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## **Nutrition expert Marion Nestle tells Vermonters how to eat**

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Marion Nestle is to nutrition what Phish is to jam bands.

She drew a standing-room-only crowd last week at the Shelburne Farms Coach Barn during a book signing and discussion event, which was also a fund-raiser for Vermont FEED: Food Education Every Day. In the audience were her groupies -- a varied bunch of "Nestleheads" inspired by her work and in awe of her meticulous investigation into the food industry.

Her new book, "What to Eat: An Aisle-by-Aisle Guide to Savvy Food Choices and Good Eating," is a 624-page masterpiece that thoroughly explores the modern supermarket. It is thick, but so user-friendly that the book is organized into sections that parallel the grocery aisles.

"What to Eat" is a follow-up to "Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health," her groundbreaking book published in 2003. Her latest endeavor was inspired by the many people who told her: "I didn't like 'Food Politics.' It was too dense, and you didn't tell us what to eat." She got a kick out of the fact that "Not only did people want me to tell them what to eat, they wanted to know what I ate."

Nestle broke new ground again by fearlessly uncovering the inner workings of today's supermarkets, food production systems and the ways government supervises our food supply. She begins the book with a blunt clarification: "Supermarkets are not social service agencies providing food for the hungry. Their job is to sell food, and more of it."

While Nestle admits that supermarkets provide a great service, the issues surrounding food are both enormous and enormously complicated. Despite this complexity, she believes eating is simple, "... so simple that I can summarize the basic principles of a good diet in just 10 words: Eat less; move more; eat lots of fruits and vegetables." To further clarify her point, she adds "go easy on junk food."

In the book, she outlines a straightforward approach to the supermarket that guides shoppers toward healthier choices. Highlights of her recommendations include:

Shop the periphery -- the most naturally nutritious, least processed foods are found in the outermost aisles. Think produce, fish, meats, poultry, dairy, eggs and whole grain bread. In the center aisles are the more processed foods and beverages (with a few exceptions like canned beans).

Don't buy junk food if you don't want kids to eat it. Nestle defines junk food as "soft drinks, candy and snack foods that are low in nutrients but high in calories, fats, sugars and non-caloric additives like salt and artificial flavors, colors and sweeteners."

Learn to read nutrition facts labels. This can be confusing, so focus on the ingredients list, and try to buy items with five or less ingredients, and nothing artificial.

Don't buy any foods with a cartoon or a health claim on the packaging. These are nothing more than marketing strategies to improve sales.

In the past decade, Americans have become more concerned about the food industry, and Nestle believes this stems from feelings of helplessness in other areas. "You can't impact climate change and you can't do anything about the war in Iraq. But food ... you can do something about that."

She stresses that food not only has implications on health, but also has implications for the kind of world you want to live in. There are numerous ways for individuals to impact the food system on a local level, which Nestle sees as a positive trend sweeping the country.

A local example is Vermont FEED: Food Education Every Day -- a collaborative effort by three local nonprofit organizations, including Shelburne Farms, The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont and Food Works. The program is a community-based approach to school food system change. You can find them at [www.vtfeed.org](http://www.vtfeed.org).

Phish might have split up, but Nestle keeps jamming with a message that resonates for one and all: "Enjoy, eat well, and change the world (for the better, of course)." Rock on.

Shari Levine has a master's degree in public health. About the book: "What to Eat: An Aisle-by-Aisle Guide to Savvy Food Choices and Good Eating," by Marion Nestle. North Point Press, 624 pages, hardcover, \$30. On the Web: [www.foodpolitics.com](http://www.foodpolitics.com)