



TRANSCRIPT:

November 28, 2008

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BILL MOYERS: Welcome to the JOURNAL. I'm grateful to Deborah Amos for sitting in while I was away these past two weeks - it's good to be back.

This is an odd Thanksgiving weekend, shrouded by ambivalence. We always have much to be thankful for as Americans: the right to vote, the Constitution, no dictatorship or caste system, the freedom to thank our God or no God at all. But the contradictions of our society are starkly self-evident this weekend. Not since the Great Depression have so many people been so haunted by insecurity.

Look at these long lines of people at a food bank in San Francisco. Some 32 million Americans - at least one in nine households - had trouble at some time in the last year putting enough food on the table. And that was long before the current meltdown. As the economy sours food banks across the country have seen a 25% increase in demand, with middle class families accounting for most of the growth.

At the same time many families are having trouble finding enough to eat, many of our biggest farmers have never had it so good.

The Government Accountability Office - our government's top watchdog - is out this week with a new report on how the agricultural department is managing farm subsidies. Not well, it seems, not well.

BARACK OBAMA: There's a report today that from 2003 to 2006, millionaire farmers received \$49 million in crop subsidies even though they were earning more than the \$2.5 million cutoff for such subsidies. If this is true, and this was just a report this morning, but if it's true, it is a prime example of the kind of waste that I intend to end as president.

BILL MOYERS: President-elect Obama has been busy putting his team together. His choice for Secretary of Agriculture could be perhaps the most important clue as to whether Obama really intends to bring change to Washington as he promised. If so, he'll have to take on one of the most powerful lobbies in the country, the people who turned agriculture into agribusiness. As "Time" magazine recently put: farm policy is "a welfare program for the megafarms that use the most fuel, water and pesticides; emit the most greenhouse gases; grow the most fattening crops; hire the most illegals; and depopulate rural America."

For a brief moment during the campaign, reformers thought Barack Obama might include agriculture in the "agenda of change" he would take to Washington. He told TIME magazine that the way we produce our food "is partly contributing to type 2 diabetes, stroke and heart disease, obesity, all the things that are driving our huge explosion in health care costs." The farm lobby roared in protest. Obama buckled, took it back, and said he was "simply paraphrasing an article he read."

Ah, yes - but what an article! Here it is: nine pages in the NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE on October 12. An open letter to the future "[Farmer in Chief](#)" - from one of the country's leading experts on food - Michael Pollan. Significant progress on health care, energy independence, and climate change, Pollan told the candidates, depends on something you haven't talked about at all - food.

That article triggered such a response that an online movement has sprung up calling



TALKBACK: THE BLOG

Our posts and your comments

OUR POSTS

November 26, 2008

Do Healthy Options Lead To Healthy Decisions?...

YOUR COMMENTS

"Thank you Bill. We were glued to the tube watching the Michael Pollan interview. The use of pes..." - *mike and Liz Fessler*

on President-elect Obama to name Michael Pollan Secretary of Agriculture.

Pollan's popular books include: THE OMNIVORE'S DILEMMA: A NATURAL HISTORY OF FOUR MEALS, and this most recent work, IN DEFENSE OF FOOD: AN EATER'S MANIFESTO.

What you won't find in his writings is a Shermansque-like statement saying that if nominated he will not serve. But let's watch my guest Michael Pollan turn pale as I ask him suppose Obama did yield to legions of admirers and name you Secretary of Agriculture instead of yet one more advocate of industrial farming? Where would you start?

MICHAEL POLLAN: I'm ready for the Shermansque statement.

BILL MOYERS: Make it. We'll make some news on this.

MICHAEL POLLAN: It's not from me. It's - this is - I would be so bad at this job.

BILL MOYERS: Why?

MICHAEL POLLAN: I have an understanding of my strengths and limitations. Well, you have to understand that that department of the government, the \$90 billion a year behemoth is captive of agri-business. It is owned by agri-business. They're in the room making policy there. When you have a food safety recall over meat, sitting there with the Secretary of Agriculture and her chief of staff or his chief of staff is the head of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

It's all worked out together. So, I don't know I mean, I think that the department, in a way, is part of the problem. And they're also very dependent on the legislation that the House and Senate Agricultural Committees cobble together. And so I think you'd get swallowed up there very easily. I think that and I don't want this job either. What Obama needs to do, if he indeed wants to make change in this area and that isn't clear yet that he does at least in his first term I think we need a food policy czar in the White House because the challenge is not just what we do with agriculture, it's connecting the dots between agriculture and public health, between agriculture and energy and climate change, agriculture and education.

So you need someone who can take a kind of more you know, global view of the problem and realize that it's an interdisciplinary problem, if you will. And if you do hope to make progress in all these other areas, you have to make sure that if the Surgeon General is, you know, going on about the epidemic of type 2 diabetes, you don't want to be signing farm bills that subsidize high fructose corn syrup at the same time. So you have to kind of align

BILL MOYERS: Because? Because?

MICHAEL POLLAN: High fructose corn syrup contributes mightily, as do all sugars, to type 2 diabetes. And we are subsidizing cheap sweeteners in our farm bill by subsidizing corn. And so you, you see, you have a war going on between the public health goals of the government and the agricultural policies. And only someone in the White House can force that realignment of those goals.

