

## CHEAP FOOD ISN'T CHEAP

Walk into any grocery store, bulk/discount store or convenience store and what do you see? Big advertisements for cheap food. Go to family gatherings across America and most likely the table will be spread with large quantities of cheap eats. In nursery and elementary schools cheap snacks are offered at break time and cheap treats given as rewards for good behavior. Yes, most people are on a budget and everyone likes a bargain but is this food really cheap? What are the hidden costs?

If one is willing to look into it, one quickly learns that mass-produced food is not only low in cost but low in nutritional value and high in artificial ingredients that are toxic. Therefore, the first place to find the hidden costs is our own physical body. If not immediately, it will eventually start to cry. Cry for nourishment, for balanced weight, for more energy or to get rid of that darn cold that lingers for weeks. And, if its cries are not answered, it will probably cry some future day under the pain of diabetes, cancer, heart disease or another of the degenerative and terminal diseases now so common that hardly a family is spared. We are what we eat and if we don't eat well, we cannot *be well*. Yet, some people do not see a connection between food and health - lucky ones who can eat anything and never go to a doctor (yet). So lets turn to other hidden costs.

Economics. First is personal economics. – a dollar saved on food today may be doubly – or exponentially- spent at the doctor or pharmacist tomorrow. Luck doesn't last forever. Our local economies suffer when mass production lowers prices to the point of driving local farmers, food producers, and storekeepers out of business. Nationally, government subsidies of water and agricultural price supports sustain big business at the expense of people and the environment overriding market forces that might otherwise reflect a more true cost of food. <sup>1</sup> Internationally, while the “bread basket” of America has rescued many in times of disaster, corporate agricultural and economic practices that may bring prosperity, to some in the short run, have brought social, economic and environmental devastation in the long run.

Earth, our home, the environment. Who will pay for the raping of the land by abuse and overuse? Who will pay for pollution of soil, water and air by chemical fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides? How can we possibly even imagine how to make up for the damage done by destroying or deforming insect, plant and animal life? Farmers in the Midwest and Florida have personally told me of farmland there barren of insect and animal life.

There are social costs: Farmers driven off the land- driven out of their role as stewards of the land pushed into serious financial distress and psychological depression; children of farmers unwilling to carry on as they see their parents struggle. All of our children disconnected from plants and animals - the source of their food and life. Animals raised in factory style that is a shame to our conscience and a disgrace for our nation. What will we do when we or our children feel a driving need to reconnect with the land and life but real farms, and real food are nowhere to be found?

*Only after the Last Tree has been cut down  
Only after the Last River has been poisoned  
Only after the Last Fish has been caught  
Only then will you find that money cannot be eaten.*

-- Cree Indian Prophecy

If we are not touched by health, economics or the environment perhaps a spiritual chord may be struck. \*\*\*\*\* part 2 here

Who among us could create such a masterpiece as a human being? It cannot be denied that our bodies are creations or gifts from an intelligence far beyond anything we can ever imagine. Religious traditions around the globe speak uniformly about caring for and respecting the human body; teachings of the Perennial Truth help us realize that having a human birth is a precious gift. How does this relate to food? Pure food renders purity in heart, mind and soul. Indigestion brings irritability. Toxins bring weakness, inability to carry out ones duty. The fear or pain of an animal at slaughter transfers to the one who eats. Perhaps Rudolf Steiner tells us best. When asked why the spiritual impulse for which one receives schooling and guidance and puts forth great effort is so difficult to manifest, the thought provoking answer was: “This is a problem of nutrition”.<sup>2</sup>

## WHAT IS CHEAP FOOD?

Cheap food is not only low cost but low on quality and taste. If packaged (has a shelf life) it is denatured and probably pumped with chemicals for preservation and to attempt to put some nutrition back into it. It is likely high on sugar, oil and salt in attempt to put some taste back in too. If fresh it is likely endowed with chemicals at every step of the way from seed to soil (or feed/injections if an animal) to transport to storage to store display. Perhaps it is irradiated. Even with all these inputs, it is still cheaper than naturally grown produce or farmed livestock because of mass production, price supports, shelf life, etc. That is it has a lower price tag at the store but not in the big picture as we can see.

