



Defending Beef: The Case for Sustainable Meat Production

By Nicolette Hahn Niman

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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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Editorial Review

Review

"I have long wished for a single compilation with all the scientific evidence that counters the charges of the anti-beef propagandists. Well, now we have it. It's *Defending Beef, The Case for Sustainable Meat Production* by Nicolette Hahn Niman."--**Allan Nation, The Stockman Grass Farmer**

"*Defending Beef* is full of important insights and information, things anyone who cares about food and agriculture, including vegetarians, ought to know."--**Edward Behr, editor and publisher of *The Art of Eating***

The Art of Eating-

"Serious thinking about food and agriculture fills *Defending Beef: The Case for Sustainable Meat Production* (Chelsea Green, softcover, \$19.95). The beef Nicolette Hahn Niman defends is unprocessed, raised outdoors using humane methods on pasture or range. A lawyer, married to a rancher, she started with an anti-meat bias and remains a vegetarian (seemingly from habit). She answers criticism that cattle-raising contributes to desertification, world hunger, and global warming. She presents the ecological importance of trampling by hooves ? natural grasslands are a product of wild-animal grazing. The key for ranchers is well-timed pauses to let plants regrow. Problems come when grazing land is left to "rest" too long. Real environmental damage, she argues, comes from plowing up grasslands to plant crops. ... Most of her assertions come with references to scientific studies pro and con. Niman believes red meat is healthful, taking an Atkins-esque view that animal fat is not responsible for making people fat. In contrast to her own diet, she tentatively proposes: "We should eat what our bodies evolved to eat" ? mainly meat and wild plants. And she ties benign methods to the highest quality beef, giving her rancher husband's view that the best taste comes from the meat of British breeds; the cattle are at least two years old and fattened on the year's best grass. Beef is ideally a seasonal meat, she argues, although she doesn't believe it harms cattle to feed them some grain."

"In response to the ecological objection that cattle production produces more harm than good, biologist, environmental lawyer, long-time vegetarian and rancher, Nicolette Hahn Niman presents the case that raising cattle can in fact have many environmental benefits. These benefits, she argues, include helping to sustain grassland as well as producing nutrient efficient products for human consumption. Using scientific data, Niman argues how small-scale, grass-fed cattle operations are actually part of a long-term sustainability solution."--**Food Tank, "Top 10 Books About Food in 2014"**

"A longtime critic of industrial agriculture and a lawyer by training, Niman mounts a lawyerly case for pasture-based beef production. She does so from an interested position. She's the wife of Bill Niman, one of the nation's most celebrated grass-based ranchers. But critics who want to dismiss Niman's advocacy on economic-interest grounds have to grapple with the mountains of evidence she brings to bear. The main ecological question that haunts grass-fed beef involves climate change. Cows emit methane, a greenhouse gas far more potent than carbon, when they burp, which is often. But by grazing, they also promote healthy, flourishing grasslands, which suck carbon from the atmosphere and store it in soil. In doing so, they convert a wild vegetation that people can't digest into a highly nourishing foodstuff. So on balance, do cows contribute to or mitigate climate change? The conventional view holds that the burps win. Niman casts more than reasonable doubt on that verdict. Citing loads of research, she argues that enteric emissions (methane from burps) are likely overstated and can be curtailed by breeding and techniques like abundant salt licks, and more than offset by the carbon-gulping capacity of intensive grazing (where farmers run dense herds through a pasture for a short time, and then give the land plenty of time to recover). She also shows that healthy pastures also provide plenty of other benefits, including habitat for pollinating insects and birds, which are declining rapidly as industrial grain farming?mostly for grain to feed confined animals?expands."--**Tom Philpott, *Mother Jones*, Best Food Books of 2014**

"[T]he former environmental lawyer and now rancher Nicolette Hahn Niman ... has now collected her thoughts in the elegant, strongly argued *Defending Beef*."--**Corby Kummer, *The Atlantic*, Best Food Books of 2014**

The Los Angeles Times-

"If you are looking for a book to inspire fisticuffs at the Thanksgiving table, you've found it. Her "manifesto" calls for a revolutionized food system ? one that requires cows. ... One after another, Hahn Niman skewers the, ahem, sacred cows of the anti-meat orthodoxy. Eating meat causes world hunger? No, livestock are critical food (and cash) for 1 billion global poor, many living where plant crops cannot be grown. Deforestation? Forests are cleared primarily for soy, almost none of which goes to feed cows. Red meat and animal fat are the cause of the current epidemic of cardiovascular disease? The 1953 Keys study that spawned this belief actually showed no causation between the two and pushed us into the deadly grip of trans-fats and the true killer: sugar. Overgrazing ruined the American West? No, it was improper grazing and, in some cases, not enough cattle. ... She's not trying to change your mind; she's trying to save your world. And if you're an eater trying to pick your way through this divisive debate, you're cheering the information on every page."

