FILM SUMMARY

Americans are fat. This has been repeated so often across the globe that it’s beginning to resemble a universal truth, and yet, obesity rates continue to climb across America. FED UP tackles the issue in 92 minutes, as filmmaker Stephanie Soechtig, alongside journalist and producer Katie Couric, investigate into why an increasing number of obese Americans are suffering the consequences of the food industry’s sweet lies.

Subject to the film’s probing are the USDA, the food manufacturers, an unregulated media industry, and the increase of sugar in the majority of modern diets. Ultimately, FED UP presents a damning case against the current modus operandi in food production and its detrimental effects.

Interviews with doctors, scientists, politicians, and American families begin to challenge widely upheld truths such as “lazy people get fat,” “thin people have willpower,” “exercise is a solution to obesity,” and “people can ignore the indoctrinations of massive corporations who manufacture malnutrition.” FED UP looks at the biochemistry of sugar, the financial forces behind the food industry, and even the role of mass media.

Fundamental changes are long overdue if the U.S. is to continue as a leading global power. The nation’s children and future leaders succumb to obesity, suffer diabetes from an early age, and fear heart attacks before they can even vote. It’s time for the food industry to serve up the truth.
FILM THEMES

The definition of a sweet tooth is reexamined in the film’s attack on the lethal properties of sugar, as the American food industry preys on common citizens and obesity threatens to shorten lives.

SUGAR
Of 600,000 food items available in the U.S., 80% of them have added sugar. As tons of the sweet stuff is poured into food and drinks, waistlines respond by bulging outwards. Sugar is scientifically proven to have addictive properties and detrimental effects on the physical body. Rather than eliminating it from food production, it continues to be added in nauseating amounts to nearly everything people have consumed throughout the last 40 years. After analyzing thousands of food products, scientist Mike Adams published an article stating that the “global food supply is deliberately engineered to end life, not nourish it.” Slyly disguised and constantly renamed, sugar could be the end of us all.

THE MESSAGE AND THE MESSENGER
Messages around obesity have been repeated for half a decade: Have more willpower. Lazy people get fat. Get up and move. The power is yours. But who is the messenger of these reprimands? It’s the manufacturers, the food companies who consciously place dollar signs before health. Their falsely fortified products directly affect the biochemistry in people’s bodies and minds. Willpower proves to be helpless in the face of addiction, and still the messenger shouts out, “Exercise more!” while the food they offer inspires quite the opposite.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The USDA is a government agency assigned with the task of providing fact-based nutritional advice to the American public, yet is simultaneously charged with promoting a food industry that is sickening consumers. In an allegedly free, democratic nation, can the Agriculture Department function in a healthy, transparent manner? With financial gains driving people, it seems impossible. The government subsidizes research into financially motivated food manufacturers, who are focused on promoting unhealthy products rather than encouraging unprocessed, nourishing choices. Thus a sick and overweight nation becomes reality.

LACK OF POLITICAL WILL
“We’ve placed private profit and special interests ahead of public health,” Doctor David Ludwig stated. The U.S., the richest nation in the world, is arguably killing its own citizens, serving the junkiest school lunches to children, not to mention the marketing campaigns filled with misguided information. When industry is valued more than health, it’s no wonder the population is sicker than ever. When schools rely on funding from manufactured food providers, and retailers are allowed to market their products to the susceptible minds of children, it’s no wonder that their bodies have bulged and their mental states have declined. A politically weak nation is an unwell nation.

“We are not going to exercise our way out of this obesity problem.”
Margo Wootan

“America is still insufficiently alert to the damage we are doing long-term to our collective health by too much sugar intake.”
President Bill Clinton

“Targeting young children is simply immoral.”
Michele Simon
FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. Name one word to describe how you felt after watching FED UP.

2. Have you been personally affected by obesity?

3. Besides eating less processed foods, what can the average family do to combat obesity?

4. Do you believe you eat a healthy diet? What aspects of your eating habits are you interested in changing?

5. How aware were you of the role of food manufacturers in government policy and public health?

6. Do you consume sugary beverages? Do you consume “light” or “fat free” products?

7. Why do you think the U.S. is leading the world in obesity? Why has America allowed the food industry to let this problem get so out of hand?

8. Do you think the film placed too much focus on sugar as the primary culprit in obesity? What, if any, factors were overlooked in the wider issue of obesity?

9. What are some common stereotypes of overweight people? Do you think that excessive weight gain is related to certain character traits? Or is nutrition at the heart of obesity?

10. What was served in your school cafeteria? Do you know what is offered in school cafeterias in your community at this time?
FILM FACTS:

- Journalist Katie Couric had the initial idea for FED UP, subsequently approaching Stephanie Soechtig after enjoying her documentary “Tapped” about the bottled water industry. 95% of the staff working on the film was women. FED UP is Katie Couric’s debut as a film producer.

- Michelle Obama’s anti child obesity campaign – Let’s Move! – was launched in 2010 on the same day that President Obama created the Task Force on Childhood Obesity. Beyoncé Knowles and Swizz Beatz created a song entitled “Move Your Body” for the Let’s Move workout.

- The World Health Organization (WHO) first recognized obesity as a global epidemic in 1997. In 2013, the American Medical Association classified obesity as a disease. Obesity was once exclusive to high-income countries, but now affects people across the globe, with sub-Saharan Africa being the only place where it is not common and malnutrition still prevails. Urban communities have experienced the greatest increase in obesity.

- Mexico leads the world in obesity rates, with 7 of 10 Mexicans classified as overweight and 34% obese. The U.S. comes in second, followed by the U.K., Canada, and Australia. 62% of the world’s obese people live in developing countries.

- In Saudi Arabia, which has one of the fastest growing economies of the world, around 70% of the adult population is overweight.

- Sugar has been produced in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh since ancient times. Crusaders brought sugar back to Europe after their visits to the Holy Land during the 1100s, and Christopher Columbus first introduced sugar to the New World from the Canary Islands in 1492. As the human palate adjusted to the taste of sugar in food, major social and economic changes took place, driving extensive colonization of tropical, sugar-producing nations.

- Excluding artificial sweeteners, the average American consumed 65 pounds of refined sugar and 68 pounds of corn-derived sweeteners in 2008. Brazil produces more sugar than any other country, followed by India, with the U.S. coming in sixth.

- In 2013, 42 million preschool children globally were overweight.

- The more common type of diabetes – Type 2 – is triggered by being overweight or obese. Consuming excess amounts of food stresses the membranous network inside of the cells, leading to higher concentrations of glucose sugar in the blood. 44% of diabetes cases worldwide can be attributed to obesity.

- In Quebec, Sweden, and Norway, advertising to children under the age of 12 is illegal. Advertising to children in the U.S., on the other hand, is unregulated, and the average American child sees 20,000 commercials per year.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Through research, education, and advocacy, The Obesity Society is seeking to find ways to combat the obesity epidemic in the U.S. Consider becoming involved in some capacity.

2. Decrease the amount of processed food in your diet. Eat real, unprocessed, unadulterated food.

3. Support Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, working to take power away from commercial marketers and protect the most vulnerable sector of society: our children.