NATURAL FLAVORS: RHETORICAL STORIES OF FOOD LABELS

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Rebecca West

The Supervisory Committee certifies that this ***disquisition*** complies with North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

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SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Dale Sullivan
Chair

Abby Gold

Miriam Mara

Kevin Brooks

Approved:

May 24, 2017
Date

Elizabeth Birmingham
Department Chair

ABSTRACT

What is in our food? What can food labels tell us about what is in our food? This dissertation applies rhetoric in the everyday human act of reading food labels and making decisions about what to eat based on those labels. Rhetoric is continually operating from the beginning of the food manufacturing process, to designing and writing food labels and packaging, and finally to the consumer reading the label in the store.

"Natural flavors" is an ingredient listing that appears more frequently on food labels, especially in the organic and natural foods industries. I collected food labels and used qualitative methods as I rendered labels textually into Word documents in order to see the discursive elements of food labels away from the sometimes elaborate graphic design. I found that food labels contained three elements: the story, the reality, and the credibility. The story of the food label lures the consumer into an emotional response in either purchasing the food item or putting it back on the shelf. The reality of the label is in the ingredients list, or what is actually in that food item. The credibility is the availability of the manufacture in connecting with the consumer and to what extent they have transparency. By comparing these three elements on a textual page, we can see if there is truth and label equivalence between them, with "natural flavors" as a central component when it appears in the ingredients list. To the extent that there is or is not equivalence is explored through qualitative rhetorical analysis and briefly discussed by engaging Brummett's rhetorical homologies.

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INTRODUCTION

'Natural flavors' is a widely used ingredient in many manufactured foods. This so-called food ingredient is a USDA regulated term signifying a group of substances that manufacturers are allowed to put in food. It is a single terminology, a single listed ingredient that serves as a way to protect a proprietary formula used to enhance the flavor of highly processed, shelf stable, refrigerated, and frozen food. 'Natural' can mean anything but natural; the government does not regulate the definition or use of the term in food production and manufacturing. However, the rhetorical impact of reading or hearing the term 'natural' resonates with consumers, understanding that anything natural must be healthy and that its opposite, 'artificial,' is not. 'Flavors' as a listed ingredient, whether combined with the 'natural' term or standing alone, is not even a substance, it is nothing tangible in the physical sense, nothing one can pick up and examine. It is a quality or a property that a specific food contains that affects the human sense of taste.

Considering these two words that make up the single ingredient 'natural flavors,' the terminology really suggests a description of a quality more than a specific ingredient one can identify readily in the natural world or one's garden. Rhetorically then, 'natural flavors' is an intangible quality, and economically it is a proprietary goldmine. The manufacturer is not obligated to specify the exact combination of ingredients used in this umbrella term, so no one really knows exactly was this ingredient comprises. (The FDA website lists all the substances that are allowed under this blanket ingredient listing in their food code.)

This leads to the research question, "What is in our food?" or more specifically "What is in our *manufactured* food?" It is difficult in this era of advanced agricultural practices and a post-industrialized society to find out exactly what comprises even basic food commodities, such as

carrots for example, because of the changing chemical composition of air, water, and soil as a result of these practices and industry. But when manufacturers process food for mass consumption, they must abide by USDA rules to include a list of ingredients that specifies all that the packaged food product contains. To get consumers to keep purchasing and eating their products they must somehow create a combination of substances to make shelf-stable and some perishable foods palatable. So then, "What can food labels reveal about what is in our food?"

Food labels are rhetorically interesting because the persuasion element is so strong and is used in such a variety of unique and sometimes incoherent and especially misleading ways. One way to approach an examination of this type is to think of the rhetorical *story* that food labels tell. In Ann Vileisis' *Kitchen Literacy*, she introduces the idea of the story of food in its general and historic sense, basically searching for the original source of different foods. The title of her introduction, "Missing Stories," suggests that each food not only has an origin story, but also how food became what it is today. She asks, "Why did I *think* the way I did about my food?" finding it difficult to take responsibility for her lack of awareness about the foods she ate every day because the "whole supermarket system seemed to make it almost impossible for me—or for any of us—to know about the origins of our foods" (4). The stories about food she uncovers begins with a historical exposé on how our food culture got where it is, where it might lead, and why being ignorant about from where food comes became the norm.

I suggest that the labels on our highly processed, manufactured food tell a story about not necessarily *how* our food got to be where it is now, although I look at terms such as "grass-fed" that are prominently displayed on the label, but *what* story the manufacturers are trying to 'feed' us in order for us to happily buy and consume their products. Is the story factual or a fictional one? The context in which these stories are told are most interesting within the realm of the

natural foods industry, one of the fastest growing areas of the manufactured food market and one of the most lucrative. Many consumers are drawn to specialty foods for reasons of health, including organic, gluten-free, vegan, and heart healthy to name but a few. The bulk of the food labels examined here is within this segment of the market.

To find the answers, I look at the story, or sales pitch, that's encountered on the front of the label of a product. Then I compare that story with the ingredients list, usually on the back of the label, to see how the ingredients do or do not back up the sales pitch. Most consumers never look at the list of ingredients on any given product they purchase and consume, part of Vileisis' observation of consumer ignorance. Finally, I want to see how manufacturers may or may not allow us to take more responsibility for our lack of knowledge about food, and how they may behave responsibly themselves, by offering more information about their manufacturing process and/or invitations to contact them.

A departure point for the rhetorical story of food labels is Aristotle's three species of *pisteis*, or proofs. As outlined above, the front of the label is the main story of the food, the portion that is meant to persuade the audience, or consumer, with promises of something good to eat inside through the use of *pathos*, by leading them to feel emotion about the product. The ingredients list on the back of the label is *logos*, put there by law for the manufacturers to show or seem to show what is actually in the food. In offering invitations to contact them, manufacturers can show availability or transparency by how easy or difficult it is to get information about the product, using *ethos* in the way they develop their character. Sometimes this is shown through abundance of communication avenues (mail, telephone, social media, etc.) or a friendly tone. With others there can be almost a complete lack of information.

Health is a basic human right. In order to be healthy, humans need fresh air, clean water, and nutritious food. Using rhetorical research to understand how consumers make their food choices, what is actually in that food, and the willingness of manufacturers to disclose more information is important for human health and contributes to the relatively new field of food studies. Examining food labels shows how nutritionism, or fragmenting nutrition information while ignoring other components of food leaves "the door to misleading marketing…wide open," while labeling strategies such as these lead to individualizing the responsibility for eating habits squarely on the shoulders of each consumer (Knezevic 252-253). This dissertation aims to add to the discussion of how food consumption choices are made through reading food labels, comparing that choice with what is actually in the food as revealed by the label itself, and how manufacturers and the food industry aid or inhibit that process.

Chapter 1 begins the journey with my own food story, along with an introduction to some of the basic approaches I will be taking in my examination of food label stories: authenticity and homologies. Chapter 2 provides the context for the entire study—Big Food. It examines how our food became so processed and the mechanisms that allowed for this to happen. Chapter 3 then continues with a closer look at food labels and how Big Food uses them to their advantage. It shows how we can and cannot know precisely what is in our food and how food labels provide or do not provide the appropriate information and why. If Chapter 2 answers the question "What is in our food?" then Chapter 3 provokes a further question "What can food labels tell us about what is in our food?" Chapter 4 outlines and develops my personal research with food labels, from collection to dissection. I illustrate some examples from my texts and introduce the term "organatural." Chapter 5 discusses three different ways in which to look at the food label stories from the previous chapter, followed by a brief Afterword.

CHAPTER 1: FROM GARDEN TO GROCERY

The time is coming soon, if not already here, when few will have been raised on anything but pre-packaged, manufactured food items. Indeed, many cannot even identify the difference or level of degree between processed food and whole food procured in its most simplistic, natural state. The epitome of overly-processed, contrived food items for sale on super-market shelves today can be found as a simple, unassuming phrase found on food labels in the ingredients list that cries out to be ignored: natural flavors. This menial, hard-working epitaph signifies a conglomeration of the height of proprietary food chemistry preparations standing in for any semblance of real food substances that would otherwise be readily recognizable. To illustrate, follow back to a time and place where everyday food was simply sourced, and journey forward to a time and place where food provenance is not only unknown, but also unknowable.

Garden

The Fruit Room

When I think about food and mealtimes growing up on a North Dakota farm in the 60s and 70s, I think about hard work, sunshine, and rain. We had a fruit room, but never did I hear the word pantry. The fruit room was in the farthest corner of the basement of our rented farmhouse. As one lowered oneself over the creaky, open-stepped wooden stairs towards the cool bottom floor, finished only with a roughly poured slab of cement, there was a coal-burning furnace to the right and shelves of general storage, as well as a deep freeze, to the left. Behind the stairs was kept fairly unencumbered in order to accommodate the family during tornado events.

Across the way to the far side of the basement was the fruit room, encased by an old wooden door with rows of wooden shelves inside. It was quite small and quite dark as well as

cool, perfect for winter storage of all we had laid aside in the fall. Sometimes Ma would try her hand at homemade wine or what she would call champagne…in any event, it was a bizarre collection of dark glass gallon jugs topped with balloons which inflated with fermentation gases from the slow bubbly brew inside. Every so often one would burst, and I remember there being a kind of disappointment; perhaps that meant that particular jug was ruined. The liquid stunk from my youthful point of view, and since my parents have never been drinkers I don't know what the fuss and effort was all about, apart from yet another way to utilize freshly grown produce.

The main treasure held by the fruit room was jars of harvested fruits and vegetables from the garden and from nearby wild fruit-bearing trees. Mostly this was quarts of tomato soup and whole tomatoes, rows of dill pickles, and pint jars of wild plum jelly, chokecherry jelly, and rhubarb sauces and jams. On the cool ground lay gunny sacks of potatoes, a combination of red and white, dug from the garden in the fall. Many buttercup squash lay alongside, and Ma frequently cooked and served both together at the same meal with a large slab of beef chuck roast, the fluffy white-flesh of the potatoes edging into the sweet, brown-sugared squash together on the plate, with butter, salt and pepper intermingling both.

In the deep-freeze was the corn and green bean harvest. Putting up the corn was an annual event, overtaking the kitchen for a few days while Ma, Pops, and my brother would take turns removing the bright yellow kernels, same color as the kitchen walls, from the cobs of corn, waiting their turn freshly shucked in bushel baskets on the kitchen floor. The green beans were blanched and put up at an earlier time in the growing season, and didn't call for such a magnitude of operations.

The Garden

The garden lay a few yards from the house, over the lawn, past the swing set, and beyond the nearest shelterbelt. There was an old abandoned horse-drawn wagon next, the wood all gray and weathered beyond splinters so we could play on it without regard. The best climbing tree was next to the wagon, providing a nice place to shade between hot, sunny work in the dirt.

We grew all sorts of vegetables, as well as harvesting the established perennials of asparagus and rhubarb patches at the far end. Our mainstay veggies were carrots, onions, beets and potatoes; green and yellow beans, sweet peas and radishes; a huge patch of buttercup squash, volunteer dill, and a host of multi-colored zinnias and other assorted hardy flowers; Ma loved to decorate the house with vases of them after the rush of freshly cut lilac branches in the spring. We ate off these fresh vegetables, a whole family of six, all summer long. For me the word garden meant vegetable garden, and it wasn't until I was well into adulthood that I understood others used the word to mean the front or back yard, which we grew up knowing as the lawn and bushes.

The Red Owl

Grocery shopping was once a week at the local Red Owl on main street in the small town five miles from our farm. At the time I thought of it as a treasure trove, with rows of pristine canned and boxed dry goods and the candy counter at the front of the cash register counter. Today that tiny store servicing a whole rural community would fit inside any respectable convenience store, but it carried the basics we needed that our garden didn't provide. We also had to visit the creamery for our dairy, overseen by a corpulent red-faced man in overalls with one glass eye.