BILL MOYERS: But suppose you are sitting across from the new president and he says, 'Secretary Pollan, what's the core idea here? What are we after?'

MICHAEL POLLAN: Well, what we're after is looking at these commodity programs for a start that-

BILL MOYERS: Commodity programs being-

MICHAEL POLLAN: Commodity programs essentially the four crops, five crops we subsidize are corn, wheat, soy, rice, and cotton. We'll leave cotton out because we don't eat too much of it, although we eat some cotton oil. And that our farm policy for many years has been designed to increase production of those crops and keep the prices low.

BILL MOYERS: And we have we have cheaper prices and plenty-

MICHAEL POLLAN: We do.

BILL MOYERS: -of food today.

MICHAEL POLLAN: And, you know, the fact that you can walk into a fast-food outlet and get, you know, a bacon double cheeseburger, french fries, soda for less than the what you would get paid at the minimum wage, in the long sweep of human history, that's an amazing achievement. The problem is, though, we've learned that overabundant, too cheap food can be as much a problem as too little food.

BILL MOYERS: In what way?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Look at the healthcare crisis. We're all eating 300 more calories than we were. We all weigh an average-

BILL MOYERS: A day?

MICHAEL POLLAN: A day. A day. We've gone from 2,000 or 2,300 to 2,600, something like that. We all weigh on average ten pounds more. And lo and behold, we have a serious epidemic of obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, diet-related cancers. All these chronic diseases which is now what kills us basically pretty reliably in America are adding more than \$250 billion a year to healthcare costs. They are the reason that this generation just being born now is expected to have a shorter lifespan than their parents, that one in three Americans born in the year 2000, according to the Centers for Disease Control, will have type 2 diabetes, which is a really serious sentence. It takes several years off your life. It gives you an 80 percent chance of heart disease. It means you are going to be spending \$14,000 a year in added health costs. So this is about how we're eating.

BILL MOYERS: But can you put this on our food? I mean, are you saying, this is primarily the result of what we eat? That we are sick today because of what we eat?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Yeah.

BILL MOYERS: Not well.

MICHAEL POLLAN: There are other factors obviously. A sedentary lifestyle. You know, cane workers in Cuba can eat 6,000 calories of sugar cane a day and they don't get diabetes because they burn it off. We don't burn it off. So exercise is an issue, although exercise hasn't changed dramatically in this period that our public health has declined so much. No, this, you know, when you have monocultures of corn and soy in the fields, which is what we have because they're our farm policy, you end up with a fast-food diet because growing all that corn and soy, those are those are the building blocks of fast food. We turn the corn into high fructose corn syrup to sweeten the sodas. We also turn the corn into cheap feed lot meat. The soy we turn into also cheap feed lot meat and hydrogenated soy oil, which is what all our fast food is fried in. It has trans fats know as lethal. So we are basically, you know, subsidizing fast food.

BILL MOYERS: You said in that article of October 12th and I laughed out loud when I read it. When we eat from the industrial food system, we are eating oil and spewing greenhouse gases. Now, Michael, I don't ever remember sitting down to a meal of yummy petroleum.

MICHAEL POLLAN: Well, we are eating oil and we don't see it obviously.

BILL MOYERS: How so?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Well, how do you grow those giant monocultures of corn and soy? As soon as you plant a monoculture, which is all that is lots of the same thing year after year. You risk depleting the fertility of the soil. So how do you replenish the fertility? Fertilizer. How do you make fertilizer? It's made with natural gas, diesel, oil. So we actually have to spread huge quantities of oil or fossil fuels on our fields to keep the food coming.

When you grow a monoculture, you also get lots of pests. They love monocultures. You build up the population of the pests by giving them a vast buffet of exactly what they're they evolved to eat. So how do you protect them? Well, you use pesticides made from fossil fuels. When you grow corn and soy, which are not exactly foods, they can't eat any of this stuff. It's raw material for processed food. You then have to process it. And so it takes ten calories of fossil fuel energy to produce one calorie of food at the end of that, you know, to make a Twinkie or something like that. It's a

very fuel intensive process, with the result that all our food together, if you think of what's in the supermarket, is taking more than ten calories of fossil fuel, one calorie of food.

Look, nobody wants to see food prices go up. Nobody wants to see oil prices go up. But we understand that we are not going to change our energy economy unless we start paying a higher price for oil. We are not going to improve our health around food unless we pay the real cost of food.

Cheap food is actually incredibly expensive. If you look at the all the costs, you are talking about the farm subsidies. That's \$25 billion a year to make that food cheap. You look at the pollution effects. The quality of the water all through the farm belt, nitrates in the water, moms who can't use tap water because it, you know, blue baby syndrome from nitrogen in the water. You look at the public health costs. You look at the cost to the atmosphere. Agriculture is the biggest contributor to greenhouse gases.

BILL MOYERS: You said in that article that we use more fossil fuel in producing food than we do in any other of our activities including driving to work.

MICHAEL POLLAN: Well, some of the transportation is in that number because when you look at the food economy's use of fossil fuel, which is about 19 percent, you've got a lot of diesel transportation. But it's more than personal transportation, absolutely. And, you know, we don't see that when we look at our food system.