Why are we so attracted – attached - to cheap food?

Many, many times in my efforts to promote good food a person will express concern over the sometimes higher prices and in the next breath tells of a vacation planned or recent purchase as they walk to their \$25,000 SUV! We may have new cars, well furnished homes, computers, clothes, vacations, etc but complain about a \$1 Biodynamic apple! Yet, that apple is going into a precious human body and the dollar compensates one who cares for the land, and sustains neighbors in the local economy.

It isn't that we sit around planning how to damage our bodies, minds, souls, soil, water, animal life, the livelihood of farmers who care about quality and the land and the economies of other countries. But our lack of awareness and lack of willingness to do what it takes does have that effect. I understand completely. I grew up in a bargain loving family with remnants of Depression era thinking on both sides. We always bought the cheapest of whatever options there were and sometimes drove across town to get it! If it was a really good bargain, we bought two! Regardless of what we spent, we boasted of how much we saved! When times changed and more money was available this bargain mentality stuck.

It can be very difficult to confront one's priorities on what the price of things should be and how to spend one's money. But it is a task we must embrace for the hidden costs are revealing themselves and the stakes are high. Global Warming. Barren Land. Terrorism and its equivalent War. Cancer and other chronic, degenerative, terminal disease. Endangered species. You probably don't need to be reminded, that all of this is ALREADY HAPPENING!

### Part 3

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Finally, the question must be asked: What would happen if everyone on the planet suddenly realized that cheap food isn't cheap and decided to buy and eat only high quality food that honored and respected oneself, the grower, and the land and all its elements? At first, we could imagine chaos to the point of starvation but that would never happen - nothing happens overnight. Instead, priorities would gradually change replacing existing "let the buyer beware" practices with sustainable ones. Consumers would learn to eat wholesome, health-giving food. The market would balance out and our budgets would balance out too. We would honor quality food. We would honor our bodies, our health, our land, our animals, our air and water, our children's future. We would have a more peaceful world because good food provides peace not only to our own body, mind and soul but to the world around us.

#### WE CAN'T AFFORD TO EAT CHEAP ANYMORE.

It took me many years of consciousness raising and more years of mental reprogramming to change my attitude towards the price of food. I still cringe at \$3/lb tomatoes and pass by items I deem too expensive preferring to wait or just not eat them. But I have better ways to control spending while buying quality food. Choosing food in season, buying bulk when possible, exchanging service for discounts at a coop, joining a CSA, avoiding packaged food, limiting eating out. And here's an interesting one: Eat Less – and this is not a sacrifice! High quality food tastes far better and nourishes much more so it is more appreciated by my body. I'm not hungry between meals, and I eat smaller meals! Second, chewing thoroughly means assimilating more and needing less. I now prepare a small plate, chew long and carefully, and finish about when everyone else is done; I used to fill the plate higher, go back for seconds and then leave the table before everyone else to prevent myself from getting thirds – and indigestion! Now my body AND my budget are more peaceful. Although it is a drop in the ocean our food choices are making a contribution to world peace.

*We can't afford to eat cheap anymore.*

Another suggestion: Visit a Sattwic Organic or Biodynamic farm (or our website). Once you see what's involved. You may offer the farmer even more than the asking price!

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1. See John Robbins book or video: Diet for a New America, Stillpoint Publishing, Box 640 Meetinghouse Road, Walpole, NH 03608, 1987. Other sources for this information abound on the internet and through food organizations.

2. Agriculture, Rudolf Steiner; Bio-Dynamic Agricultural Association, Rudolf Steiner House, 35 Park Road, London, N.W. 1; 1974 (first printing 1958)