The Red Owl also supplied us with meat, which was supplemented by fresh fish my uncles caught when they went on fishing trips in Minnesota lakes close by. They also hunted duck, goose, and deer in the fall and shared that with us as well. Pops didn't hunt nor did he farm livestock, so we came by our meat when our neighbor livestock farmers butchered a pig. These farmers also sold their fresh meat to the local meat locker and butcher, who made wonderful German sausages, ring bolognas, and liverwurst, which we bought whenever we could.

Grocery

Into the Food Lab[yrinth]

Eventually our family came to know and use processed foods more and more. Early on, processed foods were shunned for their expense and low quality—we just couldn't afford them for our family of six and the foodstuffs were either old or not pure, homemade quality. Some foods we used were breakfast cereals, served either cooked or cold, packaged noodles, canned soups, and of course baking staples such as flour and sugar. Ma baked our own bread, rolls, and kuchen well into my teenage years. I don't remember much fresh fruit, which made fruit and nut baskets at Christmastime a real treat, not just a traditional gesture as they are today.

By the mid-70s we were well on our way to subsisting on mostly processed foods: Shake n Bake chicken and pork shop coating, canned soda pop, chips and snack crackers of every variety, ice cream, candy, cake and pudding mixes, Jell-O, cold cuts, Velveeta cheese, frozen pizza, and boxed macaroni and cheese. By then too of course, margarine had totally replaced butter in virtually every household. Processed foods, along with the ensuing fast food culture even in the rural areas (usually a Dairy Queen brazier in the nearest town) was now not only much cheaper, but better, more consistent quality as well as a sign of modernity and even

prosperity, because only the lowest on the [rural] economic scale made their own food because they "had to."

Homemade food was labor intensive and a sign that you had no viable employment outside of the home. As teenaged farm kids, we eschewed the rural lifestyle, suffered through summer chores (interior and exterior painting, hoeing a quarter mile of five rows of newly planted shelterbelt, building grain bins, mowing endless expanses of lawn, and washing cars and farm vehicles) and couldn't wait to pop a frozen pizza in the oven with some store-canned baby gherkins as a late night treat. By this time, building our own pizza from a boxed kit was passé.

Enter Organic

Fast forward a couple of decades to the new millennium, where the industrial food complex has reached the level where they've developed Soylent, a substance (one can hardly call it food) that the manufacturers purport to maintain human bodily functions and surreptitiously replaces all stages of food procurement and standard consumption in order to save consumers unnecessary and troublesome time eating to staying alive, to the local foods movement, where farming, local farmers markets, food preservation, and the term "foodie" has taken oppositional stance. These two areas of food production and consumption reflect the cultural-political polarization currently plaguing the human food supply.

In between the white lab coat manufacturing and denim bib overall farming is the organic foods industry. This industry encompasses the gamut of anything referred to as natural foods, a term which is sometimes used to label an offshoot hybrid food item developed by mainstream manufacturers to describe one of their standard products that has been modified to meet a new demand in this niche market. So called natural foods, on the other hand, developed by the organic and natural foods industries sometimes also culminate in the most up-to-date consumer

informed products, meeting the demand for local, grass-fed, gluten-free, raw or wild, vegan or vegetarian, no added hormones, BPA-free packaged, no high fructose corn syrup, whole grain, low glycemic, high fiber, low-carb, non-GMO, heart-healthy, organic, all-natural, fairly traded, sustainably raised or ethically sourced food products.

From the original health food and hygienic movements at the turn of the century to the granola-eaters of the boomer generations, the organic foods industry has in turns moved from whole grains and other foods purchased from bulk bins and poured and weighed into consumer-brought jars and bags, to hermetically sealed, individual sized portions of pre-cooked ready-to-eat or –microwave natural foods products sporting a seal of organic certification. These historical shifts raise some questions that consumers may or may not be aware of when making selections at the grocery store or online: What's really in that particular food item? Can I find out the truth of what's in that item by the information given on the food label? Why does all the food, even a bag of nothing but dry split peas, still have a food label? Might there be something in that food item that will not be revealed on the food label? Can I trust the food label? Can I trust the food? Can I trust the food packager or manufacturer? If I buy a food item from a health food store, can I be sure that it is healthy? These are some questions that consumers, including myself, anguish over every time they shop for food. This anguishing over and questioning about our food choices, fueled by a history and trajectory of massive changes in how our food is grown, packaged and manufactured, drives the present study. Answers may be found by rhetorically addressing food items and how they're labeled, focusing on the organic foods industry products and their labels.

The Rhetoric of Food Labels

I don't remember exactly when I began reading food labels in order to decipher or ascertain what was in my food. Perhaps it began in the 80s and certainly by the 90s when I was diagnosed with cancer. In the 80s my concern for the contents of food was more in keeping a healthy family of three—my husband, my son and myself. In the 90s my concern about food and heightened attention to ingredients was due especially to the wry comment by my surgeon at the conclusion of conventional medical treatment for cancer: "What do you mean, are you cured? Only hams get cured!" Because conventional medicine failed to give answers about why I got sick and how to prevent recurrence, I turned to investigating preventive measures, such as mind/body medicine and the quality of food I was ingesting on a regular basis.

My quest for knowledge of personal preventive medicine, especially in lieu of the lack of its practice in conventional medical quarters, and with a focus on the most basic form of prevention—eating high quality nutritious food and avoiding food that not only lacks nutritive and healing value but also detracts from positive health—led me to employment in a number of health food stores during the turn of the century and into the first decade. This series of jobs allowed many opportunities for informal primary research into what people are looking for and how they go about finding personal preventive healing paths, especially as it pertains to dietary regimens. Searching for the perfect food, or at least food that wouldn't cause illness, begins and ends with food labels.

Although I don't claim to be a health nut let alone any kind of expert or authority on the best dietary practices, I do carry an intense yearning to understand culturally and rhetorically what has happened and is happening to our food supply. I want to understand and rhetorically explore how the list of food ingredients compares to the stories the food labels ply, along with

the manufacturers' willingness to communicate with consumers about their products. There is also the question of authenticity and truth about our food choices—how much do we really want to know about the provenance of our food and how closely does it correlate to its natural form?

Natural Flavors

My interest in food labels culminated with a phrase that kept popping up in the ingredients list, usually toward the end: natural flavors. This phrase seems to appear in almost every processed food item, including organic and so-called natural foods products. The FDA's Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) defines natural flavors as any derivative, and there is a variety of derivation methods listed, of plants or animal products, further defined elsewhere in the code. One can easily find themselves hours later still deep into the FDA's website on these matters, tracing definitions through multiple layers of links within links, and still not feel any level of satisfaction in understanding what this phrase means, or indeed what is ultimately in our food, when viewing all of the other definitions and allowances that one finds along the way. The code is written for food chemists and legal professionals.

There is nothing inherently bad, perhaps, in any of the food substances found under the heading of natural flavors, and many scientists may complain, as reported in the popular media, of "chemophobes" decrying the ubiquitous encroachment of chemical fabrication in all areas of our lives. However, it is the language of the phrase that sounds troubling. For example, the definition of "natural" in the food industry has not been generally defined or codified, except in contrast to the definition of synthetic. The term "flavor" is defined as "flavoring constituents…whose significant function in food is flavoring rather than nutrition" (U.S. Dept. – CFR).

Beyond the FDA's industrial definition natural flavors is interesting for its synecdochical representation of something substantial enough to be listed on a food label as an ingredient, or indeed as a whole food we might recognize in its natural state. When teaching customers on how to read food labels during one of my natural foods employment stints, I would ask "what do you think natural flavors is—something that grows on the natural flavors tree?" Indeed, natural flavors serves as a place-holder for food chemistry concoctions that are there to enhance the flavor of old, dead food that has a shelf life of years; alternatively, it is there to enhance the flavor of foods in order for us to increase our consumption and purchase of them.

So why is natural flavors appearing in organic and natural foods products? Natural and organic foods shoppers are looking for food that promotes health and prevents illness, products that reflect their lifestyle or at least encourage them in the lifestyle to which they aspire. These food products need to have a level of authenticity to represent healthy choices along with differentiating from conventional, "unconscious" food choices.

Authenticity

Looking for authenticity in food is like peeling back onion layers—the more you seek it, the simpler the food gets. Take for example the gluten-free food shopper. In their search for food without gluten they seem to miss a basic point—almost all food in its simplest state is already naturally gluten free: fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains such as quinoa, buckwheat, rice, and millet, fresh cuts of meat, fresh dairy products and eggs, and a wide variety of dried beans, peas, and other legumes. What I observed while working in a health food store is that gluten-free food shoppers agonize in the highly manufactured and pre-packaged food aisles, searching and scrutinizing food labels for a gluten-free statement, an allergen statement, or a list of ingredients without the gluten offenders of which they are aware. The point is that gluten-free shoppers

might serve their needs better by steering away from highly processed foods, which almost always contain some gluten, and look for natural, authentic food choices. This is good advice for any consumer, yet certain groups of shoppers get caught up in finding "foods" in the grocery aisles instead of the periphery of the store where fresh, natural food is found.

Kara Shultz, in her chapter "On Establishing a More Authentic Relationship with Food," discusses how we can make better food choices and how this relates to rhetoric. Her analysis is based on Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, or being there, and proposes that we can understand culture through the everyday experiences of our lives, such as eating along with food choices. In order to make authentic choices, she says, we must exchange a relationship with food based on mass produced, inauthentic and undifferentiated choices for food that is unique, authentic, and differentiated. This relationship is more of a conscious, mindful application of choice over a mindless, groupthink approach to food consumption (224-226). It's as if we give our trust to large corporations along with the federal government if we don't consume consciously—if we don't look at food labels and research the companies—for if we approach our food choices that way, we operate under a tacit understanding that the government would not allow anything harmful on grocery store shelves, and if we do get sick, we have the conventional medical machine to remedy our ails. Refer back to when I made a conscious choice, after my cancer surgeon was bereft of answers as to what caused it and how I could avoid a relapse, to identify lifestyle changes that might address these health concerns.

Rhetoric adds to Shultz' analysis through use of the term deliberation. Deliberation, she elaborates, is used by Heidegger in place of the term rhetoric. Deliberation as used in Heidegger's interpretation of the term can lead to acting on individual consciousness by exposing habitual behavior of mass culture (230). Rhetoric, then, breaks through habits and

opens up a space for authenticity; it gives one agency (in the onslaught of mass produced food) to *deliberate* for oneself how one wants to live: authentically or blindly, taking personal responsibility, or allowing the eco-political establishment to remold the self into a simple manifestation of the masses.

Rhetorical Homologies

Patterns of form, or those habitual activities that describe our day-to-day experiences, are what rhetorician Barry Brummett redefines the word homology to describe. Sometimes likened to analogy or metaphor, rhetorical homologies go beyond comparison in that they are generative, meaning that they can dialogue with each other to generate more forms of experience. The food label as a form of experience operates on and interacts with the consumer, the manufacturer, and the product in that the forms of food labels are similar, so "probing into the characteristics of some texts and experiences in the set invites examination of other homological texts and experiences in the set to see whether the same characteristics obtain" (258). For example, when we take similar sets of foods labels, such as those from the organic and natural foods industry, and look for similarities in the components of the label, such as the rhetorical story of the food label, the ingredients listings, and the manufacturers' contact information, we can begin to see patterns unfold, thereby gaining a "fruitful way to understand new dimensions of the form itself" (258).

As we begin to delve into a close examination of food label stories through the use of rhetorical homologies, we also begin to understand more about the food we are consuming as well as how to make more conscious, or authentic choices about what we eat. Many studies have been conducted through the years on food labels as they impact human nutrition, daily food choices, and marketing tactics, but nothing has been studied on the rhetorical force of food label

stories. Recently, an English master's thesis was written about organic food packaging as a marketing genre using the three rhetorical appeals to understand how this was effective in establishing a definition of organic (Baker), and a couple of decades ago a communications professor wrote an article about the marketing semantics of large food manufacturers and how they mislead the public into purchasing their products as healthy (Welford). Both of these works tend to favor an approach that focuses on marketing forces. This study endeavors to understand where we are in the current context of mass marketed food choices, how food labels "speak" to us with stories and how they compare with the truth of what's really in the food, and finally to understand how we can begin to become more authentic in our daily lives by not being fooled by the stories we tell *ourselves* about the food we eat.

