

Johnson's Backyard Garden
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An update on the farm purchase...we received the appraisal yesterday and the property appraised for the purchase price. It looks like we will be trying to close the second week in June. We are keeping our fingers crossed!

On Thursday I went to Bookpeople for a book signing by Michael Pollan. He was promoting his new book, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. He gave an interesting discussion on the food chain as well as perspective on national agricultural policies. Below is an excerpt of a review of his book published by the Washington Post.

In *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Michael Pollan writes about how our food is grown -- what it is, in fact, that we are eating. The book is really three in one: The first section discusses industrial farming; the second, organic food, both as big business and on a relatively small farm; and the third, what it is like to hunt and gather food for oneself. And each section culminates in a meal -- a cheeseburger and fries from McDonald's; roast chicken, vegetables and a salad from Whole Foods; and grilled chicken, corn and a chocolate soufflé (made with fresh eggs) from a sustainable farm; and, finally, mushrooms and pork, foraged from the wild.

The first section is a wake-up call for anyone who has ever been hungry. In the United States, Pollan makes clear, we're mostly fed by two things: corn and oil. We may not sit down to bowls of yummy petroleum, but almost everything we eat has used enormous amounts of fossil fuels to get to our tables. Oil products are part of the fertilizers that feed plants, the pesticides that keep insects away from them, the fuels used by the trains and trucks that transport them across the country, and the packaging in which they're wrapped. We're addicted to oil, and we really like to eat.

Oil underlines Pollan's story about agribusiness, but corn is its focus. American cattle fatten on corn. Corn also feeds poultry, pigs and sheep, even farmed fish. But that's just the beginning. In addition to dairy products from corn-fed cows and eggs from corn-fed chickens, corn starch, corn oil and corn syrup make up key ingredients in prepared foods. High-fructose corn syrup sweetens everything from juice to toothpaste. Even the alcohol in beer is corn-based. Corn is in everything from frozen yogurt to ketchup, from mayonnaise and mustard to hot dogs and bologna, from salad dressings to vitamin pills. "Tell me what you eat," said the French gastronome Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, "and I will tell you what you are." We're corn.

Each bushel of industrial corn grown, Pollan notes, uses the equivalent of up to a third of a gallon of oil. Some of the oil products evaporate and acidify rain; some seep into the water table; some wash into rivers, affecting drinking water and poisoning marine ecosystems. The industrial logic also means vast farms that grow only corn. When the price of corn drops, the solution, the farmer hopes, is to plant more corn for next year. The paradoxical result? While farmers earn less, there's an over-supply of cheap corn, and that means finding ever more ways to use it up.....

We've lost touch with the natural loops of farming, in which livestock and crops are connected in mutually beneficial circles. Pollan discusses the alternatives to industrial farming, but these two long (and occasionally self-indulgent) sections lack the focus and intensity -- the anger beneath the surface -- of the first. He spends a week at Joel Salatin's Polyface Farm in the Shenandoah Valley, a farm that works with nature, rather than despite it. Salatin calls himself a grass farmer, though his farm produces cows, chickens, eggs and corn. But everything begins with the grass: The cows nibble at it at the precise moment when it's at its sweetest and are moved from pasture to pasture to keep the grass at its best height. Their droppings fertilize the grass, and the cycle is under way. There's a kind of lyrical symmetry to everything that happens on this farm. Even the final slaughtering of chickens is done quickly and humanely, in the open air. It isn't pleasant, but compared to the way cattle are fattened and slaughtered in meat industry feedlots and slaughterhouses, it is remarkably reasonable.....

This week in the vegetable box.

Shallots that I had to pull early....use like green onion
Baby butterhead
Basil
Squash
Zucchini
Tomatoes
Eggplant



Matt Pelkey (left) and Brent Johnson (right)

Parsley
Peppers
Cherry Tomatoes
Potatoes
Green Beans
Cucumber