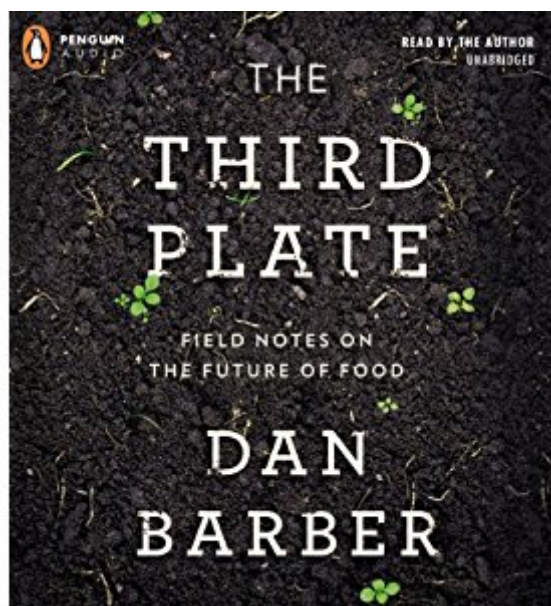


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# The Third Plate: Field Notes On The Future Of Food



## Synopsis

The Third Plate is chef Dan Barber's extraordinary vision for a new future of American eating. After more than a decade spent investigating farming communities around the world in pursuit of singular flavor, Barber finally concluded that - for the sake of our food, our health, and the future of the land - America's cuisine required a radical transformation. The revelations Barber shares in The Third Plate took root in his restaurant's kitchen. But his process of discovery took him far afield - to alternative systems of food production and cooking that maximize sustainability, nutrition, and flavor. Barber explores the traditional farming practices of the Spanish dehesa, a uniquely vibrant landscape that has been fine-tuned to produce the famed jamón ibérico. Along the Atlantic coast, he investigates the future of seafood through a revolutionary aquaculture operation and an ancient tuna fishing tradition. In upstate New York, Barber learns from a flourishing mixed-crop farm whose innovative organic practices have revived the land and resurrected an industry. And in Washington State he works with cutting-edge seedsmen developing new varieties of grain in collaboration with local bakers, millers, and malters. Drawing on the wisdom and experience of chefs and farmers from around the world, Barber proposes a new definition for ethical and delicious eating destined to refashion Americans' deepest beliefs about food. Traditionally, Americans have dined on the "first plate", a classic meal centered on meat with few vegetables. Thanks to the burgeoning farm-to-table movement, many people have begun eating from the "second plate", the new ideal of organic, grass-fed meats and local vegetables. But neither model, Barber shows, supports the long-term productivity of the land. Instead, he calls for a "third plate", a new pattern of eating rooted in cooking with and celebrating the whole farm - an integrated system of vegetable, grain, and livestock production. The Third Plate is truly a publishing event: a monumental work of personal insight and global analysis that definitively remakes the understanding of nutrition, agriculture, and taste for the 21st century. Barber charts a bright path forward for eaters and chefs alike, daring everyone to imagine a future for our national cuisine that is as sustainable as it is delicious.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is one of the most interesting books I have read that discusses everything wrong with our food culture today. That said, it's also one of the most obnoxious. It's packed full of fascinating information about the way our food is grown, and it's worth the read...if you can get past the author's idealism and snobbery. Let me start off by saying that I had no idea who Dan Barber was until I picked up this book. All of my impressions of him (and his beliefs) are based on what I read in *The Third Plate*. The Good: (and I mean REALLY good) This book essentially examines the relationships between our food and the environment in which it is raised/grown. That sounds simple, and has been looked at before, but this book takes it to a whole new level. I don't think I've EVER read something that managed to turn my beliefs upside down quite the same way this book did. I have a fairly large organic backyard vegetable garden & keep chickens, and before this book I would have called myself an environmentalist. I would have told you I was doing things the \*right\* way because it's organic, it's local, it's healthy, etc. This book turns those notions upside down. Barber made me really think about how I see "my" garden, "my" chickens, and "my" yard - and start to think of really and truly integrating the things I want to grow with all the other stuff that naturally wants to live there. Barber's ideas aren't terribly original, but he presented them in a way that was completely and utterly fascinating - and certainly made ME re-think my place and my role in growing my own food. The other thing I loved about this book was that Barber covers the same familiar ground as others - the evils of monoculture crops, the dangers of pesticides, fishing species to extinction, etc. - but he does it in a way that is fresh and interesting. He weaves his research throughout the narrative, and the result is short bursts of information that hit you hard and make you stop & think, but then he moves on before you get bogged down. In reading this book I felt like I was learning a lot, but I never felt like I was reading a textbook. To compare - I liked *Omnivore's Dilemma* as much as the next person, but I can't deny that my eyes would glaze over if I read too much at once. Barber's book is the complete opposite - lots of personal stories, reflections, and anecdotes are

