

## Corn farmers say Food Inc. shouldn't win Oscar

Farmers vs. Hollywood: Corn farmers launch online campaign against Food Inc. Oscar nomination

 Associated Press

Mary Clare Jalonick, Associated Press Writer, On Thursday March 4, 2010, 4:31 pm EST

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The corn industry is lashing out at an Oscar-nominated documentary that has grossed out grocery shoppers, saying the film is unfair to many of the nation's farmers and shouldn't win.

"Food Inc.," which was nominated for best documentary, has captured audiences with its behind-the-scenes look at the food industry, bringing cameras into feedlots, slaughterhouses and chicken farms used by corporate agriculture, describing stomach-turning practices in an effort to encourage consumers to buy locally grown and organic foods that aren't mass produced.

The corn industry, one of several food industries attacked in the film, is fighting back. Though the official voting for Sunday's Academy Awards is over, the National Corn Growers Association, the industry's largest trade group, is encouraging corn farmers to get the word out in the media and on social networking sites like Facebook to rebut the documentary in the final days before the Oscars.

"If we don't shoot down their arguments with credible and truthful information, our reputation as America's farmers will suffer significantly," reads an alert sent to member farmers this week.

The movie taps into a growing social movement critical of the nation's industrial food system. The film features Michael Pollan, author of "The Omnivore's Dilemma," and Eric Schlosser, author of "Fast Food Nation." Both books are credited with galvanizing opposition to industrial agriculture.

Darrin Ihnen, a corn grower from Hurley, S.D., and president of the corn group, says the movie makes him mad because it ignores many of the good things about America's larger farms, including the environmentally friendly practices some use, as well as efforts to feed the world's hungry.

"Because we have an abundant supply, America has the world's most affordable food, and that's due in large part to the practices attacked in this film," he said.

The documentary looks at the chemicals used to fatten up chickens and cattle, criticizes genetically engineered crops and links practices at livestock operations to deaths from E. coli poisoning. The widespread use of corn also is blamed for the country's obesity epidemic and high rates of diabetes.

But the movie isn't all negative, chronicling the increase in production of organic foods and the willingness of companies such as Wal-Mart to sell them.

The film's producer and director, Robert Kenner, says he tried to get the farming industry involved when he was making the film, but most declined to talk. He says he has been surprised at the response to it and the debate it has created -- he says said the food industry at first ignored the film, but companies have protested more loudly as the film has gained

attention.

"They are realizing their consumers are concerned," he said. "These are complicated issues and we don't mean to offer the solutions to these problems, totally, but we do mean to create a conversation about them."

James McWilliams, a professor at Texas State University and author of "Just Food: Where Locavores Get It Wrong and How We Can Truly Eat Responsibly," says he thinks the film is justified in attacking the corn industry and highlighting the overabundance of corn-based products in the American diet. Nevertheless, he says it may not give farmers a fair shake.

"Millions of conventional farmers who care about the environment and work to lessen their carbon footprint have good reason to feel threatened by the film's aggressive message that all industrial agriculture is inherently evil," he said.

Dan Glickman, former secretary of agriculture under President Bill Clinton and current chairman of the Motion Picture Association of America, says the film is a welcome addition to the debate over so-called production agriculture, but called it "a piece of advocacy work" that is not always objective.

"I think production agriculture, the corn growers, have a good story to tell, and a lot of times I don't think they have engaged in the debate," he said. "The more they protest, the more people will want to go see the movie."

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