



Brighter Green

## WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

## VIEWING GUIDE

Until relatively recently in human history, regular consumption of meat generally was limited to a society's elite. But vast changes in agricultural practices in industrial countries, including the use of large, confined, factory-like facilities that house thousands of animals, have made meat, dairy products, and eggs much more widely available and affordable. Eating meat now often represents prosperity, independence, or modernity in a globalizing world where Western-style consumption patterns have set an international standard.<sup>1</sup>

Meat is now central to billions of people's daily meals. However, the environmental, climate, public health, ethical, and human impacts of this consequence of globalization are enormous and remain largely undocumented. China, the world's most populous nation with about 1.3 billion people, is now the world's largest producer—and consumer—of agricultural products.<sup>2</sup> China has one of the world's biggest livestock populations, and its overall meat consumption is now twice that of the U.S.<sup>3</sup>

WHAT'S FOR DINNER? explores this terrain in fast-globalizing China through the eyes of a retired pig farmer in rural Jiangxi province, a vegan restaurateur in Beijing, a young livestock entrepreneur, and residents of Guangdong, a province with many manufacturing facilities that is contending with water polluted by wastes from pig farms. These figures personalize the vast trends around them. Given that every fifth person in the world is Chinese, what the Chinese eat and how China produces its food affect not only China, but the world, too.

This viewing guide is divided into two sections. The first section, to be read before viewing the documentary, includes background information and questions to keep in mind while watching. The second section, which will be most helpful in guiding discussions post-viewing, includes an overview of the film's major themes, questions for discussion, details about the filmmaking process, and a list of further resources.

This viewing guide may be most useful for an adult audience, including college or graduate students, social clubs, library groups, and community organizations. Brighter Green's policy papers on the globalization of industrialized agriculture provide a supplement to the film and this viewing guide, particularly *Skillful Means: The Challenges of China's Encounter with Factory Farming*. Links to this resource and others are included at the end of this guide.

### HOW TO VIEW OR ORGANIZE A SCREENING OF WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

To purchase the film in North America, please contact our distributor Icarus Films:

[mail@icarusfilms.com](mailto:mail@icarusfilms.com)

+1 718-488-8900

<http://www.icarusfilms.com>

For purchases or screenings outside of North America please contact Brighter Green at [wfd@brightergreen.org](mailto:wfd@brightergreen.org).

## BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- **Meat supply and consumption in China:** More than 30 million Chinese died during a nationwide famine from 1959 to 1961. During this period, hunger was common and meat was very hard to come by. Within this context, as well as historically limited access to meat, one hypothesis is that the Chinese are eating more meat now in response to years of scarcity. This poses challenges for the government to maintain a sufficient supply to satisfy the growing demand.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the industrialization of the Chinese agricultural system runs deeper than economics and demographics; it is also part of a global trend.
- **Industrialized agriculture around the globe:** The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) predicts that total world consumption of meat will increase to 300 million metric tons per year by 2015, with 40% of production then located in Asia, mainly China.<sup>5</sup> To meet demand, the industrialization of agriculture is likely to continue, driving small farmers around the world out of business, threatening the health of the planet, and increasing the number of animals being raised on inhumane, unsanitary factory farms. As climate change intensifies and the competition for resources increases, it will be the world's people living in poverty or without many material assets who are most impacted by the ongoing progression from small farms to large-scale production.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHILE VIEWING WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

1. What themes, problems, and conflicts are presented in this film? Does the film describe any potential solutions to these problems and conflicts?
2. From what perspective or point of view is this documentary speaking? How does this perspective resonate with your own personal perspective or knowledge?
3. Who are the key voices in the film? Why were these individuals chosen to tell their stories? How is each one unique?
4. What emotions are evoked while watching this documentary? Consider your state of mind at the beginning of the film, then again at the end.



