

# AMERICAN MEAT

...A Leave It Better Story

## CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR TEACHERS (WITH ANSWER KEYS)



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## ABOUT THE FILM

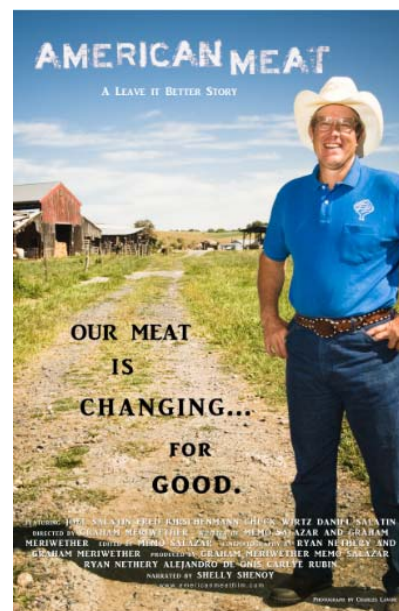
*American Meat* is a solutions-oriented macroscopic documentary surveying the current state of the U.S. meat industry. Featuring Joel Salatin, Chuck Wirtz, Fred Kirschenmann, Paul Willis, and tens of farmers across America, we take an even-handed look at animal husbandry.

We explain how America arrived at our current industrial system and show you the feedlots and confinement houses, not through hidden cameras but through the eyes of the farmers who live and work there. From there, we introduce the current revolution developing in animal husbandry, led by the charismatic and passionate Joel Salatin.

We meet tens of farmers across the country who have changed their life to start grass-based farms, and we highlight every day tangible solutions that people can take, to change agriculture in America.

This guide has been created to help teachers use *American Meat* in their curricula. After watching the film, students will be able to meet the following objectives:

- Explain how the meat industry has changed in America
- Understand how supply and demand affect the lives of farmers
- Compare commodity farming and sustainable farming
- Make informed decisions about meat and farming



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Related Reading

*The Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan

*The Country Life Movement* by L.H. Bailey

*An Agricultural Testament* by Sir Albert Howard

*You Can Farm* by Joel Salatin

*The Unsettling of America* by Wendell Berry

### Agricultural Videos

“So God Made a Farmer” (Dodge Super Bowl Ad)  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S87BhEJX\\_bg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S87BhEJX_bg)

“Back to the Start” (Chipotle Ad)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMfSGt6rHos>

## VIEWING GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

### Introduction

0:00 America's relationship with meat

### Part I. Commodity farming

4:30 Hog farming

12:00 Chicken farming

22:00 Case study: Curlew, Iowa

### Part II. Grass-based farming

26:00 A different path: grass-based farming

39:00 Grass-based farming on a larger scale?

47:30 Examples of small, grass-based farms

### Part III. Up to Us

56:00 How farming in America is changing

65:30 Farmers Markets, CSAs and Buying Clubs



*Director Graham Meriwether with high school students. Photo A. Trimbach*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Before watching

1. Before watching the film, ask a few icebreaker questions to get students thinking about their relationship to meat. Ask for a show of hands for each question, then ask 2-3 students why they did or did not raise their hands.
  - How many of you would eat meat?
  - How many would cook raw meat?
  - How many would raise your own meat?

### After Part I (26:00 minutes in)

1. Ask students if they know someone who lost their farm or had to downsize. Invite them to share their stories. Are their experiences similar to the experiences of people in the film? Different?

### After Watching

1. What are the reasons in favor of commodity farming?
2. What are the reasons in favor of sustainable farming?
3. Make a prediction: Do you think there will be more commodity farms or sustainable farms in 2050? Why?
4. What are reasons to become a farmer?
5. Would you ever consider working in production agriculture?

## Worksheet: *American Meat* (Answer Key)

Directions: Watch the documentary *American Meat* and answer the following questions. Pay special attention to differences between commodity farming and sustainable or grass-based farming.

