



Unsavory Truth: How Food Companies Skew the Science of What We Eat

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America's leading nutritionist exposes how the food industry corrupts scientific research for profit

Is chocolate heart-healthy? Does yogurt prevent type 2 diabetes? Do pomegranates help cheat death? News accounts bombard us with such amazing claims, report them as science, and influence what we eat. Yet, as Marion Nestle explains, these studies are more about marketing than science; they are often paid for by companies that sell those foods. Whether it's a Coca-Cola-backed study hailing light exercise as a calorie neutralizer, or blueberry-sponsored investigators proclaiming that this fruit prevents erectile dysfunction, every corner of the food industry knows how to turn conflicted research into big profit. As Nestle argues, it's time to put public health first. Written with unmatched rigor and insight, *Unsavoury Truth* reveals how the food industry manipulates nutrition science--and suggests what we can do about it.

Unsavoury Truth: How Food Companies Skew the Science of What We Eat Details

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From Reader Review Unsavory Truth: How Food Companies Skew the Science of What We Eat for online ebook

Jess Macallan says

The latest book from Marion Nestle is a fascinating look at the world of nutrition science, how the food industry is involved, and the complicated ethical considerations. Most readers won't be surprised to learn that food companies play a huge role in nutrition science, but they'll likely be shocked at how widespread and entrenched these companies are in all facets of research, funding, policy making, and more. The reason is on both sides is obvious--financial incentive. Funding for research isn't easy to come by, and companies need research and experts to lend credence to the efficacy of their products.

Ms. Nestle provides evidence to show studies tend to yield conclusions that favor the sponsor's interests, and she makes an interesting distinction that consumers should be aware of--the studies that prove a foregone conclusion are marketing research, not nutrition science. Full disclosure of conflicts of interest is a good place to start, but is it enough?

Conflicts of interest can impact everything from nutrition organizations to medical journals to well-respected nutrition experts. If you've ever tried to research the pros/cons of certain nutrients, supplements, or diets, you likely found studies with opposing conclusions. How do consumers know who to trust? Ms. Nestle has a few ideas everyone can employ, starting with voting with your fork, questioning studies that seem too good to be true, contacting your congressional representatives about corporate influence on nutrition science, and more.

I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in nutrition, food policy, and the integrity of science as it relates to food.

I received an ARC in exchange for an honest review.

Rupinder Sayal says

A well-researched book on the consequences of food industry's funding of research, and how it influences our purchasing and eating decisions.

Lori Cox says

This is an in-depth look at how food corporation's "research" is really for marketing purposes. When the Maine Blueberry Board sponsors research to determine if blueberries are good for you, is it surprising when the outcome is a yes? Most marketing research turns out positive for the sponsored food item. Scientists may not be immune as they think to the positive link with being given a gift/money.

This book can be a dull read if not in the nutrition or food science fields. Ms. Nestle doesn't provide adequate solution to the problem. Both the government and the universities don't have the money to promote unbiased

scientific research. As a consumer, be leery when you read about the amazing benefits of chocolate, blueberries, avocados, coffee, etc. and enjoy a well balanced diet with all foods in moderation.

Bam says

*3-3.5 stars. A very well-researched, documented and presented discussion of how the food industry influences nutritional studies. It is perhaps geared more towards scientists, college professors, dietitians and nutritionists, meaning it's a tough read for someone like me, just a reader who is interested in healthy eating and trying to decipher what the latest studies mean.

Have you ever felt confused by food studies with conflicting advice? One study might say 'Limit what you eat of this!' and the next will say 'Eat all you want! You just need to exercise more!' Most of us throw up our hands and just eat what we want.

The reasons for these conflicting results could be because of just who funded the study. Follow the money. Shocking, right?

"Unsavory Truth is about the conflicts of interest induced by food industry interactions with nutrition professionals and the systemic effects of this conflict on public policy and public health."

"The real question here is how you--as a reader, eater, and citizen--can recognize and protect yourself against the onslaught of misleading information and advice that results from food-industry manipulation of nutrition research and practice."

"As citizens, we have the right to demand that government agencies dealing with food and nutrition matters put public health first."