BILL MOYERS: But how do we do this when, as you said that food connects not only to healthcare, and you told us about that, but to energy independence, to climate change to national security.

MICHAEL POLLAN: Yeah.

BILL MOYERS: These are the dots. How do they all connect-

MICHAEL POLLAN: Yeah.

BILL MOYERS: -from what you just said?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Well, when you have a big globalized food system based on a very small number of crops, you're first, you're moving food everywhere. I mean, the supply chains of food are just absurd. You know, we're catching so-called sustainable salmon in Alaska. We ship it to China to get filleted and then we bring it back here. We're shipping-

BILL MOYERS: It's still cheaper than if we-

MICHAEL POLLAN: Yeah. That's how cheap Chinese labor is. We're not going to be able to do that much longer. We're selling sugar cookies to the country of Denmark, and we're buying sugar cookies from the country of Denmark. And Herman Daily the economist, said, 'Wouldn't it be more efficient to swap recipes?' I mean, these absurdities can't continue. So energy is deeply implicated in the system. Any system that uses a lot of energy is going to produce a lot of greenhouse gas. Plus livestock also produce huge amounts of greenhouse gas. National security, well, there's a there's a tremendous danger when you centralize your food supply.

BILL MOYERS: What's insecure about our food process?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Well, having a highly centralized food system such as we have where one hamburger plant might be grinding 40 or 50 million burgers in a week, where one pre-bagged salad plant is washing 26 million servings of salad in a week, that's very efficient, but it's also very brittle or very precarious. Because if a microbe is introduced into that one plant, by a terrorist or by accidental contamination, millions of people will get sick. You don't want to put all your eggs in one basket when it comes to your food safety. You want to decentralize. And Tommy Thompson, when he was departing as Secretary of Health and Human Services said, you know, one of the big surprises of his time in Washington was that no one had attacked, no terrorist had attacked the food supply because, and this is a quote, 'it would be so easy to do.'

BILL MOYERS: If I'm the president, I'm saying to Secretary Pollan, look, you've come over to talk to me about food and look what's happening on Wall Street. Look

what's happening to people's 401s. Look what's happening to people's security, their real physical security is in great jeopardy. This is what they're worried about. This is what they're scared about. And you're asking me to talk about food.

MICHAEL POLLAN: Yeah. Well, I think if you if you really care about dealing with climate change, which you did talk about during the campaign; if you really care about dealing with the healthcare crisis, which is going to mean getting healthcare costs down; if you really care about feeding the rest of the world, because we haven't talked about how our agricultural policies are taking food out of the mouths of people in Africa and throughout Asia, our ethanol policies in particular, you can't escape food.

Food is the shadow issue over all those other issues. And so, you know, you're only going to get so far with healthcare costs unless you look at the diet. Let's look at the school lunch program. This is where we're feeding a big part of our population. We are essentially feeding them fast food and teaching them how to eat it quickly. Well, let's look at school lunch. If we could spend a dollar or more per day per child and work on the nutritional quality of that food. And let's require that a certain percentage of that school lunch fund in every school district has to be spent within 100 miles to revive local agriculture, to create more jobs on farms, to, you know, rural redevelopment. You will achieve a great many goals through doing that. You will have a healthier population of kids who will perform better in the afternoon after that lunch. You will have, you know, the shot in the arm to local economies through helping local agriculture. And you will, you know, teach this generation habits that will last a lifetime about eating.

BILL MOYERS: But how do we do this when, as you said at the beginning of our conversation, the Agricultural Department is in the lock?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Well, the school lunch program probably has to get out of agriculture. Let's move it over to education. Lunch should be, lunch should be educational. Right now the school lunch program is a disposal scheme for surplus agricultural commodities. When they have too much meat, when they have too much cheese, they send it to the schools, and they dispose it through our kids' digestive systems. Let's look at it in a different way. This should be about improving the health of our children. So maybe it belongs in Health and Human Services. Maybe it belongs in Education. Don't, you know, get the Department of Agriculture's hands off of it.

BILL MOYERS: Who's most likely to be my best agent in changing things here if I buy your argument?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Well, here's - if you wanted to drive change, I think you've got to talk to Nancy Pelosi.

BILL MOYERS: Speaker of the House?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Speaker of the House. I think you have to look at the Constitution of the House Agriculture Committee. I think that is where much that is wrong with this Farm Bill comes out of Collin Peterson's Agriculture Committee. I think you have to-

BILL MOYERS: He's the chairman?

MICHAEL POLLAN: He's the chairman. He's from Minnesota. He's being considered for Secretary of Agriculture, I'm told which is, you know, alarming. He's-

BILL MOYERS: Because?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Because he was not willing to touch commodities subsidies at all, not willing to put a serious cap on them, and, in fact, extended them. Like a lot in politics, the initial conditions or rules determine the outcome. If you fill your Agriculture Committee with representatives of commodity farmers and you don't have urbanites, you don't represent eaters, okay? You don't have people from New York City on these committees, you are going to end up with the kind of farm bills we have, a piece of special interest legislation. It shouldn't even be called the Farm Bill. It should be called the Food Bill. It's about us. It's not just about them.

