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## **The Future of Food is Now**

*With our global food system facing collapse, filmmaker and food activist Deborah Koons Garcia tells us how to save the day*

**Interview by Noelle Robbins**

It had all the makings of a horror flick — mounting music designed to make palms sweat and stomachs flip, “mad scientists” engineering a monster that inevitably escaped to wreak havoc upon us all. But the scariest thing about it? This was no big budget fantasy scream-fest. *The Future of Food*, released in 2004, was a documentary — one with a prescient message disturbing enough to send shivers down your spine.

In the award-winning film, director Deborah Koons Garcia exposed the menacing world of genetic engineering, terminator seeds, DNA patenting and corporate monopoly of the food supply. Four years later, with rising global food prices, diversion of crops to biofuels, rapidly disappearing biodiversity and the dominance of agribusiness giants like Monsanto, her *Future* seems to be playing out.

We took a moment to catch up with Garcia, currently in India documenting the plight of farmers confronting sick soil and rising costs passed down the food chain by the likes of Monsanto, to find out if there’s still time to give our story a happy ending.

**What prompted you to make *The Future of Food*?**

I have been a healthy food fanatic since becoming a vegetarian in 1970, so I had [originally] set out to make a film about agriculture. But when I found out what was happening in the U.S. and around the world — the tremendous coup these corporations are attempting — the film became more political. We are facing the ultimate takeover bully — genetic engineering on the cellular level and corporate control on the global scale — and, of course, there is a relationship. Corporate control of the genetic material of the planet by buying up the planet's seed supply and patenting everything they can patent has a major impact on the basic security of every person who eats. After all, having access to seeds and food is the foundation of security.

### **What has changed since the film's debut?**

Well actually, the situation is better and worse. More and more people are paying attention to food — wanting better food, eating locally and organically, educating themselves, demanding accountability. More and more people are connecting diet and health, which should be obvious but is somehow news to people. So on the ground there is a big push in a great direction.

At the same time, the corporate control of the global food system — agribusiness — has gotten more intense as well. They have decreased crop diversity and claimed control of our genetic resources. The fact that we have food riots now and record high prices for food, even though there is no real food shortage in the world, is indicative of what's in store unless we citizens work to change things. Huge corporations are making record profits while people are starving. The policies of the U.S. government, the World Bank, the IMF (International Monetary Fund), and various big foundations have decreased food security/food sovereignty by mandating things like the elimination of national grain reserves. Their policies actually create food dependency.

Many new studies prove we can grow more food per acre on small organic farms than big chemically addicted agribusiness farms and that organic food is more nutritious than industrial food, so a lot of what we know instinctively is now backed by science. Which is great. What is good for our bodies and our communities is good for the planet. There are also some great new decisions in the U.S. and world courts protecting our genetic resources and our farmers — for example, stopping the planting of genetically engineered (GE) alfalfa and the restrictions placed on GE test crops, which could contaminate non-GE crops. People no longer take food for granted. It has been proven there are many problems with the industrial system of growing food — it uses too much water and oil and depletes soil fertility, and people are looking to support alternatives.

### **Do you think “voting with our dollars” is an effective means of promoting social and environmental change?**

I think we have to vote with dollars, forks and votes and voices — everything we can do to change the destructive direction of the corporate agendas. Farmers' markets and CSAs are great, but we need to rethink subsidizing biofuels and the way the farm program actually supports cheap, unhealthy foods like corn syrup while doing very little to help rebuild rural communities. Thoughtful and informed people realize that local is the answer — local seeds which grow well in a certain area need fewer chemicals, practices like crop rotation, composting, green manure-ing (using crops, especially nitrogen fixing

plants like beans, to return nutrients to the soil) — all these techniques create a healthier soil which needs fewer chemicals. And that food creates healthier people.

I do think we need to vote with our dollars but we also need to move beyond our primary identity being consumers. We need to think about creating things rather than buying them, and say, taking a walk with friends rather than shopping. We are not going to shop our way out of resource depletion.

**Is there one act that if all of us did we could change the world for the better?**

Eat locally. Ask yourself when you eat something: where does this come from, how is it grown and do I know what is in it? And if you don't like the answer, take action to eat something else.

**What's next on your agenda?**

I am in the middle of a great new film project called *In Good Heart: Soil and the Mystery of Fertility*. It's the next step after *The Future of Food* and it's exciting — I am learning so much. I am really getting into soil — how much life there is in just a handful of soil, the complex mutualism that creates life. We are working with topsoil scientists, farmers and philosophers to give people a sense that the earth is alive, and we are all part of the soil community and we ignore that at our peril. I want to give people a sense of wonder at what soil provides us. We are actually facing Peak Soil as well as Peak Oil.

**What are some of the most exciting ideas on your radar right now?**

I think powering down — staying local, creating things rather than buying them, growing food, making our own fun instead of purchasing corporate fun — these are the things we will need to do in the future when we run up against the end of oil and the scarcity of other resources. The push toward real conservation — being careful instead of careless — is a new challenge, an opportunity for problem solving and creating a more satisfying way to live.

**What question do you wish our readers would ask themselves?**

How can I cultivate virtue and live an authentic life, right in this moment?