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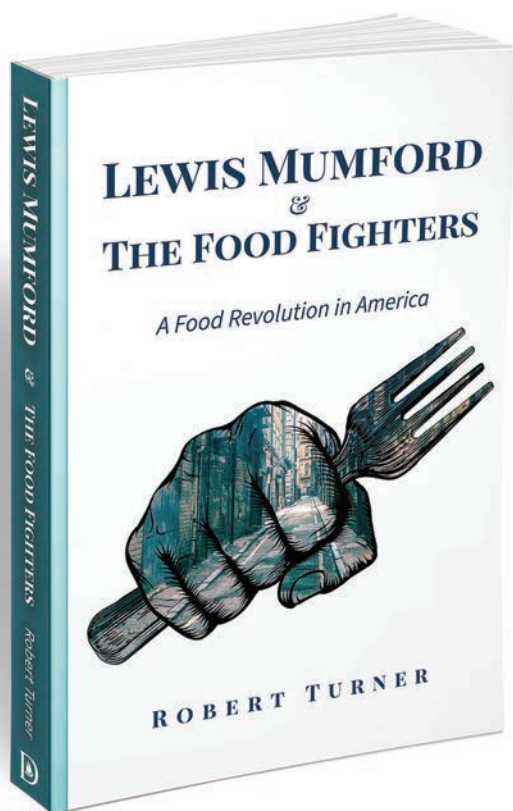
A REVIEW OF LEWIS MUMFORD & THE FOOD FIGHTERS

BY JEFF MINICK

Globalism.

For decades now, politicians of all stripes, corporations, and certain think tanks have touted the wonders a global economy would deliver to the world. Consequently, here in the United States we outsourced businesses and industries to countries around the world, China in particular, where labor was cheap. In return, Americans could shop for inexpensive sports shoes, jeans, and other trinkets.

Then came COVID-19, followed by the Russia-Ukraine War.



Lewis Mumford & The Food Fighters: A Food Revolution in America by Robert Turner. Discovery Books, 2022, 360 pages.

If we jog our memories a bit, we might think back to those earliest stage of the pandemic when for a few days news outlets informed us that 90 percent of our pharmaceuticals came from countries like China and India. A few worried politicians and commentators demanded we bring those vital businesses back home, but time has gone by, and as far as any of us know, nothing was done.

And that's just one example of goods—vital to the survival of our nation and other countries—being in the hands of a few governments. Taiwan, for example, man-

ufactures 92 percent of the world's most advanced semiconductor chips. Ukraine and Russia are breadbaskets for a large part of the world's population. Refusing to avail itself of our own plentiful oil supplies, our government is now importing oil from overseas, in some cases from adversarial countries.

And now we learn that multinational corporations have taken control of our food supply.

In *Lewis Mumford & The Food Fighters: A Food Revolution in America*, entrepreneur, farmer, and expert on food politics Robert Turner opens the curtain to reveal the frightening extent we are dependent on food from overseas. Furthermore, he unveils the damaging agricultural practices done by corporations to our natural resources.

Having worked for years in global supply chains, Turner brings his expertise to every page of his book. Here is just one example:

"Consider that just four companies control over 85 percent of the meat supply in the U.S. Two of them are foreign owned companies, one from China, who owns Smithfield, and JBS from Brazil. The other two are Tyson Foods and Cargill."

Turner, who lives near Asheville and operates a farm there, is also acutely aware of the dire changes that can take place when "thousands of people have been moving to Asheville from New York City and Chicago and all parts of California." Some of these transplants settle permanently in the mountains, but many are wealthy people building second homes.

At any rate, those homes mean developments, and developments mean vanishing land for farming. The math here is pretty simple. If your family has worked a 100-acre farm for several generations in Western North Carolina, or in many other places throughout the United States, the agricultural profits from that land will vary or even diminish to almost nothing, but you suddenly discover your property is worth a small fortune, millions of dollars, to a developer. So, do you sell or do you hang on?

Meanwhile, foreign interests are also buying up American farmland. As Turner reports, "foreign corporations and persons own 35 million square miles of agriculture land in the United States, roughly equivalent to the state of Tennessee ..." Many of these giants, as well as American corporations, chemically abuse the land in their control and are focused more on quick profits than on wise husbandry of resources.

Opposing them are concerned citizens like Turner, his friends Butch and Lewis Mumford, and a host of other “food fighters” whose motto might best be summed up as “Small is beautiful.” No—even better might be “Local is beautiful.” The guy operating his own brewery, the man butchering and cooking sheep to sell to his friends, the farmer marketing his own produce, the woman who still runs a local dairy farm: these are just some of the people Turner celebrates.

Besides learning the realities of American agriculture, there are other reasons for reading *Lewis Mumford & The Food Fighters*. First of all is Turner himself. He blends his statistics and facts about the damages done by our food corporations with humor and wit. In other words, we readers can swallow his prognostications and dark realities sweetened by the honey of laughter and by a sense of the ridiculous.

The portraits of those in this fight to preserve our nation’s agricultural resources should also inspire us. Chief among these is the subject of the book’s title, Lewis Mumford, whom Turner at one point describes as “the sage of Appalachia.” Here is a key description of this man:

“There are some people, like Mumford, who are naturally fascinated with diverse subject matter and always discovering new things and topics to explore. The character traits of curiosity and creativity should eventually lead

a person to wisdom, and I believe a deep, natural curiosity was Lewis Mumford’s key character that separated him from other men. It defined him.”

Finally, *Lewis Mumford & The Food Fighters* is not only a book that might change minds about the corporate and foreign control of our foods, but should also bring together many Americans in a common cause. My own prejudices might serve as an example. When I began Turner’s book, which my editor asked that I review, I began in a gloomy mood, convinced I must slog through a tome about the “Crunchy Crowd,” a gang listening to whale songs while eating organic granola.

Instead, I met a man who, like me, is a capitalist with a small “c,” and who fears and dislikes corporations. His treatise on the dangers of overseas influence and big business went hand-in-glove with my own thoughts. Whatever our politics, food is a place where we can surely find common ground.

At one point, Turner writes, “It is the emergence of a single world market dominated by mass transnational companies that are hurting small business and that end up putting mom and pops out of business. We all work for the man now, and he dictates prices and wages.”

With the efforts of folks like Robert Turner and many others, maybe, just maybe, we can break free of those chains.

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