

Modernist "dictator novel" regarded by critics as his second-greatest work. *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, that master class in narrative construction, was succeeded by *Love in the Time of Cholera*, his second most popular. *The General in His Labyrinth*, a fictionalized biography of Bolívar, represented marathons of historical research; *News of a Kidnapping*—he was pushing 70 by this point—a comparable effort of journalistic investigation. With his tireless diplomacy and pitiless appetite for friendship, his zealous involvement with his institutes and continuing contributions to periodical journalism (he wrote a newspaper column that ran weekly for nearly four years, uninterrupted even by the Nobel Prize), one gets the impression of a man who took occasional breaks to write novels. Only the waning of his memory in recent years has forced him into retirement. Martin's standard-setting biography comes at the perfect moment, on the brink of its subject's passage into a long and grateful posterity.

García Márquez set out to rival the great figures of Modernism. Did he succeed? A widespread judgment within the Spanish-speaking world regards him as the greatest writer in the language since Cervantes. While a longer retrospect might overturn that enthusiasm, less debatable is his status as the most important writer of the second half of the twentieth century in any language; the premier voice of the developing world and, as the man who brought magic realism to its height of possibility, the exponent of an entirely new mode of metaphoric expression. In any case, comparisons with Joyce and Woolf and Faulkner miss the most important thing about his achievement: that in rivaling Modernism, he ended by annulling its aesthetic standards. García Márquez showed us that delight is just as valid a measure of literary value as difficulty, that psychology can be revealed as effectively through action as introspection, that transparent structures can be as sophisticated as ones that flaunt their complications. For half a century, *Ulysses* was the mountain that all writers worked in the shadow of. Instead of going to the mountain, García Márquez brought the mountain to himself. Now he's the one casting the shadow (as the career of Roberto Bolaño, artist of exhaustion, Beckett to his Joyce, has demonstrated). The greatest works convert us to their aesthetic faith. When I read Joyce, I think that nothing could be better and that this is the only way that fiction should be written. And when I read García Márquez, I think the same thing. ■

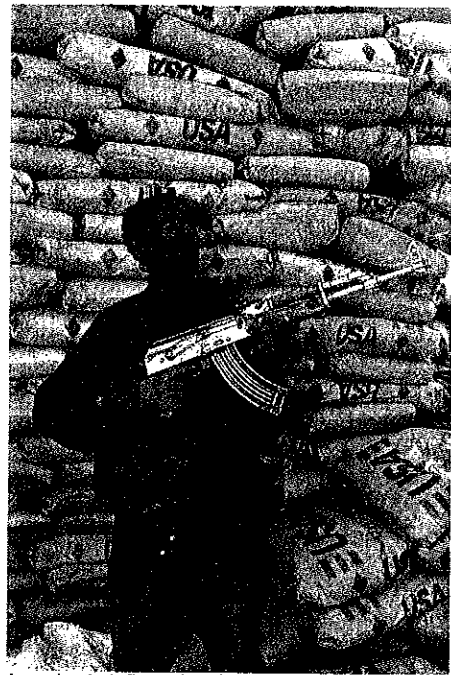
Cornucopia Blues

by BRENT CUNNINGHAM

When in 2003 famine pushed 14 million Ethiopians to the brink of starvation, it did so despite the fact that Ethiopian farmers had recently reaped a series of unprecedented bumper-harvests. It did so while hundreds of thousands of tons of grain lay rotting in the countryside and acres of fertile farmland sat fallow. And it did so as politicians in the United States advocated alleviating poverty in the developing world as a way to subdue breeding grounds for terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11. In March 2002 President Bush told a gathering of world leaders at the Summit on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico: "We fight against poverty because hope is an answer to terror." Yet two months later, Bush signed into law a new farm bill that increased the huge subsidies paid to American farmers, thereby ensuring that their unsubsidized counterparts in Ethiopia and the rest of the developing world would continue to have no hope of competing in the global food market.

