

- Watch Marion Nestle in “Marketing Junk Food to Kids”. (August 14, 2008 at The Chautauqua Institute)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qO39VEc0Ag>
- Read the IOM report. (Institute of Medicine. Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity? Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2005).
<http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2005/Food-Marketing-to-Children-and-Youth-Threat-or-Opportunity.aspx>
- Look at the Rudd Center’s “Food Marketing to Youth: The Best and Worst of 2012”.
http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/advertising/Best_and_Worst_Food_Marketing_2012.pdf
- Amuse yourself at www.happymeals.com; or download and play the “Cookie Dough Bites Factory” app for your mobile device.

Chapter 9. Pushing Soft Drinks: “Pouring Rights”

Pouring rights refer to soft drink companies paying money to school districts to sell their products exclusively. Food companies use advertising and marketing to expand their base of consumers by targeting young people.

Study Questions

Question: One way of looking at this is that any money for public school districts is a blessing.

Question: Another way of looking at this is that cash-strapped school districts are selling access to their kids.

Question: What do you think?

Question: How might this situation be prevented or fixed?

Outside Materials

- Go to the CSPI’s website on “Liquid Candy”.
<http://www.cspinet.org/liquidcandy>
- Watch Beyoncé’s Pepsi ad.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_2smYVl0zrk
- Or visit www.pepsi.com.

Chapter 10. Science versus Supplements: “A Gulf of Mutual Incomprehension”

The ways in which the FDA regulates foods, drugs, and dietary supplements changed dramatically in 1994 when the dietary supplement industry waged an intensive war to deregulate dietary supplements.

The product of this war was the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994.

In addition to permitting supplement makers to sell their products without demonstrating that they are either safe or effective, this law also has had the effect of weakening existing food and drug laws.

Study Questions

Question: What is the difference between a (pharmaceutical) drug and a dietary supplement?

Question: What is the difference between a dietary supplement and a food?

Outside Materials

- See the FDA’s “Dietary Supplements: What You Need to Know” for a quick tutorial in Dietary Supplements.
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements/UsingDietarySupplements/ucm109760.htm>

- And for more information, visit the FDA's accompanying site "Tips for Dietary Supplement Users."
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements/UsingDietarySupplements/ucm110567.htm>
- For questions about specific dietary supplements, see the dietary supplement fact sheets at the National Institute of Health's Office of Dietary Supplements.
<http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/list-all>

Chapter 11. Making Health Claims Legal: The Supplement Industry's War with the FDA

With the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act of 1990, Congress required the FDA to consider approving health claims for foods and dietary supplements.

By 1997, Congress had required the FDA to allow specific kinds of health claims for both foods and dietary supplements. The FDA was soon rebuked by the court system for attempting to hold health claims to a strict scientific standard.

Study Questions

Question: How do you think that our society and political system should balance the First Amendment rights to free speech against the duty to protect citizens and consumers from being misled and buying fraudulent products—not to mention being potentially sickened or killed by the product in question?

Outside Materials

- Read this update on Senator Orrin Hatch: Litpon, Eric. "Support Is Mutual For Senator and Utah Industry". The New York Times. June 20, 2011.
http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/21/us/politics/21hatch.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
- Read this recent report from the United States Government Accountability Office: "Herbal Dietary Supplements: Examples of Deceptive or Questionable Marketing Practices and Potentially Dangerous Advice". (GAO-10-662T). May 26, 2010.
<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d10662t.pdf>

Chapter 12. Deregulation and Its Consequences

After DSHEA was enacted in 1994, the supplement industry grew rapidly.

Companies took advantage of relaxed regulatory requirements to market both foods and drugs as supplements.

And food companies began to produce supplement-enhanced foods that could be marketed using health, nutrient-content, and structure-function claims.

Study Questions

Question: On page 293, Marion Nestle writes, "Is it not in the public interest to demand that there should be some federal system to guarantee that all those products on the shelves are safe and effective?"

Question: Shouldn't there be some regulatory framework to control patently absurd or misleading claims?" Do you agree?

Question: Misleading health claims have mushroomed since the 1990s.

Question: How have they helped or hurt the public's understanding of food and nutrition, and public discussion of both of these things?

Outside Materials

- Read a 2013 update on dietary supplement deregulation.
<http://www.foodpolitics.com/2013/03/dietary-supplements-a-round-up-of-bad-news/>

- And read the FDA's memo on "How to Spot Health Fraud."
<http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/EmergencyPreparedness/BioterrorismAndDrugPreparedness/ucm137284.htm>

Chapter 13. Go Forth and Fortify

Fortification is the addition of vitamins and minerals to basic foods.