### Part I. Commodity Farming

1. How has hog farming changed over time?
  - Hogs used to be raised outdoors on pastures, then more and more were raised in the same space. For efficiency and financial reasons, hogs are now confined indoors in small spaces
2. Why is so much fossil fuel needed for commodity farming? Be specific about different ways that energy is used by farmers and food processors.
  - There are many steps in the process, so trucks are needed to move the animals/meat from one step to the next. In addition, slaughterhouses, farms, and distribution centers are often far apart, even in different states.
3. How did the community change in Curlew, Iowa?
  - Many people moved out, schools were consolidated, businesses including farms closed, economic depression

### Part II. A Different Path: Sustainable Farming

1. Explain how each of Joel Salatin's innovations works.
  - a. Grass-based farming: Animals are raised outdoors in pasture and rotated to different paddocks, depending on the season. This system of agriculture focuses on mimicking natural behaviors of animals and ecosystems.
  - b. Pigaerator: In the fall, cattle are moved into an open-air barn called a pigaerator. The cattle are fed hay, and generate manure. The manure is mixed with carbonaceous material, such as woodchips, and corn is added to the mix as well. Over the course of a few months, the cattle stomp on the mixture of manure, hay, woodchips and corn which causes fermentation to happen. The level of the barn rises during the winter as more of the mixture builds up. In the spring, the cattle are moved out onto pasture, and the hogs are moved into the pigaerator. The hogs smell the fermented corn, which has a slight alcoholic content, and they dig for the corn, using their snout. As the pigs dig, the mixture with the manure, woodchips, and corn gets turned, or aerated, which converts the mixture into compost. In the fall, the compost is spread on the pasture, which helps the grass grow. The cattle come back into the pigaerator, the pigs go off to market, and the whole cycle repeats.
  - c. Egg Mobile: The farmer takes portable electric fencing and divides land into sections, called paddocks. Cattle are moved into a paddock, where they eat the grass for a couple of days. During this time, cattle generate manure. The manure attracts beetle grubs and insect larvae. After a couple of days, the cattle are moved to a new paddock. Egg-laying hens are kept in a hen house that is put on top of a

tractor, the Egg Mobile. The Egg Mobile is dropped off in the paddock where the cattle where. The hens are let out of the Egg Mobile at dawn, and the chickens eat the insects and beetle grubs from the manure, and spread the manure round, thus better fertilizing the pasture. The hens go into the Egg Mobile and lay eggs. After a couple days, the cattle will move to a new paddock, and the hens will follow into the paddock the cattle just left.

2. What are major reasons in favor of sustainable farming?
  - Less fuel costs because of local distribution
  - Some believe it is more humane and meat tastes better
  - Creates jobs because this type of farming is more labor-intensive
  - Different animals can be raised in the same space in complementary ways
3. What are major reasons in favor of commodity farming?
  - It takes a shorter time to raise an animal to be ready for slaughter
  - The product is consistent in flavor and texture
  - Meat tends to be more affordable
  - Efficiencies are gained with having many animals in one place

## Worksheet: Comparing Two Types of Farming (Answer Key)

Directions: Watch the documentary *American Meat* and complete the following chart comparing commodity farming and sustainable or grass-based farming. Compare farming technology, financial differences, differences between the farmers, and differences in the product.

Commodity Farming	Sustainable Farming
“We control what the animal gets, when it’s going to get it, it’s consistent from one animal to the next. A lot of that is driven by the consumer. Consumers don’t want to go to the meat case and get a piece of meat that looks like this today and tomorrow it’s going to be something different.” Eldon Gould, hog farmer, Maple Park, Illinois	“Over a couple of years’ time we got our health back, the whole family, I did, my heart, I haven’t got no problem with it anymore. We started producing food for the family...I was as redneck as redneck could be. I’d never been in one of those fruit and nut stores before. Now I go into the hippie stores—now I am one of them.” George Vojkovich, cattle rancher, Sedro Wooley, Washington
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology: Climate controlled buildings, tractors, crop dusters, trucks, GMO seeds, manure pits, feeders, etc.</li> <li>• Finances: Large upfront loans, large cost for land, guaranteed contracts with large integrators.</li> <li>• Farmers: Less people needed on farm because machinery does more work.</li> <li>• Product: Consistent, lean, affordable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology: Portable electric fences, tractors, trucks, wood, chicken wire, aluminum.</li> <li>• Finances: Large cost for land, direct marketing to customers.</li> <li>• Farmers: More people needed because less mechanization, and also people needed for sales, marketing, distribution.</li> <li>• Product: Varies with seasons, more fat, more expensive.</li> </ul>

