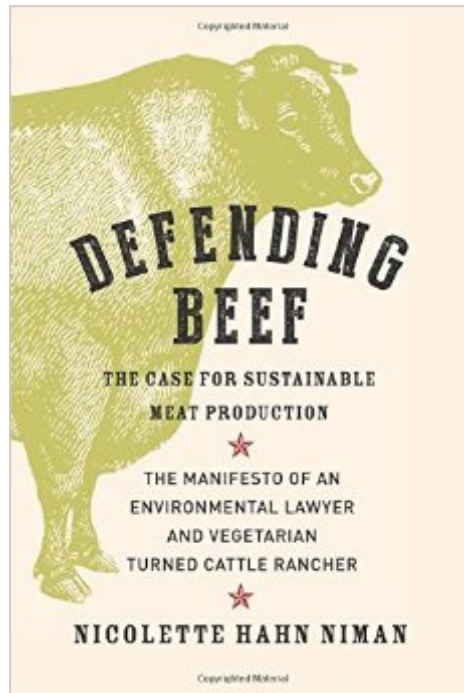


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Defending Beef: The Case For Sustainable Meat Production



Synopsis

For decades it has been nearly universal dogma among environmentalists and health advocates that cattle and beef are public enemy number one. But is the matter really so clear cut? Hardly, argues environmental lawyer turned rancher Nicolette Hahn Niman in her new book, *Defending Beef*. The public has long been led to believe that livestock, especially cattle, erode soils, pollute air and water, damage riparian areas, and decimate wildlife populations. In *Defending Beef*, Hahn Niman argues that cattle are not inherently bad for either the Earth or our own nutritional health. In fact, properly managed livestock play an essential role in maintaining grassland ecosystems by functioning as surrogates for herds of wild ruminants that once covered the globe. Hahn Niman argues that dispersed, grass-fed, small-scale farms can and should become the basis for American food production, replacing the factory farms that harm animals and the environment. The author—a longtime vegetarian—goes on to dispel popular myths about how eating beef is bad for our bodies. She methodically evaluates health claims made against beef, demonstrating that such claims have proven false. She shows how foods from cattle—milk and meat, particularly when raised entirely on grass—are healthful, extremely nutritious, and an irreplaceable part of the world's food system. Grounded in empirical scientific data and with living examples from around the world, *Defending Beef* builds a comprehensive argument that cattle can help to build carbon-sequestering soils to mitigate climate change, enhance biodiversity, help prevent desertification, and provide invaluable nutrition. *Defending Beef* is simultaneously a book about big ideas and the author's own personal tale—she starts out as a skeptical vegetarian and eventually becomes an enthusiastic participant in environmentally sustainable ranching. While no single book can definitively answer the thorny question of how to feed the Earth's growing population, *Defending Beef* makes the case that, whatever the world's future food system looks like, cattle and beef can and must be part of the solution.

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Customer Reviews

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.

Because I am at once a writer, a cook, and an omnivore, I have been confronted many times by a zealous band of culinary evangelists known as vegans, and their somewhat less-strident cousins, the vegetarians. Let me say at the outset that I begrudge them nothing, despite having been repeatedly labeled "unethical," "stupid," "uncaring," and "Satan-spawn" (really) because of the fact that I eat meat. Also, there is no doubt that it is only a small, albeit vocal, subset of them who are so militant in their execration of the meat-eating set. Aside from the occasional gentle ribbing or playful joke, I'll

make no disparaging comments about them in return. A vegetarian diet can be a perfectly healthy way to eat, and can have less of an impact on the earth when compared with some carnivorous diets. The same is true of vegan diets, although complete sources of protein can prove to be more challenging. Having said all that, I do wish that some of the more passionately vocal vegans and vegetarians would come to see that there are others in the world who do not see that world in the same way, and that fact alone does not make them worse people in any way. I think that is what Nicolette Hahn Niman was driving at in her first book, *Righteous Porkchop*, and in her new follow-up, *Defending Beef*. Contrary to the dogma of many environmental and human health advocates, beef is not inherently bad for either the earth or our personal well-being. Like so many things in our modern world, though, the over-production and over-consumption of it can be. The same can be said for production that is apathetic toward outcomes other than profit, and toward cooking and eating wherein the only motive is caloric intake.

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