woven WITH the research in a way that is highly readable. No caffeine required. The Bad: (and it's unfortunately REALLY bad) Barber believes that in order for change to occur in this country it has to start at the top. The top being elite chefs, like himself. He describes himself as the "conductor" of a large "symphony," and he uses that analogy frequently throughout the book. From what I gather from this book, Barber essentially works in the food equivalent of an ivory tower. His restaurant is funded by the Rockefellers, and he is surrounded by his own personal organic farm, where he can grow anything he wants. He then takes that "superior" food and charges exorbitant amounts of money for the wealthy folks who can afford to eat at his restaurant. His book is dripping with elitism, and most of the time I felt like he was so out of touch with reality it was laughable. Barber contrasts the monoculture crops in America (and all their evils) with what he thinks are better examples of the way food *should* be grown. He visits farms and interviews the farmers who are changing the way we think about farming in general (which is good). Unfortunately his "examples" were of things like foie gras and jamón ibérico - some of the most expensive products on the planet. It's VERY hard to appreciate the science behind what Barber is trying to say when he backs it up with \$700 goose liver examples. His ideas would have been a LOT more meaningful if he had found examples of people growing tomatoes and potatoes according to his idealistic vision of how farming *should* be. Instead, the only successful examples he seems to have found were of people who made it work because their way of farming is essentially supported by the wealthy. While I can appreciate those farmers and what they are trying to do, I was extremely put off by the rampant elitism and snobbery. I also couldn't stomach the 'top down' approach that Barber takes - mainly that change won't ever happen until the best chefs in the world take it upon themselves to start a revolution on behalf of the rest of us. Although I could appreciate Barber's perspective, it was still obnoxious. I also happen to think he has it completely backwards. He's preaching to the wealthy few who can eat at his restaurant, thinking "his" views will naturally trickle down. They won't, simply because the "rest" of us (myself included) are concerned with putting affordable food on the table every week of the year. Most people have no idea that the tomatoes they buy at Walmart don't taste anything like real tomatoes. They don't know because "real" tomatoes don't have any place in their lives - not in the stores or the restaurants they eat at - much less that there are thousands of different TYPES of actual tomatoes. I had no idea until I grew a tomato plant, and I only did that because initially I was looking for ways to save money and still eat healthy foods. I wasn't on a quest for "elite" tomatoes, and it was only by accident that I discovered how MUCH better homegrown food tastes. REAL change has to start with the millions of people that Barber ignores - the regular, everyday middle class & poor. Those are the folks shelling out the money to support our food industry, one box of

macaroni & cheese at a time. Until those dollars band together and begin supporting more sustainable agriculture, change won't happen. And until that sustainable agriculture becomes affordable, people will still buy those boxes of mac & cheese. What Barber serves or doesn't serve in his restaurant has virtually nothing to do with that cycle. Barber lives in his ivory tower and preaches about how things *\*should\** be, while the rest of us are worrying about making ends meet. So on the one hand I appreciated Barber's research and agreed with his connections between "the land" and good food, but on the other hand it was a little offensive to wade through 400+ pages of an elitist chef go on & on about perfecting ingredients most people have never even heard of. He may have interesting things to say, but he is SO far out of touch with reality that it all just comes across as idealistic nonsense. Overall: solid 3 stars Definitely worth the read, especially if you keep your own garden or backyard animals. It will make you think about the complex relationships between the soil, the plants, and the animals, and probably in a way you haven't considered before. It certainly did for me. But that 5-star research was seriously undermined by the 'Lord of the Manor' perspective, which was sometimes a little too tedious and obnoxious to stomach.

Most "go out and eat well, save the environment and somehow still be nice to everyone you meet" books suffer from the fatal problem of not offering a realistic path both to feed 7 billion people while not also destroying the planet. It is the dirty little secret of most environmental initiatives that they would price most people out of living even basic human lives. Basically, food costs too little to be produced sustainably. This is a conundrum that for the most part is just ignored. Not by Dan Barber though. The thoughts in this book may well be the answer. That is a remarkably bold statement. The answer isn't quite what one would expect and I hate reviews that make it unnecessary to actually read the book. So get this and reflect on it. There is the added advantage of the fact that he writes well. And tells an engaging story. The only thing I would suggest for Dan is to go out and open a restaurant priced for almost everyone else on earth, and that does exactly what has to be done. Prove to us that he can do what he says without having to pay \$250 a meal. I live a few miles away from Blue Hill and I would be glad to stop by for dinner at such a place. Step it up Dan. The planet depends on it. If that sounds incompatible with my review, then just buy it and see. If you care about food, the Earth and how to stop raising steaks on feedlots but feed us all, then read this.

A VERY INTERESTING BOOK from start to finish....Al Gore says " Dan Barber has a rare perspective in this pressing issue and is a Must Read" You are introduced to the Soil, Land, Sea and Seed in ways that will hold your attention and leave you craving for more...getting to meet Klaus,

Glenn Roberts of Anson Mills and many others of historical value, like seed collecting began 8000 years ago and why and how seed collecting gave the south the greatest agricultural fame by farmers who knew about crop diversity, healthy soil (Our national treasure) collecting seeds from the most flavorful crops. Mainly, it is a wonderful book, a page turner, you feel part of it.

It has been a long time since I have read a book so important, so worthy of accolades, so tied in with our future that I felt compelled to write about it. Dan Barber is a prominent chef and operator of Blue Hill at Stone Barns. His most recent book: *The Third Plate* is intelligent, very well written, insightful, educational and emotionally tied to his philosophy of cooking and of life. I am only 75 pages into the book and already feel the need to change the way I approach food. This could easily be a "page turner" book that could be finished in a day, but instead I want to savor it, take the time to read and understand, absorb what is being offered and adapt it to how I approach my profession. Chef Barber offers a truly brilliant work that is a must read for every chef, restaurateur, farmer, environmentalist and advocate for an improved food system in our country. Run, don't walk to your nearest bookstore or jump on the internet to order it immediately. I am serious, it is that important.

*The Third Plate* is warm and friendly, like a good conversation in easy chairs by the fireplace - and you learn lots too. You'll meet people you'd like to know and call your friends. This book is wonderfully informative, and superbly entertaining at the same time. I have a lifelong fascination, so I read books and blogs about food and have for years. Interestingly, Dan Barber's point of view in this book is very different from what I've read before. I am left wondering why no one asked those questions before. A delightful read for anyone who enjoys reading about food and/or those concerned with the consequences of industrialized food production. And definitely for all you foodies out there. You know who you are.

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