



# **Formerly Known As Food: How the Industrial Food System Is Changing Our Minds, Bodies, and Culture**

*Kristin Lawless*

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**One of *Bustle's* "17 Best Nonfiction Books Coming Out In June 2018" • One of *The Revelator's* "16 New Environmental Books for June" • One of *Equinox's* "5 Books High Performers Should Read in June" • One of *Foodtank's* "18 Books Making a Splash This Summer" • One of *CivilEats'* "22 Noteworthy Food and Farming Books for Summer Reading—and Beyond"**

**From the voice of a new generation of food activists, a passionate and deeply-researched call for a new food movement.**

If you think buying organic from Whole Foods is protecting you, you're wrong. Our food—even what we're told is good for us—has changed for the worse in the past 100 years, its nutritional content deteriorating due to industrial farming and its composition altered due to the addition of thousands of chemicals from pesticides to packaging. We simply no longer know what we're eating.

In *Formerly Known as Food*, Kristin Lawless argues that, because of the degradation of our diet, our bodies are literally changing from the inside out. The billion-dollar food industry is reshaping our food preferences, altering our brains, changing the composition of our microbiota, and even affecting the expression of our genes. Lawless chronicles how this is happening and what it means for our bodies, health, and survival.

An independent journalist and nutrition expert, Lawless is emerging as the voice of a new generation of food thinkers. After years of "eat this, not that" advice from doctors, journalists, and food faddists, she offers something completely different. Lawless presents a comprehensive explanation of the problem—going beyond nutrition to issues of food choice, class, race, and gender—and provides a sound and simple philosophy of eating, which she calls the "Whole Egg Theory."

Destined to set the debate over food politics for the next decade, *Formerly Known as Food* speaks to a new generation looking for a different conversation about the food on our plates.

## **Formerly Known As Food: How the Industrial Food System Is Changing Our Minds, Bodies, and Culture Details**

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Author : Kristin Lawless

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# **From Reader Review Formerly Known As Food: How the Industrial Food System Is Changing Our Minds, Bodies, and Culture for online ebook**

## **Shelly says**

Formerly Known as Food is an Eye-Opener written by a nutritional expert and consultant. The author's message is clear and concise and is one that, in my opinion, should be heard by everyone. Even when we think we are making healthy choices we may not be and the ramifications of unhealthy food choices go deeper than many believe. I found this book tremendously informative. It was educational and comprehensive but it could get a bit heavy at times for people with only a casual interest in how our eating patterns are shaping our overall health. I found it best to read in chunks so as not to get overwhelmed with all of the information. I voluntarily read an advanced reader copy provided to me by the publisher through NetGalley. This did not affect my rating. I have provided an unbiased and honest review.

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## **Sara Goldenberg says**

Preachy and sanctimonious. Guess we all have to live on water and lettuce we grow ourselves but not, Heaven forfend, in any dirt you'd find today, you'd have to find 200 year old dirt.

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## **Dianna says**

The first part of this book annoyed and depressed me. Your food has touched plastic? It was in a factory? It's not organic? Not good enough. Wait! Organic isn't good enough either! I felt like nothing I could ever eat was good enough—because America's food system isn't set up to get us the kind of food Lawless is talking about here.

But perhaps she did that on purpose, because she had me by the end of the book. She helped me to see the problem with our food system. She is calling for nothing less than a complete revamp of the way we grow, distribute, and eat food—and she's calling for people to be paid for the cooking and housework done at home.

While I don't know if I agree with all her ideas, I found the chapter on the devaluing of women's work absolutely fascinating and would recommend the book for that chapter (especially if you're a stay-at-home mom like me).

Her ideas for revamping the food system presented at the end are bold and eye-opening. I would love to see the means to grow, buy, and cook real food available to everyone, not just the 1%. Some of the ideas sounded a little far-fetched to me, but many seemed quite sensible. Plenty of food for thought, if nothing else!