BILL MOYERS: That sounds so, you know, it sounds so reasonable. But once again politics and human nature intervene. What are the political obstacles to making that happen?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Well, the commodity groups, as Harry Reid has said, are the, you know, one of the two most well-organized lobbies on the Hill. And the Farm Bureau which is, you know, purports to represent farmers, actually represents agribusiness one of the most important lobbies. So I'm not saying it's going to be easy. But, I also feel I know that there is a political movement rising. It's very young, this movement. I mean, if anyone's talking about me for Agriculture Secretary, that is a measure for how young it is. But it's rising. There are you know, millions of mothers concerned about food, about the school lunch program, about the - what's on sale in the supermarket. There's enormous concern about food safety. Our food safety system is breaking down. There is the security issue. There is there are many facets to this movement. It's still inchoate. And politicians have not recognized the power that is there. And that's going to happen first.

BILL MOYERS: I will make a confession that will show you how hard this is because there is so much human nature at play here. I mean, I like to take my grandkids to McDonald's because it enables me to cheat a little, right. So how do you convince us that we're contributing to climate change, we're contributing to a precarious national security, we're contributing to bad health? What do you say to us that moves us?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Well, the first thing I would say is, I'm not a, you know, I'm not a Puritan about food. And I'm not a zealot about it. And there is something called special occasion food that we have in our house. And it's kind of understood that sometimes you go, you enjoy your fast food. You have your Twinkie, whatever it is. People have done this for thousands of years. There's nothing wrong with doing it. Our problem is we've made special occasion food everyday food and that one in three American children are at a fast-food outlet every single day. And that's where you get into trouble. I, look, I grew up eating fast food and drinking soda and I don't have type 2 diabetes and, you know, knock on wood, I don't have heart disease. But so I think it really is our, you know, how do we handle our food lives every day.

BILL MOYERS: How did you get to from being editor of "Harper's" magazine to a man with dirt between his toes?

MICHAEL POLLAN: My path, I was executive editor of "Harper's." I wasn't the editor. Lewis Lapham was the editor. My path was through the garden. I was a gardener. And I loved gardening from a very young age. And I grew - I like growing food for myself. And that's where I learned about, you know, these kind of things. And from there it was a kind of easy step to kind of - I had an epiphany on a feed lot and on a potato field when I was doing a piece of journalism.

And I was driving up Route 5 in California, which links San Francisco to L.A. And you're driving - I was driving south. And it was a beautiful golden fall day in California. And suddenly this stench came up. And I couldn't believe the smell. And I didn't know what it was because everything around me looked exactly the same. And I drove a little longer. And the landscape, which had been gold, turned black. And it was a feed lot that's right on the highway, on both sides of the highway.

And suddenly I was in this nightmare landscape where there was mountains of manure the size of pyramids, and mountains of corn the size of pyramids, and cows, black cows as far as you could see. And I was, like, wow, this is where my meat comes from? I had no idea. And that was when I decided, you know, I need to, I owe it to myself, I owe it to my readers, my family, to figure out where does my food come from.

BILL MOYERS: Michael Pollan, let's take a break and then we'll be back to continue this conversation.

We'll be back with Michael Pollan in a bit, and we'll talk about what we can do about the food we eat. But first, this is when we remind you that you are the "public" in Public Broadcasting. This is your station, and it needs your support, call now.

[DUE TO PBS PLEDGE NOT ALL VIEWERS WILL SEE THIS SECTION OF THE PROGRAM]

BILL MOYERS: We enjoy receiving your feedback here at the Journal. Here are a few of your comments that have helped us to pause and reflect. Last month, we turned to economist James K. Galbraith to make sense of the bailout on Wall Street.

JAMES GALBRAITH: We have a government which is capable of acting as the lender of last resort, which can borrow and spend as needed to deal with this crisis. So here in the United States the capacity to handle the crisis exists. What we need is

a government that's willing to use that capacity that believes in it.

BILL MOYERS: Here's what you had to say.

MARY J. BEDARD: I believe that we need to set and enforce regulations which will protect "the people" from those whose whole purpose seems to be to get rich at the expense of others. We need to have all loopholes closed. The "rascals" responsible for this economic fiasco belong in jail.

GREG: It is amazing to hear Galbraith argue against freedom and the free market. Rather he should argue for more freedom in the market ... Fix that problem . and our economic woes will be solved.

JOHN GRAVES: No economist seems to understand . that the foundation of economic growth is not good credit but good jobs and good wages. Our excessive military power is what keeps the dollar too high, which has sucked good jobs out of the US for decades....a slow and deadly attrition.

BILL MOYERS: And our discussion with writer Roberto Lovato and political analyst Linda Chavez sparked a heated response to the topic of immigration.

LINDA CHAVEZ: I think the whole debate on illegal immigration was largely manufactured. I mean, I wrote columns about this. I think talk radio had a lot to do with it; cable news had a lot to do with it.

ROBERTO LOVATO: I would agree. I think that it is manufactured. But I think it's manufactured in a way to disguise the real problems in our life right now. Who better to blame than a border crossing, illegal alien?

S.H.: Immigration is a complicated issue but many of the reasons people cite in opposition to immigration are based on misinformation.. Too often we only get one side of the issue.

LUCIUS: What jobs will go to illegal immigrants in a Depression when we bona fide citizens will be out of work? .When it gets to the point that we Americans will take ANY job that pays a real wage, then the "problem" of illegal immigration will take care of itself. because this will no longer be "the land of opportunity."

