

KIRKUS REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

FIXING FOOD

An Fda Insider Unravels The Myths And The Solutions

Richard A. Williams

Post Hill Press (256 pp.)

\$30.00 hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-63758-012-7

October 19, 2021

BOOK REVIEW

An insider's scathing critique of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's track record protecting the public's health.

When debut author Williams started working at the FDA in Washington, D.C., in 1980, he enthusiastically believed in its core mission to ensure the health and nutritional safety of the American public, but he was quickly disabused of his idealism. As an economist, he was charged with performing cost-benefit analysis of new regulations, but, in his opinion, no one cared what he discovered. While studying the impact of a ban on lead acetate in hair-coloring products, he says, he was ordered to produce two separate assessments—one in favor of a ban and one against, depending upon what might prove politically convenient. Over the course of this memoir, Williams asserts that, for much of his 27-year career at the agency, bureaucratic concerns—including the FDA's protection of its political turf—took precedence over both science and its institutional obligations. He writes that one of his superiors told him that the point of their work was to “appear to be doing something about a problem....The good part is, no one ever checks to see whether or not...we actually did anything.” The author presents a concise but astonishingly thorough account of his time at the agency; during these eventful years, there were battles over infant formula, seafood regulation, and food labeling. He furnishes more than just a critique of the FDA, although his portrait is a devastating one; he also articulates a new mission for it, reconceived to meet the demands of a world of breakneck technological innovation. Williams discusses several issues that are prohibitively technical—for example, the pros and cons of genetically modified food—but he does so with the unfailing clarity of a seasoned teacher. It's a meticulous work, written from extensive, concrete experience, and clearly motivated by genuine concern for the general welfare.

An eye-opening anatomy of a government agency's failings.

EXCERPTING POLICIES

Please review Kirkus Media's excerpting policies before publishing any portion of this review online or in print for any use. To learn about proper attribution and to ensure your use is in compliance with our guidelines, we invite you to visit <http://www.kirkusreviews.com/indieexcerpts>.