Drought was the proximate cause of the 2003 famine, but the true culprit, as Roger Thurow and Scott Kilman make clear in *Enough: Why the World's Poorest Starve in an Age of Plenty*, were the policies known as "structural adjustment" that Western governments—under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank—have forced on Africa since the 1980s. These policies pressure African governments to stop investing in local agriculture—a sector in which it was deemed that Africa lacks a "comparative advantage"—and instead to import food from the developed world. Structural adjustment is couched in the language of free trade, but it is really just the handmaiden of subsidy schemes that prop up farmers in the United States and Western Europe. Subsidies encourage the production of massive surpluses of corn, wheat and other commodity crops, and structural adjustment guarantees foreign markets for them. Structural adjustment, Thurow and Kilman explain, assumed that the private sector in Africa would expand to fill the void created when governments pulled out of agriculture. For a variety of reasons—political corruption, war, the ane-

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A guard protects flour rations donated by the United States at a feeding center in Wollo, Ethiopia, in 2001.

Enough

Why the World's Poorest Starve in an Age of Plenty.

By Roger Thurow and Scott Kilman.
PublicAffairs. 302 pp. \$27.95.

Famine

A Short History.

By Cormac Ó Gráda.
Princeton. 327 pp. \$27.95.

mic nature of private enterprise in many countries—that never happened. The result was a complete lack of the kind of market infrastructure—transportation, storage facilities, price controls—that is necessary to minimize risk and encourage farmers to invest in their land.

As the Ethiopian famine was providing devastating proof that Western governments have failed to help African nations develop their own sustainable food supplies, a handful of writers in the United States were addressing the question of food and sustainability from a different, if related, perspective. Prominent among them was Michael Pollan, who in a series of articles published in *The New York Times Magazine* and elsewhere from 2001 to 2004 was laying the foundation for *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, published in 2006. A groundbreaking

Don't
misses lol

REUTERS/GEORGE MULLALA

examination of how food is produced and consumed in America, *The Omnivore's Dilemma* quickly became the manifesto for good-food revolutionaries seeking to replace our wasteful, impracticable and cruel industrial food chain with a patchwork of smaller organic farms and regional food sheds—with, in other words, a sustainable system of food production.

Pollan's book does not discuss famine, and Thurow and Kilman, two *Wall Street Journal* reporters whose book grew out of a series of articles they wrote on famine and food aid, do not address America's good-food revolution. But the issues at the heart of both books are stubbornly connected: the problem of ensuring that everyone has

American agriculture is at the center of an ever more global web of food trade and aid.

enough food to eat is inextricable from the problem of ensuring that food is produced in a sustainable manner. A central impediment to solving both problems is Big Agriculture and its entrenched interests—including those subsidy schemes that encourage American farmers to overproduce. Thurow and Kilman manage to distill, in one outrageous paragraph, what an imposing impediment it is. They describe how, in the years following the 2003 famine, an effort by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and others to replace the policies of structural adjustment with ones that would help Africa become agriculturally self-sufficient was derailed when the US Congress once again appeared Big Agriculture:

The legislation behind farm subsidies had been structured to make it unusually hard to undo. Unlike many laws, which automatically expire on a predetermined date, the laws underlying subsidies weren't programmed to end. Instead, if Congress didn't craft and enact a new farm bill every five years or so, the law reverted back to the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 and the Agriculture Act of 1949, which contained even sweeter payments to some farmers.

The subsidies are either extended or they become even more onerous. Anyone who can get such legislation enacted—and manage to protect it over six decades—will be a shrewd and powerful opponent, one not

easily undone by Annan and other high-profile activists, and certainly not by the vote-with-your-fork ethos the good-food revolution has advocated thus far.

Since the publication of Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* in 2001 and *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, both excellent and indispensable books, there has developed a cottage industry of publications, documentaries, panels and lectures about the industrialized food chain, all basically reiterating what Pollan and Schlosser said first and best: the way Americans eat is unsustainable, morally indefensible and slowly killing us. It is unsustainable because it depends on cheap oil, in the form of petroleum-based fertilizers and pesticides and the fuel required for planting, harvesting, processing and transporting food from the field to markets around the globe. It is immoral because it exploits

the poor and often undocumented workers who pick produce and process meat (to say nothing of its treatment of the animals we eat). It is slowly killing us because of the various health problems—obesity and diabetes chief among them—that a diet of processed food can cause or exacerbate.