Pedestrian street in central Ji'an, Jiangxi province

## AFTER WATCHING THE FILM

### EXPANDING ON MAJOR THEMES

- **China's adoption of Western, meat-intensive diets:** In the past, most Chinese ate very little meat and used it as more of a condiment than a main course. Now, the Chinese are eating more meat, more often. This phenomenon has huge consequences for public health, equity, the environment, and animals.
- **Public health:** Increased meat consumption, along with rising intake of oil, fats, and sugars and more sedentary lifestyles, has resulted in higher rates of obesity, diabetes, and cancer, in China and around the globe. In China, 90 million people (more than in any other country) have diabetes, and an additional 150 million show early symptoms of the disease.<sup>6</sup> Both the World Health Organization (WHO) and the FAO have acknowledged a connection between intake of animal fats and obesity, cardiovascular disease, and certain cancers.<sup>7</sup> Food safety is also an important concern. As shown in the film, chemical additives in animal feed can cause illness after the meat is consumed by humans.
- **Equity:** The industrialization of agriculture has huge implications for the concentration of land ownership, creating inequalities of access and power. Smaller-scale farmers are unable to compete in a market that favors factory farms due to government policies, rural labor shortages, the rapid development of farmland, and increasing market consolidation.<sup>8</sup> As in the U.S., the vertical integration of agriculture is also increasing, with major corporations controlling most if not all aspects of the supply chain, from the farm facilities themselves to feed companies and slaughterhouses.

- **Environment:** China is home to approximately 20% of the world's population, emits about 17.3% of global greenhouse gases, and has surpassed the U.S. to become the world's leading emitter of carbon dioxide.<sup>9</sup> These emissions are bound to grow as the number of livestock in China increases. In addition to its contribution to global climate change, China's industrialized agriculture is polluting its land and water resources. The waste from factory farms, many of which are situated near bodies of water, is contaminating both ground and surface water, as well as soil.<sup>10</sup> Growing livestock numbers also increase pressure on natural resources, while raising issues of food security as more grain and soybeans are fed to farmed animals.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can populations in both developing and industrialized nations benefit from the information presented in this film? In what ways?
2. What specific problems do developing countries face in light of current trends toward increased consumption of animal products (particularly given the widespread ecological damage caused by industrial animal agriculture)?
3. Is it possible to "move backwards" from an industrialized, large-scale, agricultural system to farming systems based on operations and sustainability at local, regional, national, and global scales? What would this mean for farmers' livelihoods, food security and safety, the environment, farmed animals, and human health?
4. How might the continuing global increase in meat consumption impact public health expenditures in the developing world?
5. How might the continuing global increase in meat consumption impact the treatment of farmed animals in both the developing and developed worlds?
6. How can an individual—in China, the U.S., or another part of the world—take action to influence agricultural production and improve a system that is damaging the health of humans, animals, and the planet?
7. Do you think that vegetarianism or veganism might be adequate responses to the challenges laid out in the film? Why or why not? What additional actions or responses might be required?

## MAKING OF THE FILM

### ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

**WHAT'S FOR DINNER?** is directed by award-winning filmmaker Jian Yi, who led an all Chinese crew that included assistant director Eva Song, producer Douglas Xiao, and cinematographer Pan Kewu. Jian Yi is an independent filmmaker and cultural activist working on topics related to religion, education, environmental conservation, globalization, history, and other cultural issues. He founded ARTISIMPLE Studio in 2005 and launched IFChina Original Studio, through which he works on collecting social memories with long-time collaborator Douglas Xiao. Jian taught at Communications University of China for five years and was a Yale World Fellow, an Open Society Institute Fellow, an Asian Cultural Council grantee, and an India-China Fellow.



Cinematographer Pan Kewu (left) and Jian Yi (middle) shooting in Guangdong province

### EXCERPTS FROM JIAN YI'S DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"The most immediate impact the process of making **WHAT'S FOR DINNER?** had on me was the sheer cruelty of the environment that pigs or other animals are raised in and slaughtered. One of the scenes that I remember most was being in an empty slaughterhouse. It's like being in a place where you execute a person. You don't need to hear all those sounds of the process; your imagination just pulls on you. It's really scary to be in that kind of cold environment.

"...I feel privileged to have made such a film. We all know that China has become the world's second largest economy and its economic and political muscle is growing. Due to its sheer scale and impressive growth rate, my country is at the center of many environmental issues as well. There is only this one planet for us all, and there should be no bargaining or negotiation about what we can afford to happen. I think it is important that we Chinese think of our own actions and responsibilities."

## RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

**WHAT'S FOR DINNER? film website** - Information about the film, including how to purchase and organize a screening.

<http://www.wfdinner.com> (English)

<http://www.wfdinner.com/主页> (Chinese)

**WHAT'S FOR DINNER? on Icarus Films' website** - For inquiries regarding purchases or screenings in North America.

<http://www.icarusfilms.com/new2014/wfd.html>

**WHAT'S FOR DINNER? on IMDB** -

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1813749>

***Skillful Means: The Challenges of China's Encounter with Factory Farming*** - Brighter Green's full-length policy paper complemented by a two-page policy brief that asks whether China will be able to match the meat and dairy consumption of the U.S. given the realities of the industrial production model.

<http://www.brightergreen.org/china> (in Chinese and English)

**China's Meat Consumption** - Brighter Green's four-minute video, summarizing the contents of *Skillful Means*.

[http://youtu.be/MJs\\_FyFQX4I](http://youtu.be/MJs_FyFQX4I) (English)

[http://v.youku.com/v\\_show/id\\_XNzI2MDY0OTY0.html](http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XNzI2MDY0OTY0.html) (Chinese)

**Brighter Green country case studies** - Brighter Green's policy documents and short videos on climate change and the industrialization of animal agriculture in India, Ethiopia, and Brazil:

<http://www.brightergreen.org/globalization>

**Trailers for Jian Yi's other films** -

<http://www.youtube.com/artisimple>

***Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options*** - United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report assessing the impacts of the livestock sector on the environment.

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/a0701e/a0701e00.htm>

## SUGGESTED COMPLEMENTARY FILMS FOR A MULTI-FILM SCREENING

Since **WHAT'S FOR DINNER?** is a relatively short documentary film (approximately 29 minutes in length), screening organizers may wish to show more than one film or video in a session, class, or series. We recommend the following films and videos that explore different aspects of the industrial food system, climate change, and sustainable food consumption and production:

**Fresh** (72 minutes)

<http://www.freshthemovie.com>

**The Meatrix** (4 minutes)

<http://www.themeatrix.com>

**Our Daily Bread: The Hidden Power of Food** (92 minutes)

<http://ourdailybreadmovie.com>

**Pig Business** (73 minutes)

[http://www.pigbusiness.co.uk/the\\_film](http://www.pigbusiness.co.uk/the_film)

**Vegucated** (77 minutes)

<http://www.getvegucated.com>

*Brighter Green is not responsible for the content of or views expressed in these films. Before hosting a public screening of any of these films, please contact the respective rights-holders.*



**Brighter Green** is a New York-based public policy action tank that aims to raise awareness and encourage dialogue on and attention to issues that span the environment, animals, and sustainable development both globally and locally. On its own and in partnership with other organizations and individuals, Brighter Green generates and incubates research and project initiatives that are both visionary and practical. It produces publications, websites, documentary films, and implements programs to illuminate public debate among policy-makers, activists, communities, influential leaders, and the media, with the goal of social transformation at local and international levels. Brighter Green works in the United States and internationally, with a focus on the countries of the global South.

## Notes

- 1 MacDonal, Mia. "Food Security and Equity in a Climate-Constrained World." Chapter 14. State of the World 2012: Moving Toward Sustainable Prosperity. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2012, 161-168.
- 2 Lohmar, Bryan and Fred Gale. "Who Will China Feed?" Amber Waves, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA), Economic Research Service, June 2008.
- 3 Larsen, Janet. "Meat Consumption in China Now Double That in the United States," Earth Policy Institute, February 21, 2013.
- 4 Personal communication, Professor Peter Li, University of Houston, Texas, May 2008.
- 5 Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options. Rome: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2006.
- 6 "China Faces 'Diabetes Epidemic', Research Suggests," BBC News Online, March 25, 2010.
- 7 World Health Organization and United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, Diet, Nutrition, and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases: Report of a Joint WHO/FAO Expert Consultation, 2003.
- 8 Personal communication, Professor Peter Li, op. cit.
- 9 "China Contributing Two-thirds to Increase in CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions," Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency press release, June 13, 2008.
- 10 Livestock's Long Shadow, op. cit.