

Food Movies Worth Watching

BY CAROL SPURLING

You and many of your co-op's members and customers have perhaps seen *Food, Inc.*, *King Corn*, *The Future of Food*, and *Supersize Me*. More than any other movies released in the past decade, these four have changed the way we think about food.

But please don't stop there. What we eat and where it comes from are under scrutiny by many talented documentary filmmakers. Screening their films in your community is an easy way of spreading the word about the alternatives to industrial agribusiness as usual.

Two years ago, the Moscow (Idaho) Food Co-op launched its monthly Good Food Film Series to showcase the increasing numbers of food-related films and documentaries available. Now it is a beloved and really fun part of our community-building and educational efforts.

Food feature movies can also be pure entertainment, and after a long day at work at the co-op, a great movie can really hit the spot! I highly recommend the following films.

Fresh!

If you're tired of food documentaries that depress and anger you, you're in need of a *Fresh!* outlook on life. Ana Sofia Joanes' *Fresh!* covers all the bad stuff in the first few minutes and quickly moves on to visionaries and activists who are accomplishing real change in the food system.

Especially uplifting are former pro basketball player Will Allen, who directs *Growing Power* in urban Milwaukee, and Joel Salatin of Polyface Farm in Virginia, who would appear to raise the most contented livestock on the planet. This film left our audience buzzing with good vibes and new dedication to the cause of good food.

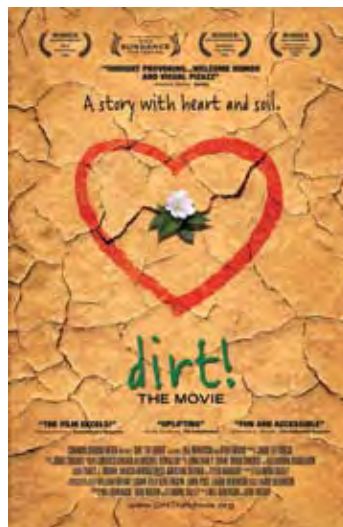
Good Food

If you're devoted to improving your local food system, there's nothing more inspiring than meeting a bunch of people who are already doing just that. *Good Food*, by Melissa Young and Mark Dworkin, introduces us to sustainable growers, businesspeople, and public officials all around the Pacific Northwest who are creating real change and advancing the cause of good food.

The filmmakers really know how to draw out people, so that they're sharing themselves with us, letting us see how passionate they are about their work and the world. The contrast with interviews of poker-faced corporate officials that we've seen in movies like *King Corn*, for example, could hardly be more striking. Good food, and *Good Food*, are all about good people.

Mad City Chickens

Quirky, informative, touching, and laugh-out-loud funny, this documentary about the urban chicken movement in Madison, Wis. is the perfect rallying point for communities interested in changing outdated and restrictive backyard poultry codes, or who simply want to generate some enthusiasm for really local food.



Posters for movies like *Fresh*, *Mad City Chickens*, and *Dirt! The Movie* use snazzy promotional graphics that make the films look legitimate to the general public.

The people are genuine, the chickens nonchalant, and the filmmaking tongue in cheek. You aren't going to learn anything bad about chickens from this film, but that's okay. Chickens' occasional bad moments pale in comparison to their suitability as family pets and backyard food producers. If you can, attend with someone around the age of 8 or 10: their chortling throughout the film will be infectious.

Homegrown

Just how much food can you produce in a single yard? The answer is staggering, and this film by Robert McFalls about the Dervaes family, who have taken urban self-reliance to new heights, is heart-warming and inspiring.

True, not all of us live in a California climate like the Dervaes. But many of us have a small patch of ground doing nothing but producing grass. *Homegrown* is mostly a story about creative people who are uncommonly devoted to a cause, not a gardening how-to. But there's plenty of take-home material here for folks who are worried about what the neighbors might think if they do something just a little different with their landscaping.

Dirt! The Movie

Life depends on dirt. *Dirt! The Movie*, by Gene Rosow and Bill Benenson, reminds us of the almost spiritual connection between humans, food, and the dirt we mostly take for granted. The best trick that this movie pulls off is giving the microorganisms that populate the soil a voice, even something of a personality—not easy to do, but they did it memorably well. You won't be able to see concrete being poured again without feeling sorry about the dirt underneath, condemned to being, well, buried alive.

What's On Your Plate?

Two 11-year-olds in New York City start asking simple but very important questions about where their food comes from, and the result is this lovely and educational film that is perfect for both children and adults. It could have gone the other way—how many 11-year-olds do you know who can act completely normal on camera? Sadie and Safiyah manage to be charming, photogenic, professional, and real all at the same time. *What's On Your Plate* has exceptionally good support materials, too, for teachers and other educators who want use the film as a launching pad for further discussion.

The Gleaners and I: Two Years Later

Inspired by classic images of gleaners in the paintings of French impressionist Millet, French filmmaker Agnes Varda becomes a gleaner of images in this wonderful film that explores waste food, the tradition of gleaning, and cast-offs both human and material. The film is not brand-



A scene from *Mid-August Lunch*.

The Moscow Food Co-op launched the Good Food Film Series to showcase food-related films and documentaries. Now it is a beloved and really fun part of our community-building and educational efforts.

new, but it's still worth showing; it is a classic in the making. Very different in feel from the other films in this list, it is not a celebration of abundance but rather a tender look at people and the ways in which they get by. The follow-up to the original film is worth seeing immediately afterwards too.



A shot from *The Real Dirt on Farmer John*.

The Real Dirt on Farmer John

The trailer shows a straight-faced farmer riding his tractor with a colorful feather boa around his neck, blowing out behind him in the Indiana breeze like a banner of oddity. In reality, farmer John Peterson is as normal as the rest of us. He wants to live a meaningful and purposeful life, following his dreams while meeting his obligations, without pretending to be something he's not nor disappointing the people he loves.

Peterson's life is shaped by the farm on which he was born and which he had to learn to manage as a teenager when his father died too young. How his life is intertwined with the farm's life, the rebellious '70s, the farm crisis of the '80s, and the growing organic movement in the '90s, is gripping stuff. But the film never manipulates the viewers or wrings emotions out of us. Farmers have a lot of time to think while they're out there on their tractors. Farmer John has obviously used his time wisely, fulfilling his urge towards creative expression, and eventually, coming to peace with his land and becoming, again, a beloved member of his community.



A still from *The Gleaners and I*.

Mid-August Lunch

It's the mid-August holiday in Rome, and everyone is getting out of the city for a couple of days off. Everyone, that is, except the middle-aged Gianni, who winds up caring not only for his aging mother (as he usually does) but three other elderly women, each of whom has her own special needs. What binds them together is their expectation of a lovely lunch to celebrate the holiday and fortunately Gianni is an excellent cook and dutiful son.

Don't wait for the climactic dénouement or sudden plot twist. *Mid-August Lunch* unfolds leisurely and luminously until it ends as gently as it began, which is, come to think of it, an excellent way to eat a multicourse meal, savoring every bite.

More films to come

Besides these movies that we've seen and loved, we are looking forward to seeing these new films very soon: *Vanishing of the Bees*, *The Greenhorns*, and *Truck Farm* (from the folks who brought you *King Corn*). ■