

# *Fast Food Nation: Reading Guide Questions*

---

## **Introduction**

How does the amount spent on fast food compare with the amount spent on other things in our society?

Why is fast food worth studying?

What are some of the observations about McDonald's made by the author?

What does the author say about independent farmers?

What does the author say about the political clout of the meat packing industry?

According to the author, why did he write this book?

## **Chapter 1 "The Founding Fathers"**

What restaurant chain did Carl Karcher start?

Why did General Motors want to buy trolley systems throughout the U.S.?

What was the "Speedee Service System" and how was it different from what other fast food restaurants were doing?

What were some of the characteristics of the men who started the fast food industry?

What were some of the other fast food restaurants that were inspired by McDonald's approach to food service?

## **Chapter 2 "Your Trusted Friends"**

What are some parallels between Ray Kroc and Walt Disney?

How does the author describe Walt Disney and Ray Kroc's involvement in politics?

What is synergy in marketing? What are some of the ways that fast food companies practice synergy?

Why, in the 1980s, did companies start marketing to kids? What were some of the ways in which they did this?

How successful have efforts been to limit advertising aimed at children? What does the author say about marketing fast food products in schools?

## **Chapter 3 "Behind the Counter"**

In what ways is Colorado Springs today much like southern California?

What new businesses have moved into Colorado Springs in recent years?

Why are so many fast food employees teenagers?

What is "throughput?" How does the term apply to the fast food industry?

What is the average job turnover rate in the fast food industry?

What are the benefits and costs of having teenagers work after school?

What does the author say about robbery and murder in fast food restaurants?

## **Chapter 4 "Success"**

What is different about the way McDonald's franchised businesses?

How does the cost of a McDonald's franchise compare with the cost of a franchise from other fast food chains?

How does the failure rate of franchises in general compare with that of other businesses?

Among franchises what is "encroachment?"

What are some of the disadvantages of running a franchise?

### **Chapter 5 “Why the Fries Taste so Good”**

What connection does J. R. Simplot have to the fast food industry?

How have potato farms in Idaho changed in the last 25 years or so?

What is PGI? How successful has it been at organizing potato farmers?

What makes McDonald’s fries taste different from the fries at other fast food restaurants?

What are some of the similarities and some of the differences between “artificial flavors” and “natural flavors?”

### **Chapter 6, “On the Range”**

What are some of the problems facing cattle ranchers?

What impact has the consolidation of the meat packing industry had on cattle ranchers?

What are “captive supplies” of cattle?

What was the impact of Chicken McNuggets on the poultry industry?

What are the conditions or terms of business under which most poultry farmers operate?

Why would small independent cattle ranchers be afraid to speak out against the practices of large meat processors?

How does the suicide rate for ranchers and farmers compare with the rate for U.S. citizens in general?

### **Chapter 7, “Cogs in the Great Machine”**

What changes did IBP introduce to the meatpacking industry?

Why were newer meatpacking plants located in rural areas rather than in cities?

What were the links between IBP and organized crime?

What has been the relationship between labor unions and modern meatpacking plants?

How do wages in meatpacking plants today compare with wages in the early 1900s, after the workers became unionized?

How high is the employee turnover rate in the meatpacking industry and why don’t the meatpacking plants see this as a problem?

Where do meatpacking companies go to recruit new employees?

What is the impact on small communities of having a meatpacking firm?

### **Chapter 8, “The Most Dangerous Job”**

How does the injury rate in meatpacking compare with the injury rate in other occupations?

What kinds of injuries do workers in meatpacking plants typically suffer?

What the impact on workers of speeding up the line in meatpacking plants?

What role do supervisors play in the reporting of workplace injuries in meat processing plants?

What does the author describe as the most dangerous type of work in these plants and what kinds of injuries do these workers risk?

What has been the impact of allowing plants to maintain their own injury logs?

How has the authority of OSHA changed over time?

From a worker’s point of view, what are some of the problems with Colorado’s workers’ compensation law?

### **Chapter 9, “What’s in the Meat”**

Compared with several decades ago, how common are food-related illnesses today?

What authority does the U.S. Government have to demand the recall of tainted meat?

What are most of the microbes in meat spread by?

What was the first national hamburger chain & what did it do to try to change the image of the hamburger?

What are the effects of E. coli 0157:H7 on the human body? What are some of the ways people can be infected with E. coli 0157:H7?

What kinds of things are fed to cattle, things that might facilitate the spread of pathogens?

Why is the author concerned about the use of older dairy cattle to make ground beef?

What was the Streamlined Inspection System launched by the USDA?

What criticisms does the author have of the current recall system for tainted meat?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of irradiating meat?

### **Chapter 10, "Global Realization"**

Why did the author visit Plauen, Germany?

In a discussion of fast food corporations, why is it important to talk about their overseas operations?

In foreign countries, what group does most fast food advertising target?

In what ways might there be a connection between the obesity rate in America and the fast food industry?

Why is obesity a problem for American society as a whole?

What kind of business is the most frequent target of anti-American protests in foreign countries and what kinds of groups engage in these protests?

What did London Greenpeace do to protest McDonald's and what was McDonald's response?

### **Epilogue, "Have It Your Way"**

In what ways are restaurants like Conway's Red Top and In-N-Out different from McDonald's and most other fast food chains?

What does the author think should be done about advertising unhealthy foods to children?

What does the author say about the safety of the U.S. food supply compared with that of other countries?

What does the author think Congress should do about food safety and about working conditions in meatpacking companies?

What can consumers do to change food safety and working conditions in the fast food industry?