

Friday 6<sup>th</sup> July:

*Before you eat*

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I only think about food constantly when I'm awake; occasionally I'm not dreaming about it when asleep. Food is at the centre of our lives constantly, a social as well as a physical staple. And yet, we in the developed world are further from the production of food than we have ever been before. The chain from farm to plate is now fantastically long and increasingly invisible to individual consumers, many of whom even do precious little cooking these days.

As a teacher of literature I particularly notice how a whole body of metaphorical reference to farming means nothing real to 'the youth of today'. People who blithely talk about something being 'a hard road to hoe' clearly have no idea what a hoe is for, or that seeds go in a row that is best dug in friable soil rather than bitumen.

My point is that the food chain is attenuated and we consumers don't know much about what we are putting in our mouths. In particular, we could afford to know more about any or all of:

- The risks to health (real as opposed to imagined) from chemical inputs in the food chain;
- The costs and benefits to individual health of highly processed foods;
- 'Food miles' – the costs (nutritional as well as environmental) of having everything in season all the time;
- The further dietary implications of affluence that mean most people in the developed world can eat what would once have been luxury foodstuffs most of the time;
- The alleged 'obesity epidemic' and what we can do about it;
- The other risks of industrial-strength agriculture.

What are the desirable alternatives to the way we eat now?