

The V. Factor



Subject for Docu-Series, created by
Gianni Cardillo and Edoardo Rossi

OVERVIEW

“No Reservations” meets “Chef’s Table”, The V Factor is a new series that introduces viewers to the most popular health-food chefs and restaurants around the globe. The demand for healthy and eco-friendly foods has never been so high, but unbeknownst to ethical consumers, these trends are doing more harm than good. V Factor takes us on a journey from the trendy, health-food scenes in Europe and the US, to the dark world of developing countries, where superfoods are cultivated. In this eye-opening investigation into the health food industry, we will discover how our ravenous appetite for avocado, almonds, quinoa, and dozens of other popular, imported health foods are decimating local cultures and ecosystems all over the world today.

KEY INFORMATIONS

Format: 6 x 50’

Structure: Series, Multiple Seasons

Genre: Docu-Series

Language: Multiple (all interviews will be filmed in original languages). Narration will be in English.

Creators: Gianni Cardillo, Edoardo Rossi

EP/producer: Edoardo Rossi

Production Company: OneManDoing Things prod.

Locations: Various countries all over the world.

STRUCTURE

Every chapter will begin showing the product in all its beauty, following the bright world where it is cooked and served; our luxury restaurants launching a new healthy life style made of exotic products of which we were not used until 15 years ago. This luxurious style (because to choose is always a luxury!) goes mixed with the scientific point of view of a well known nutritionist regarding all the health properties of this product, adding a touch of humor with some funny topics from the entertainment/social media world. Therefore, we’ll move to the other side of the world, where this product is cultivated! Expert from FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) will help us to approach this world from a scientific and human point of view, until we’ll see it with our “own eyes”, all the dramatic consequences that the over production of these specific food is generating on the other side of the planet.

2’ Titles on black background with luxury images of the product. Table Top Style

10’ Luxury Restaurants, images from 1 or 2 large, western cities, Interviews with Chefs.

5’ Interview with a well-known nutritionist, explaining all the benefits of the products.

5’ Topics that demonstrate the irony of how sought-after these products are nowadays.

10’ Interview with FAO expert.

20’ Dramatic images from the other side of the world, where the product is cultivated.

Following the stories and the realities of local people, using archive and hidden-camera footage.

Total: average 52’ per episode

“Man is what he eats”

Thus, a better diet for a better man. And, ultimately, for a better world. We have been told, or we simply convinced ourselves, that following a diet capable of respecting other living beings, free from food of animal origin, is an ethical choice, one that improves our health and also of the planet in which we live.

In principle, such concept would be correct: we would avoid causing unnecessary suffering; we would improve ourselves and, consequently, the world around us.

Unfortunately in this case, theory and practice are not in tune.

Or, maybe, we should say that they are not anymore.

As a matter of fact, for the first time in our history, the 'do no harm' concept applied to food could paradoxically damage the planet's already precarious well-being.

Therefore, without being aware of it, we risk improving ourselves at the expense of the environment around us. Already in the Middle Ages the Cathars, Christian heretics, practiced non-violence and avoided eating meat, referring to the most ancient evangelical tradition, according to which every living being has a soul. At the time, before modern globalization, such a choice was truly revolutionary and subversive. Today, this is a choice that stems from wellness.



In the "wealthy" West, where hunger is unknown - except for restricted minorities, we can afford to choose what to eat and what not, based (supposedly) on ethical and health principles. This legitimate choice has become a well-rounded business. In every supermarket we can find whole isles for vegetarians and vegans alike. There are dedicated restaurant chains. Even among the gourmet menus of starred restaurants, we now have plenty of dishes created for those who do not consume animal source foods. Meals that have nothing to envy from the more 'traditional' ones. Recipes that, when made by top chefs, are true works of culinary art and whose preparation is probably even more demanding as one cannot use all the usual ingredients freely. To replace these 'offending' ingredients, chefs - whom we will visit in their restaurants in Los Angeles, Paris, Rome, Oslo, Berlin, Toronto ... - use others that form the basis for this type of cuisine: quinoa, almonds, cashews, tofu and avocado.

