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Mark Winne

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Closing the Food Gap

*Resetting the Table
in the Land of Plenty*

MARK WINNE

"It's heartening to find a book that successfully blends a passion for sustainable living with compassion for the poor."
—DR. JANE GOODALL



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Mark Winne : Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty:

32 of 40 people found the following review helpful. Lost me at the last chapterBy Laurie J. NevermanI've had the privilege of attending a food policy workshop at which Mr. Winne was the guest speaker. The man has a lot of experience in a wide range of food policy issues. As another "overeducated white guy" (his words), he's dedicated

much of his life to improving the food security of those who need help most. Through much of the book, he reiterates time and again how meaningful change must come from within - it can't be forced on a community from an outside source. He honestly shares his successes and failures in a variety of efforts - bringing grocery stores back into underserved neighborhoods, establishing farmer's markets and community gardens, growing CSAs, working with food pantries, even changing bus routes so people from underserved areas can reach the serves they need (food and other services as well). I found his narrative informative and engaging. Best of all, it was real - "We did this, it worked. We did that, it didn't." This was not a "in theory only" book. What really bothered me, and why I am only giving this book three stars, is how at the end of the book he turned his back on every lesson he's learned and called for top-down, big money, legislative efforts to enforce change. The blew me out of the water. I know Mr. Winne has a very socialist viewpoint, but, dang, from his own experience he should know that simple handouts never solve anything except for in the short term, and federal bureaucracy is very slow to respond to the needs of the people and inevitably does do at higher costs than local programs. He says this himself earlier in the book. I was really disappointed. Read the book, learn from his successes and failures - there is a lot of good material here - just be aware that it ends in contradictions.

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Good food -- but for whom? By Daniel Hicks I'm an academic, and read this book in part for possible use in a class that I teach on philosophy and the food system. Criticisms of the food system are very popular these days, and my current (and very incomplete) list of food books is pushing a couple hundred. Winne's book stands out from this crowd in two respects: his perspective as an activist rather than an academic, and his attention to aspects of the food system and the "food movement" that are often overlooked. As Winne notes near the beginning, he's a college-educated white man, but his working life has been spent as professional activist and organizer for food access in impoverished urban communities around the US. Much of the book is stories from either his own experience -- especially in Hartford, Connecticut -- or from other activists and organizers. His tone is generally thoughtful, and he stops occasionally to reflect on what succeeded and what failed in these efforts. In a few places -- though only a few -- he steps back even more, giving his take on the fundamental problems with our food system. But he's not an academic, and he's not offering an academic analysis. In my class, I can see using his book (or a few of the best chapters of it; more below) in tandem with more theoretical readings: How well does this theory fit with Winne's experiences? How useful would it be for what he's trying to accomplish? In this respect, Winne's book is similar to Barry Estabrook's *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit*. However, where Estabrook is a journalist writing about activists, Winne is an activist writing about himself. Winne offers us an especially keen view of the class dynamics of the food system and the movement that aims to change it. The food movement, especially in the wake of Michael Pollan's three books on food (*The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World*, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*) and the documentary *Food Inc.*, has emphasized artisan and home production, organic/natural practices, and the aesthetics of food. However, over the past thirty-five years, supermarkets have followed their white, middle-class customers from cities to suburbs and politicians have dismantled the economic supports that helped impoverished households maintain food security. Urban farmer's markets and community gardens may be well intentioned, but aren't an adequate replacement for a familiar grocery store and food stamps. Finally, I found four chapters to be especially thought-provoking -- and I've been thinking about food a lot over the past two years, so that's saying something! Chapters three and four deal with urban farmer's markets and food banks. Winne is skeptical about farmer's markets to address food security, since food insecure households can't afford to pay the premiums small farmers need to stay in business. Food banks do a much better job providing "emergency" food, but are dependent on wealthy and powerful benefactors and consequently are hesitant to pose deep criticisms of the food system. Chapter five discusses the economics and geography of urban grocery stores, including the best discussion of public transit systems and food deserts that I've come across. And the first half of chapter seven looks at the obesity epidemic, portraying the food industry as a predator of vulnerable consumers in the urban jungle.

