Blockbuster Critique of U.S. Food Industry, “Food, Inc.,” Premieres Wednesday, April 21, 2010, in Special 9 p.m. Broadcast on PBS’ POV Series

Film Draws on Pioneering Work of Eric Schlosser (Fast Food Nation), Michael Pollan (The Omnivore’s Dilemma) and other “Slow Food” Advocates

"Don't take another bite till you see ‘Food, Inc.,’ an essential, indelible documentary.” — Peter Travers, Rolling Stone

“Does for the supermarket what 'Jaws' did for the beach.” — John Anderson, Variety

American agriculture has in many respects been the envy of the world. U.S. agri-business consistently produces more food on less land and at cheaper cost than the farmers of any other nation. What could possibly be wrong with that? According to the growing ranks of organic farmers, “slow-food” activists and concerned consumers cited in the new documentary Food, Inc., the answer is “plenty.” As recounted in this sweeping, shockingly informative documentary, sick animals, environmental degradation, tainted and unhealthy food and obesity, diabetes and other health issues are only the more obvious problems with a highly mechanized and centralized system that touts efficiency — and the low costs and high profits that result from it — as the supreme value in food production.

Less obvious, according to Food, Inc., is the entrenchment of a powerful group of food producers, which sets the conditions under which today’s farmers and food workers operate, in order to maximize profits. The industry also maintains a revolving door of employment for government regulators and legislators to protect its power to set those conditions. Then there is “the veil,” a strange disconnect — propagated in good part by millions of dollars poured into marketing and lobbying by the industry — between the average American and the food he or she eats. As one chicken industry representative puts it, “In a way we’re not producing chickens, we’re producing food.”

Robert Kenner’s Food, Inc. has its American broadcast premiere as a special broadcast on Wednesday, April 21, 2010 at 9 p.m. on PBS as part of the 23rd season of POV (Point of View), American television’s longest-running independent documentary series. POV is the recipient of a Special Emmy for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking.

For all the dazzling technological innovations of American food production, there are many people who would ask, “But is it food?” In addition to the animal cruelty, environmental despoliation and economic monopolization that Food, Inc. graphically details, the film also questions whether the industrial system at least produces the nutritious, health- and life-sustaining stuff we call food.

To discover the answer, filmmaker Kenner marshals mountains of data, vérité visits to production sites and footage of meat-packing operations secretly shot by workers, plus eye-opening testimony from farmers, workers, consumers’ advocates and the few industry people willing to talk in their own
defense. *Food, Inc.* also features the on- and off-screen guidance of Eric Schlosser (*Fast Food Nation*), Michael Pollan (*The Omnivore's Dilemma*) and such practitioners of organic, sustainable farming as Joel Salatin of Virginia’s Polyface Farms, to warn that the nutritional value of American food products is increasingly in doubt. More alarmingly, many of these products, including processed foods, fresh meat and produce, pose real dangers to public health and safety. “The average consumer does not feel very powerful,” says Gary Hirshberg, founder of Stonyfield Farms, the No. 3 yogurt provider in the country.

The Monsanto, Tyson, Perdue and Smithfield companies — whose business practices are examined in *Food, Inc.* — all declined to tell their side of the story to the filmmakers. These companies also use their economic clout to discourage farmers and workers from showing their operations or speaking about their experiences with corporate farming. These four companies, as a result of corporate consolidation, constitute a huge share of the “seed-to-fork” American food production market. (In the 1970s, the top five beef packers controlled just 25 percent of the market; today, the top four control more than 80 percent. Smithfield’s Tar Heel, NC, plant is now the largest slaughterhouse in the world.)

Once *Food, Inc.* begins penetrating the industry’s marketing — family farm images, hyper-perfect food photos, health claims and bewildering brand arrays (that all lead back to the same few producers and, in the case of processed foods, to the same few ingredients) — its food-gone-bad tales are so numerous that they threaten to overwhelm. But the filmmakers carefully craft a fast-paced narrative that is informative and moving, as well as infuriating. Colorful, easy-to-grasp graphics support on-screen testimony, and despite the often grim toll of animal cruelties, human sickness and economic pressures unflinchingly recounted by *Food, Inc.*, the film is driven by the brighter visions of the activists and alternative businesses which are leading the movement to make American food reliably safe and nutritious.

