Omnivore's Dilemma Chapter by Chaper Summary Part II.docx

by Jennifer Cook

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Chapter by Chapter Part II Summary

In this section, Michael Pollan visits the Polyface Farm and presents points that relate to the organic food sector and how processed foods have ruined nature's natural flavors and richness of foods. In addition to this, he also describes the nutritional benefits of eating products that originate from grass fed animals.

Part II: Pastoral Grass

Chapter 8: All Flesh Is Grass

1. **What is the concept of "grass farming" – how is this different from typical agriculture?** Joel Salatin owns the Polyface Farm and describes himself as a "grass farmer" (Pollan, p. 125). Grass farming is a way of farming that allows various animals to feed on the grass on a particular rotation schedule. The grass is the starting point of everything at the Polyface Farm. Each animal species and parts of the land play an important role. The chicken guts go into the compost, the compost then becomes fertilizer for the grass that the cows graze on. The cows eventually become beef that can be consumed by consumers. This type of farming was once considered "organic." However, the definition of "organic" has changed. Due to the government changing the definition of "organic", many products are now labeled as "organic," when in reality they are not actually organic. Most consumers that buy "organic" products are completely in the dark about this change. Salatin explains his frustration with the government by stating, "But the Western mind can't bear and opt-out option. We're going to have to refight the Battle of the Little Bighorn 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" (Pollan, p. 132). Typical agriculture does not even consider grass to be part of the farming process as far as humans are concerned.

2. **What does "industrial organic" mean?** Industrial organic is food products that are mass produced using industrial machinery and other industrial methods. The products are then marketed as "organic," because no pesticides were used to produce the foods. However, this only meets government standards of "organic." This way of producing foods is not a sustainable method of farming as Salatin explained throughout this chapter. Consumers

should always do their research on products and beware of food products that are labeled as "organic" or "natural." Just because a label states something is "organic," it does not always mean that it is truly "organic."

Chapter 9: Big Organic

1. **What does "grocery lit" mean? What are some examples of this?** Grocery lit is labels and stories that are posted on various products in the store. Whole Foods is a supermarket that has a vast array of this. According to Pollan, "Whole Foods is a literary experience" (p. 134). For example, ". . . it was formerly part of a steer that spent its days living in 'beautiful places' ranging from 'plant-diverse, high-mountain meadows to thick aspen groves and miles of sagebrush-filled flats'" (Pollan, p. 134). This was in reference to a particular steak in the Whole Foods store that Pollan visited. The store is filled with many different stories, "grocery lit," similar to this to entice the consumer to buy one product over another. The problem with these labels and stories is that that they are over exaggerated, and unfortunately most consumers fall right into the trap. "But what about the 'free range' lifestyle promised on the label? True, there's a little door in the shed leading out to a narrow grassy yard. But the free range story seems a bit of a stretch when you discover that the door remains firmly shut until the birds are at least five or six weeks old – for fear they'll catch something outside – and the chickens are slaughtered only two weeks later" (Pollan, p. 140). This is obviously not truly "free range" chickens, as "free range" chickens are allowed to graze on the grass 24/7.

2. **How does industrial organics play a part in one's health and the environment? Due to the extra cost and effort, is it really worth it to buy organic products?** One central issue that industrial organics introduces to one's health is the possibility of foodborne illnesses. E. coli and Salmonella are two examples of such illnesses. Furthermore, ecological sustainability and low soil-building are issues related to the environment when it comes to industrial organics. If one is buying truly "organic" products, then the health benefits can be very much worth the effort and extra cost. Conventional products contain many pesticides, hormones, and other harmful ingredients that can cause numerous health ailments over time.

Chapter 10: Grass – Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Pasture

1. **What constitutes the beginning of a successful grass farm?** Successful grass farming starts with the energy of the sun. "Grass farmers grow animals – for meat, eggs, milk, and wool – but regard them as part of a food chain in which grass is the keystone species, the nexus between the solar energy that powers every food chain and the animals we eat. . . The grass is just the way we capture the solar energy" (Pollan, p. 188). Industrial organic

farms utilize big tractors, and other equipment which all use petroleum based products. "One of the principles of modern grass farming is that to the greatest extent possible farmers should rely on the contemporary energy of the sun, as captured every day by photosynthesis, instead of the fossilized sun energy contained in petroleum" (Pollan, p. 188). This way of farming is much better for the environment.

2. **What are the ecologic and economic benefits of grass farming and rotational grazing?** There are numerous ecologic and economic benefits to using the grass farming and rotational grazing method. When the cows eat the grass and move on, they have benefitted because they were fed their natural diet. The farmer benefits because he/she did not pay to feed the cows. The grass benefits because it is natural for animals to graze on the grass and the land, which in turn allows the grass and land to thrive. Ecologic benefits of this approach include better soil quality, healthier plant life, and better grass seed production. Economic benefits include the fact that the cattle are eating nutritionally sound meals for free. Essentially, the farmer, Joel in this case, is ultimately making more money.