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## **yamiyoghurt says**

I do have a pet interest in this topic and have read a couple in a similar vein. This is a good primer in the current state of affairs in our industrial food system. If you enjoyed this and wanted more nuanced exploration, check out "The Dorito Effect", "The World According to Monsanto", "Combat Ready Kitchen", "The Omnivore's Dilemma", "Fast Food Nation" and "Food, Inc".

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## **Nena Kelley says**

Presented decently, but no new information. Same thing I've read in previous books on this subject matter.

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## **Christina Dudley says**

(from my Bellevue Farmers Market blog post, minus the pics)

### **THE PRICE OF DOMESTICATION**

We were dogsitting this past week, and, whenever it came time to feed the critters, I would find myself philosophizing about the price of domestication: in exchange for a steady food supply, wolves/dogs gave up their freedoms. On the plus side, they wouldn't starve. On the minus side, every day they must eat the same bowl of kibbles. The kibbles have been pumped up with pleasing synthetic flavors and a smidge of actual meat by-product, but it's still a little bowl of kibbles, twice a day, day in and day out, getting more and more stale the longer the bag sits out.

It's a dog's life.

But I was also reading Kristin Lawless' Formerly Known as Food: How the Industrial Food System is Changing Our Minds, Bodies, and Culture and discovering some uncomfortable parallels.

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Like dogs being domesticated, we've made a deal of questionable benefits. In exchange for convenient, always-available food, we've handed over our ability to choose what we eat. Yes, some of us can afford to be choosier in our groceries, but it's gotten harder and harder to avoid that darned bowl of kibbles. The corn, soy, canola, synthetic flavors, emulsifiers, sweeteners, preservatives, pesticide residues, packaging plastics, oxidized fats, antibiotics, and so on, are everywhere. Buy organic all you like. You cannot escape.

The book makes for some grim reading. There are the usual alarming facts about rising obesity, metabolic syndrome, and allergies, which we've almost become inured to, but what was newer to me was the discussion of cumulative effects of pesticide and chemical build-ups in fields, foods, and oceans, as well as permanent changes to our microbiota caused by diet-induced extinction. Did you know that DDT, banned way back in 1979, is still found in the umbilical cord blood of newborn infants? Discouraging, to say the least. Or that TBT, an organic pollutant used in paints and coatings for boats back in the 1960s (and since banned), has nevertheless so leached into our waters and been biomagnified up the food chain, that we're eating it today. So what, you say? Well, TBT is an "obesogen," causing animals in studies to "have more and bigger fat cells...They're eating normal food, and they're getting fatter." As an added bonus, TBT-induced weight gain can be passed down generationally.

Fine, fine, you concede. There's nothing to be done about the DDT, but I just won't eat seafood. Oh, but TBT is just one kind of "organotin" we are exposed to. There are others,

used in the linings and sealings of food cans, in polyvinylchloride (PVC) plastics, as fungicides and pesticides on crops, as slimicides in industrial water systems, and as wood preservatives. Like many other classes of chemicals, organotins were wrongly deemed environmentally safe for many years -- and they appear to be everywhere in our environment.

And remember the BPA fuss? Because it messed with our hormones, public uproar got it removed from baby bottles and water bottles and such. Sad to say, the plastic compounds used as replacements still have endocrine-disrupting characteristics. Plastic in food and drink packaging is unavoidable nowadays. Buy organic all you like, and 90% of the time, it's still being delivered to you in plastic.

Lawless makes a very compelling argument for breastfeeding but recognizes that women who have to work outside the home and who don't have the most understanding schedules or workplaces for pumping breast milk face impossible situations. In fact, Lawless points out relentlessly how economic and social class constrain food choice, from gestation onward. Some of us can't simply "choose" to breastfeed and buy organic and home-cook our meals:

When food movement leaders say the solutions are to eat whole foods and buy organic, they leave out the crucial fact that we need to collectively reject the production of poor-quality processed foods and stop the production of dangerous pesticides and other environmental chemicals that contaminate many foods. Critics do not often articulate this omission, but it is largely why the movement is perceived as elitist, and rightly so. If the food movement's solutions are market based and predicated on spending more for safer and healthier food, they ignore how impossible these solutions are for most Americans...The food movement has allowed these [crappy, processed] products and additives to exist alongside a cleaner and safer food supply for the privileged few.