But the wide availability of these raw materials in the West, like other exotic foods, is an anomaly that has emerged only around twenty years ago. An anomaly that we no longer consider as such, which stems from the economic import-export agreements that supplies us with supermarket shelves filled with foodstuffs from remote parts of the planet. Food of which we ignored the existence until a few years ago, unless we had travelled to the same places in which they are produced. Starting from this anomaly, we will make a journey to discover the pros and cons of vegan-vegetarianism. And, if it is true that man is what he eats, also of our identity.

A journey during which we will meet experts from international organizations, top chefs, nutritionists, scientists, entrepreneurs, NGOs, farmers, etc.

We will try to understand the impact such food regimes have on our health. In addition, we shall determine, in social and environmental terms, the impact the crops of these raw materials have in their producing countries, since they have become intensive to meet global demands. We will find out if they have safeguarded the land and its balance, if they have improved the life of those who produce them and, if applicable, at what price.





PILOT. AVOCADO: MEXICO

“The Green Gold”! It manages to slow down cellular aging, counteracts cholesterol deposits, helps the heart, prevents Alzheimer's disease, promotes recovery from depression, has anti-inflammatory powers and is excellent for treating very dry hair. All of these properties concentrated in a mere 200-300g. Apparently, this is another perfect fruit.

However, 270 litres of water are required to produce just 1/2 kg. Mexico, one of the world's top producers, has increased its exports tenfold in 10 years. According to Greenpeace, peasants have deforested at a rate of 20,000 hectares per year in order to make room for avocado orchards.

Over 50% of pine and oak forests in Mexico have been lost since 2000. The huge amount of pesticides and fertilizers necessary for cultivation, have poisoned the reserves from which animals and local people draw their water.



80% of the the Avogado consumption in USA comes from Mexico, especially from the region of Michoacán, one of the region controlled by the Cartel of the Caballeros Templarios, also responsible for the distribution of crystal meth in the USA. Growers who do not pay for “protection” find the orchards burned or, even worse, are killed. A journalist from Vocativ tells the story of the kidnapping of a farmer’s two sons. In order to put together the ransom money (1.5 million pesos) he had to sell everything he owned. He never saw his sons again. We will tell his story and of others like him, who suffered similar violence. Between 2006 and 2015, the battle for the market left a long trail of blood: more than eight thousand killed in the State of Michoacán alone, this being the largest producer of avocados in Mexico. To counter the Cartel, farmers organised themselves by fortifying the villages in which they live and the cultivated land, and they pay ‘shoot to kill’ armed gangs to protect them. This is why we speak of "blood avocados", just like we do with diamonds. We will meet those who have decided to arm themselves and hire mercenary troops to defend themselves from the Cartel. We'll meet as well brand new small agriculture realities from South of Mexico, who are dedicated to a balanced work of the soil. Small farmer activist movement that bring a small light of hope in this cruel reality.



2. QUINOA: PERÙ AND BOLIVIA

Until its commercial explosion a decade ago, no one had ever heard of quinoa. Since then it has become quite fashionable, an indispensable ingredient for any animal derivatives free diet and of any healthy diet. As a matter of fact, cholesterol-free vegetable milk is obtained from quinoa, without lactose and very rich in mineral salts. Also flour for coeliacs, and cleansing milk with a 100% vegetable base, free of paraffinic mineral oils. It truly is a super-food.

In the past, quinoa was cultivated on the slopes of the Andes, while the plains were reserved for llama and alpaca breeding, which was the base of the support of the Andean people as well as a fundamental source for the sustainable fertilization of the soil. In fact, the camelids' manure enriches the soil with organic substances and improves its physical properties. To maximize its yield, the Andean plains have now been occupied by quinoa and farms confined to the hilly areas.