CHAPTER 2: AMERICAN CUISINE = PROCESSED FOOD

The truth about our food is in its provenance, and also in its packaging. We rely on food packaging to give us clues about its origins, how it was made, manufactured, contained, and ultimately labeled. Most people don't look at food labels, not to the extent that I do and that many other concerned consumers do. When we see food labels and compare the rhetorical strategies used in convincing us to buy, eat, and buy the product again, we can be sure that marketing forces are at play in the big game of Big Food.

Many of us have read or are familiar with Michael Pollan's and Barbara Kingsolver's criticisms of the food industry, and they are well met. However, it would be provident to dig deeper into the underpinnings and machinations of the way our food is produced and mass marketed in order to take back control of what we ingest in order to take back control of our public (and personal) health. These are big issues that are at stake in reading about and understanding the rhetorical stories of food labels, and are the present task of this chapter.

American Cuisine

American cuisine strongly features processed food. Since the time of exploration and trade, we really cannot discuss the idea of local or regional cuisine with any degree of finality. But first, why should we even care? What does cuisine have to do with our food choices? Cuisines organize our food choices into cultural as well as familial menus. Long ago we were raised on a limited amount of what we considered edible in our immediate worlds. Some things were good to eat, or healthy to eat, or not. This is what cuisine does for individuals; for nations, it creates an identity as well as an economy. As I will illustrate in subsequent chapters, food labels may help us to decide what foodstuffs belong to our cuisine.

How We Got Here

Travel of both food and persons has developed and determined what we eat through collections of acceptable comestibles called cuisines, Raymond Sokolov tells us. Idiocuisines develop like idiolects in language: as individuals and families incorporate various additions and evolutions of foods and ingredients through contact, distribution, or travel, new regional cuisines develop. As more of the "home" comfort foods become available in traveling, immigrant, and colonization settings, Sokolov suggests that the newer innovations take a back seat or disappear altogether as familiar foods displace local and native foods and cuisines (9).

Following Sokolov, then, the geographical movement of agricultural products is like an inversion of the hunter and gatherer lifestyle. Instead of humans travelling over ground for foodstuffs, the foodstuffs travel ground to humans wherever they have settled. Variety, instead of being everywhere as one travels, is separated and settled into different areas. Agriculture, as a substitute for the previous lifestyle, must rely on trade and distribution to provide everyone with (assumedly) even more variety than was experienced before.

The modern version of cuisines evolving from innovation and adaptation back to comfort and familiarity is more clearly evident as supermarkets and worldwide distribution make available what seems to be a variety of foods made from only a handful of commodities. Any regional variety is made available for purchase and eaten only on special occasions for a given idiocuisine (Sokolov 10). In other words, wherever we are living today, we can have the foods we grew up on, because they are available in supermarkets. The regional variety offered on special occasions such as holidays might be items such as Scandinavian lutefisk or lefse, but mostly processed shelf stable food items that we celebrate and elevate to holiday status by

combining them in traditional ways. An exemplary illustration of this occurs during the distinctly American holiday of Thanksgiving.

"Traditional" American Thanksgiving

This year I went shopping with my mother and father for their traditional Thanksgiving meal. Basically the traditional foods of an American Thanksgiving are highly processed. The menu can be discerned by the food items marked down for sale in the grocery stores and as advertised in their weekly fliers. The menu consists of turkey, stuffing (called "dressing" in our family), gravy, mashed potatoes, sweet potato side dish, green bean casserole, corn, cranberry sauce and/or relish, iceberg lettuce salad with bottled salad dressing, and pumpkin pie with whipped cream for dessert.

To produce this meal you need to buy a cheap large turkey, which will have been grown to preternatural proportions on a factory farm (although the one we got this year only weighed in at 27 pounds), milk and white refined flour for the gravy, and a number of packaged and processed dried white and "brown" bread for the stuffing, along with cheap ground beef used as a substitute for or enhancement of the turkey giblets (gizzard, heart, liver). For the sweet potato side dish you need processed canned yams (in water or in corn syrup), brown sugar (essentially highly refined white sugar made from sugar beets with molasses added for color and texture), and marshmallows (another corn syrup product and one which baffled our Chinese guest to whom I sat beside and was asked repeatedly what some of the dishes were; later I was informed that she was trying to get used to American cuisine and its high use of sugar in almost all of our food).

Next follows the ubiquitous and meme-like green bean casserole, for which you need French-cut canned green beans, canned cream of mushroom soup, processed American cheese

slices, and canned French fried onions. The green bean casserole uses possibly the most highly processed foodstuffs of all the dishes for this holiday meal and is the most coveted by all the guests, which demonstrates the processed nature of American cuisine as holding an exalted status. The cranberry sauce is also ubiquitous at the Thanksgiving holiday meal, although not always relished by all at the table. Some less adventurous in the kitchen will purchase the canned gelled cranberry congealment that comes out of the can in a perfect cylinder. My mother makes hers from scratch using whole fresh cranberries, oranges, and apples to make up two different versions, but then adds highly processed white sugar and sugar substitute.

The salad and dessert have highly processed items as well: bottled salad dressings with high fructose corn syrup and pie made from canned pumpkin, canned milk, sugar, and white flour and shortening (processed hydrogenated vegetable oil) for the crust. This is topped with a frozen non-dairy whipped product that comes in a plastic container with a fundamentally dubious ingredients list. The corn is home harvested from freshly husked cobs grown on the farm (genetically modified) and thawed and cooked from freezer bags, and the mashed potatoes are just potatoes whipped with milk, these last two items guilty only by their seed stock.

One might think that this cuisine has been forced on us through the years and "advancements" of the food industry, but Sokolov concludes differently. The real problem is, he points out, the greedy demand of consumers for off-season items, and not the fault of hybridization, genetic modification, or premature ripening. Demand stems from the necessity of certain parts of our cuisine that require the fresh tomato, for example, no matter what time of year (116). From this angle, it is consumer demand that drives the high tech agricultural products, processing and manufacturing, and distribution and importation, and not the manufacturers "pushing" their products on us. What we have developed as cuisine over the years

drives our need to have a meal that satisfies us. However, with the help of food manufacturing, those tastes and cuisines driving eaters have led to products that might not even be called food or conform into a cuisine anywhere.

Processed Food

Unless we eat a berry just picked from a bush with our hands, or pull a carrot up from the ground, brush off the dirt, and take a bite, all of our food is in some way processed. This was a point easily made to a co-worker in a health food store when he was looking to purchase food for his lunch that was emblematically and exemplary unprocessed. As he grabbed a jar of almond butter off the shelf, with an ingredients list that sported the single ingredient of organic raw almonds, I asked him why he was choosing to eat processed food. Taken aback, he listened to my explanation of how the almonds were processed in order to become almond butter, put in a jar, and distributed to reach the final destination of the store where we both worked. I'm not sure what he ended up eating for lunch that day, but it was obvious I had given him some food for thought. More to the point, however, and for the purposes of the present exploration, we turn now to the current state of our food supply and what's in our highly processed American cuisine.

How We Got Here

When we first began looking to grocery stores or markets to supply our food, processed or prepackaged food was unregulated and therefore considered generally unsafe and with dubious quality or consistency. This was changed in 1906 with the Pure Food and Drug Act whose intention it was to protect the public from adulterated food (Veit 142; Guthman 130). Thus began our trust of federal regulation to supply us with processed foods that were safer and more reliable than homemade or spurious market supplies, and with it a shift towards a new trend in our relationship with food. An observation made at the time was that "new foods,

concentrated foods, and out-of-season foods tempted Americans at every turn, confusing them into spending too much, eating too much, and choosing foods based on what tasted good rather than what *was* good" (Veit 161).

It is important to consider here the implications toward the trend in wanting to eat food because it tastes good. Many consumers have no idea nor do they care what the ingredients list of a food contains let alone the information on the nutrition facts label. If you ask someone why they are eating a certain food today they will inevitably reply "because it tastes good." Veit points out that this began the trend of overconsumption, which was considered at the time to be morally wrong, as was intemperance with alcohol (161-162). Perhaps overeating is still considered a personal and public embarrassment in some circles, but in many others we see restaurants and food manufacturers encouraging the practice by oversizing their products and adding ingredients that make a person find it difficult to stop eating their products even after they are full.

Further, Guthman points out that During the New Deal, the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act was passed in 1938 in order to identify nonstandardized ingredients on labels as artificial. Then the Delaney Act in 1958 prohibited ingredients proved to be carcinogenic such as saccharin, which re-entered the market later but with a warning label (130). By 1996 with the Food Quality Protection Act the Delaney clause was overturned, reinforcing "old norms of risk assessment that weighed regulatory costs to business against public benefits" (131). There have been some ingredients that have been banned since, but many of these ingredients' "cousins" remained as allowable.

In the meantime, allergies to certain food substances became an increasingly serious health issue. The FDA stepped in to enact the Food Allergen Labelling and Consumer Protection

Act (FALCPA) in 2004, which contained a list of common food allergens that had to be disclosed on the label in order to protect consumers (U.S. – "Guidance Food"). In addition, in 2011 the FDA Food Safety and Modernization Act (FSMA) provided the FDA with a number of new tools to improve our food supply and its ingredients. These tools include stronger food safety enforcement, the provision to require imported food to meet domestic standards, and the ability to create more integrated systems between the FDA and local and state food systems (U.S. – "Significant Dates").

Processed food also began to take on a new cultural hue as agricultural production rose so that food processors were forced to deal with the situation by making cheap products with many additives that "defined postwar modernity: cake mixes, margarine, [and] Hamburger Helper" (Guthman 125-126); processed food was "cool" to eat and defined a generation; it became a cultural item that could "confer social status" (Winson 25). From there the system has grown to public health issues of obesity, many times blamed on the food companies, and affecting the lower income population as they are forced to eat cheap foods which are inevitably highly processed (Guthman 112). We have come full circle from the need for regulation to create safety and quality standards to a labyrinthine conglomeration of federal regulations where consumers, Big Food, and food ingredients all come in search of the truth at the middle of the maze.

The New Normal

The heights (or depths) of food processing are reached in what Anthony Winson refers to as the degradation of our food supply, which is three-pronged: simplification, adulteration, and speed (29). I would add a fourth prong, which Winson also refers to in his book: spatial colonization. Simplification indicates those foods that are derived from a few agricultural commodities, such as wheat, corn, and soybeans. For example, you may see a multitude of items

on rows and rows of supermarket shelves, but they are all made from the same basic commodities: crackers and chips made from corn and wheat and cooked in soybean oil, sweets and confectioneries made from corn syrup, or boxes of cereal and loaves of bread made from highly refined wheat products and beet sugar.

Adulteration is the area of degradation most consumers are familiar with and read about; that is, "cheapening the cost of producing an edible product" by adding sugar, fat, and salt (Winson 30-31; Moss). In the past, before the 1908 legislation (see above) foodstuffs were adulterated by putting non-food substances or other things in food to make them stretch, or to get more money for fewer products. Now the substances added are nefarious combinations and fractionated components of sugar, fat, and salt and are insidiously designed specifically to be addictive (Winson 175). He calls these pseudo-foods, and emphasizes their danger to our health because they are overabundant in calories and lack other nutrients essential for health (177, also cf. Guthman).

Speed is Winson's third type of degradation and describes the "turnover time of capital" (31). This prong is a bit more difficult for most average consumers to comprehend because of the economic forces at work, but can be best illustrated by observing meat production in that animals are forced to reproduce and grow under abnormally fast conditions whereby an enormous turkey, for example, is produced in the shortest time possible. When these processes are at work, shareholders see a greater return in the shortest possible time on their investment (146). Guthman also adds that with speed comes laxity, whereby many additives get pushed through the system without notice because the regulatory environment prioritized productivity over caution (138).

My added fourth prong and Winson's additional argument for the degradation of our food supply is spatial colonization. This happens when food manufacturers and marketing spaces join

forces to promote profits through selling highly processed food by "transforming food environments" and occur in three "vectors:" supermarkets, along with convenience store chains; fast-food restaurants; and transnational snack food manufacturers (34-37).

