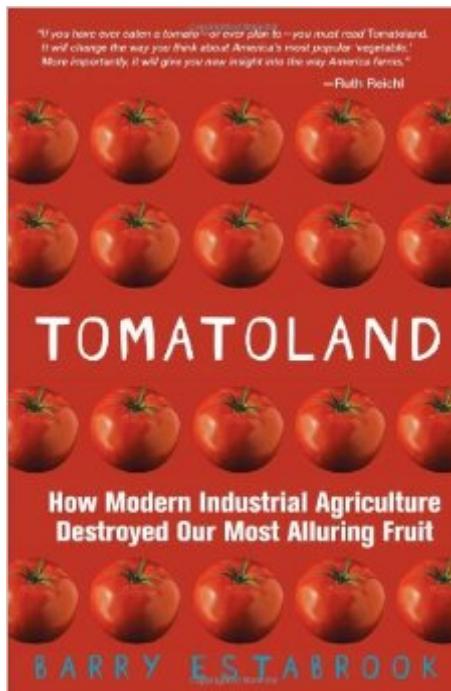


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# Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit



## Synopsis

First paperback edition of the New York Times best-seller. Based on a James Beard award-winning article from a leading voice on the politics of agribusiness, *Tomatoland* combines history, legend, passion for taste, and investigative reporting on modern agribusiness and environmental issues into a revealing, controversial look at the tomato, the fruit we love so much that we eat \$4 billion-worth annually. 2012 IACP Award Winner in the Food Matters category

Supermarket produce sections bulging with a year-round supply of perfectly round, bright red-orange tomatoes have become all but a national birthright. But in *Tomatoland*, which is based on his James Beard Award-winning article, "The Price of Tomatoes," investigative food journalist Barry Estabrook reveals the huge human and environmental cost of the \$5 billion fresh tomato industry. Fields are sprayed with more than one hundred different herbicides and pesticides. Tomatoes are picked hard and green and artificially gassed until their skins acquire a marketable hue. Modern plant breeding has tripled yields, but has also produced fruits with dramatically reduced amounts of calcium, vitamin A, and vitamin C, and tomatoes that have fourteen times more sodium than the tomatoes our parents enjoyed. The relentless drive for low costs has fostered a thriving modern-day slave trade in the United States. How have we come to this point? Estabrook traces the supermarket tomato from its birthplace in the deserts of Peru to the impoverished town of Immokalee, Florida, a.k.a. the tomato capital of the United States. He visits the laboratories of seedsmen trying to develop varieties that can withstand the rigors of agribusiness and still taste like a garden tomato, and then moves on to commercial growers who operate on tens of thousands of acres, and eventually to a hillside field in Pennsylvania, where he meets an obsessed farmer who produces delectable tomatoes for the nation's top restaurants. Throughout *Tomatoland*, Estabrook presents a who's who cast of characters in the tomato industry: the avuncular octogenarian whose conglomerate grows one out of every eight tomatoes eaten in the United States; the ex-Marine who heads the group that dictates the size, color, and shape of every tomato shipped out of Florida; the U.S. attorney who has doggedly prosecuted human traffickers for the past decade; and the Guatemalan peasant who came north to earn money for his parents' medical bills and found himself enslaved for two years. *Tomatoland* reads like a suspenseful whodunit as well as an exposé of today's agribusiness systems and the price we pay as a society when we take taste and thought out of our food purchases.

## Book Information

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## **Customer Reviews**

When is the last time you ate a tomato? What did it taste like? Where did it come from? If the answers to those questions are a.) within the past few months, b.) it had no taste at all, and c.) it came from the store or a restaurant, chances are you ate a modern-day relative of a real tomato. "Perhaps our taste buds are trying to send us a message. Today's industrial tomatoes are as bereft of nutrition as they are of flavor. According to analyses conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 100 grams of fresh tomato today has 30 percent less vitamin C, 30 percent less thiamin, 19 percent less niacin, and 62 percent less calcium than it did in the 1960s. But the modern tomato does shame its 1960s counterpart in one area: It contains fourteen times as much sodium." - from *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit* by Barry Estabrook. That quote came from a new book that has caught my attention in a big way. I've noticed for quite some time that supermarket tomatoes have zero taste. But I like tomatoes in salad and other favorite dishes. I know they aren't like "real" tomatoes from the garden or the farmers market, but I still buy them. Not any more. *Tomatoland* made me take a good look at the tomato industry and I didn't like what I saw at all. The author, Barry Estabrook decided to find out why we can't buy a decent fresh tomato and discovered that it's not a simple question and answer. He learned that Florida "accounts for one-third of the fresh tomatoes raised in the U.S., and from October to June, virtually all the fresh-market, field-grown tomatoes.." It's an example of industrial agriculture at its worst.

*Tomatoland* is a book dedicated to the tomato; the soft, round, universally liked fruit that shows up in

so many of the foods we eat every day. This book focuses on the many changes that have taken place with tomato growing and harvesting over the years and how these changes have resulted in a fruit that is less nutritionally balanced and less tasty than it was in the past and that is grown and harvested in a less than ethical manner. Tomatoland offers up some interesting facts about tomatoes and some of what I read here surprised me. I have often wondered why people think tomatoes are vegetables when they are actually fruits and this book provides some background info on this misunderstanding along with some more alarming facts about tomatoes that will shock many who read. For example, how many realize that Florida winter tomatoes are picked while still green in color and then taken to a processing center where they are manipulated to look and feel like a normal, red tomato? How many realize how industrial practices have reduced the nutrition level of the tomato? And how many realize that Florida's climate is actually far from the ideal place to grow tomatoes and that they actually grow best in drier climates? These and other questions are answered and explained in the book with a good amount of detail. Once Tomatoland finishes talking about the industrial destruction of the tomato, it then moves to the topic of labor. In fact, among the main topics discussed in this book, labor issues receive the most coverage of all. It is one thing for the nutrition level of the tomato to undergo an unhealthy demise, but it is another thing entirely when migrant workers are treated like slaves as they attempt to make a meagre living.

With every passing year, I'm getting pickier and pickier about which tomatoes I eat. The more I think about it, the mealier and more tasteless the tomatoes that you buy in the supermarket are. I'd almost stopped buying them altogether before I read Tomatoland. Tomatoland convinced me even more that the tomatoes from the grocery store, especially the ones available in the winter, are just not worth it. Taste is the obvious reason. Every single one of us can go to the supermarket and tell the difference between a tomato grown locally and in the summer versus one grown in Florida in the winter. Estabrook makes clear that that is because the organization that regulates the tomatoes that come out of Florida regulate for every single aspect of a tomato - color, shape, texture, blemishes - except taste. The second problem with tomatoes grown in the winter is that, if they are not grown in a hot house, they are grown in Florida or California. The problem with growing tomatoes in Florida is that it just happens to be one of the worst places in the world to grow tomatoes. In order to do so successfully, Florida tomato growers rely heavily on dangerous pesticides and chemicals to fight off pests and diseases and to put nutrition in the soil, which is actually just sand. And now we get to the heart of Tomatoland, the mistreatment of migrant workers, especially concerning pesticide use, on tomato farms. This was not necessarily the turn that I expected Tomatoland to take, but I was so

happy that it did. This is an important cause and an important topic that everyone needs to know about. When you purchase a tomato, you are making a choice. Are you going to support the abuse and slavery of the people who pick those tomatoes?

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