

The Hype from Hollywood: Tinseltown's Latest Assault on the Meat Industry
Kendal Frazier; Janet Riley

[1]We're going to spend about an hour or so to hear from Kendal Frazier from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and Janet Riley, one of my co-workers at the American Meat Institute, and they are going to talk about the hype from Hollywood; Tinsel Town's latest assault on the meat industry. First, I would like to introduce Kendal Frazier. Kendal is the Vice President of Communications at NCBA. He has spent twenty-one years at both the National Cattlemen's Association, NCA, as well as NCBA. He is a graduate of Kansas State University, and he was raised on a diversified livestock and grain operation in south-central Kansas, and Janet Riley, they are going to tag-team this morning on the talk, and Janet is the Senior Vice President of Public Affairs and Professional Development at the American Meat Institute. In her role, she develops public information on issues management strategy and manages various other public communications including AMI's news reporting on meatami.com. In addition, she is the liaison to the Animal welfare Committee and oversees policy initiatives in this area. Janet also leads educational and professional development efforts for the Institute, and as a member of the AMI Crisis Management Team, she provides strategic counsel to AMI members when in need. So, with those brief introductions, I'm going to turn it over to Janet and Kendal. Thank you Randy and good morning everyone. Thank you for being up this morning so early. It's a beautiful day. In fact, I'm the only guy with a tie on in the whole crowd. So, that's all right. That's kind of what we do in Denver. All right. Janet and I are going to talk for the next few minutes about some new threats to the business climate that we've been dealing with since last spring and this summer, and then, we'll be dealing with it again this fall.

[2]And it basically is a book called Chew on This and a movie called Fast Food Nation that have been written by Eric Schlosser. I'm sure many of you are familiar with the book Fast Food Nation.

[3]Eric Schlosser is an activist masquerading as a journalist. He is very clever, and he raises a lot of issues about modern U.S. food production, and these are some of the issues that he's raised in both the book and the movie that will come out later this fall. In watching him through the years, he is a clever and worthy opponent. He does not have PITA under his name title. He does not have CSVI under his name title, and he's very clever about how he approaches these things, and I think he's pretty effective in some of the things. But these are some of the issues that he has raised. Make no bones about it, what he is doing is an assault on U.S. modern food production and specifically, in the movie, beef production.

[4]Now, earlier this spring, a group of people came together in Washington, D.C., representing a farm to pork coalition of companies and organizations to put together a strategy to deal both with the book and with the movie, and there's a steering committee of that coalition. Janet and I are two co-chairs of the coalition representing, and we represent each segment of the farm and pork food production. Sue Hensley from the National Restaurant Association represents that segment of that industry. But here's what we've been doing; preparing our stakeholders, developing our messages, engaging when necessary, monitoring our results, and continuing to set the record straight.

[5]Fast Food Nation was first published in 2001. I bet a lot of people in the audience have read it. When it came out, it was well reviewed. Book reviewers liked it, except for The Wall Street Journal. They basically gave it an A. It was on The New York Times Best Seller List. It is now required reading in over two hundred universities in the United States. So, this had a significant impact and drew some attention in 2001.

[6]Schlosser and another person named Charles Wilson have rewritten Fast Food Nation as a text book for middle schoolers ages eleven to fourteen, and this is how it's described in the publicity kit of the publisher, which is Houghton Mifflin, which is one of the leading text book publishers in the United States: "A jaw-dropping look at the junk food industry - can you stomach the truth?"

[7]It is a call to activism, and here are some of the statements in the book. I'm not going to read all of these, but here is the publicity kit that accompanied the book. The publisher had put a quarter of a million dollars behind a book promotion tour and the publicity of this book, and they are, again, a well-respected text book publisher. In fact, they are one of the leading text book publishers in the United States.

[8]This is out of the publicity kit: "Stomachs will turn and tempers will flare." These are some of the statements: "Chickens in slaughterhouses are sometimes killed by being thrown against walls or stomped on." This is the kind of language that appears in this.