It is always easier, of course, to identify a problem than to solve it, but the good-food revolution feels stuck, unsure how to move beyond its evangelical phase, which has been fairly successful in raising awareness about the ills of the industrial food chain. To be sure, far from the panel-and-documentary circuit, some important work is under way to change how our food is produced and consumed: the efforts by governments and nonprofits to make farmers' markets food-stamp friendly; the growth in states and cities of food-policy councils, which bring together citizens, government officials and other stakeholders in the food system to work on all manner of food-related issues; the increasing number of mayors who are adding good-food initiatives to their agendas (in June the annual US Conference of Mayors adopted a resolution urging President Obama to "seek out partnerships with Mayors on Local Food initiatives to develop strategies that help urban America develop better access to quality food"). Yet these efforts are nascent and uneven, and the tenor of the movement is still dominated by big ideas with a facile and vaguely paternalistic quality that is frustrating. Eat less meat. Plant a garden. Cook. Under-

stand that "cheap" food has hidden costs. Appoint a food czar.

Earlier this year, Jane Black, a food writer at the *Washington Post*, suggested that the good-food movement has a message problem—that in asking to fix everything at once, it hurts its chances of fixing anything at all. Black's article appeared on the heels of a series of pricey charity dinners organized in Washington by the pioneering chef Alice Waters, *Gourmet* editor in chief Ruth Reichl and others as part of the festivities surrounding Obama's inauguration. The idea was to place the food revolution alongside the new administration's other top priorities. Black was skeptical of the strategy, even as she supported the goal. "Whether you're Detroit, which just won \$25 billion in bailout money, or the International Sleep Products Association, which is currently asking Congress to add a \$5,000 tax credit for consumers to buy furniture to the new stimulus bill, the key to success is focus," she wrote. "By contrast, the sustainable food movement is asking for a fundamental overhaul of the entire U.S. food system—and everybody has their own ideas of how to begin."

Black's constructive criticism provoked a defensiveness—at least publicly—among some good-food advocates that was disheartening. Rather than address Black's argument, Reichl dug in and shouted past it. "We want to change it all," she declared on WNYC's *The Leonard Lopate Show*. "Who doesn't think that obesity is a problem, and by the way pesticides are a problem, and social justice for farmworkers is a problem?" Who indeed? In February, Waters responded with an op-ed in the *New York Times* in which she called for a tripling of the funding for the National School Lunch Program, from \$9 billion a year to \$27 billion. Specific? Very. Realistic? Hardly.

I'm sympathetic to the goals of the good-food revolution. I cook. I shop at farmers' markets. I buy organic food when I can afford to. I support the revolution's vision of a safer, healthier, more equitable approach to food production. But Thurow and Kilman's study of famine, as well as another new book on the subject—*Famine: A Short History*, by Cormac Ó Gráda—have left me wondering whether the good-food movement as a whole grasps that "changing it all" involves much more than moral suasion, that large-scale solutions to the problem of creating a sustainable system of food production will require compromise, patience, a clear focus on

achievable goals and a realization that these problems are global, not national. Can the revolutionaries stomach solutions that move beyond their lovingly cultivated ideals and engage the realities—political, economic and cultural—those ideals are pitted against? One thing that Thurow, Kilman and Ó Gráda make clear is that no matter how just your cause, victory is not guaranteed. “Since the time of the Green Revolution,” Thurow and Kilman write, referring to the massive transformation of agriculture that did much to eradicate famine in Latin America and Asia in the decades following World War II, “the world has known how to end famine and tame chronic hunger.... But we haven’t done it.”

For better or worse, American agriculture is at the center of an ever more global, interconnected web of food production, trade and aid. The United States could no more remake its food system without regard to agricultural policies and food supplies in the rest of the world than it could withdraw from the international finance system, say, or bring home all its military troops. How, for instance, do we persuade the growing number of people in countries like China and India that they should resist the allure of the meat-heavy diet that many in the West take for granted now that rising living standards have put it within their reach for the first time in their lives?