Food movement leaders also emphasize the importance of home cooking and cooking whole foods from scratch. Yet many fail to mention that the majority of Americans do not have the time, money, or resources to cook meals from whole foods at home. And when these leaders do acknowledge that lack of time to cook is a problem, they usually address it through providing better ways to cook healthy foods quickly.

I plead guilty to all of these charges.

What solutions does Lawless suggest, if you haven't already succumbed to despair? I admit, I was paralyzed by her solutions. She called for some fairly reasonable measures, like longer paid leave for new moms and household-skills classes for all, but then ventured into suggestions that made my eyes widen: universal basic income, paying people to cook at home, shorter work weeks, and so on. I just didn't see where all the money would come from. Yes, I agree our health as a society would improve, but it's hard to fund programs based on "we'll save money later, years down the road."

I liked better her mentions of urban farming programs on unused land, which has been done successfully in places like Milwaukee and Detroit, although the thought of sending inexperienced college kids out to run them made me think of Chairman Mao sending out all the academics to do the national farming and finding that--whoa!--they didn't actually know how, and now everyone's gonna starve! I guess if this FoodCorps hired the kids who'd done 4-H and had a little experience, but that's a dwindling pool nowadays.

In any case, I highly recommend the book as an eye-opener. And, if you've got the time and money, invite someone over for a home-cooked meal of whole foods, cooked and served on glass and metal.

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## **Don Gorman says**

(1 1/2). This is not a great book. However, it is filled with great information. In fact, it is downright scary. Lawless presents a very compelling case about how the nutritional quality of food (and our lives) have suffered badly in the modernization and profit driven food industries. It is, as well, one of those books that you have to skim fairly regularly of you will nod off. The solutions that Lawless presents are not viable but maybe there are no real solutions to what she presents. It is a shame. A worthwhile research piece.

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## **Bam says**

Kristin Lawless believes in the importance of whole organic foods, breast feeding, etc., but says it is not enough. She will scare you to death with her descriptions of what is getting into our food supply and what it is doing to our bodies. And all this has come about in the last 75-100 years--for the sake of speed, efficiency, convenience and profit. "What about public health, nourishment, stewardship of the land and water, the preservation of Earth and all its species, and the protection of the young and their future?"

There is much information here and it is not always easy to read. Alarming to say the least. But perhaps it is time that all of us really understand what we are feeding ourselves and our families and what it may be doing to our health.

Lawless concludes her book with 'a radical food manifesto' listing what she'd personally like to see happen but only if we come together and demand change:

- the end to poor-quality industrial foods, primarily pushed on low-income people;
- that food processors stop marketing infant formula to parents;
- warning labels on processed food packaging stating these foods may be harmful to your health;
- third party testing of chemicals used in and on our food supply;
- affordable access to chemical-free and whole foods for all;
- nutrition and cooking classes in our schools;
- a universal basic income;
- a wage given for cooking and household work;
- a six-month paid parental leave to encourage breast feeding.

Read this book and perhaps be inspired to join her challenge for better food, as well as a better world, for all.

I received an arc of this book from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for my honest opinion. I am grateful for the opportunity.