The Wall Street Journal-

"Using a potent mix of scientific data and neoteric theories about health and environment, Ms. Niman makes a convincing case that grass-fed cattle should be a part of a sustainable food culture. If I were not already a consumer of grass-fed beef (I buy it frozen), I would be upon reading this book. ... The problems with beef today 'are problems of land management, water resources, pollution, animal welfare, and food safety,' Ms. Niman writes. She honors the cattleman culture, hoping the industry will self-correct, and to that end she

shares the techniques that her husband developed to produce great-tasting grass-fed beef. Some of the author's observations touch on larger topics, like the gross amount of food waste in this country (a whopping 50% of all food produced) and how our system of food subsidies 'leads us to eat an abundance of unhealthy foods.' These problems actually suggest pathways by which you and I might drive change, but they are not explored here. That may be because 'Defending Beef' is true to its title: It seeks to persuade, not inflame."

Publishers Weekly-

"After learning from her rancher husband the benefits of raising and eating beef, Niman (*Righteous Porkchop*) delivers a head-on attack against everything negative that has been said about the cattle industry. An environmental lawyer and vegetarian, Niman is a force of nature when it comes to debunking the untruths about how raising beef effects global warming, the connection between eating beef and heart disease, and that eating beef is the reason Americans are fatter than ever. Reading Niman's pointed and convincing prose, like when she states: 'compared with other ways of producing food, the keeping of grazing livestock, when done appropriately, is the most environmentally benign,' one can only imagine challenging her combination of intelligence, passion, and thoroughness. Despite the title, Niman isn't always on the defensive. In fact, she continually proposes ideas how to make meat production better by promoting the land- and animal-friendly practices of free-range, grass-fed ranching as a safer, more ecological, and healthier alternative to BigAg and industrial meat farming. Niman saves some of her most convincing and damning criticisms for her own vegetarianism as she demonstrates how raising livestock is not only a better option for the world's hungry masses, but also a better option for the planet's health. It sounds hard to believe, but Niman is almost impossible to disagree with."

Acres U.S.A.-

"The irony could not be more acute, for this vegetarian makes as forceful and compelling a case for rational livestock husbandry as could be imagined. ... A wealth of personal experience percolates through her case, giving it detail, color and emotional logic. ... The trick to telling this kind of story has to do with rendering reams of data into a relatively swift narrative without oversimplifying it. Whether telling the story of Allan Savory and mob grazing or recapping the findings of the late John Yudkin?author of *Pure, White and Deadly* that fingered sugar for crimes against health 40 years ago?Hahn Niman never misses a step. ... *Defending Beef* gives advocates of sustainable livestock a powerful weapon."

Library Journal-

"Niman (*Righteous Porkchop*), previously a senior attorney for the Waterkeeper Alliance, has a simple premise: 'We should eat what our bodies evolved to eat.' This title lays out her arguments in two sections. The first deals with cattle and how intensive factory farming has had a deleterious effect on certain environmental aspects of raising beef, but the author contends that these have been overstated. The link to climate change has been exaggerated, according to Niman, who claims that if cattle were permitted to graze on grass as they were evolutionarily designed to do, alteration to the earth's temperature might be mitigated, as this would promote carbon sequestration. Traditional cattle farming has other benefits, such as connecting

people to the land and to the rhythms of the seasons. The book's second part enumerates the health benefits of beef. Niman contends that bad science from the 1960s has led us to believe that fat and cholesterol should be avoided. We have switched to a diet that is heavy in sugars and carbohydrates and this has resulted in an increase in many chronic health conditions. The author maintains that a switch to less-processed foods and meats would reverse this trend. **VERDICT** As a vegetarian, Niman is an intriguing spokesperson for the beef industry. Her arguments seem sound and well researched. Recommended reading for those interested in the links between diet and health."