And what of American food aid, which constitutes half of all international food aid? It is a big business, one that has been conjoined for sixty years with the surplus commodity crops that our industrial agriculture system is designed to produce, and one that cloaks itself in moral imperative. In the wake of World War II, food aid was central to the Marshall Plan, and as Ó Gráda explains, “the explicit aim of Public Law 480, passed in 1954, was ‘to lay the basis for a permanent expansion of our exports of agricultural products with lasting benefits to ourselves and peoples of other lands.’” To accomplish this, the law stipulated that American food aid be actual food, not cash, and that the food be purchased exclusively in the United States. This requirement created a powerful alliance among the constituencies that stood to profit from this arrangement, the so-called Iron Triangle of farmers and other agriculture players, shippers and humanitarian groups that distribute the food.

In *Enough*, Thurow and Kilman relay an anecdote about Ethiopia during the 2003 famine that shows the grim consequences of the Iron Triangle’s stranglehold on food aid. As trucks laden with 1 million tons of US corn, wheat, peas, beans and lentils rolled

into Nazareth, a city of around 230,000 people in central Ethiopia, they passed warehouses stuffed with 100,000 metric tons of Ethiopian grains, beans and peas—the surplus from a bumper crop two years earlier that had failed to sell when prices collapsed. (Here again was the legacy of structural adjustment: the dearth of storage facilities meant that farmers had no choice but to dump their grain on the market at the same time; and the stunted internal markets and an ancient transportation network that still relied heavily on donkeys meant that there was no way to move the glut of grain to the parts of the country that needed it.) The market was undermined further by the arrival of international food aid. “American farmers have a market in Ethiopia, but we don’t have a market in Ethiopia,” huffed Kadir Geleto, who managed a grain-trading operation in Nazareth.

Geleto understood that Ethiopian-grown grain alone couldn’t feed the hungry when the rains failed, but he also knew that the deluge of American food aid had created a cycle of dependency that sapped the incentive of many of his countrymen to work to feed their families. Why, Geleto wondered, didn’t America provide cash aid to buy up the local surplus and then send food aid to cover the rest of the shortage?

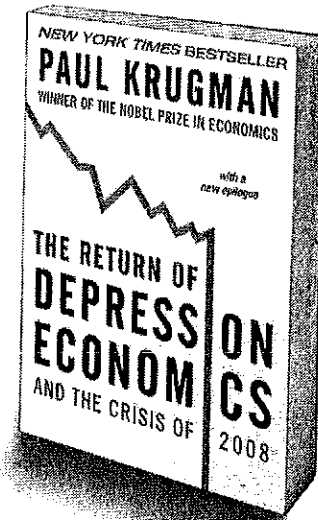
During the 2003 famine, Andrew Natsios, the administrator of the US Agency for International Development, asked the same question. He knew that if he had the flexibility to buy surplus grain in Ethiopia, food aid would be cheaper and made available to the hungry faster than food shipped from the United States. As Thurow and Kilman write in *Enough*, Natsios also knew that the Iron Triangle had consistently quashed efforts to allow for such flexibility in American food policy. But by 2005, with the reverberations from the 2003 famine keeping world leaders nominally focused on ending hunger in Africa, Natsios convinced President Bush that “reforming the... food-aid program would complement his initiative to end famine in the Horn of Africa.” Bush’s budget that year included a proposal that one-quarter of the \$1.2 billion in food-aid money be used to buy African crops. But when Natsios presented the idea in April of that year to the annual food-aid industry conference in Kansas City, he was nearly run out of town. Robert Zachritz of World Vision, a Christian aid group, described the reception Natsios received as “hostile.” The law governing food aid didn’t change. As Ó Gráda notes in *Famine*, “Public Law 480 has allowed U.S. food producers to

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The globalization issue is further complicated by the charged debate over genetically modified crops. GM, or transgenic, crops are anathema to many in the good-food movement, who argue that they are a threat to biodiversity and may not be safe for human consumption, and note that the promise of significantly higher yields from GM seeds has by and large not materialized. The biodiversity issue, in particular, is troubling. The makers of GM seeds patent their products, thereby forcing farmers who would normally husband seeds from one crop for the next to buy expensive GM seeds each year. Given this level of corporate control, and the fact that so few crops are grown commercially (about 150, as opposed to the 7,000 or so that figure prominently in the

How can people be persuaded to change their behavior about something as intimate as food?

diets of poor people around the world), there is legitimate concern that if the use of GM crops continues to expand, the biodiversity necessary to sustain subsistence agriculture in the developing world will be lost, turning farmers there into the serfs of giant seed companies.