## **Worksheet: The Story of Two Food Dollars (Answer Key)**

Blazin' Hot Chicken Wings raised by Johnny Glosson of Pilgrim's Pride  
Whole Chicken raised by Joel Salatin of Polyface Farms

### **Blazin' Hot Chicken Wings: Draw the Path**

First, we'll outline the entire process. Draw the path of the chicken from the hatchery to your plate. Use actual geographic locations if possible. Remember that a truck needs to transport the meat from one step to the next.

Start- Hatchery  
Step 2- Truck  
Step 3- Johnny Glosson's Chicken Barn  
Step 4- Truck  
Step 5- Slaughter  
Step 6- Truck  
Step 7- Processing  
Step 8- Truck  
Step 9- Packaging  
Step 10- Truck  
Step 11- Distribution Center  
Step 12- Truck  
Step 13- Walmart  
Step 14- You!

### **Blazin' Hot Chicken Wings: Questions**

1) How much of the food dollar that is spent on Blazin' Hot Chicken Wings at Walmart goes to Johnny Glosson, the man who raises the chickens?

Johnny Glosson gets 8 cents per dollar spent at the grocery store.

2) Why does Johnny Glosson get such a small percentage of the food dollar?

Johnny Glosson is a small part of a larger integrated system. Because he does not distribute, market or transport his product, he gets a small percentage of the overall sale.

3) In your opinion, how much of the food dollar should Johnny Glosson get and why?  
(Varies with student opinion)

### **Polyface Farms Chicken: Draw the Path**

Outline the entire process again for Polyface Farms. Draw the path of the chicken from the hatchery to your plate. Use actual geographic locations if possible. Remember that a truck needs to transport the meat from one step to the next.

Start- Hatchery  
Step 2- Truck  
Step 3- Polyface Farms  
Step 4- You

### **Polyface Farms Chicken: Questions**

1) How much of the food dollar that is spent on the whole chicken at Polyface goes to Joel Salatin?

Polyface Farms receives the entire dollar, 100%.

2) Why does Joel Salatin get such a large percentage of the food dollar?

Joel Salatin and Polyface Farm are responsible for every aspect of the production of the chicken, from raising it, to slaughtering, to processing and distribution. Because they do everything, they get the whole dollar.

3) Why do Joel Salatin and Johnny Glosson get such a different amount of your food dollar?

Joel does every aspect of raising, slaughtering, and distributing so he gets the entire dollar, Johnny only raises the chickens, so he only gets a percentage of the sale.

4) What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a farmer in these two different distribution systems?

Johnny Glosson has a guaranteed contract. He doesn't have to do all the work of distribution and marketing. He has to take out big loans to get the equipment. He's also beholden to the integrator he signed a contract with, and if they pull out on the contract, he has few options. He gets a small chunk of the food dollar, and often takes many years to pay off loans, at which point new technology develops, requiring new loans.

Joel Salatin keeps the entire dollar spent by consumers. There is no loan needed for equipment. This system requires more labor, so people are needed to slaughter, market and distribute the product. It can be overwhelming to grow product and market it too. This system works well for large families or communities, but is very difficult if undertaken by one person.

## Activities around Distribution Models (Partial Answer Key)

One of the ways farmers get food to customers is at Farmers Markets and through CSAs. After watching Section III, *Up to Us*, participate in the following activities:

### ACTIVITY THREE: Changing Course

In groups of 4-5 students, answer the following questions:

1) Why did Chuck Wirtz decide to transition a portion of his farm to organic production? What happened with the deal?