Chapter 11: The Animals – Practicing Complexity

1. **How does each part of Joel Salatin's method of interconnected farming contribute to the entire process as a whole?** The Polyface Farm is characterized by "modeling a natural ecosystem in all its diversity and interdependence" (Pollan, p. 215). Each of the animals waste helps to provide nutrients for another animal. The compost from the pigs helps to feed the grass. The grass then helps to feed the cows. The cow's feces feed the insects; the insects feed the chickens, etc. This entire process does away with the need for antibiotics or the use of chemical fertilizers. This allows Joel to virtually run his farm for next to nothing.

2. **Why do so few farmers choose to cultivate in the same manner as Salatin?** There are easy answers to this. First, running a farm such as this would be a complicated process, and most Americans are not willing to make an effort to maintain something to this degree. Simply put, Americans today are just plain lazy. Furthermore, this type of farming requires critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. Many Americans no longer have these skills due to the ever evolving technology. According to Joel, "Part of the problem is, you've got a lot of D students left on the farm today" (Pollan, p. 210).

Chapter 12: Slaughter – In a Glass Abattoir

1. **According to Salatin, what is the problem with current food-safety regulations?** Joel states, "they are a one-size-fits-all rules designed to regulate giant slaughter-houses that are mindlessly applied to small farmers . . ." (Pollan, p. 229). "USDA regulations spell out precisely what sort of facility and system is permissible, but they don't set thresholds for food-borne pathogens (Pollan, p. 229). This is a problem. It is hard to understand how products produced in this manner can be sold to the general public. This is exactly how consumers end up with those foodborne illnesses.

2. **How do I feel about Pollan killing a chicken just because he is a meat eater? Could I personally kill a chicken?** I do think that Pollan's way of thinking on this is accurate; however, I do not think that I could personally kill a chicken and then eat it. I eat chicken quite often, but the thought of having to kill it, prepare it, and then eat it is not very appetizing. I know farmers do this on a regular basis, so I am sure it becomes easier in time. I know people who eat goat meat, rabbit meat, etc. However, these types of animals are also raised as pets, as are chickens in some instances. This is what makes this type of killing for meat so appalling to me. It is hard to befriend an animal and then turn around and kill it to use as a food source. "In a way, the most morally troubling thing about killing chickens is that after a while it is no longer morally troubling," Pollan voiced (p. 233). I cannot imagine that I would ever become used to doing something such as this.

Chapter 13: The Market – "Greetings from the Non-Barcode People"

1. **Salatin asks Pollan, "Don't you find it strange that people will put more work into choosing their mechanic or house contractor than they will into choosing the person who grows their food" (p. 240)? Do I agree with him that it's strange? Why or why not?** This is strange behavior, because what we put in our mouths ultimately affects our overall health. A particular mechanic or home contractor has no control over this. The unusual thing about this to me is that there is no need for a mechanic or a home contractor if we are unable to maintain our health. If one knows who is growing the food, then more than likely the process by which the food is produced is also known. Health should be the number one priority, and buying foods that are grown and produced locally rather than from these big box chain stores would be one way of helping to maintain our health longer. This would also help to maintain our environment for much longer, as well.
2. **What do I think about society's unwillingness to pay a higher price for food? Is the reluctance due to affordability or priority?** Frankly, I think it is a little of both. Personally, I feel that most people do not place this on the priority list because they just do not understand how detrimental some of the chemicals and hormones in conventional

products can be to their health. In addition to this, society does not realize how these chemicals are affecting our environment. For me, buying the "organic" products is important and a priority to me due to the health benefits. The environmental benefits are just another plus. However, these products are not always an option due to the cost.

3. **Is it feasible to believe that society would spend less on healthcare in the long run, if more was spent on naturally produced foods?** As a nurse, the answer to this question is a no-brainer. My answer is absolutely. It may not be something that one reaps the benefits of immediately, but it will be felt and shown later in life at one's most vulnerable time. I also feel that it would benefit in the way of a prophylactic for Alzheimer's, Dementia, and Cardiac related diseases.

Chapter 14: The Meal – Grass-Fed

1. **How does Pollan think that a grass-fed meal might exhibit more nutritional benefits than a meal grown on a conventional farm?** "... large quantities of beta-carotene, vitamin E, and folic acid present in green grass find their way into the flesh of the animals that eat that grass" (Pollan, p. 266). Since this is the case, the person eating this food is also reaping the nutritional benefits of these things without having to eat the actual grass, which humans are unable to digest. In addition to the added nutrients, grass-fed animals also contain less bad fat and more healthy fat than those fed with grain.

2. **Why does Pollan think that omega 3 fatty acids and omega 6 fatty acids are important?** Omega-3s and Omega-6s are two kinds of good essential fats in one's diet. Omega-3s are essential to one's neurological health. Pollan asserts, "Researchers report that pregnant women who receive supplements of omega-3s give birth to babies with higher IQ's; children with diets low in omega-3s exhibit more behavioral and learning problems at school; and puppies eating diets high in omega-3s prove easier to train" (p. 267 – 268). This is astounding, since most people I know do not begin to have enough of this in their diet. Omega-6 is another polyunsaturated fat that is essential to our health; however, our bodies do not make it. Therefore, omega-6s must come from the foods we eat. They also play an important role in neurological health among other things.

References

Pollan, M. (2006). *The omnivore's dilemma: A natural history of four meals.* New York: Penguin Press.

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