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In the Region

SCHOOL FOOD

Two Mothers, a Camera and a Fresh Take on School Lunches

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Fairfield

AMY KALAFKA, a filmmaker from Weston, has explored everything from Cajun culture to criminals. Now, she has focused her lens on a subject that is a little closer to home: school lunch.

Her latest effort is “Two Angry Moms,” a 90-minute documentary directed and narrated by Ms. Kalafa, who also appears in some scenes, and co-produced with her husband, Alex Gunuey.

The other angry mom is Susan P. Rubin, a dentist turned nutritionist from Bedford, N.Y., in Westchester, who is featured in the film. Ms. Rubin, who has three daughters, founded the grass-roots advocacy group Better School Food. In two years, its membership has grown to 750.

The film features the good (a schoolyard where students grow their own vegetables), the bad (chips and soda for lunch), and the ugly (what it is really like inside a school cafeteria kitchen).

“This isn’t about pointing fingers,” Ms. Kalafa said from

California last month during a tour of the West Coast to raise funds for the film. “But I am trying to look at where things have gone wrong.”

Since 1980, obesity rates have doubled among children and tripled among adolescents, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). The film notes the growing number of children with asthma and allergies, which some experts believe is directly linked to diet. (The C.D.C. estimates that there are 6.5 million children with asthma, approximately 8.9 percent of all children in America.)

“This is a national security issue,” said Ms. Rubin, 47. “Without adequate nutrition, we will not have future leaders.”

Ms. Kalafa, also 47, and her husband have two daughters and run a film production company in Weston. She said she first made the connection between diet and health in the 1980s when she spent time in Europe with her husband, who is French.

“How they live, how they eat, it changed my life,” she said.

Caught on camera are Ms. Rubin’s impassioned testimony before members of the [Institute of Medicine](#) of the National Academies in Washington, and her sneaking cafeteria food out of her children’s school because she had been barred from showing up without an appointment.

“Amy’s the filmmaker,” Ms. Rubin said. “I’m the troublemaker.”

At a preview last month in Fairfield, Ms. Kalafa spoke about what

she hoped audiences would take away from the film: that the varied interests of government, corporations and school administrations have produced a flawed system when it comes to feeding the approximately 73 million school-age children in this country.

Under a federal law passed last year, public schools that receive government subsidies must develop a wellness policy. Connecticut has gone beyond many other states by banning soda and sugary drinks from the school cafeteria. It is also one of a handful of states selected this year for the Agriculture Department's Fruit and Vegetable Program, which encourage healthy meals and snacks for children.

"If you came into our schools, you would see a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables," said Madeleine C. Diker, the food service director for the Cheshire public schools.

Ms. Diker, who attended the screening in Fairfield, said she believed that some of what the film presented was a "misrepresentation" of what goes on in schools today.

"We've been working on healthy choices for years," she said. "We want what's best for the kids as well."

One of the school districts featured as a success in "Two Angry Moms" is Katonah-Lewisboro in Westchester County. With Ms. Rubin's encouragement, the district changed its lunch policy, even hiring an outside chef to train food service staff.

"We went from refrying processed chicken nuggets to grilling

fresh chicken breasts and making homemade apple crisp,” said Donna D. Walsh, a member of the Katonah-Lewisboro Board of Education.

Ms. Rubin and Ms. Kalafa plan to spend the summer trying to raise money for the film’s national distribution in the fall. And they have appeared on ABC’s “Good Morning America” and are in talks with producers of [“Oprah.”](#)

“This was a labor of love,” Ms. Kalafa said of the film, which took almost three years to complete. “But I want parents to know that they can have a huge impact. Parents are the ones that can reverse this tide.”

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