31 of 31 people found the following review helpful. A fresh and engaging perspective on food justice By Michele Simon Having read almost every book out there on food policy (and having written my own), I can safely say that *Closing the Food Gap* has something unique and important to offer. The author has been in the trenches and speaks from first-hand experience, which is rare to find among writers on this topic. Even though I am familiar with the many of book's issues, I thoroughly enjoyed the personal, accessible style and poignant story-telling. If you are looking for an introduction to food justice issues in the U.S., then this is the perfect doorway in. Winne takes us into a world where there are no easy solutions. But by the end, we are convinced that we must find a way to fix the deep injustices in our food system. What makes this book a critical contribution is its elegant argument for access to affordable and sustainable food for everyone. Even if you think you've read other books like it, you really haven't. Read this book and then pass it on. Michele Simon, author, *Appetite for Profit: How the food industry undermines our health and how to fight back*

In *Closing the Food Gap*, food activist and journalist Mark Winne poses questions too often overlooked in our current conversations around food: What about those people who are not financially able to make conscientious choices about where and how to get food? And in a time of rising rates of both diabetes and obesity, what can we do to make

healthier foods available for everyone? To address these questions, Winne tells the story of how America's food gap has widened since the 1960s, when domestic poverty was "rediscovered," and how communities have responded with a slew of strategies and methods to narrow the gap, including community gardens, food banks, and farmers' markets. The story, however, is not only about hunger in the land of plenty and the organized efforts to reduce it; it is also about doing that work against a backdrop of ever-growing American food affluence and gastronomical expectations. With the popularity of Whole Foods and increasingly common community-supported agriculture (CSA), wherein subscribers pay a farm so they can have fresh produce regularly, the demand for fresh food is rising in one population as fast as rates of obesity and diabetes are rising in another. Over the last three decades, Winne has found a way to connect impoverished communities experiencing these health problems with the benefits of CSAs and farmers' markets; in *Closing the Food Gap*, he explains how he came to his conclusions. With tragically comic stories from his many years running a model food organization, the Hartford Food System in Connecticut, alongside fascinating profiles of activists and organizations in communities across the country, Winne addresses head-on the struggles to improve food access for all of us, regardless of income level. Using anecdotal evidence and a smart look at both local and national policies, Winne offers a realistic vision for getting locally produced, healthy food onto everyone's table.

From Publishers Weekly Having been a part of the movement since the 1970s, serving as (among other positions) the executive director of the Hartford Food System, Winne has an insider's view on what it's like to feed our country's hungry citizens. Through the lens of Hartford, Conn.—a quintessential inner city bereft of decent food options apart from bodegas and fast food chains—he explains the successes he witnessed and helped to create: community gardens, inner city farmers' markets and youth-run urban farms. Winne concludes his tale in our present food-crazed era, giving voice to low-income shoppers and exploring where they fit in with such foodie discussions as local vs. organic. In this articulate and comprehensive book, Winne points out that the greatest successes have been an informal alliance between sustainable agriculture and food security advocates... that shows promise for helping both the poor and small and medium-size farmers. For the most part it is a calm, well-reasoned and soft-spoken call to arms to fight for policy reform, rather than fill in, with community-based projects and privately funded programs, the gaps left by our city and state legislators. (Jan.) Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. A calm, well-reasoned and soft-spoken call to arms. —Publishers Weekly "Fearless, intelligent, and surprisingly funny." —Gwyneth Doland, Sante Fe Reporter "It's heartening to find a book that successfully blends a passion for sustainable living with compassion for the poor." —Dr. Jane Goodall, DBE, author of *Harvest for Hope* "Reading this book should make everyone want to advocate for food systems that will feed the hungry, support local farmers, and promote community democracy—all at the same time." —Marion Nestle, author of *What to Eat* "By combining stories of his deep personal experience as an activist with keen insights into strategies for addressing food injustice, Winne fills a gap in the growing literature on good food, why it matters, and how to ensure that everyone everywhere has access to it. Plus, the book is a fun read. Winne's stories made me want to meet him down at the local farmers' market and then join him afterward for a cold beer." —Anna Lappe, cofounder of the Small Planet Institute and author of *Grub* "Part personal journey, part manifesto for creating food security in the United States, *Closing the Food Gap* sets out the dream of a nation without poverty and hunger, telling stories of people and community projects that have made a difference in the lives of the food-insecure." —Rod MacRae, *Food for Thought* About the Author For 25 years Mark Winne was the Executive Director of the Hartford Food System, a private non-profit agency that works on food and hunger issues in the Hartford, Connecticut area. During his tenure with HFS, Mark organized community self-help food projects that assisted the city's lower income and elderly residents. Mark's work with the Food System included the development of a commercial hydroponic greenhouse, Connecticut's Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, several farmers' markets, a 20-acre community supported agriculture farm, food and nutrition education programs, and a neighborhood supermarket. Winne now writes, speaks, and consults extensively on community food system topics including hunger and food insecurity, local and regional agriculture, community assessment, and food policy. He also does policy communication work for the Community Food Security Coalition. His essays and opinion pieces have appeared in *The Nation*, *Hartford Courant*, *Boston Globe*, *In These Times*, *Sierra*, *Orion*, *Successful Farming* and numerous organizational and professional newsletters and journals across the country. He lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. To learn more about Mark Winne, visit his web site: www.markwinne.com.