According to FAO, because of the inadequacy of the natural fertilizer from camelids, now decreasing in numbers, the farmers have introduced toxic chemical fertilizers, which cause the contamination of the product itself, of the soil, air and water reserves. According to Juan Pablo Seleme, owner of 'Quinoa Foods', up to a decade ago people talked about quinoa with contempt, as a food for the poor. The recent boom is a blessing for him, as it brings progress: before, most of the houses in the Andean plateau were muddy, now they are made of bricks; there are new roads; electricity has reached most areas; schooling has increased...



This is all true, but there is another reality. Since its consumption has boomed, the price of quinoa has risen quickly, reaching €8,000 a ton. Too precious to be consumed locally, it is sold to companies that export it all over the world. Thus, the locals do not consume it anymore (if not to prepare it for tourists), and they feed on 'junk food'. According to UNICEF, 19.5% of Peruvian children suffer from chronic malnutrition, a problem that was pretty unknown to these populations until a few decades ago.

Considerable economic interests have also created an unprecedented local banditry situation, based on abductions and dynamite in order to take over quinoa cultivable land, destroying entire environmental and social balances in the process. Felix Gonzalez, governor of the Bolivian province of Potosí, has asked central government for the militarization of his area. In fact, armed clashes have led to people being killed or wounded in what has truly become a war. We will meet the victims of this war, telling the stories of those who have suffered the violence of bandits and have seen their lives destroyed in the name of alleged progress, of a hypothetical improvement of their conditions.



3. CASHEW NUTS: VIETNAM AND INDIA

They help against osteoporosis, vascular fragility, joint problems, cholesterol and diabetes. They contain a flavonoid that is absorbed by the retinal macula, protecting the eyes from aggressive external agents and helping to prevent macular degeneration in the aged. They contain fewer fats than other types of dried fruit, and only unsaturated fats. They contain oleic acid, a healthy substance for the heart and blood vessels. They are very rich in copper. Therefore this can be classed as a fantastic food, even if to be consumed moderately as it is known to be allergenic.

So, what seems to be the problem?

Cashews are produced in different tropical countries, Vietnam being the world's largest exporter. There they are gathered using forced labour prisoners and people in drug rehabilitation. The nuts release caustic oil that burns the skin, and prisoners are not given any protective gloves. In addition, they are treated with very toxic chemicals and those working on their collection or processing, take in a huge amount of these by air. Among the prisoners there are also children. Yes, because if the mother is a drug addict, the child is with her. Adults and children, without distinction, are punished if they do not accomplish their share of work (harvesting, shelling, etc.).



They are denied the bathroom for a month, beaten with spiked clubs, subjected to electroshock, chained, forced to remain standing on their tiptoes for more than twenty-four hours without water or food, put in isolation for days in cells so small that they are forced to sleep upright.

The Times interviewed one of these former inmates: "We had to go to work all lined up, controlled by policemen who beat us if we slightly stepped out of line. At the end of the day's work they searched everyone and would beat us if we had stolen even one single nut. I do not know what chemicals were used on the plantations, but I do know that all the people that worked there, including myself, got seriously ill and many died. Perhaps, it is because the poison comes directly from the cashews. When you open a fruit, a toxic resin comes out of it, and nobody gave us masks. We had to collect, clean and process a certain amount of cashew nuts every day. Those who could not do it were heavily punished. "Human Rights Watch" reports that stories like this are an everyday occurrence.

We will enter the life of an ex-con, forced to work on the cashew nuts plantations, and we will tell what price he had to pay - and what price many others like him are still paying - to allow us Westerners to consume this fantastic fruit. Also, which supply chain ensures the cashews reach us, enriching those who are part of it.



