

## Food Politics: Pollan v. Hurst

### “Farmer in Chief” (Michael Pollan, Oct. 9, 2008)

- The food system is related to the health care crisis, energy independence and climate change. How so?
- What effects do rising food commodity prices (i.e., the **global food crisis**) have on those most in need?
- How does Pollan say our food system got the way it is (see: Earl Butz, ‘get big or get out’)
  - Wendell Berry: “to take animals off farms and put them on feedlots is to take an elegant solution—animals replenishing the fertility that crops deplete—and neatly divide it into two problems: a fertility problem on the farm and a pollution problem on the feedlot. The former problem is remedied with fossil-fuel fertilizer; the latter is remedied not at all.”
- Creating a definition of “food” (as against what Pollan calls ‘edible food-like substances’)
- This article is one of Pollan’s best-known works, but it is just one of many articles, books, and films (the best current example is *Food, Inc.*) that are growing increasingly critical of our current food system.

### The Omnivore’s Delusion (Blake Hurst – *The American: Journal of the American Enterprise Institute*)

- “He thinks that farmers are too stupid to farm sustainably, too cruel to treat their animals well, and too careless to worry about their communities, their health, and their families. I would not presume to criticize his car, or the size of his house, or the way he runs his business. But he is an expert about me, on the strength of one book”
- “Some of the largest farms in the country are organic—and are giant organizations dependent upon lots of hired stoop labor doing the most backbreaking of tasks in order to save the sensitive conscience of my fellow passenger the merest whiff of pesticide contamination.”
- “The parts of farming that are the most “industrial” are the most likely to be owned by the kind of family farmers that elicit such a positive response from the consumer.”
- The example of pig gestation crates and turkeys raised outdoors (even though “the turkeys don’t seem to mind” wallowing in their own waste, apparently...)—are you convinced by Hurst’s arguments here?
- What is Hurst’s response to the argument that manure ‘lagoons’ are an environmental/health problem?
- “If we are about to require more expensive ways of producing food, the largest and most well-capitalized farms will have the least trouble adapting.”
- Why does Hurst argue that commercial fertilizers are, for better or worse, an absolute necessity?
- What did you think were the strongest points of Hurst’s arguments? The weakest? Are you convinced?

### On Vegetarianism(s) and Food Choices

- “The symbolism of meat-eating is never neutral. To himself, the meat-eater seems to be eating life. To the vegetarian, he seems to be eating death. There is a kind of gestalt-shift between the two positions...” (Midgley)...What are some of the ethical considerations at play when we decide what to eat?

### On the global/international aspects of food politics

- On the ecological and human costs of agribusiness, **demographic** shifts, and the ongoing “**livestock revolution**”. What are the range of environmental harms that are complicit in industrial “meat” production?
- What is the **Green Revolution** and what are the effects on the international agricultural market of the skyrocketing demand for feed grain?
- The role of **global supply chains**, **agribusiness**, and international trade