A good example of colonizing space is not only about product placement on the shelves, but also all of the processed items showing up in the produce section of supermarkets. Next time you shop for fresh fruit and vegetables notice and calculate how sugary plastic-bottled juices, pre-packaged cut vegetables, and bottled salad dressings and other such items take up much of the refrigerator space. Because fruit and vegetable produce can be such a loss leader in profit margin the space has become colonized by processed foods that can stay on the shelf longer and look prettier and have much higher profit margins, but they are not fresh food and can fool consumers into thinking they are making purchases of fresh fruit and vegetables when they are far from that goal.

Finally, the new normal of our processed food condition includes Gyorgy Scrinis' idea of nutritionism, which refers to nutritional reductionism, which is an ideology, he states, that has "framed and shaped nutrition science research since the late nineteenth century and has increasingly informed dietary advice, food labeling regulations, food engineering and marketing practices, and the public understanding of food." It focuses on the composition of nutrients in food in order to understand how healthy they are, along with an interpretation of how these nutrients play a role in human health. Most importantly, in my opinion, it overlooks the impact of the "production and the processing quality of a food and its ingredients" (2). I believe the biggest impact of this ideology is that it enables and encourages the adulteration of our food supply by singling out nutrients needed for health and consumers are duped into believing that as

long as processed food contains these nutrients, especially as listed in the nutrition facts label, that the food we are eating is healthy for us.

They Reap the Profits; We Reap the Pain

The burden of responsibility is on the consumer, and the point of food processing is no longer food safety and availability—the point is profit. Robert Albritton uses the idea of consumer sovereignty to illustrate this point, stating that the ideology of "extreme individualism" as a useful tool for capitalist food industry (179). He names it "the myth of consumer sovereignty" that is ultimately driven by "the horrific global inequality that continually pushes people toward consumption choices that undermine human and environmental health" (180). Albritton calls for a way to make corporations and markets accountable for the food they produce and sell, stating "we are asking individuals to struggle against the root causes of the problem which remain intact" (180). In the interests of capital, the goal is to socialize costs, and privatize profits. This is the root cause of the problem that needs to be addressed.

The Corporate Consumption Complex

Nicholas Freudenberg creates a new phrase, the "corporate consumption complex," to describe a current state of economics that replaces, or at least succeeds, the military industrial complex that Eisenhower warned about in 1961. He defines the complex as a "complex web of organizations that include the global corporations that produce the goods of the modern consumer economy, the retail conglomerates that sell their products, and the trade associations that represent them in the political arena." Actors include banks and investment firms as well as law firms, advertisers, and lobbyists. The complex also uses scientists, the media, and elected officials. (95)

Freudenberg does not consider the complex as some secret conspiracy to undermine our health, or an "organization of evil men," but it has become the world's most "powerful influence on health" and the "primary modifiable cause of today's major causes of premature death and preventable illnesses" (96-97). Its motivation is profit and growth, and in order to keep at bay any threats to its prevalence must undermine the democratic process (97). "Hyperconsumption" is another term Freudenberg uses to describe the goals of this consumption complex, which leads to the health issues that are most serious today. He hastens to add that a free-market economy could promote health by supplying healthy products, but because of the economic changes the country has undergone these companies operate on "short-termism," or a rapid return on investments, so they can demonstrate to shareholders gains in every quarter (cf. Winson). This leads to the "externalization" of health, whereby the consumer bears the ultimate responsibility and costs for healthcare (97).

Asymmetrical power is created when these corporations work to have and maintain a major proportion of the market in as few companies as possible, leaving the consumer with little or no power or information to make good decisions in purchasing. This is where Freudenberg comes by the title for his book, when he explains that the corporate consumption complex "has the power to maintain a political and economic system that allows companies to produce and market 'lethal but legal' products and to promote unhealthy lifestyles and unsustainable practices at the expense of healthier alternatives" (98).

This lack of consumer power in food agency is what allows the complex to deter the improvement of public health and the reduction of healthcare costs. Winson concurs, stating that solutions to the problem of our food supply need to address the "asymmetries that now exist in the marketing machinery devoted to food consumption [as] powerful corporations spend

enormous amounts of money pushing nutrient-poor edible commodities…that undermine health" (286).

Where Do We Go Now?

Besides addressing the power asymmetries inherently built into our current commodities food system, Jose Pol argues for a transition back to agriculture as a commons, something that is an essential human need, the same as air and water, beyond food as being "only valued for its price in the market" (17). These two latter items are treated as commons, except for water, which has been increasingly subject to privatization, leading to commoditization. If one considers food in the same way we consider our natural right to air and water without interference of the marketplace, we would have less hunger and more justice. Because food, unlike air and water, is only accessible if one has entitlements such as proprietary rights or legal authorization, it is not free, and the answer to this inequality is to consider food as a 'common' good for humanity (17).

Food security as a policy issue is not being answered by the commodity food system. When food is commoditized, it has only "one dimension," the goal being to produce "non-nutritious and cheap food for everybody" (18). We need to stop speculating food in the market place, and stop patenting living organisms such as seeds, bacteria, and genetic codes. A parallel is drawn here by Pol between food patents and commodities and human slavery. Both should be abolished because they are living beings and it is ethically wrong to persist in either endeavor.

Finally, Pol proposes a "tri-centric governance system for food production, distribution and access…based on three pillars: the state whose main goal is maximizing citizen's well-being; the market (whose main goal is maximizing profit), and citizens in collective arrangements" whereby they are self-regulated and organized locally. Such initiatives are already at work in various places in the world such as "community supported agriculture in the US, food

swaps in Australia, food sharing systems and transition towns in the UK, joint purchasing groups in Spain and France or urban gardens with free food access in Belgium" (18). Further, Pol suggests that just as we have seen universal health care and education provided by the state as a basic human right and need, we should launch "Universal Food Coverage" whereby basic food substances are guaranteed as a "first step in the transition towards a commons-based food system" ensuring every person a right to food (20).

Healthy, nutritious food cannot be provided through the current system of commodity farming whereby corporations and food manufacturers are trying to make a buck, ensuring their future as well as Big Medicine's future, while at the same time destroying human health through chronic illness and poverty. Local, sustainable food collectives are vital to *transitioning* to a food system as yet to be determined for the future that will ensure food security and access for all.

But beyond security and access we desire unadulterated food, food we can trust to not harm our health. Just because food additives cannot be scientifically, positively ascertained to be harmful at our current level of testing and regulation, does not mean there is not a cumulative effect in many people and over time. As Guthman has discussed, food regulation is only as effective as its enforcement. Because there is an almost total inability by the FDA to enforce regulation, the food label has become the "primary mechanism of regulation" (132). She states: "The focus on labeling as regulation assumes that consumers read the label, care about what it says, will make choices based on labeling information, and, if they can find a more healthful or desirable alternative, will have a chance to buy it" (133). The result of this focus has been increasing consumer litigation against Big Food based on what is and what is not on a food label. We have explored what is in our food, now we turn to what food labels can tell us about what is in our food.

CHAPTER 3: "NOT ON THE LABEL"

Why is there such a lack of transparency about what goes into our food, and why should we even care? Very little research has explored the rhetoric of food labels, yet a number of works have been written that shed light on the ways rhetoric plays out in consumer interaction with food purchases through the use of these labels. Some of the ways include legal issues, consumer perceptions, our level of trust concerning what is in our food, and an exploration of what food labels can tell us about what it is, and is not as the case may be, in our food.

Free Speech or Free Manipulation?

One of the earliest critics of food labeling practices explored what he termed "supermarket semantics" and the legal ramifications and obligations of the government towards food manufacturers in regulating labeling practices and enforcing federal law. Win Welford wrote about how manufacturers employed the "sophistic" arts in their marketing efforts to persuade consumers to purchase and ingest their products. Further, he explains through food labeling rhetoric how Big Food aims their strategies at consumers' emotional vulnerabilities concerning their health (3-4). These emotional appeals are keenly felt in today's so-called health food industry packaging labels.

Even though the government is trying to guide human health by use of devices such as the four food groups, the food pyramid, and most recently choosemyplate.gov to inform people how to select foods for the proper nutrition, the products food manufacturers sell hardly fit into daily recommendations and serving sizes that easily translate into proper nutritional guidelines and practices. Welford places the onus on the government as sole enforcers of the USDA, the FTC, and FDA policies, contrary to what Guthman has suggested (Welford 4-5, Guthman previous chapter). A quick search of the web suggests that there is soon to be an explosion of

lawsuits by consumers with complaints against labeling that is misleading about what is actually in their food or beverage products.

Big Food Backlash

Consumer lawsuits are usually based on health claims about products that appear on food labels, and they rely on these claims to help them make healthy food choices to maintain or improve their health. Jennifer L. Pomeranz suggests that chronic disease related to improper nutrition stems from increased consumption of processed food that invariably makes health claims that are misleading to the consumer and thereby ultimately harming public health. The FDA is the food label regulatory agency but lacks the funds and authority to address this situation, which is dependent on voluntary compliance to current food labeling rules as well as consumer- and manufacturer-initiated litigation (617-619).

The link between nutrition and disease is described here as the "greatest challenge to public health in the United States stem[ming] from chronic diseases related to poor nutrition," and suggests that "obesity increases as people consume a higher proportion of processed food and beverages in their diet." Further, "[e]xperts point to this modern food environment as the primary driver of the obesity epidemic" (618). Pomeranz calls the misleading information on food labels and claims on packaging as "a significant development" within this current health crisis, due to lax regulations and not being up-to-date with current nutritional science (618). Misleading labels and misbranding of products is generally not addressed or enforced by the FDA (620).

Because consumers are more frequently looking for healthier food choices, Pomeranz explains, manufacturers have increasingly begun using food-labeling practices that include health claims. This is not to say that all manufacturers are out for pure profit; some have a

"financial interest in consumers choosing their products over their competitors' products; thus, they have a stake in ensuring that consumers are not deceived by the competition through misleading labels" (621). However, consumers do not have the overt knowledge of the health claims definitions that manufacturers are privy to, unless they do the research themselves, which is an unlikely scenario.

To show the complexity and nuanced legal definitions of health claims and how this language can play out in food labels, Pomeranz explains that over eighty-five percent of manufacturers use one type of claim, the nutrient content claim, allowed by the FDA. These are the claims that state low-sodium, for example, and must be kept in accordance with the Recommended Daily Values. The other three allowed claims are health claims, qualified health claims, and structure/function claims. Health claims may state that the food may reduce a risk of a certain disease, but must be based on the current scientific standards. Qualified health claims are similar to health claims but in addition must state a disclaimer that the research is limited or preliminary or that the FDA concludes there is not enough research. Structure/function claims state that a particular nutrient, such as calcium, can build strong bones, for example, but cannot state that it can improve a current medical condition, only to maintain normal structure/function of the body (622).

Pomeranz continues that the biggest problem with these claims is that they are made on a product that might also contain high amounts of unhealthy ingredients, like sugar, saturated fat, sodium, or cholesterol in amounts that disqualify it from prior FDA established levels. The consumer can easily be misled by the legitimate health claims of the product while ignoring the less healthy attributes (623). Some examples of this practice are when candy bar manufacturers start listing the relatively higher amounts of protein in their snacks which is derived from the

peanuts it contains (624). In order to get by First Amendment rights in commercial speech, litigation must prove that claims are misleading (624), even though they may be very confusing to consumers (625). In addition, some labeling practices "directly violate FDA regulations or guidance documents; others are perfectly legal but highly questionable" (625). For example, a breakfast cereal might have a blueberry version of its product that doesn't contain a single blueberry (626).