In some ways, the revolutionaries have an easy target. Monsanto and the other GM seed makers have killed their crops as part of an effort to stamp out world hunger. “Produce More. Conserve More. Improve Farmers’ Lives,” reads the motto on Monsanto’s website. But this credo is disingenuous, since Monsanto has thus far failed to invest seriously in research for the kinds of seeds (such as millet, sorghum and groundnut) and seed traits (tolerance of salt, drought, acidity) that would serve the needs of populations in those parts of the world where chronic hunger and famine persist. Instead, Monsanto and other agribusiness giants have preferred to focus their research and development on big commodity crops, such as corn and soybeans, and on the production of crops for ethanol. Given this, it is easy to wonder whether solving world hunger is as important to Monsanto as it claims.

Yet Monsanto’s corporate motives shouldn’t discredit the need for a discussion about the potential of GM crops. There are

enough unresolved questions about transgenic seeds—concerning both their performance to date and their potential—that to rule them out as part of a global solution to hunger would be shortsighted. For instance, world population is currently 6.5 billion, and it is expected to rise to more than 9 billion by midcentury. In many of the world’s most vulnerable societies, people are living longer and the fertility rate continues to rise. Even the most extreme GM opponent must concede that if the current food system leaves some 1 billion people suffering from hunger and malnutrition—the largest number since the 1970s—then the question of how those additional millions of people will be fed in the future is a difficult one.

Another difficult issue is the likelihood of farmers being forced to adapt to a range of new and extreme environmental conditions stemming from climate change. A recent study by the Program on Food Security and the Environment at Stanford University and the Rome-based Global Crop Diversity Trust, for example, suggests that over the next forty years farmers in Africa will need seeds that can grow in temperatures

“hotter than any year in historical experience.” In light of this, it’s crucial that the development of transgenic seeds capable of growing in very acidic soils, or in drought conditions, or on a diet of saltwater, be pursued, even if the business rules governing it (and the ways the technology and intellectual property are made available to farmers) need to be radically reconceived in order to ensure that GM seed development is more sensitive to the commonweal than to the price of a company’s common stock.

The revolutionaries would say that the effects of climate change, and hence at least part of the rationale for GM seeds, could be dramatically reduced if industrial agriculture and the sea of oil that lubricates it were replaced by organic farming. Fair enough. But the case against organic farming, traditionally, has been that it simply can’t produce enough food to feed the world without a dramatic expansion of the acreage devoted to agriculture. A recent study by University of Michigan ecologists suggests that this may not be true, that average yields from organic farming are much more commensurate with the yields of conventional agriculture than critics claim. “Our models... suggest not only that organic agriculture, properly intensified, could produce much of the world’s food, but also that developing countries could in-

crease their food security with organic agriculture.” But the authors of the study also offer a significant caveat that, given the political realities in Washington, puts a sobering spin on the hopeful message of their study: broad conversion from industrial to organic will be difficult—“agronomically, economically, and educationally”—and will require “a committed public.”

Even without that caveat, though, how do we square this good news about the potential for organic farming to feed the world with the emerging picture of some sectors of organic farming as a deeply compromised enterprise? In *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Pollan introduces us to Gene Kahn, the founder of Cascadian Farm, which began as a communal hippie farm in 1971 and today is part of the General Mills empire—and Kahn is now a General Mills vice president. In Pollan’s book, Kahn is something of a poster child for the co-optation of the organic movement by the very industrial food chain it set out to replace. In order to profit from economies of scale, Kahn went from growing his own produce to buying it from other farmers and from an alternative distribution system to a commercial one. As Pollan puts it, Kahn is unapologetic about “the compromises made along his path from organic farmer to agribusinessman” and about how, as Kahn says, “everything eventually morphs into the way the world is.” Whether you think Kahn is a realist or a sellout, the lesson he offers Pollan about his efforts to reform industrial agriculture is hardly irrelevant to the renewed effort to change that system today: “We tried hard to build a cooperative community and a local food system, but at the end of the day it wasn’t successful. This is just lunch for most people. *Just lunch*. We can call it sacred, we can talk about communion, but it’s just lunch.”