The film includes interviews not only with Schlosser, Pollan and Salatin, but also with people like Barbara Kowalcyk, whose 2½-year-old son, Kevin, ate a hamburger and died 12 days later from E. coli. She investigated the facts of a beef industry whose drive for efficiency and profit has increased the incidence of E. coli, and she has since become a food safety advocate, fighting to give the USDA back its power to shut down plants that repeatedly produce contaminated meats.

Maryland chicken farmer Carole Morison is disgusted enough with the animal-raising practices forced on people like her by corporations like Perdue that she defies potential retaliation from the company to show the filmmakers what no other Perdue farmer would — what antibiotics, high-tech breeding and overcrowding are doing to the nation’s chickens. Morison subsequently lost her contract when she refused the company’s demand to completely enclose her chicken houses, leaving her with few economic alternatives. She is left considering the worst-case scenario: selling the family farm.

Kentucky chicken-raiser Vince Edwards, a Tyson contractor, approves of the corporate method. “The chicken industry came in here and it’s helped this whole community out,” he says. “And it’s all a science. They got it figured out. … if you could grow a chicken in 49 days, why would you want one you gotta grow in three months? More money in your pocket.” But many farmers are forced to borrow hundreds of thousands of dollars to meet corporate requirements for efficient facilities while ending up earning as little as $18,000 a year.

Seed cleaner Moe Parr explains how, after 25 years of practicing a trade that goes back to the origins of farming, he found himself one of the few seed cleaners left in Indiana — and squarely in the sights of the giant agribusiness company Monsanto. The company sued Parr for offering a

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service that might help a farmer save seeds, in possible violation of the contract a farmer must sign when he buys the company's patented seeds and herbicide system. Parr ultimately could not afford to defend himself against Monsanto’s deep pockets and was driven out of business.

From a large, working family, struggling to keep their kids fed while plagued by the health costs incurred by the father’s diabetes, we learn that a McDonald’s double cheeseburger — made from cows fed government-subsidized and E. coli-prone corn diets — costs less than a head of broccoli. Says Troy Roush, vice president of the American Corn Growers Association: “In the United States today, 30 percent of our land base is being planted to corn. That’s largely driven by government policy, government policy that, in effect, allows us to produce corn below the cost of production. The truth of the matter is, we’re paid to overproduce and it was caused by these large multinational interests. … And the only reason we feed [cows] corn is because corn is really cheap and corn makes them fat quickly."

Food, Inc. is a powerful, startling indictment of industrial food production, revealing truths about what we eat, how it’s produced, who we have become as a nation and where we are going from here.

“Eric Schlosser and I had been wanting to do a documentary version of his book Fast Food Nation,” says director Kenner, “and, for one reason or another, it didn’t happen. By the time Food, Inc. started to come together, we realized that most of the food in the supermarket had become industrialized just like fast food. Then we realized there’s something going on out there that supersedes foods. Our rights are being denied in ways that I had never imagined. And it was scary and shocking.

“But things can change in this country,” he adds. “It changed against the big tobacco companies. We have to influence the government and readjust these scales back into the interests of the consumer. We did it before, and we can do it again."

Food, Inc. is a production of Participant Media and River Road Entertainment, distributed by Magnolia Pictures.

About the filmmakers:
Robert Kenner, Producer/Director
Award-winning filmmaker Robert Kenner worked for more than six years to bring Food, Inc. to the screen. His previous films have played theatrically, on television and to President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore at the White House.

