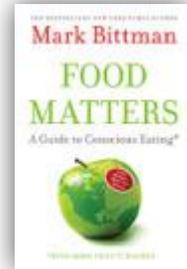




Food Matters: A Guide to Conscience Eating **by Mark Bittman**

In *Food Matters: A Guide to Conscience Eating*, Mark Bittman, the bestselling author of *How to Cook Everything* and *How to Cook Everything Vegetarian* proposes a plan to help everyday Americans eat responsibly. *Food Matters* “calls attention to the way government policy, big business marketing and global economics influence what we put on our tables. With more than 75 recipes that are as good for the planet as they are for your weight and your health.”



Discussion Questions

1. In *Food Matters*, Mark Bittman suggests that by making small, relatively easy changes to our diet, we can improve our personal, economic and environmental health. Do you agree? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. On page 68, Bittman states, “Here’s the summary: Eat less meat, and fewer animal products in general... Eat fewer refined carbohydrates... and junk food... Eat far more vegetables, legumes, fruits, and whole grains.” Is this lifestyle change realistic for you? For the average North American? Are some suggestions more practical than others? Why?
3. Do you agree that Bittman’s thesis (as stated in Question 1) creates a healthier and more sustainable world? If so, how? If not, why not?
4. Is changing our eating habits the best way to improve our health and/or environment? If not, what alternatives are available?
5. What is the relationship between *Food Matters* and other contemporary food-conscience arguments (e.g. Michael Pollan’s *Omnivores Dilemma* or Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Eating Animals*)?
6. Many of us are accustomed to eating meat on special occasions, especially during Jewish holidays. While Bittman’s argument doesn’t rule out this custom, he does challenge us to rethink our food choices. Would rethinking the food we serve *change* the festival celebration? Would *your* family or synagogue choose non-meat alternatives?
7. Genesis 1:29-30 states, “And God said, ‘Look, I have given you all the seed-bearing plants on the face of the earth, and every tree that has in its seed-bearing fruit – these are yours to eat. And to every land animal, and to every bird in the sky, and to all that creeps on the earth in which there is the breath of life, I [give] all green vegetation for food.’” How does Bittman’s argument relate to this Biblical passage? Does it support or contradict it?
8. Over half the book consists of recipes. In what ways do the recipes further Bittman’s thesis?
9. Does *Food Matters* inspire you to change your behavior? If so, how? If not, why not?

TAKE ACTION!

- **Incorporate dialogue into your Holiday celebration:** From Tu B'Shevat Seders to Sukkot, you can integrate readings, recipes or discussions about ethical and healthy consumption into your celebration.
- **Preach what you practice!** Share information about ethical and healthy consumption in congregational sermons, newsletters, etc. Encourage others to submit articles and share recipes.
- **Learn about the history of Biblical eating and *kashrut*:** Structure a class, text study or discussion on the evolution of *kashrut*. Examine how healthy and socially responsible eating relates to *kashrut*.
- **Revisit your synagogue food policy:** Revisit your synagogue's food guidelines. Do these rules take ethical consumption into account?
- **Start a Consumer Supported Agriculture project:** www.urj.org/food
- **Join an eating *Chavurah*:** Form a group within the congregation to share recipe and meals
- **Plant a community garden:** Grow food to share amongst members or with a local food bank.
- **Volunteer at a Local Food Shelter:** In addition to helping serve food, consider working with your local shelter to develop healthier menus for guests.
- **Improve school lunches and child nutrition:** Encourage schools to develop healthier menus and advocate for improved Child Nutrition programs on the national level in the U.S. and Canada. Develop materials for classroom use or for extracurricular activities
- **Collect food:** Instead of the traditional canned food drive, collect natural, less processed foods.
- **Host a "local" cooking class:** Invite a local chef or congregant to lead a cooking class using local, less processed and/or fresh ingredients (e.g. holiday side dishes or whole wheat challah).

Additional Resources

- **Religious Action Center's Advocacy Center:** www.rac.org/advocacy/lac
- **Just Table, Green Table:** www.urj.org/food
URJ's Initiative to promote ethical eating - curriculum, Webinars and our "Food Talk" email listserv!
- **Greening Reform Judaism:** www.urj.org/green
Materials to help you green synagogues and homes.
- **Hazon & The Jew and the Carrot blog:** www.hazon.org & www.jcarrot.org
New Jewish Food Movement Blog with a focus on health and sustainability
- **COEJL:** www.coejl.org
Jewish environmental organization providing news, program resources and advocacy resources.
- **Films:** *Food, Inc.*, *Fast Food Nation*, *No Impact Man*, *King Corn*

Topical Books

Interested in reading more? Try these:

Jewish Eating, David Kraemer

The Omnivore's Dilemma, In Defense of Food or Food Rules, Michael Pollan

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle, Barbara Kingsolver

Eating Animals, Jonathan Safran Foer

Just Food, James E. McWilliams