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Keith Hamm

‘Good Food’ host Evan Kleiman kicks off UCSB speaker series

A self-described culinary multitasker, Evan Kleiman has been a chef, restaurateur, cookbook author, and today is known most readily as a longtime podcaster and KCRW radio host of “Good Food.” Her guruship and thoughtful transmissions with likeminded connoisseurs and chowhounds — from cooks and farmers to artists and scientists — has earned her the title as the “fairy godmother of the L.A. food scene,” according to one prominent and devout listener.

Kleiman is bringing her conversational interviewing style to the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center (IHC) at UC Santa Barbara for a sitdown with Marion Nestle, a pioneering food-policy scholar and author of “Sugar Coated: Unboxing the Hidden Forces Shaping America’s Favorite Breakfast Food” (University of California Press, 2026). Their talk, “Food and the Body: The Politics of What We Eat,” launches the IHC’s “Bodies Politic” speaker series. Free and open to the public, the event begins at 4 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 29 in the McCune Conference Room on the sixth floor of the Humanities and Social Sciences Building.

“The book is about food marketing and the history of food regulation using cereal boxes to illustrate the stories,” Nestle said. “The cereal industry is in decline, mainly because Pop-Tarts and bagels are more convenient but also for all the reasons the food industry is in trouble: (Health and Human Services Secretary) Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s ‘the food industry is poisoning America,’ ultra-processed foods, GLP-1

drugs and inflation. Cereal companies are scrambling to keep up."

Nestle added that her discussion with Kleiman will also look at the "Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025–2030," which, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, represents the most significant reset of federal nutrition policy in decades.

"Nestle's new book is particularly fascinating because she collaborated with Lisa Sutherland, who was the Vice President of Nutrition at Kellogg Company," Kleiman said. "So you have the insider and the food-politics guru looking at our shifting national obsessions with health, ingredients, dietary advice and American culture through the lens of cereal boxes. It's fascinating and disturbing."

The talk between Kleiman and Nestle is a fitting opening event for the series, said Susan Derwin, IHC director. "The theme was developed in recognition of the myriad forms of control that politics, policy and corporate power exert over individual and collective bodies throughout the world. We wanted to explore the dynamics of those power relations and the ways that communities organize to reclaim the destinies of their bodies as well as the narratives through which those bodies are represented."

Into the fall, "Bodies Politic" continues on Nov. 5 with Virginia Tech professor Edward Anthony Polanco, who will discuss the practices of 16th century Nahua healing specialists of central Mexico in the context of colonialist society. On Nov. 19, Princeton University professor Rhae Lynn Barnes will unpack the intersecting politics of blackface and disability during the Roosevelt era. Audience Q&A and a reception will follow.

More talks are scheduled after the first of the year. Visit the Bodies Politic full schedule.

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