And that last quote is the reason I think this book is an important read--to educate oneself about who influences research and studies and then analyze what we are being told. While reading this book, I heard a news report that the dairy association is concerned that children are drinking less milk in schools and they recommend that chocolate milk be provided again. Is this good for the children or good for the milk suppliers?

I received an arc of this book from the publisher via NetGalley for an honest review. I am grateful for the opportunity.

Quintin Zimmermann says

The aptly named Unsavory Truth is an exhaustive account of the pervasive influence of the food industry, more particularly their monetary largesse, upon nutritional science and research.

The simple truth in a nutshell (pun intended) is that there is no such thing as superfoods, sugar is bad and plants are good. Yet, the food industry spends millions of dollars telling us otherwise.

They have borrowed the same playbook that was first established by the tobacco companies, with strategies

of casting doubt on the science and promoting the virtues of self-regulation and personal responsibility.

For me personally, I have no issue with our freedom to choose the crap we put into our bodies, but don't, please don't lie to me and try to fool me into believing it's good for me. Set the truth as free as our own personal choices.

We are faced with the mutually exclusive aims of nutrition education versus the aims of the food industry. One seeks to promote public awareness of healthy food choices, whilst the other seeks promote food purchases for the most profitable outcome.

Marion Nestle is a wonderful, strong woman fighting the good fight, armed with the truth and not being shy to shine the light on falsehood. However, *Unsavory Truth*, as illuminating as it is, can be very dry and replete with organisational acronyms that span the alphabet. Yes, the devil is in the detail, but there is such a thing as too much detail.

Unsavory Truth is an unapologetic examination of the food industry, but it is a heavy read for the average reader.

Nina !! says

"*Unsavory Truth*" covers the growing problem of industry sponsorship in nutrition research. Every food company wants to claim that their product is a "miracle" or "superfood," but as Nestle argues, that is never the case. What goes on behind the scenes is food companies paying researchers -- university or independent - to examine the claims that their product will provide x benefit. The studies seem trustworthy enough, but if you read between the lines, you see the reciprocity principle, the pointed questions, and the more positive interpretations of the results in each of these reviews.

This book was eye-opening. I feel that I have had a healthy distrust for the claims food companies make in my teenage and adult life thus far, but a lot of topics that Nestle discussed had never occurred to me. I did not realize just how many ways food companies twisted results, or even premises, of studies in order to claim that their products are better than anything else out there.

Though the information provided was thoroughly researched and eye-opening, the style in which this book was written brought down my rating in the end. Firstly and most prominently, I felt that Nestle seemed to write herself in a circle, repeating the same arguments multiple times on different topics (such as symposiums, specific companies, and nutrition journal practices). To me, the book could have been half this length and still have contained the same volume of information, just by cutting out the same points Nestle made again and again.

Additionally, more than once I felt that Nestle was trying to jump into her own narrative and clear her own name, though no one was doubting it in the first place. I noticed she would mention the follies of other researchers in regard to industry support, but would often include a sentence about how she would not make the same mistakes, that she contributed industry-gifted money to her college's nutrition program, etc. It distracted from the story and felt unnecessary and even self-centered. A bit of personal background and practices may have been useful to contribute, but no one is accusing Nestle of anything, yet she seems to perceive it as so.

Overall, I give this book **2.5 stars**. I felt that it had strong evidence of food companies meddling in research and consumer opinion, but the writing style was weak and repetitive. In my opinion, what this book really needs is a tough editor to cut out all the "noise" and repetition and let the core of Nestle's argument shine the way she clearly intended it to.

Ramona Mead says

I got about 10% in, and found the content so unsettling that I don't want to continue. This is not the author's fault, it is very informative, well written, and well-researched. The level of corruption in the drug and food industries is more severe than I expected and I don't want those details right now.

Boz says

Recently, Netflix documentaries like "Rotten" and "What the Health" have exposed the shady practices of the food industry. In this new book, "Unsavory Truth", Marion Nestle (I'm assuming no relation with the company) exposes another shady side of the food industry.

The food business is exactly that: a business and companies need to make money and find ways to drum up interest in and necessity of their products. Attaching an endorsement from a nutritional professional or respected institution conducting nutrition and health-based studies adds validity to a product, can influence consumers, and even legislation. But if you look beneath the surface and see the companies that are sponsoring these studies, it should raise red flags for consumers.

