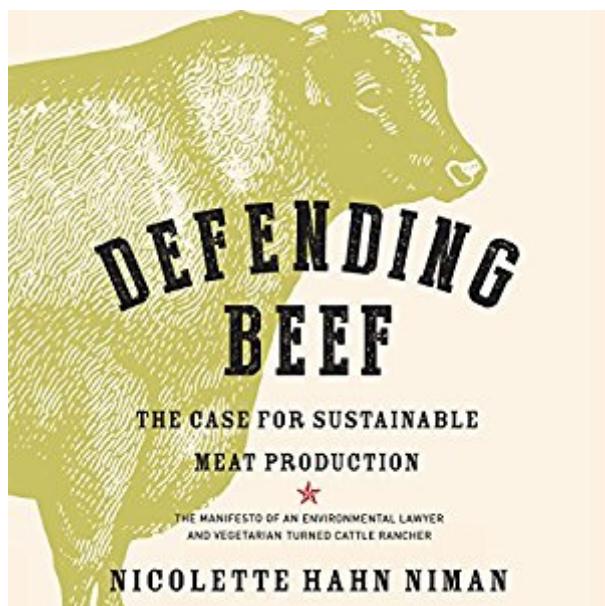The book was found

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.

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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.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 that 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.

The author formerly was an environmental attorney steeped in natural sciences, who by serendipity ended up immersed in cattle ranching and by her own admission stopped imbibing the Kool Aid of her former indoctrination.It is pleasant to read of the awakening of someone from the slumber of the Bambi mantra. She does so quite well and eloquently as far as cattle ranching is concerned. Her treatise of both good and bad is wide ranging, insightful and salient. I particularly harmonized with

her views on people, with particular emphasis on the state of our children¢ ™s upbringing. This could not have been more insightful and to the point.Of course her preferred rotational grazing cattle management and local style farming is a sanity that must and will return particularly as our synthetic economic bubble dwindles in our engaging world market.Where I find the book disheartening somewhat is in the various exposures of residual dogma that the author has not winnowed out but rather clings to as her foundational life raft. Meaning she has grander oxes to gore before arriving at full clarity. We as a society, country and world are so corrupted by the greenism parade that few can find the sobriety to clear the glaze before their eyes.Yet this book and author offers hope. It is a well written, and a sound science based rational foray dispelling the myths and revealing the truths regarding domestic beef production and consumption.

'Defending Beef' is an enjoyable and straightforward book which I highly recommend to be read by all, especially by those who, like me, were raised to think that red meat is bad for you and the environment. A passionate and riveting manifesto for sustainable meat production, it does not defend beef the way it is currently produced on a large, industrial scale. Instead, it makes a compelling case for better and humane cattle management which guarantees a better life for the animals, healthier food for people (including non meat eaters), and a restored balance to the environment. Nicolette Hahn Niman presents a gripping and informative case in eight chapters, in which she discusses the historical, social, environmental, and health biases against bovines alongside the emerging implications of raising grass fed cattle. Split into two parts, she weaves an illustrative narrative and maintains a comprehensive equilibrium between scrutiny and scientific facts. The first part discusses cattle within the context of climate change, grass, soil, and water, while the second half discusses beef within the context of food and health. In both parts, she incorporates and juxtaposes long standing beliefs with the most recent data. Most illuminating, for me, is the evidence she presents regarding cattle grazing, the restoration of grasslands (and their ecosystems) which have suffered desertification, and reversing the effects of climate change through soil carbon sequestration. The plethora of information in this book makes it more than just an informative read. It serves as a permanent reference, inspiring many thought provoking conversations at the dinner table.

This book is a well written, insightful argument for the humane raising of grass fed cattle, and how it can actually HELP the ecosystems we live in, contrary to popular belief. I've read a few books on similar subjects, but still learned quite a bit. I recommend it, regardless of whether you're

vegan/vegetarian/omnivore/carnivore. It's definitely eye-opening.

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