Enter the organic food industry, or Big Organic, and the race to reign in the consumer dollar geared toward food products that increase health and wellbeing (cf. Nestle). Pomeranz references a 2010 Big Food report that stated most of the top ten newest products are geared toward health and wellness, evidenced by the increase in organic, eco-friendly, and so-called natural products. Because the FDA does not define many of the health food product claims, such as the term "natural," consumers are at the mercy of food labels and cannot win litigation based on these undefined descriptions (627-628). This has led to a food environment where some of the least healthy items in a supermarket may contain claims on the labels that lead consumers into believing they are nutritious and health promoting (630). I argue that is why many areas of research, including and especially rhetoric and writing studies, need to address this major public health issue. It is my intent through the present research to unpack these labels by making comparisons between the claims made on the most prominent areas of the label, usually on the front where consumers see some of the major messages, and by what I consider the evidence of those claims as found usually on a side panel or the back of the label in tiny print where the actual ingredients of the product are listed by law.

The major industrial food companies are not sitting back and allowing these food labeling complaints and criticisms of their products and processes to go unanswered. As they claim their

right to free speech in labeling their products, consumer protection is effectively subdued. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is another way Big Food puts the burden on the consumer to figure out what is in their food by reading food labels.

To illustrate, examine a recent study by Stephanie Houston Gray where she considers that much is at stake for food companies in consideration that food is traded more heavily than any other commodity in the U.S. When critics challenge health claims or questionable food practices (such as "pink slime") stocks can plummet. That's why manufacturers are appropriating arguments for free speech from precedents set by citizen sovereignty cases. Big Food use litigation that claims free speech rights in food labeling as well as the corporatization of food and puts the burden of scientific legitimization on individual consumers. Further, "the food industry has attempted to restrict discourse about issues such as food safety, genetically modified products, and labeling" (5-6).

One of the ways the industry handles this, Grey continues, is to contest expert knowledge systems leading to further conflict rather than achieving consensus (7). Another is to attempt legal definition of words such as "natural" and "pure" (cf. Welford), and instead of empowering consumers, these definitions serve to protect the industry from litigation. Grey elaborates on how food companies have co-opted the "rhetoric of expression, choice, and dissent [from] the philosophy of food sovereignty, in which a critical individuality manifests in alternative or dissenting ways of food production or diet" (8).

As a result, state level Food Disparagement Laws (FDL) and so-called "veggie libel" laws were legislated (in a few states) to protect the industry from individuals and groups who speak out against processed and fast food along with questionable agricultural practices. Because litigation is so expensive a process, it is an effective strategy to silence food activists and health

advocates. When consumers try to increase the FDA's power and ability to regulate these big companies, the industry claims that such abrogate federal oversight amounts to government interference of their free speech rights (Grey 14-20).

Natural Flavors

So now that Big Food has the upper hand in what goes on the label, we are left to decipher, through rhetorical means, what is in our food. But first, let's look at some of the items that are on the label before figuring out what is in our food that is not on the label. For example, we can examine some of the insidious and ubiquitous substances omnipresent in our food. Taylor and Dormedy look at the safeness of food flavors from a food chemistry research standpoint. They admit that food additives can sometimes play a role in food allergies and intolerance, but in the case of flavorings added to food products, they claim that there is no evidence to date (1998) because the amount is so small. This argument is still relevant today by evidence of natural flavors, as listed in the ingredients list on many food labels. I might add that it would be difficult to prove harmful to humans because if a single component of a group of additives were to be tested the process would be so involved and expensive that by that time, Big Food would have already found another chemistry-based loophole around it (cf. Scrinis).

The context of flavorings as a food ingredient and its role in food allergies provides the authors with the opportunity to describe how these substances are made. There is a good amount of detail provided that could be of some use in determining how they are made; for example, they undergo processes using different chemical and physical applications that are not disclosed on the food label. Some of these processes include the application of enzymes, which can be GMO derived, as well as yeasts, solvents, emulsifiers, ad nauseum (literally).

A section on food labeling of flavoring substances sources Section 403 of the Food, Drug and Cosmetic (FDC) Act, which states that ingredients in fabricated food need to be listed in descending order of predominance, and gives Taylor and Dormedy the authority to exert the following:

> This requirement was by no means meant to be rigidly comprehensive. From the start, Congress recognized that reasonable limits to any such required disclosure are essential to preserving an efficient and competitive food industry and the concomitant benefit of an abundant food supply. The intent of Congress is clear: the labeling provisions of the FDC Act do not reflect a consumer right-to-know orientation. Even on issues as sensitive as food ingredients, Congress has specifically exempted the identification of certain ingredients and provided the agency authority to, in its sound judgment, exempt further ingredients from disclosure requirements (Taylor and Dormedy 20-21).

The ingredients that fall under this Act are listed in the generalized categories of spices, flavors, and certain colors, as they are considered "trade secret information." These substances are basically flavor enhancers, but there are other functions these substances can provide besides flavor and therefore can be used at higher levels (21).

Unpacking that defense, Big Food and its agents in the food chemistry research sector use the FDC Act to allow them a wide berth in developing flavors and substances that make their food not only competitive, but irresistible to consumers' tastes. They are allowed this leeway under the auspices of trade secrets, as well as the assertion that they serve to alleviate a short food supply, and so thereby are deemed safe as well as highly welcome. Let's look a little closer at what the law states.

Using natural flavors as an example of the insidiousness of food additives in our highly processed food, we turn to the USDA and FDA for specific legal definitions used by Big Food to determine, in conjunction with food chemists, what they can put in our food and under what auspices it may be labeled in the ingredients list. Any consumer may access this information, as it is on the web, but the code list is worded in legalese and cross-references many other sections of the code, so that an ordinary user of this information and the FDA's Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) pages could easily get lost in opening new web pages and window browsers and navigating back and forth between viewed pages.

The USDA "Code of Federal Regulations – CFR" covers labeling requirements in the list of ingredients on food labels for many of the ingredients one finds that seem unexplainable, such as "natural flavoring." It contains eleven items (a-k) under which some have additional sub-numbered paragraphs. The first item, (a), defines "*artificial flavor* or *artificial flavoring*," "*spice*," "*natural flavor* or *natural flavoring*," "*artificial color* or *artificial coloring*," and "*chemical preservative*." For example, natural flavoring is derived from any vegetable or animal matter, and the rules do not include vegetarian, vegan, or organic labeling of natural flavors, so when a manufacturer does so, it does this voluntarily. Further, the processes by which a manufacturer can obtain these flavors can include "essential oil, oleoresin, essence or extractive, protein hydrolysate, distillate, or any product of roasting, heating or enzymolysis, which contains the flavoring constituents derived from" said list of vegetable or animal sources (USDA "Code").

Under (h), ones finds that an "incidental additive" in a food does not need to be labeled if it meets requirements listed in another section of the code, 101.100(a)(3). Following that section, the code uses terms such as "insignificant levels" of additives in that they "do not have any technical or functional effect in that food," yet still are present. These are substances that have

been added during processing and have been removed, or that are "converted into constituents normally present in the food, and do not significantly increase the amount of the constituents naturally found in the food," or substances that "migrate" into the food from processing equipment or packaging and are not defined as food additives elsewhere or if they are, conform to the established regulations (USDA "Code"). As one can clearly see, the obfuscation of the code and the allowable substances that may get into our food is myriad.

However, the FDA does have "Guidance for Industry" web pages that are meant specifically for manufacturers in preparing their list of ingredients in a "user-friendly" format, as opposed to the legal Code of Federal Regulations. Item 7 is of particular interest because it refers to and interprets further the "incidental ingredients" in a food item. These incidental ingredients do not have to be listed on the label because they are usually present as an "ingredient of another ingredient." If it is an allergen, however, the Food Allergen Labeling requirements go into effect. For example, if the incidental ingredient is "sulfites" it does not have to be listed in the ingredients but must be indicated elsewhere or below the ingredients list as an allergen warning (USDA "Guidance").

Another area of food ingredients listing these pages "illuminate" is the confusing "and/or" one sees when listing fats or oils in a product; for example, "sunflower and/or safflower and/or canola oil." This is permitted when the oil is not the predominant ingredient and where the manufacturer "is unable to predict which fat or oil ingredient will be used," usually due to fluctuations in market prices at the time of manufacture. This allows them to purchase whichever oil is the cheapest in order to keep the price point of their product stable. (cf. Pollan).

Finally, the FDA does provide a resource for consumers in their "Overview of Food Ingredients, Additives & Colors." These pages are meant specifically for consumers to abate

concerns about food additives, along with a chart at the end that categorizes almost every food additive and what its use is in the food. It is also a rich source of rhetorical communication to assuage a consumer's anxieties about the various (unpronounceable!) ingredients in our food supply (US FDA "Overview").

Natural flavors is an ingredient listing that is the epitome of Big Food's interference in what we eat, and its path to obscuring consumers' agency in taking control of our diet and therefore our health. Profit and growth are foremost in any capitalistic enterprise, and the industry has legal allowances to include a variety substances to ensure that financial gain many times in lieu of public health (cf. Freudenberg, Guthman, Pollan). This leads to an ambience of consumer complacency bent on either what tastes good, or when aiming for health improvement, what people *believe* is good for them to eat.

Belief and Trust

Contemporary eating can be an act of faith. We'd like to believe that the food we eat is good for us, especially if it tastes good and is satisfying. We'd like to trust the food companies that prepare our food, and trust that the government is monitoring and regulating our food supply, from how it is grown and harvested, to how it is packaged and distributed. Although we're not always aware of it, we also believe and trust in the stores and markets that sell our food products to be sanitary and fair, and to place on their shelves only products that meet these standards. We begin by exploring the nature of consumer perception and belief and move into issues of trust.

"I Don't Like Healthy Food, It Tastes Bad"

Many times I have heard that phrase while working at a local health food store, sometimes customers use the term "organic" in place of "healthy." This always astounded me,

because healthy and organic food should taste better than any other food. A couple of issues intervene in this perception, however. One is that as previously discussed there are many additives in processed food to make it taste better, even to the point of addiction. Second, natural, organic, or real healthy food might not taste as good because after one's taste buds have been conditioned by processed foods that same level of stimulation is not there. Finally, some processed organic or natural foods lines manufactured by Big Organic really do taste bad, because of the way they are processed, the types of additives used that are trying to maintain organic standards, and the packaging involved may not keep the item as fresh.

Crum et al. decided to test why these perceptions exist by developing a psychological study into participants' response to healthy versus unhealthy foods. They took it one step further: they wanted to see if actual health changed after consuming what a participant believed to be healthy. Mindset, or perceptions and beliefs, are important elements in the growing body of literature that addresses how they affect human biological responses to natural stimuli. Food labels and their perceptions were studied here to find out how they affect hunger and satiety responses in humans. The results showed that there was a heightened sense of hunger and accompanying increase in satiety after subjects viewed and consumed a milkshake with a label purporting its indulgence factors of high calorie, creaminess, and taste. The hunger and satiety response was flattened when subjects were given the exact same shake with a label that touted its health benefits of being low-fat and low-calorie.

The mindset response to food labeling in this study might have some implications to real world labeling, where manufacturers make health claims that "stretch the healthy or hedonic attributes of their product in an effort to increase consumption" (428). These claims are often misleading; for example, a low-fat content could make up for taste by raising the sugar content.

"This juxtaposition of unhealthy nutrients with healthy proclamations may be especially dangerous, [because] not only is the product itself unhealthy," but a consumer believing they are ingesting a healthy food might result in an inadequate satiety response (428).

Results like these could actually enable those companies with inaccurate health claims to keep doing what they are doing, because the sensibility factor of the consumer wanting to be healthy will signal them to buy the food, then keep eating the whole box/can/package because the satiety response doesn't kick in because of their beliefs. If a healthy food is labeled as satisfying and indulgent in some regard, the consumer will feel full and not want to eat more. More and more healthy foods are being touted as such through food labeling practices, as we shall see, yet if labeled as organic or natural there is still a (large) segment of the population that will not buy and consume not matter what the indulgence factor states.

What are the implications of this study for the present discussion? The conclusions seem a little bit confusing as they are written. Let's say if the food is really bad for you, like low-fat but high sugar, you might not be satiated by just one serving, so you eat more and more because it is low in fat (and calories). By the time you eat a few and finally get satiated, you have ingested a great amount of sugar leading to insulin imbalance and obesity. Alternatively, if the food company is a legitimate health food company and the food is touted as nourishing with plenty of fiber and protein, but low in fat, calories, salt, and sugar, will the consumer feel satiated because it is suppose to be a healthy food and they know that fiber and protein help them feel full?