BILL MOYERS: And finally, we talked with filmmaker Mark Johnson who co-directed and produced, "Playing for Change", a documentary about the simple but transformative power of music:

MARK JOHNSON: Well I think music is the one thing that opens the door to bringing people to a place where they are all connected. It is easy to connect to the world through music, you know. Religion, politics, a lot of those things they seem to divide everybody.

MIDGE BIHR: I have been deeply troubled by the bleak state of our economy and the effect it's having on my family. I haven't felt much joy lately. Tonight, . for the first time in a very long time, my heart felt something other than pain and fear. I am uplifted.

ERAN FRAENKEL: I agree wholeheartedly that music inspires positive emotions. But unless those positive emotions then are transformed into positive action, lives unfortunately remain unchanged.. I wish that music could change the world. So far, it hasn't.

CRAIG SPAULDING: We can only begin to solve our collective problems when we make a soul connection which transcends and appreciates difference. Music and art are the seeds for this connection and transformation.

BILL MOYERS: Keep telling us what you think of our broadcast-by mail, [email](#), or on the [blog](#) at PBS.org and we'll keep reading.

[SPECIAL CONTENT ENDS]

BILL MOYERS: I'm back now with Michael Pollan, author IN DEFENSE OF FOOD, and THE OMNIVORE'S DILEMMA. We're talking about what President-elect Obama, and we, can do to improve the nation's food system. Let me ask you, you said in your

letter to the president-elect, that the first family should eat locally.

MICHAEL POLLAN: Yeah.

BILL MOYERS: What do you mean?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Well, look, the president's bully pulpit is a very important thing. And, you know, I think the first family could set an example with who they appoint White House chef. Is it someone who's really associated with this, you know, local food movement? Who would not only cook wonderful, healthy food for them, but who, at state dinners, would kind of shine a light some of the best farmers in this country and elevate the prestige of farming. I also think that we need, in addition to a White House Chef; we need a White House Farmer.

BILL MOYERS: Are you suggesting that the president should rip up the South Lawn?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Not all of it. Not all of it.

BILL MOYERS: All right, say five acres.

MICHAEL POLLAN: Five acres. They've got 17 acres to play with. I don't know exactly how much. But I'm saying five acres. Put in a garden, organic garden. Hire a good farmer to grow food there. I think that that would send a powerful message. You know, this has happened before. Eleanor Roosevelt put a victory garden in, in the White House in 1942.

BILL MOYERS: ...during second world war

MICHAEL POLLAN: It was over the objections of the Department of Agriculture, who thought it was going to hurt the food industry if people started growing food at home. You know, God forbid.

BILL MOYERS: Some things never change

MICHAEL POLLAN: Yeah, I know. So they were on the wrong side of that issue, too. But she persisted. And she said, "This is really important for the war effort. I want to encourage people to grow food." And she put in this garden. And by the end of the war, there were 20 million victory gardens in America.

People were ripping up their lawns, planting vegetables, raising chickens, and by the end of the war, they were producing 40 percent of the fresh produce in America was being produced in home gardens. So it's not trivial, it could make a tremendous contribution, especially in hard times.

BILL MOYERS: We have some people right here in urban New York who, themselves, are growing gardens. And I want to show you a short film we produced in honor of your presence here today.

MICHAEL POLLAN: Excellent.

BILL MOYERS: The East New York section of Brooklyn is a cornucopia of fast and cheap food - healthy options are hard to find. There are restaurants, easy on the palate but hard on the arteries. There are corner delis, they offer some basics, but it's processed food that fills the shelves. And the grocery stores here come and go, taking their produce with them. Residents must travel miles to reach the nearest supermarket.

WOMAN: The market is open!

BILL MOYERS: But each Saturday, the East New York farmers market offers some much needed relief.

VENDOR: That's very good. Right?

BILL MOYERS: The market's appetizing array of food comes from just outside the city and just around corner. From sweet to savory, land to sea.

DENNIS DAVE CARGILL: This is a baby blue fish. This tastes excellent.

BILL MOYERS: People say it's worth the wait.

CLAUDINA WILLIAMS: It's a different taste. When it's fresh from the tree on the table, it's delicious!

SARITA DAFTARY: We have a great market, and you know, I think when people come and visit us, they're surprised that it's here. They're surprised that it's in East New York.

BILL MOYERS: Sarita Daftary heads up the market, started ten years ago by the non-profit United Community Centers. It's been a welcome source of pride - and nutrients - in a tough neighborhood better known for its crime stats than its crop yields.

SARITA DAFTARY: Food that comes from the ground that is in its most whole form is much better for you than food that's processed, or packaged. And food that's grown by small scale farmers, and especially organic farmers, tends to be more nutritious.

BILL MOYERS: Some of the freshest vegetables here were picked just hours ago from land a few short blocks away. Jeanette Ware has been gardening here for the past two years.

JEANETTE WARE: We're going to be harvesting some herbs, some oregano, some collard greens. Some string beans and some beets.

BILL MOYERS: Jeanette and her husband James start each day in the dirt.