"Unsavory Truth" looks at these sadly too common marketing practices, using case studies and examples to show how consumers can easily be manipulated by the food industry and not even know it. Just like we need to look into the type of associations politicians accept money from, this book might be able to make people look into the type of people who sponsor food studies and articles that claim that [insert food name] is the next superfood.

David Wineberg says

Conflict of Interest as a career

If you have followed Marion Nestle's books as I have, you will note not so much a progression, as a regression. They started with the nutritional value of foods in the body, worked their way back to manufacturing and chemicals, and now with Unsavory Truth, there is almost nothing about food at all - just money. It's as American as - individual apple pie in a cardboard sleeve.

The issue is the discipline of nutrition. It is decades behind other sciences in recognizing that money corrupts. They've only just begun arguing about it, as they are absolutely inundated with cash, gifts and samples to help sell pretend food. Just like doctors with pharmaceuticals. Nestle opens with the real foundation of the issue: the slightest gift influences the recipient. Those pens and umbrellas and freezer bags and coffee mugs, all serve to make the recipient feel indebted. They make them remember the donor's company when it is time to buy, recommend or prescribe. It works. Beautifully. Or they wouldn't do it.

The recipients whine and complain they aren't that gullible or stupid. But they are. Worse, medical practitioners claim they are actually entitled to the gifts because of all the hard work and expense they went through to get to where they are. So bring on the junkets, the conferences in resorts around the world and all

expenses paid plus honoraria. They earned it all! There's an entire chapter just on Coca-Cola's masterful efforts. She also includes a delightful cartoon – a bingo card one of her colleagues created, with a box for every moronic excuse why researchers can and should accept corporate money.

And it has been going on for so long, it is an accepted part of the culture. “The link between drug industry gifts and prescription practices is so firmly established that it is considered beyond debate,” she says. They live a career of conflict of interest. And so does nutrition.

Possibly the most important new bit of information in the book is what Nestle calls nutrifluff. Any study that claims one single food or additive improves health, prevents disease or provides all the nutrition you need – is nutrifluff. Those news releases come out all the time. Reporters take them at face value. But the world, nutrition, and science don't work that way. Taking one element out of context is a scientific absurdity. Similarly, there is no such thing as a “superfood”. Foods work in combination. They each contribute in their own way. Alone, they can't do the job. And none is endowed with special powers.

Companies are forever funding studies to prove their product performs exactly that way. Industry and foundations account for 70% of food-related research. NutraSweet funded 74 studies, all of which found it safe. In 94 other studies, 90% (84) questioned its safety. Since studies without corporate backing are becoming an endangered species, all studies should be read with a cynical eye. But they should actually be read, Nestle says, because the truth is often easy to see, and it doesn't appear in the news release or the news report.

There are exceptions to the corporate study plague. The honey industry paid for a study to show that honey is healthier than high fructose corn syrup. It isn't. It turns out that honey has about the same levels of fructose, and therefore all the problems of fructose. That the study was published at all is a small miracle.

Some frauds are easy to spot. Fifth Quarter Fresh brand chocolate milk claimed it alleviates symptoms of concussion in high school football players. It had the study to “prove” it. And it got school districts to switch to its products on that basis.

Nutritionists want to know what are the real effects of various additives. “We would find out a lot sooner if trade association agendas were not involved,” Nestle says. All the studies to prove chocolate is a beneficial supplement to any diet, diverts scarce research resources from more worthwhile studies, she adds.

At bottom, the industry uses the playbook devised by Big Tobacco. It is, as everyone now knows, a combination of diversion, selective use of data, obfuscation, flooding the market with sponsored “research”, quoting out of context and out and out lies. Later, the industry learned to create “grassroots” groups, fake associations of consumers demanding the freedom to consume at will. Apparently, you can get four or five decades of obscene profits using those tactics, while customers become ill and die by the millions. Whatever works.

What all this leads to is somewhere Nestle won't go. She recommends consumers call food producers and demand to know where the money goes, and that companies pool donations in blind trusts to be doled out to worthy studies. But she acknowledges this is a longstanding disaster, the result of the takeover of the government by huge corporations. It is capitalism that is the problem. Giving the FDA, the EPA and other agencies the ability to force disclosure, retract false claims, prevent false advertising and fund research without strings would go most of the way to solving Nestle's issues.