Tomaiyama and Mann weigh in: It is agreed here that as stated towards the end of the article above, "labeling foods as sensible may actually be counterproductive and ironically lead to increased consumption due to hunger" (430). They hope that findings such as these pertaining

to the psychological effect of perception on biological response in humans will put to rest the "'calories in/calories out' model that dominates the medical dieting literature" (430). They point to the larger implications of the study "that all calories are not created equal if they are not perceived equally" (430).

If labeling foods as sensible is counterproductive, then that could explain why there is an increase in selling high indulgence foods, like Hardee's' campaign with the Monster Thickburger. If people perceive they are eating healthily does that mean they are never being satisfied? If that is the case, why do some persist in eating healthy? Maybe healthy means different things to different people, not just simply lower fat, lower calories, low in sugar, and so on. Perhaps healthy means eating a balanced diet or being in step with environmental concerns. Or maybe we can eat healthy foods that are whole and local and in season and perceive them to be satiating if they taste good, regardless of fat, calorie, and sugar content. Where does this leave manufacturers and commodity foods? (cf. Pol).

Another interesting study on consumer perception involves use of health information on food labels to determine what is healthy to eat. Bosman et al. attempted to determine the link between what people eat and how it affects their health in maintaining and preventing disease and altering risks of chronic disease (31). Researchers attempted to discover consumers' awareness, or even belief, in how their diets and food choices affect their health through their use of food labels. Many people still don't use food labels to help them make healthy purchases and there are barriers in food labeling practices that affect this: confusing information, lack of understanding of and trust in food labels, habitual purchasing, price insensitivity and perception of labels as advertising (31). People who do use food labels are those who have greater interest, and I would add personal responsibility, in their health.

The research project collected information from respondents on a variety of measures about their beliefs and opinions of the contents of food labels. The authors point out that opinions are more easily changed, while beliefs tend to be based on assumptions that something is truthful. Both of these guide consumers in how they behave (32). The South African participants in the study agreed that the health information on food labels was backed by scientific research, and that they were an important source of information in selection of foods that provide specific health benefits (40). In America, the Nutrition Facts label is considered the scientifically backed source of trusted health information on a food label, and the rest is up to the manufacturer to fabricate.

Trust or Truth?

How do we engage our level of trust with a food label in that what we see is what we get, what we don't understand won't make a big difference, and what we don't see isn't important? Thinking back to the discussion of Big Food and our processed American cuisine, Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, a prominent author in vegan lifestyle, offers a quick opinion on these matters. He advises to read the label, so he is obviously not writing about commodities as food choices, he is writing about processed food. He states that everyone, no matter what style of eating, needs to "learn how to read food labels so that they can learn what is actually in their food" and that "food is best when it is less processed" (182). He takes his advice one step further into admonishment about the food companies that manufacture our food. Even though he suggests that choosing healthy food and reading food labels is a matter of "common sense," the companies write the labels to be somewhat confusing, so that we must "trust to their goodwill" (183).

Trusting in the goodwill of any company is inherent when selecting food to eat, but maybe even more so when reading a label. At first this sounds counter intuitive, because reading a label might imply that a consumer does not trust the company so they are reading the label for more information, or to find cracks in the story. However, people read food labels to convince themselves that the product is o.k., overlooking some minute items that might indicate a slackness in quality or integrity of ingredients. Let's explore this a little bit further.

Discourse practices and intertextuality intersect with government regulation in a field study by Rodney H. Jones that took place in Hong Kong. New regulations required all imports that have unlawful claims redacted on the label through blacking out with a marker or covered over with a label. Jones looks at the many actors involved in carrying out this task including the customers of these products. These are complex discursive processes that interact with each other across an historical and projected itinerary of people, agencies, and processes (479-480). In this case the government has stepped in to protect the consumer trust in the label by eliminating false claims on imported products. Now trust has shifted from the manufacturers and their labels to trust in the government, a dubious exchange at best.

Jones further relates some participants are inclined to trust the government's efforts in food labeling redaction as a way to protect the public. But in Hong Kong, previously there had been no food labeling regulation, so this was a major improvement (502). Another area of trust, probably more ubiquitous in consumers especially those who don't use food labels to such an extent in making purchasing decisions, is the lack of expertise in understanding nutrition, nutrition guidelines, and labeling laws and government regulation. Because one cannot be an expert nor have the time to understand all of these interacting texts and actors, one simply has to place trust in the product to conduct their daily lives. Jones continues that one participant

concluded, “when they say gluten free and low fat, I trust them. And if the government says they’re not allowed to say that, well then I trust them. Bottom line is, I’ve got to trust somebody” (503). This is the reality of the situation consumers find themselves in: eating modern food is an act of faith, and you have to decide in whom that trust is placed.

Moving towards trusting the process of how labels arrive at their information and certification, Festila et al. did a recent study about consumer response to food labels in Romania. Although geared toward manufacturers gaining a better hold in emerging markets through use of food labels, one area focused on the roles of both consumer and manufacturer, as consumers use food labels to make healthy food choices and manufacturers use them to “promote and communicate certain qualities of their food products.” Also, the significance of the “proliferation of quality differentiated foods” appears to have an increasing important effect on consumers and how they react to food labels (organic, fair trade, sustainable seafood, etc.). These qualities are there to provide information on the “processing, quality, sustainability and the traditional nature of foods” (166).

The authors acknowledge that most of the research on food labels concerns the nutrition facts, and that other “schemes” for labeling foods needs to be examined. To this end, the research includes food labels in several areas, including “ethical concerns, organic food production, authenticity, sustainability and quality assurance” (Festila et al. 167). (These are some of the symbols and certifications that will be discussed in the next chapter analyzing health food labels.) Trustworthiness was also measured, and the suggestion was made that the “procedure followed by certification bodies should be made more transparent to consumers,” as well as having authorities aim to improve their image by acting more responsibly (173). So how manufacturers arrive at their food products in order to achieve certification, symbols of trust that

embolden consumers with feelings of quality assurance in purchasing decisions, is also a matter of inherent trust. Once that seal is stamped on a product the consumer relies on the trustworthiness not only of the process the manufacturers and certifiers use, but also in the system itself.

Peter Laufer unfortunately blasts consumer trust in the organic certification seal in his recent investigative journalistic endeavor to follow up on this process and delve into what's behind the different seals. His interest was initially piqued during a shopping trip to a big box organic supermarket that used country of origin labeling on some of their products. For example, he found "organic" walnuts from Kazakhstan, and "organic" black beans from Bolivia, and considering the types of governments found in those countries he thought them to not be conducive to organic agriculture. This resulted in his efforts to chase down what he thought to be dubious and unregulated organic food labeling, the organic industry as a whole from farm to plate, and how much we can trust the organic food label today with unprecedented organic production and regulatory agencies that can't keep up (x-xii).

Laufer conducts some consumer research where one person states that she likes to buy organic when she can, but knows that it might not all be organic when it says it on the label. She says, "there's not a lot of truth to labels." She concedes that she might trust US organics more than those from other countries, but she doesn't know, perhaps other countries have better standards than the US. She doesn't really know how any of us can be sure that when we buy organically labeled food that it really is organic. Again, we want to have confidence in stores like Trader Joe's but really in the end everything is based on trust (8-9).

Then there are the different levels of organic, because the USDA Organic seal means it contains at least 95 percent organic ingredients, which leaves one to wonder what is in the last 5

percent, Laufer continues (11). Processing is an issue here as well because even though a product might have been grown organically, what are the processing methods used to get it to the table that do not have to be labeled? For example, the crop might have undergone chemical cleaning or have added flavors or colors (14).

Laufer interviews organic growers who state that their business is one based on trust. There are other organic certifiers other than the USDA that are more reliable but because the USDA label is now used almost ubiquitously the standards have been compromised (15). Laufer reminds us of the horsemeat scandal in the European market in 2013 that "reminded consumers around the world that labels are suspect" (16). As Trader Joe's is a subsidiary of the supermarket in Europe that unknowingly sold the horsemeat (Aldi), how much trust is left in what they put on their shelves, he asks. He quotes from a Spanish newspaper pointing to the fact that food labeling fraudulence is widespread and that it should even be prosecuted and punished (17).

He interviews another subject who is in a class action lawsuit with General Mills over their Nature Valley granola bars because they say they are "100% Natural." She believed this meant that there was nothing processed in it, but consumers can't be sure because they can't test the product. She states that she is not a chemist, and can't visit the factory to see how it is made, so she has to trust the label. Part of the problem, she admits, is that she didn't read the ingredients list (Laufer 137, 139).

A good example of what is *not* on the label is organic microwave popcorn, Laufer continues. That little bag of popcorn is lined with perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), used to keep the popcorn from sticking to the bag, and is also the basis for Teflon. It has been shown to cause cancer in lab animals, and the West Virginia University School of Public Health suggests that the more of it that is in your blood, the more your chances of heart disease risk (142). Laufer even

goes on to question the little produce stickers that adhere to fresh organic fruits and vegetables, and admits that it would be almost impossible to find out what is in the adhesive and how it might affect the organic status of the produce (143-144).

Finally, Laufer refers to a case concerning fish in Portland in which 20 percent of it was mislabeled. He points out that if one industry mislabels and consumers don't find out about it until later, if at all, then no labels can really be trusted. But he suggests that consumers should trust a label only if they verify it, even though some companies and retailers make it difficult to do just that (151). The Hungarian official who burned Monsanto fields in that country suggested to Laufer that it is logistically impossible to monitor and regulate 100 percent of the food to know that it is organic, and that the consumer must rely on the label. The manufacturer of the product should put enough information on the label so that the consumer can feel confident; feel the trust, although more consumer awareness is needed (203). I hope to add to that level of consumer awareness through this research study on the rhetoric of food labels.

"Not on the Label"

Finally we arrive at what's not on food labels. Felicity Lawrence, a British journalist and author, provided the phrase taken from the title of her book, *Not on the Label: What Really Goes Into the Food on Your Plate*. She explores what is known in that country as "the ready meal," also the name of the chapter from which most of this expose is drawn. Lawrence looks into the ingredients list of some of these items and examines them for comparison with the front (of package) labeling to see just how close the picture and title description compare with what is inside. She states that simple and vast commodities, in order to use up these subsidized food crops, are broken down into many components in order to get more profitability from them. For example, corn refiners break it down into "starch, oil, protein, and fibre" (194). Most of the

imagination and development of processed foods can be attributed to the "carbohydrate chemist," whose job it is to development as many cheap components as possible, thereby increasing the costs because of the time for research and development and the processing itself, in order to supplement expensive ingredients such as meat (195).

The sources of processed food, as pointed out above and elsewhere, are the few subsidized commodity crops available today: "corn, sugar, soya, palm, and rapeseed." Since they are cheap due to subsidization and have a long shelf life, they go into processed food. Fresh fruits and vegetables are unsubsidized and have a very short shelf life. The former are "high in calories and low in nutrients," whereas the latter are low in calories and high in nutrients. Lawrence further suggests that these subsidies "have undermined farmers in developing countries, [while] distorting diets in the West" (198).

Concerning sugar, Lawrence suggests that the reason that ingredients lists are so long is because of the USA subsidies (199). Further, she states that in order to turn these subsidized crops into food, one needs additives. Billions of dollars are spent on chemical additives each year in order to prolong shelf life and make processed foods palatable. "Manufacturers wanting to create the impression of fruit or vegetables or other expensive ingredients without the bother of paying for the real thing have 4,500 different flavouring compounds at their disposal" (200). Other types of processing foods include emulsifiers and stabilizers as binders to prevent separation on the shelf. Some additives are part of the processing itself, in order to help ingredients "survive the factory process," such as gums to replace bacteria lost in yoghurt manufacture (200).