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## **Mara says**

This book is a gut punch that is not easily digested (see what I did there?), in which the author basically takes everything that you've always kind of known about processed food and shoves it in your face until you can't look away or unsee what you see. Basically a manifesto, Lawless mercilessly deconstructs the industrialized food complex of America. Heavy on diagnosis, light on a scalable prescription, I'd recommend this to anyone to read. It may not have a lot of solutions on offer, but you can't solve a problem that you don't acknowledge. This book details that problem in excruciating (but in a good way-- the brutality of this book is kind of a masterpiece) detail

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## **Sarah says**

Formerly Known As Food Presents a rigorous analysis of both the effects of industrial foods on our bodies and the social and political mechanisms that have gone into creating our society's vexed relationship to food preparation. While this book, at times, reads like a gloss of other's writings on the subject, her discussion of the emerging research on the human microbiota combined with her pointed criticisms of the alternative food movements emphasis on personal choice and responsibility felt like a new and exciting addition to the dietary advice genre. I especially loved her discussion of the ways in which the skilled labors of food production have been rendered invisible and supposedly expendable by the food industry so that only those with extreme privilege are justified in expending time and money by cooking at home. I also adored her explanation for the strange alignment constructed between patriotism and processed food.

My main criticisms of this book lie in the fact that it was not very readable. Often it felt like a mere presentation of the author's research findings without any underlying narrative. The book would have benefitted from some attention given to humanizing those most affected by the processed food industry, presenting the voices of individual consumers rather than just the findings of UC Davis scientists.

That being said, I was impressed with this book and would feel comfortable recommending it to my students and my colleagues. I hope more journalists will follow Lawless's lead and present the problem of health and nutrition in the United States as stemming from a complex and multilayered set of issues that should be addressed both through community organizing and strategic policy change. "Voting with your fork" is not nearly enough!

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## **Sophie says**

Formerly Known As Food delivers great knowledge to improve the way we eat. It's interesting and easy-to-understand. I enjoyed reading it.

Thank you NetGalley and St.Martin's Press for an ARC of this book.

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## **Anna says**

This is like the book version of the mom who calls CPS because someone gave their kid a poptart. I don't dispute the research, etc. presented in this book, it's just the tone that makes this a tough read. Alternately condescending, preachy, and over the top.

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## **Dawn Betts-Green (Dinosaur in the Library) says**

Initially not a bad book. But she gets really preachy in bits, and I just cannot with it right now.

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## **Kayo says**

While it seemed the research was phenomenal, this book was a bit of a bummer. So many facts on every page, it was just one thing after another. Didn't make for a book you wanted to read.

I'd say author needs to write for the whole, not for a select few.

Thanks to publisher, and NetGalley for the chance to read this book. While I got the book for free, it had no bearing on the rating I gave it.

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## **Janet says**

I received a DIGITAL Advance Reader Copy of this book from #NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

From the publisher ---

From the voice of a new generation of food activists, a passionate and deeply-researched call for a new food movement. If you think buying organic from Whole Foods is protecting you, you're wrong. Our food—even what we're told is good for us—has changed for the worse in the past 100 years, its nutritional content deteriorating due to industrial farming and its composition altered due to the addition of thousands of chemicals from pesticides to packaging. We simply no longer know what we're eating.

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My nephew always says when he comes to my house that "I don't have any food, only ingredients" ...and, aside from a box of KD that I keep for when I am hormonal, it is true! We also get so many complaints at our

food cupboard over ingredients as well..we nee4d to teach people to get back into the kitchen and cook!!!  
This book is scary: no wonder corpses are not decomposing as fast as they used to- we are piles of chemicals + some organic matter. Speaking of organic, there is no proof that organic food is better for your body: finally, I have some back-up for that comment.

The state of our food is horrible: no wonder kids through adults are fatter than ever and there are more diabetics than ever before. Although I don't eat processed food I am pre-diabetic and decidedly fat, so it makes me wonder what is in my INGREDIENTS as I don't have any other explanation. The programs we run (where I work and volunteer) emphasize healthy food vs. fast food and try to get people to stop calling the pizza place and make their own ... maybe if we made this required reading people would listen up!  
Read it with a strong stomach ... with a piece of fresh fruit on the side.

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