[9]Here are some more of the outrageous statements in the book: "Workers often take their knives home after work spending at least forty minutes a day keeping the edges smooth and sharp."

[10]"You can smell Greeley, Colorado," which Fast Food Nation is based on Greeley, Colorado, "long before you see it...a combination of live animals, manure, and dead animals being turned into dog food. Think of rotten eggs mixed with burning hair and stinky toilet and you get the idea." It is ironic that Weld County, Colorado, where Greeley is located, is one of the fastest growing counties in the United States. So, why people are moving to there if this is true is beyond me, because I live in Colorado, and that place is hopping right now.

[11]Some more outrageous statements: "A single animal infected with E. coli can contaminate thirty-two thousand pounds of ground beef."

[12]More outrageous statements: "A single fast-food hamburger now contains meat from hundreds or even thousands of different cattle." We've watched Schlosser through the spring as he went on his book promotion tour. That's one of the key messages that he has delivered.

[13]It's interesting how other activist organizations have hooked onto the title of this book. This is a common way that they try to move their agenda by using - this is a tactic used by PETA and others to build on Chew on This, and you can see it on some other activists' websites.

[14]Schlosser went on a book tour in May around the country to promote the book. I would describe the coverage that he got on that tour as being fairly moderate. In fact, at the end of the tour, he was in the mood of trying to promote a fight with the industry in order to gain additional publicity. In other words, I think as we saw the tour he was not thrilled with the amount of coverage he got, and toward the end of the tour, he got more strident in some of his comments and tried to make it more of a free fight between the industry and play the victim role; "They are really attacking me. I've got a credible message, and this big bad ugly U.S. food industry is really attacking me."

[15]Now, okay. I'm going to turn it over to Janet, and she's going to talk about the movie that's going to come later this fall.

[16]Good morning. Thanks so much for having me.

[17]Let me just go back here.

[16]Okay. There we go.

[15]Fast Food Nation; it is a fictionalized thriller that's based on a town in Colorado. This is from the promotion for the movie, and Richard Linklater is a fairly popular sort of semi-cult director, and he makes a lot of very edgy films, and it says in here that he's pretty skeptical of the whole food industry, and believe me, that comes through in what we've seen about the movie. We haven't had an opportunity to see the movie in its entirety, but rest assured, you are going to

get to see the trailer today.

[16]The movie themes include slaughterhouses horrors. I mean, we've long been a great topic to draw viewers into a new segment. If you look at sweeps week and Dateline and all of those shows love to do a meat story, because it can really grab the viewer, and so, this movie is just like a dramatic version of some of the shows that we've seen so often. It makes a lot of allegations about unsafe food, and it makes a lot of allegations about abusive workers. How many people saw Crash? Has anybody seen that movie? Crash was a movie where it was a lot of vignettes about different people in different walks of life, and they all intersected at different points. It was a very, very good movie. This movie is trying to be Crash. Many critics have acknowledged that, a lot of different vignettes, but apparently, according to the critics, which I'll show you later, it failed to accomplish that.

[17]Here's the cast; Avril Lavigne, Ethan Hawke, Kris Kristofferson, Patricia Arquette. Bruce Willis is in this film and many names that are familiar to those of us over forty and many names that are probably very familiar to the U of I students and others here today. Now, help me. I can't remember. Did Avril Lavigne go to Texas Tech, or is she an Aggie? Yes. She's got a lot of thoughts about the modern meat industry, and she says she's looking forward to doing the publicity tour about this. So, I'm sure we can expect some very informed comments to go with the release of the film.

[18]Actor Greg Kinnear, a very popular actor, says, "They drafted an incredible script and a lot of people signed on because of their passion for that book." We understand that they cut their rates to be in this particular film, because they believe it was the socially appropriate thing to do.