JEANETTE WARE: It's fun. It's hard, but it's fun. It gets your back hurting, but it's good for your heart and it's a good feeling. You are digging in the natural earth and you are producing something for everybody to enjoy and be healthy.

BILL MOYERS: Gardening satisfies James' itch to return to his South Carolina roots.

JAMES WARE: I was sitting up there listening to the birds one morning, and then it just got back in my blood, farming, from when I was a kid.

BILL MOYERS: Before this land was an urban oasis it was an urban dump. Farmers market organizers reclaimed the space and cleaned it up. It's now known as the Hands and Heart community garden. Anyone can rent plots here for a small fee.

JEANETTE WARE: These are hot, you want some? These are twelve for a dollar.

BILL MOYERS: For the Wares, what started as hobby has quickly turned into a small business. From their stand, they help fuel their community with home-grown vitamins, minerals and good cheer.

JEANETTE WARE: Hello, I like that hat.

BILL MOYERS: Hazel Smalls is on the hunt for organic produce.

HAZEL SMALLS: We are pretty healthy eaters, so we are into a lot of fruits and vegetables. I usually get the frozen because they last longer, but once I found out about the market here I said, let me check it out. I can always take the collared greens, clean them, cut them up and freeze them.

BILL MOYERS: Hazel keeps an eye on what her daughter eats. Fortunately, Cheyenne prefers pears to junk food.

CHEYENNE SMALLS: My mother lets me eat candy only like Saturday, or just Saturday, because she doesn't want me to get diabetes, because it's very painful so I know that I don't want to eat too much candy.

BILL MOYERS: Many of the chronic diseases that plague the country today - like diabetes - are linked to diet. Unfortunately, East New Yorkers know this all too well. Starting with the Wares themselves - both Jeanette and James are diabetic, and so are many of their customers.

WOMAN 1: I'm anemic, diabetic, my cholesterol is high.

WOMAN 2: I watch sugar and salt and fat. That's the three main things because of cholesterol. I'm diabetic.

BILL MOYERS: There's a health crisis in East New York. One in six adults here suffers from diabetes - that's nearly twice the New York City average. Nearly one out of three is obese. The primary cause of premature death here is heart disease. Over the past ten years, hospitalization for the condition has increased by 35 percent. So food here can be a simple matter of life and death, and people like Claudina Williams need the market for food that won't make them sick.

CLAUDINA WILLIAMS: You have to find it, it doesn't matter how much it costs because that's your health.

BILL MOYERS: Claudina uses coupons to help ease the expense of eating right. A number of states, including New York, encourage low-income people to shop at farmers markets by accepting food stamps and distributing free food vouchers to senior citizens and moms.

SARITA DAFTARY: People in low-income communities, people everywhere deserve the same quality of life, a great quality of life

BILL MOYERS: Back at the Hands and Heart community garden, James and Jeanette Ware bring this year's growing season to a close.

JEANETTE WARE: I have customers that come every week without fail to get fresh food, so I'm going to really, really miss them. And they ask me, "You're not going to keep growing stuff in the hot house or something for the winter we can come to the garden and buy?" They're going to really miss them, and I'm going to miss them too.

BILL MOYERS: Next year, the Wares hope to build a children's garden and they'll grow even more of the produce their customers crave in a new hot house. It's all part of their master plan.

JAMES WARE: My dream is to sell to stores, delis, that will in turn feed the community. And many, multiplied by others that are doing the same thing, we can eventually feed the community fresh grown produce.

BILL MOYERS: What do you think?

MICHAEL POLLAN: It's a kind of thrilling program. You know, a lot of people talk about the elitism of the food movement. And they think about Whole Foods and people shopping at, you know, upscale farmers markets. But there is another face to this food movement. And that's what you see in that film. And that, there is a real crisis in the inner city with access to fresh produce. And we know, distance from a source of fresh produce is a predictor of health.

BILL MOYERS: What do you mean, crisis?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Crisis because, in West Oakland, a neighborhood sort of like this, or where I live. I live in Berkeley. West Oakland is an area that has about 26 convenience stores, liquor stores, that sell processed food, and not a single supermarket. No source of fresh produce. You might get some onions and potatoes in that convenience store, but that it is. Yet, it's full of fast food outlets. So you have, a fresh food desert, in effect. And that is one of the reasons that people in the inner city have such higher rates of diabetes. There is a demand for fresh and healthier food that's not being served.

BILL MOYERS: Well, you heard just how serious a problem diabetes is out in East New York.

MICHAEL POLLAN: Yeah, one in six. One in six, type 2 diabetes.

BILL MOYERS: And traces to the food?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Right. Largely exercise and food. But in that case you know, food is really what you've got to look at, and what you can fix. And we have to understand that that's not the free market at work. The fact that you see all that fast

food and you don't see any supermarkets. You know, oddly enough, government policy helped get the fast food outlets into the city. Very well-intentioned small business administration loans to encourage minority business ownership. The easiest business to get into is opening a fast-food franchise in the inner city.

So, our government helped that happen. Again, for good reasons. We need similar programs to encourage the supermarkets to come in, so there is a source of fresh produce. Or, draw in the farmers markets. And that's why those vouchers. I mean, we're going to need to supplement food stamps, I'm sure, in the next few months. Why not offer every food stamps recipient, a voucher redeemable at a farmers market for fresh, wholesome food? That would, at a stroke, draw farmers markets, farmers into the inner city, and improve the diet. Not just the number of calories people are getting, but the quality of those calories.