Debates in the United States and Europe over the ethics of GM crops could very well be overtaken by events. In the past five years, the amount of land in the developing world planted with GM seeds has tripled, and worldwide it has doubled. China is poised to commercialize GM rice. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, together with the Rockefeller Foundation, is pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into African agriculture—not just GM crops but soil improvement, market access and irrigation (precisely the kind of private-sector development that structural adjustment presumes). The plan, according to Peter Pringle, author of *Food, Inc.: Mendel to Monsanto—The Promises and Perils of the Biotech Harvest* (2003), includes public-private partnerships to help scien-

tists in Africa develop their own new seeds using royalty-free biotech material and intellectual property. As Pringle puts it, "In the end, the debate over biotechnology in agriculture may well be settled...not by the arguments of advocates and critics but by the practical effects of the range of useful products available to humanity. In the meantime, it's easy to take a position pro or anti-Bill Gates, as long as you don't have to address the problem of the world's food supply."

Perhaps the most subtle and complex challenge the good-food revolutionaries face is persuading people to change their behavior—on a mass scale and in enduring ways—about something so intimate and fundamental as food. In May I attended a screening of a new documentary called *Fresh*. Unlike the star-studded *Food, Inc.*—which features Michael Pollan and Gary Hirshberg, the founder of Stonyfield Farm (and is unrelated to Pringle's book)—*Fresh* didn't get much hype, but it delivers essentially the same message: our food industry is in need of radical change. The screening was followed by a panel discussion featuring some of the usual suspects, including Joel Salatin, the voluble Virginia farmer immortalized by Pollan in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*.

Salatin runs Polyface Farms, where the grass growing in his pastures is the basis of a sun-based, symbiotic and self-contained food chain in which all the animals he raises for food—cows, chickens, turkeys, pigs and rabbits—work in harmony to sustain the entire operation. In *The Omnivore's Dilemma* Salatin comes across as a thoroughgoing outsider, someone disgruntled with the modern world and unsparing in his critique of our food-production and consumption habits:

Me and the folks who buy my food are like the Indians—we just want to opt out. That's all the Indians ever wanted—to keep their tepees, to give their kids herbs instead of patent medicines and leeches.... But the Western mind can't bear an opt-out option. We're going to have to re-fight the Battle of the Little Big Horn to preserve the right to opt out, or your grandchildren and mine will have no choice but to eat amalgamated, irradiated, genetically prostituted, barcoded, adulterated fecal spam from the centralized processing conglomerate.

Salatin is a great character, a pastoral curmudgeon, and from a purely logical and moral standpoint, his approach to farming and sustainable food may be unassailable. But it's difficult to see him as the future of sustainable farming in America, where less than 2 percent of the population is engaged in farming, down from 50 percent in 1885. Someone in the audience asked Salatin how we will get the "thousands" of farmers "like you" that we will need to see this revolution through. Salatin's answer? "One person at a time."

Granted, Salatin was speaking extemporaneously, but one person at a time is not a realistic strategy for success whether the goal is to develop new farmers or to persuade people to steer clear of McDonald's, no matter how many "healthy choices" are added to its menu—not when your opponents are as mighty as Big Agriculture, as vast as globalization, as ingrained as America's love of convenience and as mysterious as human behavior. Reading and listening to the good-food manifestoes, I get the sense that many of their authors consider the superior logic and morality of their case to be so self-evident that once everyone tastes a grass-fed steak or a free-range egg, the battle will be won. But a strategy that relies primarily on the morality of personal choice and grassroots conversion—crucial components of any solution, to be sure—will never be enough to fix what ails our food system. For evidence of just how quickly consumers can abandon the cause of sustainable agriculture, one need look no further than the hardships experienced by organic dairy farmers during the recession. After several years of double-digit growth, dairy farmers nationwide—many of whom took on significant debt to convert to organic—are being told by distributors to cut production by 20 percent this year to accommodate a deep drop in demand. Seven dollars has become too steep a price for a gallon of organic milk. "I probably wouldn't have gone organic if I knew it would end this way," one Vermont farmer told the *New York Times* earlier this year.