[19]Schlosser's targets are really like three legs of a stool. They are the brands. "Junk food goliaths are crushing the little guy." He talks a lot about "big is bad." We all hear about that theme a lot these days. He talks about the products and the suppliers and tries to dehumanize the meat packing industry and cattlemen. He talks about franchisees and restaurants, the substandard pay they get, how they profit off the backs of teenagers and are driving out the moms and pops and are just peddlers of junk food.

[20]I'm going to show you a couple of clips so that you can see firsthand. The first clip we are going to see is CNN, and it has been edited down. It was a fairly long segment. So, this is about a two minute segment. Now, before I click it on, let me tell you that we knew that he was going to appear on CNN, and so, we tried to get on opposite him, and Elsa Murano, who you all know, agreed to appear, and we did our best to get them to offer a balanced point of view, and the best that they would do was to do a background interview with Dr. Murano, and she was very forceful. She read Chew on This, and she was ready to roll, because it made her so mad, and unfortunately, I don't think that the background time they spent with her had a whole lot of affect on Katie Couric's interview, which you'll see here. [Video]. Interestingly, as he talks about all that food, I found myself last Saturday with a bowl of grapes and apples sitting at the pool and eating a salad and my kids had cheeseburgers, and somebody said to me, "Where did you get that delicious fruit," and I said, "McDonald's." McDonald's happens to now be the largest purchaser of ground beef and the largest purchaser of apples in America. So, the choices that he claims are not available are available. We just need to exercise our right to make those choices. This is Glenn Beck from CNN, and this is a very amusing clip. Watch closely. [Video]. As I assume you know, Eric was on by remote and had no idea that any of this was happening, but Ken and I were talking just before we got started about Schlosser's demeanor, and he's really effective, because he's not coming on like someone from PITA would. He's not saying, "Don't eat meat," which would automatically just sort of make people tune out. He's very good at appearing very reasonable. "I don't want people to stop eating meat," or "I eat meat, and my children have it, but they have it occasionally," and so, he's very skilled at appearing to be - I don't know how you all reacted to him, but I watched him in action, which I'll talk about a little later. I went to one of his book readings, and he's very clever in the way he sort of captures people, validates their

feelings, and really gets them to buy in.

[21]It was interesting though, when - I should have brought this other clip. My CEO, Patrick Boyle, who is very, very gifted when it comes to media debate, actually appeared opposite Eric Schlosser on CNBC recently, and if any of you go to our website, we did buy the rights to post it there. So, you can watch it on our website, meatami.com, but it's interesting, when Schlosser is really challenged hard, as Patrick challenged him, with facts about E. coli reduction and all of the food safety progress we've made, he really started to get very agitated. He had a tough time, because his style is death by a thousand anecdotes. That's what we call it. He finds that one guy. He probably found that one guy at a... plant in the country who said, "I bring my knife home to sharpen it," and he says that that's the entire meat industry, all five hundred thousand workers take their knives home at night and sharpen them for forty minutes, because we don't have knife sharpening stations in our plants. So, there is probably a grain of truth in the things that he says, and then, he uses it, and he twists and turns it to indict the entire industry, and I'm laughing because he says, "If you have seen these big feed lots or if you have seen these big meat packing plants," well, perhaps he stood on the edge of a feed lot, but I have a feeling, based upon fifteen years of working with my members, that if Eric Schlosser called them, they would have called me, and nobody called me to tell me that Eric Schlosser was coming for a visit. So, I'm relatively confident that he was not in any American slaughterhouses. Our communications game plan to respond to him has been one of surround sound, and it's to have a lot of people echoing the same messages, and so, we have tried, as Kendal had mentioned earlier, to inform a lot of people who may not have realized they were one of his targets. For example, the potato industry is not as squarely in his target as is the meat industry, but we have the Potato Board involved, and we got everybody to provide the true facts; to take a look at the book and give us the rebuttal information that we needed.

