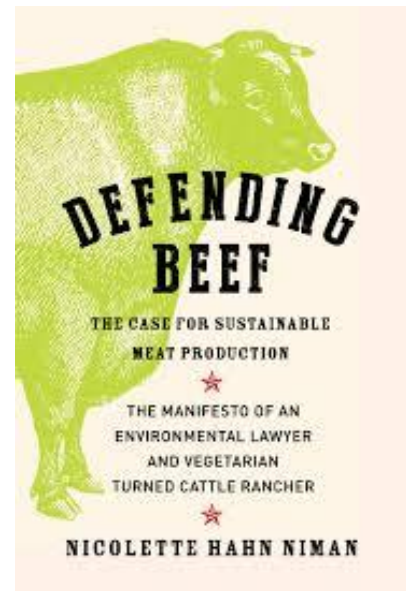


15. A Real Man Eats Meat

Over recent decades a rift between Vegetarianism (and Veganism) and Omnivorism (and Carnivorism) has grown proportionally to our pride-fueled proclivity for proxy fight-or-flight and the propagation of nonsensical memes. It is all the more tempting to ego-identify with an “ism” if it is associated with a brand that makes the believer look good. For example, it is widely believed that Veganism (and it works for Vegetarianism too) is associated with a person who is “intelligent, compassionate, enlightened, interesting” and otherwise special in some way – which makes the ego attachment to the “ism” even stronger, and whatever potential harm it possesses even more severe – while the believer may not actually be any of these things. He’s just a vegetarian, and his ego is fed by the respect that the vegetarian brand brings. This is how pride operates, and it need not be conscious, that’s for sure. In fact awareness (in particular awareness of what can be observed in the empirical data available to our senses) tends to reduce the effects of this pride. That is the point of this chapter – to raise awareness of the empirical facts, in spite of what we have been encouraged to believe.

The following is my Amazon review of the book *Defending Beef*. The review summarizes her book, so it is not necessary to have read it. I include it as a chapter here because it fits perfectly with my theme of observing the data with regard to the state of our mainstream food system, our personal physical health, and the role pride plays in the discourse.



The ongoing debate over beef production and consumption is rife with pride, hardened egos, and conflict. *Defending Beef* provides the most current description of the many facets to this debate and a breath of fresh air from the common, myopic manner that unfortunately characterizes how the related topics are often treated. While far from being free of passion, the author expertly describes with minimal prejudice the best that science, rational thought, and common sense have to offer the discussion of where we find ourselves with respect to our food supply near the end of 2014. I can imagine it will be hard for many readers, in particular those who pride themselves in living in accordance with principles intended to be of the highest benefit and kindness to all of life, to swallow their pride and humbly question whether or not their principles are actually resulting in what they intend. Yet this is the challenge of *Defending Beef*. It may be an incentive to neutral or hostile readers to know that at least one reader kept this challenge in mind and found *Defending Beef* to be very worthy of a person's best efforts to maintain the willingness to question one's cherished beliefs.

During my first reading of *Defending Beef*, two words repeatedly came to mind: comprehensive and balanced. Comprehensive, because in less than 250 readable pages, *Defending Beef* manages to effectively describe nearly all of the many perspectives by which one can approach this debate, alone making it an indispensable resource for anyone wishing to review the latest findings or investigate further. Balanced, because it presents the prevailing positions on each

perspective, chapter by chapter offering the most up-to-date evidence of how and why these positions either hold up or break down under scrutiny.

Chapter 1, "The Climate Change Case Against Cattle", reviews the latest data on the effects of cattle on climate and reveals that, historically, the degree to which greenhouse gas emissions can be attributed to cattle farming has been miscalculated and usually overstated. Rather, citing the most recent studies, the author explains exactly how properly managed cattle farming restores soil and grasslands, which stems erosion and sequesters carbon. The net effect is that cattle farming can (and actually should) be a "climate change mitigator."

Chapter 2, "All Food is Grass", reacquaints the reader with the commonsensical concept that "grass is, in fact, the base layer of the global food system" and further elaborates on the crucial role that grazing animals have always served to maintain this base layer, which co-evolved along with all large mammals, including our pre-human ancestors. When managed in a manner that approximately mimics how prehistoric ruminants naturally lived, modern-day livestock is our best resource for fulfilling their necessary life-sustaining functions to which the entire ecosphere is accustomed.

Chapter 3, "Water", presents the case that cattle farming is a polluter and heavy user of water, and then refutes it. While it's true that large animal confinement operations produce concentrated waste that pollutes water, farms that put cattle on pastures help to cultivate healthy soil for the benefit of the earth, in addition to eschewing the use of ecologically harmful man-made chemicals. As for water usage, oft-cited calculations that ostensibly prove beef to be a heavy water user are shown to be flawed, usually because of over-simplification. Taking into account the water sequestration capacity of healthy grass, the case is made that beef production uses far less water than other forms of agriculture. Indeed, the "net effect of cattle in the food system is a benefit to the world's waters."