Ó Gráda is instructive on the difficulty of changing people's behavior, even when the brutal conditions of their lives dictate it. At one point, he compares the causes of death from famine in sub-Saharan Africa today with those in Ireland in the 1840s and India in the 1890s. "Extreme poverty is responsible for children catching deadly diseases even when their parents are familiar with the modes of transmission, simply because they cannot afford the minimal

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needs for prevention. Thus, in Thane, near Bombay, a woman who had already lost two children to waterborne illnesses pointed out that 'to boil water consistently would cost the equivalent of US\$4.00 in kerosene—a third of her annual income.' The problem in Thane, as in Ireland and Africa, was that "behavioral patterns and consumption were subject to a great deal of inertia. It is not enough for people in some sense to 'know' what causes disease; they have to be *persuaded* to change their behavior." If such persuasion is difficult to accomplish around life-and-death issues like disease and starvation, imagine what it will take to persuade Americans, who live in a land of convenience and processed plenty, that food is more than just lunch.

I believe that Pollan, the movement's most synthetic thinker and eloquent writer, understands that the hardest part of the revolution is still to come. In an interview last fall with Bill Moyers, he said, "I think we have to figure out different solutions in different places, and it's not all or nothing." And *The Omnivore's Dilemma* is sprinkled with moments where he touches on the jagged conflicts looming beneath the smooth surface of his narrative. "By definition local is a hard thing to sell in a global marketplace," he writes. "Local food, as opposed to organic, implies a new economy as well as a new agriculture—new social and economic relationships as well as new ecological ones. It's a lot more complicated." He even wonders at one point whether Salatin represents a case of allowing the ideal to become the enemy of the good.

At the same time, Pollan is such a clear and lyrical writer that it is easy to glean from his books the sense that the revolution is well under way, its triumph inevitable. And in fact it is under way, at least among people who have the time and money to participate. This isn't to criticize Pollan but rather to stress that the rank and file of the revolution—at least at this point—is elite, as the revolution's critics charge, and thus susceptible to the easy allure of an inspirational battle cry and generous portions of moral rectitude. They can afford to spend more money on better food, and so the thornier aspects of "What next?" may not necessarily engage them. I know more than a few foodies who have no desire to live like Joel Salatin, but the idea of Salatin's life—and the lives of his happy chickens and pigs—makes them feel part of something virtuous.

Stung by the charges of elitism, some good-food advocates (including Schlosser) have begun to adjust their rhetoric to include issues such as social justice for farmworkers and the importance of extending the benefits of the revolution to those who may not immediately grasp its inherent worthiness. But even so, the solutions too often remain impractical and exclusive. In his most recent book, *In Defense of Food*, Pollan offers guidelines for what to eat and how—buy a freezer, eat wild foods when you can, get out of the supermarket—that are suited to people with disposable income, not to the single mother who must feed her kids while working two jobs, negotiating the world without a car and dealing with the many other, less obvious burdens of poverty. To her, the Value Meal at the corner McDonald's is practicable; foraging for salad greens is not. For the revolution to succeed, it must find ways to make better "food decisions" practicable for her. Even if she wanted to vote with her fork, she has few realistic options as she waits for the system of agricultural subsidies to be fixed.

Last year, Michael Specter published an article in *The New Yorker* that examined the concept of the carbon footprint and cast doubt on the "widely held assumption that the ecological impacts of transporting food—particularly on airplanes over great distances—are far more significant than if that food were grown locally." Because so many variables contribute to a product's carbon footprint—including water use, cultivation and harvesting methods and the type of fuel used to manufacture the packaging—it is impossible to reduce the politics of food to a simplistic equation of local always being better than global. Given the complexity of the equation, Specter asks, "How do we alter human behavior significantly enough to limit global warming? Personal choices, no matter how virtuous, cannot do enough. It will also take laws and money."

The same is true of reforming our food system: securing money for lobbying efforts and passing the necessary laws will require getting our hands dirty in something other than organic topsoil. It will require playing the game of power politics, which means identifying specific, manageable goals, being willing to compromise and accepting the prospect of incremental change. It will mean, also, keeping foremost in mind the fact that what we do in America can have life-and-death consequences for people around the world for whom the notion of voting with their forks is a meaningless abstraction. ■