4. ALMONDS: CALIFORNIA

The Department of Nutrition Sciences of the University of Toronto states that almond consumption brings significant benefits to our cardiovascular system. It reduces the risk of heart disease by 3.5%, is useful for weight loss (because of the sense of satiety that induces), helps preventing diabetes, improves arthritis, helps in halting the growth of cancer cells, reduces the risk of Alzheimer's. Their milk is used to make cheeses and creams. The request is such that the price has tripled in only 5 years.

The State of California produces 82% of the world's needs. Almonds, pistachios and walnuts from the region are becoming so profitable that, in addition to farmers who change crops without major problems and a lack of laws to hinder them, Investment Funds have also begun to get involved in the business.

However, the production of one single almond requires an astonishing 4 litres of water!



Water reserves have dried up, so much so that on 1 April 2015, Jerry Brown, Governor of California, had to announce restrictions on water consumption for the very first time. Water usage has since been reduced by 25%. Between 2003 and 2010, the aquifers of Central Valley, the plains of central California, lost a total of 20m³ of groundwater, enough to meet New York's water needs for a whole 11 years. The animals, thirsty, push themselves into areas inhabited by man. Some indigenous tribes - some of which we will talk to - try to save the Chinook salmon, a fundamental fish for their heritage and culture. However, the waterways that host it are diverted to irrigate almond groves. Unfortunately, the risk associated with intensive almond cultivation not only concerns salmon, but also the roads that, due to the intensive irrigation, are subject to sudden collapse. It is also no coincidence that the land, drying up because of water drainage or deviation, is increasingly subject to major fires, which have devastated California for the last few years. To many, almond crops seemed the ideal way out of the great economic crisis of 2008. Today, some of those people have lost their homes and land to fires.



5. SOYA: ARGENTINA, BRASILE AND BOLIVIA

The main food of veg diets, soy is the largest forest destroyer in the world.

To cultivate it, more than 8 million hectares of Amazon forest are razed to the ground every year across Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia. The same forest that produces a massive 28% of the oxygen we breathe, which stabilizes global warming through the absorption of carbon dioxide, which contains 40% of the planet's living animal species.

In the last 50 years, a fifth has already been destroyed.

Soy production has therefore been identified as a fundamental cause for forest conversion. We must add the external impacts of soy production to this, such as agrochemical pollution of watercourses and soil erosion.

We will give faces and names to a tragedy that can appear impersonal, tell stories of individuals, true human stories: of those who cultivate and deforest, feeling entitled to do so in the name of well-being, progress and the fact that 80% of the world's production of soya is intended for livestock breeding; of those who, due to deforestation, have seen their lives destroyed, as well as their families', and the land on which they have lived for generations.



6. VANILLA: MADAGASCAR

Environmental defenders say they highlight how the surging price of vanilla on global markets is connected to village crime and forest destruction.

Madagascar is the world's primary supplier of pods used to flavour ice cream, cakes and chocolate. Despite its notoriously bland reputation, a more-than-tenfold surge in the value of the spice over the past five years has aroused dangerous passions.

Crop thefts have been reported in most of the key growing regions and there have been dozens of murders. Some communities have called for protection from armed police. Others have taken matters into their own hands.. The killings have yet to be solved by the institutions. Locals say there is no will or capacity in the police forces to investigate the vanilla thefts - or the mob justice that sometimes follows.