Prior to directing Food, Inc., Kenner received the 2006 Peabody, the Emmy for exceptional merit in Non-Fiction Film-Making and the Grierson (British Documentary) for his Vietnam War documentary “Two Days in October.” His other credits include “The Road to Memphis” segment of Martin Scorsese’s epochal The Blues series on PBS; “War Letters” for PBS’ American Experience; and numerous specials for National Geographic, including “Don’t Say Goodbye,” which was screened at the White House and won CableACE, Genesis and Emmy Awards. Kenner has also directed television commercials for ad agency giant Goodby, Silverstein & Partners. His “Fran” spot for Hallmark was named to Adweek’s list of Best Spots of the Year, and “Origins,” a company history Kenner made for Hewlett-Packard, won two Tele Awards and an Aegis Award.

Eric Schlosser, Co-producer
Eric Schlosser is an investigative journalist, best-selling author, playwright and a correspondent for The Atlantic Monthly. In 1998, what began as a two-part article on the fast food industry for Rolling Stone turned into the acclaimed book Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All American Meal (2001). Fast Food Nation was on The New York Times best-sellers list for more than two years as well as on best-seller lists in Canada, Great Britain and Japan. It has been translated into more than 20 languages. The book also became the basis for the feature film “Fast Food Nation,” executive-
produced and co-written by Schlosser. His other writing credits include the books *Reefer Madness: Sex, Drugs, and Cheap Labor in the American Black Market* (2003) and *Chew on This: Everything You Don't Want to Know About Fast Food* (co-written with Charles Wilson), both of which also became *New York Times* best sellers.

In 2007, Schlosser served as an executive producer of the Academy Award®-winning “There Will Be Blood,” directed by Paul Thomas Anderson and based upon the novel *Oil!* by Upton Sinclair. In recent years, two of Schlosser's plays have been produced in London: “American” (2003) at the Arcola Theatre and “We the People” (2007) at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre. In addition to *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Rolling Stone*, his work has appeared in *Vanity Fair*, *The Nation* and *The New Yorker*. He is the recipient of a National Magazine Award and a Sidney Hillman Foundation Award for his investigative reporting. Schlosser is currently at work on a book about America’s prison system.

**Special Consultant:**

**Michael Pollan**


Pollan served for many years as executive editor of *Harper’s* magazine, and is now the Knight Professor of Science and Environmental Journalism at UC Berkeley. His articles have been anthologized in “Best American Science Writing” (2004), “Best American Essays” (1990 and 2003) and the “Norton Book of Nature Writing.” *Newsweek* named Pollan one of the top 10 new thought leaders of the decade. He lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with his wife, painter Judith Belzer, and their son, Isaac.

**Credits:**

Director: Robert Kenner
Producers: Robert Kenner and Elise Pearlstein
Co-producers: Eric Schlosser, Richard Pearce and Melissa Robledo
Cinematographer: Richard Pearce
Editor: Kim Roberts
Original Music: Mark Adler

Running Time: 93:00

**Awards & Festivals:**

- Gotham Award, 2009, Best Documentary
- Environmental Media Award, 2009, Documentary
- Southeastern Film Critics Association Award, 2009, Best Documentary
- Washington, D.C. Area Film Critics Association, 2009, Best Documentary
- Berlin Film Festival, 2009
- True/False Festival, 2009
- Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, 2009
- Seattle International Film Festival, 2009
Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and beginning its 23rd season on PBS in 2010, the award-winning POV series is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today’s best independent documentary filmmakers. Airing June through September, with primetime specials during the year, POV has brought more than 275 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide and has a Webby Award-winning online series, POV’s Borders. Since 1988, POV has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)
POV’s award-winning Web department produces special features for every POV presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. POV Interactive also produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, POV's Borders. In addition, the POV Blog is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss and debate their favorite films, get the latest news and link to further resources. The POV Web site, blog and film archives form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

POV Community Engagement and Education
POV works with local PBS stations, educators and community organizations to present free screenings and discussion events to inspire and engage communities in vital conversations about our world. As a leading provider of quality nonfiction programming for use in public life, POV offers an extensive menu of resources, including free discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. In addition, POV’s Youth Views works with youth organizers and students to provide them with resources and training so they may use independent documentaries as a catalyst for social change.

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American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.org)
American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | POV.

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