



The Chain: Farm, Factory, and the Fate of Our Food

Ted Genoways

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A harrowing investigation of the tortuous path our food products take—from slaughter to Spam

On the production line in American packing-houses, there is one cardinal rule: the chain never slows. Under pressure to increase supply, the supervisors of meat-processing plants have routinely accelerated the pace of conveyors, leading to inhumane conditions, increased accidents, and food of questionable, often dangerous quality. In *The Chain*, acclaimed journalist Ted Genoways uses the story of Hormel Foods and its most famous product, Spam—a recession-era staple—to probe the state of the meatpacking industry, including the expansion of agribusiness and the effects of immigrant labor on Middle America.

Interviewing scores of line workers, union leaders, hog farmers, and local politicians and activists, Genoways reveals an industry pushed to its breaking point. Along the way, he exposes alarming new trends: sick or permanently disabled workers, abused animals, water and soil pollution, and mounting conflict between small towns and immigrant labor.

The narrative moves across the heartland—from Minnesota, to witness the cut-and-kill operation; to Iowa, to observe breeding and farrowing in massive hog barns; to Nebraska, to see the tense town hall meetings and broken windows in reaction to the arrival of Hispanic workers; and back to Minnesota, where political refugees from Burma give the workforce the power it needs to fight back.

A searching exposé in the tradition of Upton Sinclair, Rachel Carson, and Eric Schlosser, *The Chain* is a mesmerizing story and an urgent warning about the hidden costs of the food we eat.

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