



In The News:

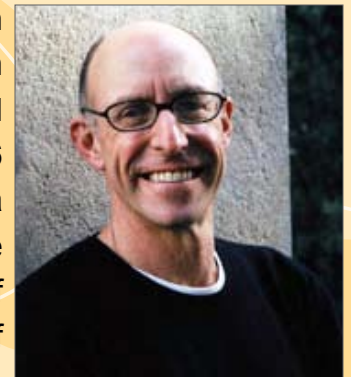
From Michael Pollan's article

by Farmer and Chief, New York Times

After cars, the food system uses more fossil fuel than any other sector of the economy — 19 percent. And while the experts disagree about the exact amount, the way we feed ourselves contributes more greenhouse gases to the atmosphere than anything else we do — as much as 37 percent, according to one study. Whenever farmers clear land for crops and till the soil, large quantities of carbon are released into the air. But the 20th-century industrialization of agriculture has increased the amount of greenhouse gases emitted by the food system by an order of magnitude; chemical fertilizers (made from natural gas), pesticides (made from petroleum), farm machinery, modern food processing and packaging and transportation have together transformed a system that in 1940 produced 2.3 calories of food energy for every calorie of fossil-fuel energy it used into one that now takes 10 calories of fossil-fuel energy to produce a single calorie of modern supermarket food. Put another way, when we eat from the industrial-food system, we are eating oil and spewing greenhouse gases. This state of affairs appears all the more absurd when you recall that every calorie we eat is ultimately the product of photosynthesis — a process based on making food energy from sunshine. There is hope and possibility in that simple fact.

In addition to the problems of climate change and America's oil addiction, you have spoken at length on the campaign trail of the health

care crisis. Spending on health care has risen from 5 percent of national income in 1960 to 16 percent today, putting a significant drag on the economy. The goal of ensuring the health of all Americans depends



on getting those costs under control. There are several reasons health care has gotten so expensive, but one of the biggest, and perhaps most tractable, is the cost to the system of preventable chronic diseases. Four of the top 10 killers in America today are chronic diseases linked to diet: heart disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes and cancer. It is no coincidence that in the years national spending on health care went from 5 percent to 16 percent of national income, spending on food has fallen by a comparable amount — from 18 percent of household income to less than 10 percent. While the surfeit of cheap calories that the U.S. food system has produced since the late 1970s may have taken food prices off the political agenda, this has come at a steep cost to public health. You cannot expect to reform the health care system, much less expand coverage, without confronting the public-health catastrophe that is the modern American diet.