In the UK flavorings are not tested for safety and do not have to be proclaimed individually. The food industry regardless of country affiliation needs these additives because

starch has no taste, so added salt, sugar, and cheap subsidized oils and fats are used. Lawrence adds: “The vast majority [of additives] are used to make cheap fat, constipating starch and subsidized sugars look and taste like natural food” (201). Because of our industrialized civilization structure, there is much more distance figuratively and literally between our food and us that allows for more adulteration of our food supply in the manner of processed foods, foods which have much going on in their making that is not proclaimed on the label.

Lawrence notes a pattern in the evolution of food adulteration from early beginnings to ensure a safe food supply until today: “ignorance among the consuming public, an assumption among the producers that what they are doing is entirely acceptable, the lure of large profits, and weak law or weak enforcement” (203). What really drives this pattern is that people want cheap food. The food industry claims that their methods help the poor to buy food. So in the process of making cheap commodities stretch further in highly developed countries, both rich and poor can access the cheapest foods possible, and with the longest shelf life. Most of us put food way down on the list of what we want to spend the most money on. Keeping ourselves alive with quick, cheap calories is the standard operating procedure of modern living.

Some food additives do not have to be declared, thus the title Lawrence’s book, *Not on the Label*.” This is the case when additives are used as processing aids (204). At least in Britain, Lawrence states that “natural lemon flavouring” is not natural at all, it just means that it is “nature-identical.” This rhetorical shifting of definitions was referred to above in the USDA FCR where many processes are allowed in the making of natural flavors and other flavoring substances and additives in the US. Another example of what is not on the label is “mechanically recovered meat,” which is a “sludge extruded from bones, tissue and sinew left over once prime cuts have been removed from a carcass” (218). Again, this describes some of the processes used

in making our food that are certainly not illustrated on the label, lest we lose our appetites right in the store where we're shopping.

Be Afraid

Other "ingredients" in our food not appearing on the label are genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Although this topic is a vast research subject in its own right, it requires mention here. As Jeffrey M. Smith provides in his popular *Seeds of Deception*, there are a number of processing methods and agents that go into manufacturing food, and even though these change the composition of the food and may add traces of the agents into the food itself which will be ingested through human consumption these processes and agents are not required to be listed on the food label. Many of these agents are derived from GMO sources such as soy and corn. Ingredients listings in common foods (as well as dietary supplements) contain Vitamin C which is made from corn, and vitamin E is made from soy. Other vitamins have excipients in them that are derived from GMOs, such as starch, glucose, and maltodextrin. Flavorings can also be made from GMOs. (240)

Food manufacturing processes that use GMOs to make the food item use bacteria and fungi to produce enzymes in the manufacture of a variety of foods, especially cheese. Because GMOs and their use in processes and flavoring agents are not required to be listed on the label, they are difficult to avoid, should a consumer wish to do so. Some of the other food items that use GMOs in their manufacture include: beer, alcohol, starch, dextrose, fruit juice, malt syrups, mayonnaise, and animal feed (Smith 241).

As the author further discusses, the use of the term "non-GMO" on a food label or in front of a specific ingredient in the ingredients list is not regulated; therefore, it is meaningless (my conclusion). One might see the use of the "non-GMO" phrase on a product of which the

manufacturer has a trusted reputation, but there can be cross-contamination in production. Others who test their products might still allow for a minute amount of GMOs, because they are basically ubiquitous at this point. Smith adds that "manufacturers must select a level of GMO contamination that they consider acceptable, [and that] having a zero tolerance is neither practical nor possible to guarantee" (243).

As far as the organic label is concerned, it does not allow any GMO content at any level, whether specified as 100% organic, or simply organic, or made with organic ingredients. Any of the non-organic ingredients, even though they aren't organic, are still not allowed to contain GMOs. On the other hand, if there is cross pollination and the farmer has taken reasonable precautions to prevent it, they are not penalized, although their buyers may reject their products if tested over a specified low level (244). The precise rules for organic labeling and GMOs have changed slightly since Smith, and will be elaborated in the next chapter where applicable.

Mikael Klintman brings to the discussion the idea of consumer agency when encountering food with content derivatives not listed on the label. He considers food labels as political consumer tools; that is, people who use food labels to decide what to purchase are exercising political power when they do so. Labels are considered mostly voluntary and a "soft" consumer tool as opposed to "hard" regulations. They help consumers make informed decisions thereby enabling people to politically express their wishes, as in the case with organic food labeling (427). However, what is *not* on the label takes away political power from the individual, subjecting them to the whims and vagaries of Big Food.

The term organic is far from straightforward, so national standards (or those of other third party certifiers) have to be developed in order to give credence to the label. Klintman continues that organic food involves complex issues of environmental consequences, human health, and

farm economics (428). So as GMO and organic labeling are voluntary, one can assume non-organic if not labeling organic, and one can assume that anything not labeled non-GMO is GMO, except for organic which is supposed to be non-GMO by definition. The complexity of the preceding claims and non-claims illustrate what consumers face in the grocery store.

Finally, Klintman's article responds to a "broader call" in political consumerism research and hopes to raise issues of transparency about tools such as food labels on which consumers are dependent if they are to make political choices in the marketplace (428). The author chooses framing theory because it helps to examine complex policy issues that tend to be simplified in the instance of a food label, and how the various aspects are either selected or omitted (429). The basic framing table Klintman uses distinguishes between product-oriented and process-oriented food labeling (430). In most cases in the U.S. the label refers to the product and not the process. We know if something is a package of beef, but we don't get to learn about what the animal ate or how it was kept. Organic labeling helps to change this level of knowledge, although the explanation of what organic entails is too lengthy to appear on the label in totality. But other than organic, or other voluntary information such as grass-fed, kosher, halal, free-range, etc., we don't know how a product is made. Look at the canola oil product, for example. The plant itself is not a result of natural evolution, and the involved processing to get from the seed to the oil is quite manipulative. Almost all conventional oils are highly processed and use solvents, deodorants and bleaches to get to the supermarket shelves. Indeed, the organic label (mostly) allows for consumers to know about the process as well as the product (cf. Laufer).

Michael Pollan

I suppose any discussion of what's in our food would be incomplete without the aid of Michael Pollan's work, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. This "natural history of four meals" is

introduced by a title that refers to "our national eating disorder" (1-11). He refers to our industrial food system and wonders why we find items on food labels such as "'natural grill flavor' or TBHQ or xanthan gum" (5). Pollan attempts to follow a bushel of corn as it goes through the so-called food mill of industrial agriculture. He comments that the "industrial food chain goes underground, in effect, as it passes through these factories on its path to our plates" (87). In a way, processed food is pre-digested for the consumer, "broken down through a series of steps that includes the application of physical pressure, acids, and enzymes," resulting in its most simple molecular form: sugars (87).

Because corn is one of those subsidized commodities it must be processed to the nth degree in order to make a variety of "foods" out of it. "Food additives of every kind" are added to the various products, and the consumer has become that "supremely adapted creature: the eater of processed food" (Pollan 90). Many of the food additives one sees on a food label come from cornstarch that food chemists break down and rearrange into "acids, sugars, starches, and alcohols" that then become items on the list of ingredients such as "citric and lactic acid; glucose fructose, and maltodextrin; […] sorbitol, mannitol, and xanthan gum; modified and unmodified starches; as well as dextrins and cyclodextrins and MSG" (Pollan 86).

A salient point about the food industry economy is that there is only so much a person can eat. Pollan states that an individual in this country can only eat about fifteen hundred pounds of food a year, which is a natural limit. This amounts to about a growth rate of 1 percent per year for the food industry, which leaves Big Food to figure out a way to expand on that growth. In order to do that, they need to either get consumers to eat more or spend more on food or both. The corn industry has excelled in both of those areas thanks to the myriad ways they have developed to fractionate and process corn commodities (94-95). More recently, manufacturers

have developed indigestible food components from resistant starch, mostly for the diabetic community, and presumably allowing one to eat as much as one likes (99).

Further, Pollan shows that the organic food industry has followed suit of conventional foods—they produce foods that are highly processed with long lists of ingredients, most of which can be found in the frozen foods product lines. This explains why more processing happens in either food industry, because falling prices means higher levels of processing (96). Another reason whole foods and organic manufacturers are placing more processed foods on the market is because of branding, since it is difficult to distinguish between one farmer's chicken or apples from another's (96-97).

Part of the reason for fractionating foods into tiny parts and reassembling them comes from what Pollan describes as a "reductionist premise," that which Scrinis terms "nutritionism" (cf. Scrinis). So food can be made from a variety of sources and later reconstructed: "fortified apple bits, red-wine extract, flavor fractions derived from oranges, isoflavones from soy, meat substitutes fashioned from mycoprotein, and resistant starches derived from corn" (98). He concludes by saying that "natural raspberry flavor" doesn't necessarily come from raspberries; it could come from corn, as long as it isn't synthetically derived. (cf. USDA "Code") Because omnivores have a predilection to eat a variety of foods, we get "tricked" into eating and enjoying the never-ending variety of processed foods available (98). Although as previously discussed that variety is an illusion based on highly processed variations on a theme—the theme of three or four commodity crops.

Another way to get people to eat more is to lace processed foods with fat and sugar, since humans are programmed to "seek out energy-dense foods." These become an insidious tool in

the demographic of the obese poor because these energy-dense foods are the least inexpensive, especially when measured as cost per calorie (Pollan 107).

Some specific ingredients are exposed by Pollan where he discusses his corn-based McDonald's meal. He describes what they are made from and what they do, or why they are in the product. For example, modified cornstarch is for binding pulverized meat, mono-, tri-, and diglycerides along with lecithin are emulsifiers to keep fat and water together, cornstarch as a filler, and citric acid as a preservative. There are also synthetic ingredients that come from petroleum refineries or chemical plants that he refers to as "quasi-edible substances." They are the hallmark of modern processed foods, as they keep the food looking and tasting fresh. Some of these include what manufacturers list on the label as "leavening agents," and are items such as sodium aluminum phosphate, monocalcium phosphate, sodium acid pyrophosphate, and calcium lactate, serving as antioxidants, according to Pollan's research. Another on an ingredients list is "anti-foaming agents," such as dimethylpolysiloxene, which he has found to be a "suspected carcinogen" as well as an "established mutagen, tumorigen, and reproductive effector" as well as being flammable. Finally, Pollan discusses tertiary butylhydroquinone (TBHQ) derived from petroleum and is a form of butane, but can "comprise no more than 0.02 percent of the oil in a nugget" because of the severe possible reactions to it as well as death if too much is ingested (113-114).

Perhaps most strikingly, Pollan says one cannot actually taste these synthetic and other "natural" ingredients because that is part of the natural history of this kind of food in that they are hidden ingredients because of the inability for the palate to detect them. He accuses the food industry of purposefully "obscuring the histories of the foods it produces by processing them to

such an extent that they appear as pure products of culture rather than nature—things made from plants and animals" (114-115).

Now we turn to what specific food labels can tell us by examining the rhetorical stories of food labels. Even though local foods advocates persuade us to source our foods from as near to our homes as possible, a food produced locally even at the state level can have travelled not only geographical distances, but homological distances as it has been poked, prodded, manipulated and put back into some semblance of what we may recognize as edible sustenance. A thorough analysis of the stories we find on food labels, the certification seals and symbols, the list of ingredients as compatible or non-compatible with the story, and the manufacturers' transparency of their food processes necessitates the answer to our questions: What's in our food? What can food labels tell us about what's in our food?

CHAPTER 4: FOOD LIBELS

"I don't care what's in it—it tastes good and I love it!" -- Anonymous

There is a game that circulates among health food store workers where you are given a list of ingredients and have to guess what the food item is—it is the ultimate challenge with the moral that we should be eating food, not a list of ingredients. With that, I submit the following:

> Sugar, enriched bleached flour (wheat flour, niacin, ferrous sulfate, thiamine mononitrate, riboflavin, folic acid), soybean oil, eggs, water, butterscotch chips (sugar, partially hydrogenated palm kernel oil, whey, soy lecithin, artificial color [yellow 6 lake, yellow 5 lake, and blue 2 lake], natural and artificial flavor, salt), modified corn starch. Contains 2% or less of each of the following: artificial flavor, partially hydrogenated vegetable shortening (soybean and/or cottonseed and/or canola oil, propylene glycol, mono- and di-esters of fatty acids, mono- and di-glycerides, soy lecithin, BHT (preservative), emulsifier (propylene glycol mono-esters, monoglycerides, sodium stearoyl, lactylate), salt, nonfat milk, sodium bicarbonate, acidic sodium aluminum phosphate, sodium caseinate, guar gum, xanthan gum.