[22]Our coalition has nineteen different trade associations and CMA consulting. I don't know if you've ever heard of Charlie or not, but he was with Premium Standard Farms for many years. He started a firm. He came at this issue from a really solid knowledgebase, and he's done a fantastic job of helping us pull together all of the information and build a website rapidly to respond. We have three sector chairs; AMI, NCBA, and the Restaurant Association, who have been helping to put this all together.

[23]This is what our website looks like, and what we tried to do was be very positive. We will not stoop to the level of attacking Eric Schlosser in public. We've tried to attack the facts but not the person, and we've tried to put a fact on the industry, because as I said, he's trying to dehumanize us. So, all of those faces are real people working in our industry, and they are not the CEOs. They are the people who are working on the lines, who are working to raise the cattle; I'm trying to think who else we've got in there. Someone from the New York Restaurant Association is in there. We've got a pork producer. Down on the left hand side, you'll see all of the industry facts. You can click by segment to get the facts you need. There is a blog.

[24]We address the most egregious errors directly like the fact that the meat industry is not the most dangerous industry. He tells everybody we are the most dangerous industry. There are sixty-three industries ahead of meat packing on the list of most dangerous industries. Cattle are not mistreated in this country. We have incredible animal welfare programs in place today. We do not benefit from turnover. We benefit from a stable and legal workforce. We do not have poop in the meat. You'll notice the language he uses also. He uses poop and stinky toilet, and if you guys have kids in that age range like I do, you'll know that these are the kinds of words that really grab them. They like to talk about poop and stinky toilets. Food-borne illnesses are decreasing. They are absolutely not increasing, but the data be damned it seems according to Eric Schlosser, and it's ironic that he hired Charles Wilson, who is a fact checker at The New Yorker, to make sure that everything is accurate. I'm just blown away that his co-author is a fact checker, because I've said, if I'm asked on TV, I'm going to say, "Get your money back from

that fact checker, because it is wrong."

[25]In terms of humanizing the industry, we've taken everyday people to tell their stories in an unscripted way, and I wish I had time to play all of them for you, because they are just fantastic, when you hear what people have to say about their jobs, but we particularly like this particular guy, Lewis Cooney from Odom's Tennessee Pride, and Odom's is one of these plants that has just really jumped on animal welfare. They are very forward thinking about animal welfare, and they send Lewis and his animal welfare team to our Animal Welfare Training Conference every year. So, I'll let you hear what Lewis has to say. [Video]. I thought that was really terrific. He wanted to retape it. He wanted it to be more scripted and more perfect, and we persuaded him that it was just right the way it was. I mean, it's just really from the heart, and there are many others just like it on here. So, I really encourage you to read it.

[26]we think it's important to reach educators. We have received two education critiques to Chew on This by leading education experts who do raise concerns about the book and its appropriateness and whether or not the facts have been checked, and several have commented that much of the information is based on outdated data. We are engaging in an outreach to education officials nationwide. We are sending materials to Ag in the Classroom, which is an organization of ag teachers to help them understand what's coming, and we are looking for other opportunities to help the education community think critically about this book.

[27]The NCBA has put out Beef in Brief, which is a packet of materials that went to middle schools.

[28]we are doing a lot of media outreach, and we did - we went into every market before he was on his book tour. It was pretty amazing, because we found fairly limited media interest there. As I said, we pitched Elsa Murano to the Today Show. We also have Joe Leavitt, the former FDA Administrator engaged. He has done some radio interviews, and we've got a grassroots media toolkit prepared to help people who also want to engage at their levels. The media coverage has been more limited, but we are very nervous about what's around the corner.

[29]I was on ABC News, and I told them that this move bears as much resemblance to today's meat industry as Poseidon does to the modern cruise industry, and they used that. That seemed to be a comment that resonated. Patrick Boyle was on CNBC. Kendal Frazier was on NPR, and various members of the Fast Food Nation have done a number of interviews with The Wall Street Journal.