"I hope this book, which is more about the future of humanity, will be read by every citizen?not just those who feel the need to defend their meat-eating preferences. Biologist, environmental lawyer, and mother Nicolette Hahn Niman has provided a balanced report on the effects of cattle production on our environment, health, and climate change. Openly accepting the damage done by modern-day cattle production?on the land and in factory feedlots?she effectively argues that cattle themselves are not the problem; it is the way they are being managed that is endangering our health, environment, and economy. We can do something about that, and we must for the sake of our children and grandchildren. Key to our success will be an informed citizenry?for whom this book will be an invaluable tool."--**Allan Savory, founder and president, the Savory Institute**

"Creating healthful, delicious food in ecological balance is among humanity's greatest challenges. In this insightful book, Nicolette Hahn Niman shows why cattle on grass are an essential element. Every chef in America should read this book."--**Alice Waters, executive chef, founder/owner, Chez Panisse, Berkeley, CA**

"Anyone who doubts that beef can be part of a sustainable food system and healthy diet should read this book. *Defending Beef* proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that we can feel good about eating beef that's raised the right way."--**Steve Ells, founder and CEO, Chipotle Mexican Grill**

"*Defending Beef* is a brave, clear-headed, and necessary addition to the discussion about sustainable food systems. Using hard data and solid scientific research, Nicolette Hahn Niman, a lawyer turned rancher, presents a convincing case that everything we thought we knew about the environmental and human health damage caused by beef is just plain wrong."--**Barry Estabrook, author, *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed our Most Alluring Fruit***

"In this remarkable book, Nicolette Hahn Niman proves herself to be a true environmentalist?one who is willing to dig deeply, challenge orthodoxies, and get to the truth. You should read *Defending Beef* not only for the compelling case she makes for sustainable meat production but also as an example of critical thinking

at its finest.”--**Bo Burlingham, Editor-at-Large of *Inc.* magazine and author of *Small Giants* and *Finish Big: How Great Entrepreneurs Exit Their Companies on Top***

“I have traveled to every state in the U.S. during both summer and winter and have seen the land in extensive rural areas. There are huge land areas in this country that cannot be used for crops. The only way to grow food on these lands is grazing animals. Grazing done properly will improve the land. *Defending Beef* shows clearly that beef cattle are an important part of sustainable agriculture.”--**Temple Grandin, author of *Animals Make Us Human* and Professor of Animal Science at Colorado State University**

"Anyone hesitating to eat beef due to environmental or nutritional concerns needs to learn the other side of the story. *Defending Beef* is both scientifically accurate and highly readable. Kudos to Nicolette Hahn Niman for successfully engaging in one of the biggest environmental tensions of our day."--**Joel Salatin, farmer and author**

"Nicolette Hahn Niman just became beef's most articulate advocate. In *Defending Beef*, she pivots gracefully between the personal and the scientific, the impassioned and the evenhanded. It's a deeply compelling and delicious vision for the future of food."--**Dan Barber, chef/co-owner, Blue Hill and Blue Hill at Stone Barns**

"The prosecution will never rest after the case presented here by this unusually well-armed defense lawyer. Exactly how much and in what ways cattle benefit our world?whether or not we eat beef?have never been more thoroughly explained. Cattle are lucky to have such a remarkable rancher gal come to their aid on our behalf."--**Betty Fussell, author, *Raising Steaks: The Life and Times of American Beef***

“Nicolette Hahn Niman’s *Defending Beef* is as timely as it is necessary. With patience and passion she separates truth from fiction in the emotional debate about the role of beef in our lives and the effect of its production on our planet. Far from being a bogeyman of climate change and other environmental concerns, she argues, cattle, when properly managed, can play an important role in local food systems, land health, and carbon sequestration. The key is treating cattle as an ally, not an enemy, and exploring opportunities instead of simply pointing fingers. In this exploration, *Defending Beef* leads the way!”--**Courtney White, founder and creative director, Quivira Coalition, and author, *Grass, Soil, Hope***

“In our collective confusion and desperation about the environment, many zero in on cattle as an unlikely

culprit for everything from water pollution to climate change. In *Defending Beef*, author, rancher and environmental lawyer Nicolette Hahn Niman takes a nuanced look at the impact of livestock on land, water, the atmosphere, and human health. With clarity and eloquence, she puts research in context and shows that the raising of cattle can be destructive or restorative depending on how the animals are managed. Cattle?and common sense?have found their champion.”--**Judith D. Schwartz, author, *Cows Save the Planet***