BILL MOYERS: But with urban sprawl, and with so many acres of farmland being turned over to development. Most of us live a long way from a farmers market.

MICHAEL POLLAN: Yeah. I agree. I think one of the problems, since the 50s has been, a lot of the local farms have been paved over with houses. And we need, but not all of them. And we need to protect that land. Because we're going to need it. When the oil runs out, we're going to need to be able to feed ourselves from within 100, 200, 300 miles. I mean, look. We're shipping - one of the more significant things that happened when we had this oil price spike last summer, is the price of moving a box of broccoli from the Salinas Valley in California, where most of it is grown, to the Hunts Point Market here in New York, went from \$3 to \$10.

BILL MOYERS: Whoa.

MICHAEL POLLAN: When that happened, two or three of the big growers in California started buying farmland in New England. See, they get it. They get that in the future, we're going to need to grow food closer to where people live. And broccoli goes really well any where in this country. So we need to look at high-quality farmland, close to cities like New York and realize, that it as precious as, say, a wetland, which we wouldn't let you develop unless you could really prove the need to develop a wetland. We need to protect farmland.

BILL MOYERS: Here in New York, vacant lots, such as the old dump that became that garden are being taken over for high-rise development. I mean, that's, a long-range.

MICHAEL POLLAN: That's going to slow down, there will be less of that. There'll be more vacant lots.

BILL MOYERS: But how practical, truly practical, is it to think that what we just saw, a garden in East New York could be replicated across the country in urban areas?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Well, it is being replicated. There is a community food security movement in cities all across the country that are bringing, you know, starting the farm on vacant lots. Building farmers markets. Bringing farmers in. It's happening, with very little support. Imagine if it got some support. Imagine if the farm bill were really encouraging this movement.

Building four season farmers markets, so it's not just in the good weather. I think it's very realistic. It's not an all or nothing proposition. It's not like we're going to flip the switch, and we're going to have this localized agriculture, you know, overnight. We're going to need different solutions in different parts of the country.

What the people in Iowa, I think, need to be doing, we need to recognize what they're really growing there is cattle feed. I mean, it looks like corn and beans, but 40 to 50 percent of that grain is going to feed cattle and hogs. So what if we cut out all the transportation, the middle man, and actually put animals back on those farms? Let them grow really high quality grass-fed beef. You know, that is some of the best agricultural land in the world. And so we grow meat, back on the land, sustainably. And meat, you can move some distance to a market. So I think we have to figure out different solutions in different places, and it's not all or nothing. We need to let a thousand flowers bloom. We need to try many things in many places, and figure out what works

BILL MOYERS: Other than write President-elect Obama and support your nomination for Secretary of the Agriculture, what can people do, ordinary people,

who are not farmers. You've described a very stubborn political process. You've described a Washington controlled and dominated by the big industrial farms. There is a sense that people could be demoralized by listening to you.

MICHAEL POLLAN: Actually, not at all. I mean, the great thing about this issue, and it's very different than a lot of other issues. It's very different than climate change, energy and so many different issues we're grappling with is you don't have to wait for Nancy Pelosi or Barack Obama or Collin Peterson to get their act together on this issue. You can act now. There are alternatives. You can vote with your fork.

You don't, you know, it's important to vote with your vote as well, for better agricultural policies. But what's happening around this country is we're building an alternative food economy. It's being done without virtually any support from the government. And it's burgeoning. Now, yeah, sometimes it costs more. Not always. There is a moment in the farmers market where the tomatoes are really cheap. The potatoes, the apples are really cheap, and you buy them then, and you know, it's a really good deal. So I dispute that it's always more expensive. I think that you have to shop strategically and be prepared to cook. And then you can eat in a budget-conscious way.

So that's one thing. Think of the dollars you spend on food in a different way. You're not just a consumer. You're a producer too. And you can produce another kind of agriculture depending on where you choose to spend your money. So that's point one.

BILL MOYERS: What do you mean?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Look at the rise of organic agriculture in this country. It's now, what, \$20 billion business, okay? It grew without any help from the government until very recently. It grew essentially, consumers talking to farmers, farmers talking to consumers. They developed this market. Everyone who is willing to spend that extra money on organic was helping to create a new kind of farm, a new kind of agriculture.

BILL MOYERS: What else? Give me a list, quickly, of what we can do to make a difference in this reforming the food system.

MICHAEL POLLAN: Well, plant a garden. If you've got space, and if you don't, look into a community garden where you might rent a little bit of space, like we saw in East New York.

Cook. Simply by starting to cook again, you declare your independence from the culture of fast food. As soon as you cook, you start thinking about ingredients. You start thinking about plants and animals, and not the microwave. And you will find that your diet, just by that one simple act, that is greatly improved. You will find that you are supporting local agriculture, because you'll care about the quality of ingredients. And you know, whether you're cooking or not is one of the best predictors for a healthy diet. It's more important than the class predictor. People with more money generally have healthier diets, but affluent people who don't cook are not as healthy in their eating as poor people who still cook. So, very, very important. If you don't have pots and pans, get them.