[30]Schlosser has really tried to take - to persuade people that he's being attacked, and that's why we thought that it was so important to stay positive about it. There have been some attacks by other organizations, but they have truly been unrelated to our activities. It's been unfortunate, because we've tried to take such a high road, and then, we've seen some people take a different approach, and now, Houghton Mifflin has hired a PR firm, which tells you that they are very nervous about the lack of publicity they are getting and about the public disputes over the facts.

[31]In terms of meeting Schlosser and Wilson, he was in Washington, and so, I went and heard him speak on a Friday night, because I really wanted to see how he interacted with people, and that was very interesting, because he's a very thoughtful, very approachable person. Everybody greeted him. He spent time chatting. I waited until the very end, and I approached him and introduced myself, and he was very surprised that I would come up to him. I wrote him a handwritten note on my personal stationery, because he's claiming that the industry doesn't want to meet with him, and we do. So, I wanted to make sure that got into his hands, and so, he wrote back on his personal stationery and said that he wanted to have a meeting to really have a blunt discussion, and I haven't heard from him again. We sent, Kendal and I..., sent a letter to his publisher. We've not had a response to that. When Patrick appeared on CNBC, the producer called and said he was there and wanted to have a steak lunch with us, and we said, "Okay. When? Here's our phone

number," and we haven't heard again. So, at least now there is no way he can say that the industry didn't want to meet with him. We like to be able to tell folks that we've confronted our critics directly. When Human Rights Watch came after the meat industry about a year ago for the way we treat our workers, we did about a ten-page critique with footnotes, and we provided all of the facts, and we went to New York, and we sat down with them, and I'm not going to tell you that they were attracted to the report, but I think we gave them some food for thought. I feel better when I'm talking to the media and I can say, "I've sat down and talked to them about this and here is the document I provided."

[32]In terms of the movie release, it appeared at Cannes, and a movie trailer was put out, which I'm going to watch. Get ready to get mad, and after just a few... publicity around this, he disclosed that the packing plant scenes were actually shot in Mexico, which I think is really insightful. [Video]. The feel of the movie, to me, and I've only seen this clip, reminds me of Pulp Fiction, and I certainly enjoyed Pulp Fiction, but I certainly didn't take it seriously or think that it was an accurate depiction of American society, and so, I hope that based on this that's how America would react, but you never know. As I said to the media, the war of the worlds was fiction, and we all know how America reacted to that. So, you can't be too careful about this, and it's interesting that the movie is going to be rated R. So, we took poop in the book to the 's' word for the R rating. So, anyway, it's just a little bit more inflammatory.

[33]Here are some of the excerpts from the reviews: "It demands an unacceptable level of questioning support...something of a factory-processed turkey;" "It's hard to see this Fox Searchlight film having much impact in the U.S., other than to alter dinner plans after the movie;" "It's highly sympathetic but surprisingly mild-mannered;" "It has little new to say...may be one of his worst movies yet."

[34]"The only thing this made me feel was this was pretty pretentious, and if you don't like the country so much, why don't you just stay in Mexico, and if you don't like how they produce meat here, just don't eat it," and I love this one from TCS Daily, "Linklater's official selection offering Fast Food Nation based on the best-selling book by Eric Schlosser fills the Moore slot as this year's "Americans are all fat and stupid and their lifestyle is ruining the rest of the world entry,"" but in fairness and for balance, I had to quote The New York Times, the meat industry's favorite newspaper, which said, "It is the most essential political film from an American director since Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9/11."

[35]Full release is still slated for fall. As I said, actors want to join in the publicity. We do think it's really going to increase the focus on meat packing and restaurant industries, and I'm quite confident there are lots of really disgusting meat packing plant scenes in there, but we are curious about what they are going to do in the wake of these reviews. They may do re-editing. It's hard to imagine that they could completely reinvent the film, but they may be trying to fix it a bit.