“Issues related to the long-term health effects of red meat, saturated fat, sugar, and grains are complex and I see the jury as still out on many of them. While waiting for the science to be resolved, Hahn Niman’s book is well worth reading for its forceful defense of the role of ruminant animals in sustainable food systems.”--**Marion Nestle, Professor of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health at New York University and author of *What to Eat***

“*Defending Beef* is an important book. Nicolette Hahn Niman had me at the chapter, ‘All Food Is Grass,’ where she unpacks the complex clash of views over animal rights, ecology, and the legacy of human impact upon bioregions. The more I read, the more I came to value the passion and insight of someone who (like me) does not herself consume meat but recognizes that it rests at the center of what’s troubling with our food system and how we might set it right.

At Slow Food, we believe that better, less meat should become a rallying cry for a shift in our relationship to animals and each other. Scale, biodiversity, and rural economies get ample attention in this comprehensive yet easy-to-digest manifesto. If we ever hope to challenge the prevailing culture of confinement that defines the industrial meat system today then we need to make this book required reading for butchers, bakers and policymakers.”--**Richard McCarthy, executive director, Slow Food USA**

“*Defending Beef* clearly and unequivocally connects the dots for us on how vitally important raising pastured beef is to humanity. From increasing the glomalin in soil that helps create healthy grass, to sequestering carbon, battling desertification, enhancing the water supply, mitigating climate change, and promoting biodiversity, Nicolette Hahn Niman carefully draws a constellation for understanding just how our food production systems affect people, culture and our ecosystem?for good or ill. The case is airtight and the jury is in: Cattle on pasture are an integral part of the solution.”--**Mary R. Cleaver, owner/executive chef, The Cleaver Company and The Green Table, New York City**

"A breakthrough book that reclaims our relationship with farm animals and nutritious food. Comprehensive and insightful, *Defending Beef* delivers a compelling description of a food system that works with nature and wildlife, supports humane animal husbandry, and builds strong local economies. With a keen mind and passionate love of life, Nicolette Hahn Niman provides an insightful solution to feeding our growing world population and shows us a way of life that is both beautiful and sustaining."--**Judy Wicks, founder of White Dog Cafe and the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies and author of *Good Morning, Beautiful Business***

"It is so important that we free our minds of conventional beef wisdom and open up to the solution set that uses nature's wisdom as well as the smart agricultural practices of the future. In *Defending Beef*, Nicolette Hahn Niman gives us an exacting and compelling defense of land management that solves for environmental resiliency, human health, climate change mitigation, and prosperity. How could we not listen?"--**Kat Taylor, CEO and co-founder, Beneficial State Bank; co-founder and director, Tomkat Ranch Educational Foundation**

"As a chef, I am concerned with not just the flavor of my ingredients, but also their ecological, economic, social, biodiversity, and health implications. In *Defending Beef*, Nicolette Hahn Niman delves deeply into the many impacts of beef production. Through both scholarly research and her own personal journey, she shows how, again and again, the 'conventional wisdom' has missed the mark, while making an extremely convincing case for well-raised cattle having a necessary place in our global agriculture system and on our plates. Simply put, this book doesn't just make me a better chef, but also a better person."--**Michael Leviton, chef/owner, Lumiere; chair, Chefs Collaborative**

"Nicolette Hahn Niman, a lawyer, vegetarian and cattle rancher, serves up a well-argued defense of an American icon: the hamburger. Passionate and persuasive, Hahn Niman delivers a tough-minded critique of industrial animal operations along with an eloquent case on behalf of pasture-raised beef. The good news? It's safe to eat steak again--so long as you know where it comes from."--**Marc Gunther, editor-at-large, Guardian Sustainable Business US**

About the Author

Nicolette Hahn Niman is the author of *Defending Beef*. She previously served as senior attorney for the Waterkeeper Alliance, running their campaign to reform the concentrated production of livestock and poultry. In recent years she has gained a national reputation as an advocate for sustainable food production and improved farm-animal welfare. She is the author of *Righteous Porkchop* (HarperCollins, 2009) and has written for numerous publications, including the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Huffington Post*, and *The Atlantic* online. She lives on a ranch in Northern California, with her husband, Bill Niman, and their two sons.

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