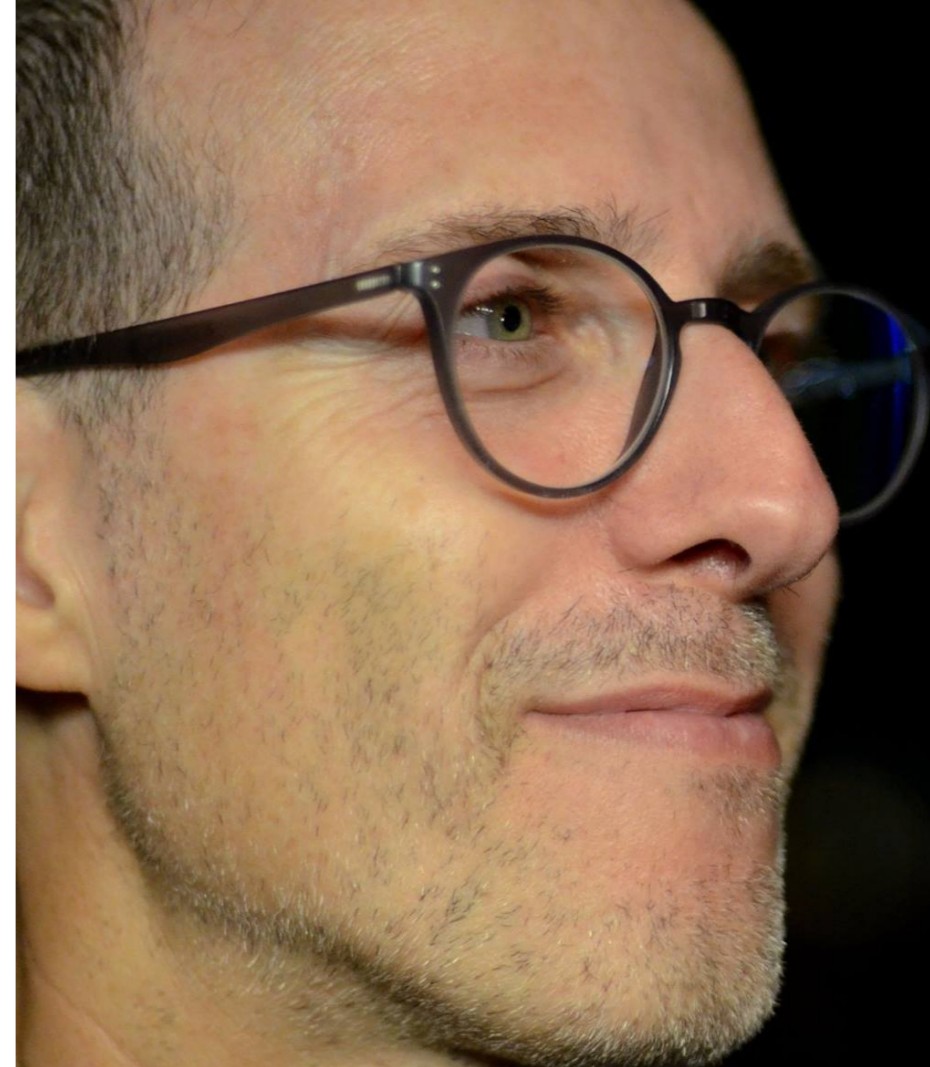


AUTHOR: GIANNI CARDILLO

As a screenwriter, he has written the scripts for the movies: In carne e ossa (directed by Christian Angeli), Il sole nero (directed by Krzysztof Zanussi), Fate come noi (directed by Francesco Apolloni), La verità, vi prego, sull'amore! (directed by F. Apolloni), Il silenzio intorno (directed by Dodo Fiori), Intolerance (episode 'Roma Ovest 153', directed by Paolo Virzi).

He has written various TV series, including: Medico in famiglia, Distretto di Polizia, Il commissario Nardone.

As a director, he has worked for several years in the theatre field, then he has directed the short films Un viaggio, Love song, Gabbie, and the feature film Ristabbanna.



CREATIVE PRODUCER: EDOARDO ROSSI

During the last decade he has been active as Line Producer and Incentives Advisor with CWA, a creative and specialist Production Service Network operating mainly in Latin America, Mediterranean area and SouthEast Asia.

Edoardo has recently launched OMDT srl, a specialist boutique production company, which aims to discover and develop exciting and outstanding projects from both Latin America and Europe, bringing them to the attention of a broadcaster/bigger audience.

Based in between Latin America and Europe among the latest 13 years: travel, discover and produce is a stable part of his life!





PRODUCTION COMPANY

OneManDoingThings prod.

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