Chapter 4, "Biodiversity", references evidence, books, and studies that put forth the argument that the pasture/livestock combination leads to greater biodiversity wherever it is allowed to occur, and to less biodiversity when the cattle are removed - just as nature operated before man embarked on the endeavor of large scale mono-crop agriculture.

Chapter 5, "Overgrazing", is another well-documented section dedicated to debunking a popular myth: that today's crises of desertification and loss of topsoil is the result of overgrazing. Acknowledging the truth of harm caused by early 20th century mismanaged grazing (as opposed to overgrazing), today the reality is that these deleterious environmental effects are more likely the result of large scale agriculture practices and can actually be reversed, instead of worsened, through properly managed livestock.

Chapter 6, "People", imparts to the reader another, more subtle benefit of raising beef: Living on grass-based farms and ranches provides opportunities for people, especially children, to reap the many psychological rewards and physical/emotional health benefits of exposure to animals and nature - opportunities that are being rapidly replaced by modern indoor living.

Chapter 7, "Health Claims Against Beef", starts with an overview of the myriad of health problems that afflicts the Western World, of which beef consumption has been implicated in

recent decades as a prime cause. Upon closer examination, the overwhelming evidence from nearly every discipline related to nutrition (biochemistry, endocrinology, neurology, epidemiology, anthropology, evolution, history, politics, etc.) points to sugar, not beef, as the more likely prime culprit. This chapter is the longest of the book, and the topic is complex. Fortunately, as is the case with the entire book, the explanations are very well written, and the documentation is broad and extensive (143 citations) for anyone who wants to investigate the matter further.

Chapter 8, "Beef is Good Food", takes the theme of Chapter 7 one step further. Not only is beef not bad for you, it's good for you, especially when raised naturally (on grass). Again, the evidence across multiple disciplines is yielding some controversial results: that consumption of animal fat and protein promotes physical and psychological health. Beef in particular provides essential nutrients that can be very difficult to obtain from other sources without taking measures which are costly and unnatural.

The next to last section, "What's the Matter with Beef", the author presents her criticisms for how beef is currently produced, mainly regarding "problems of land management, wasted resources, pollution, animal welfare, and food safety." Then she gives her "call to action" to the rest of the cattle industry on what specifically needs to be done to address each of these problems.

I found the last section, "Why Eat Animals", to be the best of the book. It is an absolutely brilliant moral and philosophical discussion on raising and eating beef. If you had to choose only one chapter to read, then this is it. The author begins by assessing the commonly parroted claim that livestock farming is immoral because it is too resource intensive if we expect to feed the global human population, in addition to being cruel to animals. As usual, *Defending Beef* argues that the conventional thinking is flawed, and exactly the opposite is true. In many areas across the globe where crops won't grow, or where crop cultivation is prohibitively costly, livestock are uniquely capable of converting plants that are inedible to humans into densely nutritious meat and milk which is stored in self-propelled containers that provide the owner with hide, fiber, and other high quality materials when their lives are done - and all of this is available on the owner's timetable, not restricted by seasonal harvest times. For the purpose of feeding and clothing the world's poorest people, livestock has always been, and continues to be, an indispensable resource.

At this point in the final section, *Defending Beef* reaches its culmination and makes what I believe to be its most valuable contribution: It speaks to the state of discourse on the topics of the book. The author leads by example, beckoning the reader to look inward with humility and reflect on what is most important:

"What has really fostered my interest in the debate over meat eating is not a desire to encourage meat consumption but a longing for some nuance in the discussion. The issue is far from black-and-white, and polarized camps lobbing accusations at each other only hinder movement toward a better system. Building a food system that is more ecological and more humane is far more important to me than whether so-and-so is eating meat." (p. 230)

Regarding animal cruelty/death, a very strong case is made that death and suffering are

consequences of ALL agriculture, in particular crop farming, while grass-based cattle farming sits at the benevolent end of the spectrum of animal treatment. Following this line of thinking and the corroborating evidence to their logical conclusions, *Defending Beef* arrives at this one particularly remarkable, simple, and brilliant piece of wisdom:

"What I'm looking for is agriculture that respects all life and follow nature's model. Answering the question: Am I eating food derived from an animal? tells you very little about the impact production of that food has had on nearby animals and plants. All farming, and especially crop farming, necessarily kills a lot of animals of all shapes and sizes. The more meaningful question is Has this food been produced as nature functions?" (p.236)

As many thinkers over the centuries have warned us, the central cause of our problems is our own pride, not our ignorance, not the wrong method or ideology; these are merely symptoms. Pride in man - what he thinks, feels, creates, and does apart from natural processes - divides us and blinds us from seeing the wisdom of Mother Nature. For the strong and open-minded, *Defending Beef* is a challenge to conquer pride, to take nature seriously, and to help save the planet in the process.