Chuck saw that there is a growing market for organic pork, so he decided to invest. Also, because it is more labor intensive to raise organic grain and pork, it creates jobs for members of the community, and Chuck's son Carson. The deal fell through at the last minute, as volatile grain prices in 2008 caused Whole Foods to pull out. The deal was somewhat salvaged when Niman Ranch purchased the pork, although because they are not an organic provider, the full premium and profit of the local organic model was not tapped into. Chuck and his brother Jim continue to look for an organic contract.

2) Why did Chipotle decide to source pork for their Charlottesville, Virginia restaurant from Polyface Farms?

There's a good story for the customers, knowing the place where the pork is raised. The flavor is better to many people, because the pigs are fatter and because the hogs are slaughtered close to the farm and restaurant. Finally, because the hogs and pork are only trucked 85 miles from farm to fork, lots of money is saved in transportation costs. As this model has been successful, other hog farmers have begun to source Chipotle restaurants across America.

3) What are the advantages and disadvantages of setting up local distribution networks?

The biggest advantage is the saved cost in gasoline. There's also an advantage to actually knowing the people who are you are doing business with, which makes it easier to hold people accountable. The biggest disadvantage is the scale of production. Local farms are often smaller, and therefore there is inefficiency in the distribution. It's also not good to have a region be totally sourced locally because if a drought or a storm came through and wiped out the area, there wouldn't be any food.

4) What is the difference between a buying club, a CSA and a farmers market? What are the advantages and disadvantages of these different distribution models?

A buying club is where a group of people buy food online from a farmer and then meet up at someone's home to pick it up. A CSA, Community Supported Agriculture, is when farmers grow a bunch of produce and then drop off a portion of the produce to customers once a week. A farmers' market is a place where farmers sell produce directly to customers. The advantage of the buying club is that customers get exactly what they want and the farmer saves transportation costs because a bunch of customers meet at one convenient location. The advantage of the CSA is that farmers get to unload all of their produce, making for an efficient business model. It's an advantage for customers because they get food at very affordable prices. The farmers market allows farmers to meet their customers in person, to meet potential clients like chefs. It's a fun experience for customers, although the prices are usually higher because the farmers don't know which products customers will buy.



## Tying It All Together: Quotes from American Meat (Answer Key)

Directions: Consider the following quotes from *American Meat*, then answer the questions that follow.



"I think farming, quote honestly, brings us closer to God than any other vocation there is out there because you get to see the wonder of His creation every day. Do we love our pigs? Yes, we love our pigs. But do we understand what God created them for? Absolutely, they're meant to be food. They're meant to sustain us."

--Chuck Wirtz, hog farmer, West Bend, Iowa (left)

"It's gratifying to me to know that I'm helping feed the world. That might seem simple-minded, but it does fill a void in my life. I'm helping feed people that, if it weren't for people like me, you and everybody else would be hungry."

--Sam Talley, chicken farmer, Siler City, North Carolina

"In terms of my passion, it's the farm. I want to be on the farm every day. I love being around the animals. The "Aha!" moment for me getting into farming was the idea of how much we consume that is processed and the effect of that processing on our health. We [on the farm] know exactly what goes into everything that we raise, and therefore we can feel completely confident in what we're eating. Deep-rooted in all of us is this desire to get back to what we know is being healthy and what we know is right for the community. I think eventually when I leave Wall Street, I won't miss anything."

--Jon McConaughy, Double Brook Farm, Hopewell, New Jersey (former Wall Street financier)

"If you could get paid a nice wage for working with your hands, something that was healing, if you look back at the end of the day and say, 'I really accomplished this,' clean air, sunshine...It doesn't get much better than this. Would you give up your globalist-agenda, Dilbert cubicle job?"

--Joel Salatin, Polyface Farms, Swoope, Virginia (right)



1) What are benefits of going into production agriculture for a career?

- Working outside, good for health
- Working with family
- Free food
- Get to be your own boss

2) What are the challenges or disadvantages of going into production agriculture for a career?

- No health care
- Low financial income
- Hard physical labor
- Land and equipment can be expensive

3) Would you consider going into production agriculture? Why or why not?

(Varies with each student)

4) If you are interested in production agriculture, which of the above quotes most clearly align with the reasons you are personally interested? Explain.

(Varies)