[36]In terms of our response, this happens to be the hundredth anniversary of the publication that... the hundred anniversary of the Federal Meat Inspection Act, that's June 30th, and the hundredth anniversary of the American Meat Institute. So, we decided, even if this weren't happening, we'd still be doing efforts - engaging in efforts to get the positive story out there, but I hope you all saw the brochure that we sent down here. It's hot off the presses. "If Upton Sinclair were alive today, he'd be amazed by the U.S. Meat Industry." This has been sent nationwide. It was sent to our members. We are sending it to conferences like this one. It's on Capitol Hill. It's with the regulatory agencies, and next week, we are doing a major mailing to the media nationwide, and we are having a media event in our office where we are actually going to walk them through. "This is how it was. This is how it is today," and then, we are going to serve them federally inspected meat products and offer a champagne toast to all of the progress in the U.S. If you want copies of this brochure, we are getting a lot of requests from people who have seen it, and if you want it for your students or for anyone else, if you want to send it to your local mayor or to the media, whatever, just contact me, and I ordered plenty of extra copies, and I'm very happy that people have been requesting them.

[37]And if you haven't seen the back, it does include testimonials from the following individuals like Dr. Murano and Dr. Grandin, Dr. Smith, John Henshaw, who is the former OSHA administrator, and others who saw it and liked it and said they wanted to be part of it.

[38]And now, I'm going to turn it back to Kendal to tell you what we are going to do as everything unfolds this summer. Okay. As Janet said, we are going to be watching very closely what happens this fall. We expect the release date on this movie this fall, and again, based on the reviews that it got at the Cannes Film Festival, there are rumors that they are doing some major rework on this movie. We don't know that, but we expect it to come out sometime this fall. So, we are doing some planning. The coalition members are stepping back and saying, "Okay. Now, how are we going to deal with this movie when it rolls out?" We expect some of the actors to play a prominent role in the promotion of the movie. We would expect them to be on some of the early morning talk shows and some other publicity that they'll put behind the movie. It's being distributed by Fox Searchlight Productions. So, they'll have a movie promotion budget in order to roll it out. We don't know if it will start in independent art house type movie theaters or whether they'll try to reach out and go higher than that. A lot of films like that start in independent film theaters, and then, if they create some buzz, they'll move into more of what I would call mainstream ANC type theater complexes. We are also doing a lot of strategic planning, and we are also fundraising for resources to deal with this effort.

[39]Our strategy will be to be well-armed in the trenches. We will continue to monitor the coverage – the media coverage that it gets. We'll respond when necessary and respond in an appropriate manner. One of the things that makes this difficult, from a media standpoint, is that this is his book, and this is his movie. So, he has the first shot out of the gun. So, while we are asked to respond to it, it's not like a BSE issue or some of the common issues that we deal with, and this is really the platform that he speaks from, and he has publicity people behind it. So, it's a little bit of a different take on a communications/public relations issues management strategy when we are dealing with this, but we will respond when appropriate. We really don't want to get into conflict with this guy. As you saw, he's clever, he can jump around, and we've really tried to avoid name calling with him, even though I'd like to do it and my brothers who are still involved in agriculture would really like me to do it and a lot of our members of NCBA would really like me to do it, but we've got to be really careful about that; getting into name-calling contests, because I think when we do that we are going to lose what's really the target audience, which are parents and moms and people that choose our product, and we hope it's successful as ABC's bird flu movie, which was basically a flop. It didn't get any squawks, but we can't count on that. We've got to prepare for the worst.

[40]Now, what can you do to help us? You can contact Janet or I or the national organizations, if you see something in your local newspaper about this. I believe we have a toolkit up on the website, or we can provide you with example letters to the editors. You need to probably monitor your local education officials and what goes on with this book. Personally, I think the movie is going to come and go, but I think this book is probably more of a long-term threat to us, because it's going to be around, and it's going to be circulated. It came out so late in the school year that it will probably draw more attention this fall when kids start returning to school. So, we would urge you to monitor your local school districts, your local school officials and see if this book is being used. We've got all kinds of information on how to go in and counter this with another point of view.