Its original purpose was to help alleviate situations of widespread deficiencies of key nutrients (such as iodine or folic acid).

Certain foods have been fortified in the United States since the mid-20th century.

Questions still remain, however, about how safe and helpful fortification actually is.

And in more recent years, food companies have begun voluntarily fortifying all manner of products as they see fit.

Study Questions

Question: When food companies voluntarily fortify foods with certain nutrients, (such as iron), this can be dangerous for some members of the population.

Question: How do you think an issue like this should be regulated?

Question: Is it the personal responsibility of individuals to assess what fortified foods might be dangerous for them to consume?

Question: Do food companies have a responsibility to sell only products which are not harmful to anyone?

Question: What role do you think it makes sense for government bodies to take in these situations?

Outside Materials

- Contemplate the gallery of fortified foods shown and discussed by the Wall Street Journal in 2009 in: "Fortified Foods: How Healthy Are They?," by Sara Reistad-Long.
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124267976477131801.html#project%3DSLIDESHOW08%26s%3DSB124456512827898375%26articleTabs%3Darticle>
- Stay up-to-date on food fortification news by checking this page of Marion Nestle's blog.
<http://www.foodpolitics.com/tag/fortification/>

Chapter 14. Beyond Fortification: Making Foods Functional

The effect of Congress's 1990 and 1994 instructions to the FDA on considering health claims for foods and permitting even less restrictive claims for dietary supplements had the effect of encouraging food companies to market their foods using health claims that trumpet the inherent nutritional qualities of their foods.

Since all foods and drinks have something nutritional about them, this change in regulatory policy has opened the door for the makers of conventional foods to market their products using all kinds of enticing new claims.

Conventional foods with dietary or herbal supplements added to them—and sold as dietary supplements—provided even more opportunities for ingenious marketing.

The unifying theme of these marketing developments is that in making health claims about ordinary foods, or adding "functional" ingredients to regular foods, food companies succeed in selling more of these products.

Study Questions

Question: Do you think that foods with dietary or herbal supplements added to them have helped make Americans any healthier? Why or why not?

Question: What do you think that our grocery stores would look like if health claims were not permitted on any food packaging? What do you think packages would look like?

Question: Do you think people would purchase different types or brands of food?

Outside Materials

- Read about one ongoing battle between regulators and the POM Wonderful company, which markets its juices using fraudulent health claims.
<http://www.foodpolitics.com/?s=pom+wonderful>
- Be sure to watch Stephen Colbert's take on functional foods from the Colbert Report.
<http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/422858/january-14-2013/vitaminwater-advertising-lawsuit>

Chapter 15. Selling the Ultimate Techno-Food: Olestra

In 1996, the FDA approved the oil-like fat substitute, Olestra.

Its developer, Procter & Gamble, sold the rights to using Olestra to Frito-Lay.

Products made using Olestra were not a success.

The Olestra enterprise, however, illustrates the attempt of food manufacturers to answer the government's call to make healthier products.

Study Questions

Question: When policymakers ask the food industry to make healthier products, do you think they have in mind things like Olestra? If yes, then what do you think this product's failure says about policymakers' recommendations? If no, then what kind of products do you think that they had in mind?

Question: Marion Nestle writes on page 355 that, "From the standpoint of nutrition, techno-foods simply are not necessary."

Question: From the standpoint of food traditions, they may not be desirable. The food marketplace already is glutted with an enormous overabundance of calories and products, and it is not difficult to select a health-promoting diet from this supply at low cost.

Question: The techno-food approach misses the point that the best health outcomes are associated with dietary patterns that follow recommendations, not just eating or avoiding one or another single food."

Question: It is clear why food producers continue to develop and produce techno-foods: people will buy them.

Question: But why do you think that people buy them?

Question: At the same time as the growth in techno-foods and foods fortified with things that wouldn't normally occur in them, there has been a tremendous growth in organic, local, natural, and sustainable food movements.

Question: How do these two very different trajectories in the eating and purchasing habits of American fit together? And how do they differ?

Outside Materials

- Visit the Olean website.
<http://www.olean.com/home.php>
- Note that TIME declared Olestra one of the world's fifty worst inventions.
http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1991915_1991909_1991785,00.html
- And see the Center for Science in the Public Interest's Olestra Materials.
<http://www.cspinet.org/olestra/>

The 2013 Afterword

Outside Materials

- For current legislation relating to food politics, visit the Legislation Database at Yale University's Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity:
<http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/legislation/>