Not happening. The best we can hope for is being informed. Unsavory Truth meets that requirement.

David Wineberg

Y.S. Stephen says

Unsavory Truth exposes the connections between scientists, government, pharmaceuticals and the food industry. It shows how the food industry influences research on nutrition in order to favour companies and how we all we all end up paying the price.

WHAT I LOVE ABOUT IT

What Unsavory Truth does well is its disclosure of the mechanics of how the food and pharmaceutical industry lobbies the government to get controversial new products on the market. It also reveals tricks some companies use to get certain parts of a food research suppressed or lost in translation.

More importantly, the Marion Nestle reveals the false claims made about certain foods, the aim of which is to make the company more money.

WHO WILL ENJOY READING

This is a book for anyone concerned about what they put in their mouths. Those involved crafting health policies and well as health practitioners might benefit from reading it.

Many thanks to Perseus Books for review copy.

Sean says

I read about food A LOT.

I'm interested in the science of nutrition, traditions, policy, the gamut.

I was excited for this book. I even pre-ordered, which is rare for me.

I could barely get through it.

~250 pages to say SPOILER ALERT... 'Big Food' lobbies to influence policy and science.

Mystereity Reviews says

I requested Unsavory Truth by Marion Nestle from Netgalley because I was interested in learning more about just how the unsuspecting and trusting public is being manipulated by companies. I've known for years how news articles about health have been manipulated, ever since an article I read years ago about how doctors who ate nuts were healthier than those who didn't. The last paragraph in the article mentioned that the study was sponsored by The Nut Growers Association. Hmmm.

I had to read this book in fits and starts because it was rage inducing! The book was fascinating, unsurprising (because I'm a cynical grump) and infuriating! As I got into the book, the author discusses how the strawberry industry was actively seeking studies linking their product to good health and realized I had just

seen a headline about how strawberries are good for digestive health. Ugh.

This book tackles the myths with the hard truth behind all the hyperbole and psuedo-science thrown at us every day in the news. From scientists' bias, whether conscious or sub-conscious to active marketing of these biased findings to the public. So maddening! At this point, they could try to sell me a study about how the sky is blue and I still wouldn't believe it.

This was an excellent read, and one I've already recommended to several people and will continue to do so. It's an important tool against this bad "science" they're peddling and will only be of benefit in the long run.

Remi says

Great informative read about how we as Americans are very badly informed when it comes to nutrition. And all because we allow food companies (whose sole purpose is to make us buy more of their product) fund and therefore skew studies claiming health benefits that don't exist or over-hype them. It also covers conflicts of interest for scientists in the food industry.

Kayo says

I wanted to like this book. I'm not sure it was meant for the average reader. There was so much information that I couldn't even process. And I thought I was somewhat smart.

Thanks to author, publisher and Netgalley for the chance to read this book. While I got the book for free, it had no bearing on the rating I gave it.

Katie says

It can be difficult to differentiate between scientific research and marketing research when it comes to information on the food that we eat. Nutritionist Nestle, of no relation to the food company of the same name, goes into great detail about how corporate interests influence nutrition science, especially as reported to consumers. I would recommend nutritionists, journalists, and those with an interest in research science to read the whole book in detail. The average consumer would probably get too bogged down in the detail of this book but can take away the following main points:

- Always look for who funded any research about food. If not mentioned, ask.
- Pay attention to wording. "Might" means just as likely to be "might not".
- If it sounds good to be true, it probably is (especially if it highlights one specific food; there are no superfoods)
- Best nutritional advice: eat a wide variety of relatively unprocessed foods in reasonable amounts

After reading this book, I will be more skeptical about the food and other types of research I hear about. For instance, I never considered that corporate interests would fund other causes of a problem that do not involve their product. For instance, big sugar gives money to research on plaque and tooth care to move focus from the effects of sugar on teeth while soda companies fund research on how physical activity is more important

for avoiding obesity than food choices. Without a big pool of funds for unbiased research, we don't have an avenue for pure scientific research. Take all scientific news with a grain of salt.

Thanks to NetGalley, Perseus Books, and the author Marion Nestle for an advanced electronic review copy.