Now people say they don't have time, and that's an issue. And I am saying that we do need to invest more time in food. Food is just too important to relegate to these 10-minute corners of our lives. And you know, even if you would just take, you know, we watch cooking shows like crazy on television. We've turned cooking into a spectator sport. If you would merely invest the time you spend watching cooking shows in actually cooking, you would find you've got plenty of time to put a meal on the table.

BILL MOYERS: Are you suggesting that we're going to have to learn to shoot our own pigs because if we do, I don't have a fridge large enough for a whole hog.

MICHAEL POLLAN: Well, I actually think buying a freezer, Bill, is a really good investment. Because that's how you can take advantage of the deals, when there are deals at the farmer's market. I did - I learned how to hunt, when I was writing "The Omnivore's Dilemma". I haven't hunted since. I actually think hunting is a very sustainable form of meat production in a lot of places, where we have way too many whitetail deer. I know that this will offend some people. So, you know, but producing some of your own food too. Make yourself a real producer. Put in a garden. I mean, that is not a trivial thing. You know, it sounds kind of sweet and old lady-like. But

gardens are very powerful things.

BILL MOYERS: How so? What do you mean? Powerful things.

MICHAEL POLLAN: Not only will you discover that a very small plot of land, my garden now is only 10 foot by 20 foot, produces so much produce, I need to give it away. I have to spend time figuring out how to get rid of it. So you will actually get some of the healthiest, freshest food you can possibly get. It is the shortest food chain of all. But it teaches certain habits of mind that I think are really, really important. You know, Wendell Berry had a phrase. He talked about our kind of predicament with regard to energy. He said-

BILL MOYERS: -farmer, philosopher in Kentucky, right?

MICHAEL POLLAN: Yeah. And he said, "You know, we're afflicted by this cheap energy mind," that we, because cheap energy has allowed us to outsource so much of our lives. You know, we do one thing, right? We do our job, and everything else, we have a specialist who provides. They entertain us. They feed us. They clothe us. We don't do anything for ourselves anymore. It's one of the reasons that when we look at climate change, we feel so helpless, because we can't imagine doing any more for ourselves.

Well, as soon as you start gardening, it is a cure for the cheap energy mind. You're suddenly realizing that hey, I can use my body in support of my body. I have other skills. I can, you know, I can feed myself, if I needed to. And that is kind of a preparation, I think, for the world we may find ourselves in. But it's very empowering to realize that you're not at the mercy of the supermarket.

BILL MOYERS: We have 6.7 billion people on this earth, wanting to be fed. Do you think that we have a system that it will produce enough food, if we put into effect what you're talking about?

MICHAEL POLLAN: As long as the sun still shines. There is the energy to produce the food. The thing we need to remember, when people ask, "Can we feed the world sustainably?" is that about 40 percent of all the grain we're growing in the world, which is most of what we grow, we are feeding to animals. So there's an awful lot of slack there, if we're not eating nine ounces of meat a day. We're wasting 25 percent of what we're growing. I mean, there is, you know, there is plenty of food, if we organize our agriculture in a proper way.

The 'can we feed the world' argument has been used for 50 years to drive the industrialization of agriculture. It is agri-business propaganda, people who are not interested in feeding the world. They're interesting in driving up productivity, on American farms. Yes, some want to export it. ADM and Cargill want to ship it out to other places, but basically they want their raw materials as cheap as possible. I'm talking about Coca-Cola. I'm talking about McDonald's. And the way you keep you need overproduction to do that. You want your raw materials, if you're producing that McDonald's hamburger, or Coca-Cola, you're dependent on that corn and soy, and the cheaper that is, the more profit you're going to make.

BILL MOYERS: I'm sorry that I can't persuade you or convince you to take the job. You would be a provocative Secretary of Agriculture.

MICHAEL POLLAN: Well, that's probably a good word for it.

BILL MOYERS: Michael Pollan, it's been a pleasure to talk with you. Thank you for being on the JOURNAL.

MICHAEL POLLAN: Thank you, Bill. Thank you very much.

BILL MOYERS: We were abroad these past two weeks trying to cleanse our journalistic pipes, so to speak. We thought we could put American politics out of sight and out of mind for a spell. We were wrong.

Everywhere we went people wanted to talk about America. The Greeks, Sicilians, Sardinians, Tunisians, Algerians, and Spaniards we met, were euphoric - cab drivers, guides, waiters, hotel clerks, bank tellers. They expect miracles from America. Their own economies are imploding: layoffs, budget shortfalls, failing banks, fear spreading among the populace. They want to believe that somehow the long arm of America will pull them back. I tried but I didn't have the heart to tell them just how much

trouble their rich Uncle Sam is in.

Maybe I was wrong not to dispel their illusions about America; after all, they live on top of the ruins of long-gone empires, whose rise and fall is a far more familiar and consistent theme of history than democracy's success. I did my best, to say that America is trying very hard right now to put our own house in order.

That self-correcting faculty, even in the darkest hours, is the best thing we have going for us. That and the knowledge that nothing we face in the months ahead is more than was asked of our parents and grand parents in war and depression.

This giant of a country is bleeding badly from savage self inflicted wounds, but what happens next is still our story to write. We can be thankful for that.

That's it for the JOURNAL. See you next week, I'm Bill Moyers.

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