What's the first thing you notice? That you can't pronounce over half the list, the exorbitantly long list, the confusion with parentheses and brackets within one ingredient listing, or that you have no idea what the food is? Most would guess with the sugar, flour, oil and eggs that it is some kind of dessert or sweet treat. The answer is: a common bakery department produced muffin. This is the kind of item shoppers pick up in regular grocery store rounds as they make their way through the various departments of a supermarket. In America, muffins are usually considered a breakfast item—imagine having a stomach-load full of those ingredients to begin

your day. But that doesn't matter, because most shoppers are looking for something that tastes good.

Other food labels employed by manufacturers aware of the growing concern by consumers to avoid these agonizing ingredients lists as presented above go beyond a list of chemistry lab materials to present something that more resembles food, but doesn't always resemble the truth, which are what I call "food libels." As a type of defamation of character, I define food libels as a sobriquet referring to the way food manufacturers describe their products via the food label. Libel destroys the reputation of someone, so I offer that food libels seek to destroy the reputation of a food by misrepresenting its journey from raw material to manufactured product, using a description that does not always employ full disclosure of the process. Food libels do this by feeding a story to consumers about what's in their food. Getting at the stories on food labels and how to go about doing that is our present task.

Reading Food Labels

As the quote at the beginning of this chapter indicates, many consumers are so overwhelmed with food choices, dietary information and advice that they cannot fathom much more outside of food tasting good as a requisite for buying and eating something. Further, food manufacturers are selling a product for a profit and aren't always sure exactly what kind of disclosure is required of them on food labels, at least as far as consumer interest is concerned. There is a potential here for an analysis of food provenance that could take into account air and water conditions during the growing of the food, much less the quality and material makeup of equipment for harvesting and processing, so there has to be some limits in order for food labels to adequately and briefly describe the food contents of the package, let alone the ingredients of

the packaging itself (which indeed is what some labels reveal and even proudly proclaim, e.g. BPA-free can liner).

Even though much has been written about food industry practices and even more on what constitutes a healthful diet, there still remains a gap in the research of how food choices are made in everyday life and even wider in the rhetoric involved with reading food labels and how they influence consumer choice and ultimately affect our health. A recent example of general food label reading and a rhetorical approach to food label reading are offered below, followed by my own unique approach to the body of rhetoric and food research via food libels.

A General Approach

Peter Singer and Jim Mason researched food choices made by three different families in *The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter*. This general approach to food label reading began with observing the way the different families selected their food by following them during shopping trips to the grocery store. There the authors were able to observe how foods were selected from simple identification by food label within the preferred grocery store of each family. The first family shopped and ate the standard American diet (SAD), the second family as conscientious omnivores, and the third family as vegan.

The purpose of the research was to provide consumers general advice about their food choices, using food selections based on labels generally, but also following the families into their kitchens and discovering the provenance of the foods each was eating in order to compare what they thought they were eating *ideally* with the reality of the food consumed. With the SAD family these issues were less about the quality of the food and more about the cost, while the next two families examined displayed increasingly involved attitudes as to what they ate. The scope of my research does not allow for actually visiting the factories, businesses, and

marketplaces where the items were purchased as do the authors here, instead I use rhetoric to uncover what is going on in the way we are influenced, assuaged, and convinced to buy and eat the products within a veil of trust and belief, as introduced below.

A Rhetorical Approach from the English Discipline

Eve Baker looked more specifically at food labels through an English disciplinary lens in "The Rhetoric of Organic Food Packaging." Baker uses Foss' generic criticism to outline a genre of organic food labels. Some useful ideas include reference to "health halos" in consumer organic purchases along with the organic food labeling definitions. She also discusses the use of narrative on organic food labels that endeavors to persuade consumers to purchase the product as one of the features of the genre, and connotations of organic food labels are introduced along with moral licensing.

This research approach resulted in Baker identifying five genre characteristics of organic food packaging: organic status notation, nature colors, images, recyclable packaging, number of words in the narrative, and number of positive impact phrases. Baker's findings used graphic images and the organic seal as well as quantifiable methods, and emphasize the persuasion element used by the organic companies in order to sell their products in competition with conventional food items. Research methods I find more intriguing and perhaps more revealing include qualitative methods that use text rather than images and emphasize the persuasion element as it is used to linguistically purvey a story to sell products *within* the organic field of competition as companies vie for a piece of this burgeoning lucrative market.

My Approach

I've long harbored a fascination for food labels, particularly ingredients lists, and the colorful stories they relate about the hidden product inside. Combined with a passion for

rhetorical analysis, research on food labels seemed a natural progression. My approach begins with the reading of food labels, followed by rendering them into a form they could be more readily studied, and finally uncovering the rhetorical stories they tell.

From a consumer standpoint, I find that there are generally six levels of on-the-spot label reading; that is, in the retail store browsing and looking over a product directly from the shelf. The initial tier consists of the first three levels: what is the product, what is the brand, and what is the price (not on the label now but it used to be; still, consumers may find a price on a tag stuck to the label by retailers or by looking at the adjacent shelf tag). Levels in the first or second tiers are not necessarily discussed in the order of consumer preference, because many people buy the product that is the cheapest or on sale, so that would be their first priority.

The initial tier is so named because consumers are readily most interested in the information provided by these levels, and usually purchase with only this information at hand. They look at the product to see what it is (crackers, soup, spaghetti sauce), decide which brand to choose (if more than one brand is available, and usually there are too many brands to choose from), and how much it costs. The levels in the first tier represent historically original food labeling practices that cater to *consumer preference*. They represent the beginning of rhetorical stories of food labels.

The next tier consists of the last three levels: nutrition facts, allergy or food sensitivity information, and finally, and rarely, the ingredients. I say rarely because most consumers will never look at the ingredients list perhaps because it appears in such small print so that it is difficult to read, or perhaps because it is in such small print a consumer may think the information is irrelevant. Further, the ingredients list almost always appears on the back of a label, and consumers are more concerned with what they see on the front, or the *story* of that

food. The levels in the second tier appear because of *legal requirements*, and are a more historically recent incarnation of the practice of food labeling. (See Table 1)

Table 1

Reading Food Labels

Tier 1: Consumer Preference	Tier 2: Legal Requirements
Level 1: Product	Level 4: Nutrition Facts
Level 2: Brand/Company	Level 5: Food Allergens
Level 3: Price	Level 6: Ingredients

In making my own selection of food items based on labels for the present research, my criteria consisted of finding those items that may best result in a favorable rhetorical harvest. At first, anything was game and I engaged a few close friends and family to offer me their food labels if they found anything of interest along with labels from any food purchases I made. After collecting a few, some from standard and even junk food fare, I focused on collecting those items that were from the so-called health or natural foods companies along with any that had interesting stories. It seems a general practice among many of the health or natural foods companies to either create a narrative, sometimes extensive, or make an exhaustive list of those items considered detrimental contraband to health conscious consumers on their food labels. These types of labeling practices among the health and natural foods companies make for rife rhetorical situations on food labels, especially since they are trying so vehemently to capture that market niche that consists of consumers who devour food labels in their attempts at healthful food choices. Finally, I especially wanted to select health and natural food labels that listed natural flavors in the ingredients list, and compare with a health and natural food label that did not include natural flavors as an ingredient.

Rendering Food Labels

After consideration of my approach to *reading* food labels, the question is how to *render* food labels in order to get at these levels of reading food labels and how the rhetorical strategies might affect consumers into feeling happy or even secure in their food choices, thereby purchasing more of the same. From the first tier of food label reading I took only the first two levels: what is the product and what is the company (analyzing price point was not within the scope of this research). From the second tier of food label reading I took only the last level: the ingredients list (nutrition facts and allergy information lies within the purview of dietetics). With the chosen three levels of food label reading, I could now begin to carve out rhetorical stories of food labels by rendering into text the product and its accompanying story; the company and how readily identifiable, transparent, or approachable they represent themselves to the consumer; and the ingredients list with its own vagaries of how manufacturers choose to supply the legally required information on the contents of our food. (See Table 2)

Table 2

Rendering Food Labels

The Story: Level 1, Product
The Reality: Level 6, Ingredients
The Credibility: Level 2, Brand/Company

Rendering food labels into purely textual form in a Word document seemed the most efficient way to get at the three chosen levels of food labels. It seems obvious to look at graphical information on such a visual plane as a food label, yet graphics are often researched in the fields of business and marketing, and I wanted to get at the discourse of what was happening without being distracted by images. Further, by combining the three levels of food labels onto

one document in sequential order, I could begin to see how the stories authenticated themselves (or not) by directly comparing the story on the page with the ingredients list right below it, and finally reviewing company information directly below that.

After identifying the three levels of food labeling categories, I wanted to identify where on the package these levels appeared—in some cases they may have a bearing on the rhetorical forces shaping the story, but in other cases manufacturers were following standard labeling procedures. Generally, manufacturers put the product name and its description on the front, and their contact information and ingredients list on the back. In an effort to be as specific as possible, especially as I found a variety of packaging schemes for different food products, I borrowed from nutrition research labeling.

In a review of food label research Temple and Fraser considered how food labels interface with consumers in selecting a healthy diet. The authors describe two types of labels: front-of-package (FOP), which gives the brand name, the type of food, compositional benefits ("full of fiber"), and possibly a health claim (such as "low in fat can reduce risk for…"); and back-of-package (BOP), which includes the Nutrition Facts panel and the ingredients list (257). Some of the problems reported in consumers' use of labels include the misleading names of foods and beverages given on the FOP (beverages suggesting they have actual juice in them) and BOP ingredients lists that don't give the actual amounts of each ingredient contained in the product (258).

The FOP and BOP designations are useful in rendering food labels into text, but because I wanted to identify all areas of a label from which I was rendering text, I modified the nutrition research labeling designations to conform to food label positions, so I utilized the term "label" in my acronyms; thus, Front of Label (FOL) and Back of Label (BOL). Further, many times

information was found on the Side Panels (SP) as well as the inside of the label (IOL). Finally, occasionally there was Top of Package (TOP) information and Bottom of Package (BOP) information.

The Story

To guide the organization of the material using the three levels, I began with the first level: what is the product. Within this level is found the basic food label story, which could be a narrative, an emphasis on what's not in the product, or both. This information could be quite lengthy or very brief, either way relaying a story of some significance. The story is the first and most basic element of consideration when creating a food label, because it describes the product and why the consumer should buy and consume it. The story encourages a strong emotional reaction in the consumer so that they will not only feel good about the product, but also create a bond with it, even to the extent of allying with the product's political, environmental, and perhaps finally or inclusively health message.

As discussed previously, the product information is found mainly on the FOL, but as I began to render all aspects of the story, I found text from all other five defined areas listed above. Many times and in many areas the smaller bits of story were repetitive, like the company name and slogan, and at other times little surprises could be found, like a message to recycle on the BOP. I made a definitive and conscious decision not to render certain items that were outside of the parameters of this study: the nutrition facts label and allergy information as discussed previously, full recipes or directions for preparing the product, expiration dates and how to store the product, and other miscellaneous residue like packaging numbers and color block coding on the inside flaps of side panels and such. I did, however, include all seals and symbols of certification and storyline such as organic, kosher, and halal certifications; trendy new seals and

symbols for non-GMO, vegan, gluten-free, fair trade and the like; and brief descriptions of the main graphic elements, such as the Annie's bunny logo, the ubiquitous cow grazing in the field, and iconic images that indicate a traditional tone to the story. These items were bracketed because they are not fully textual, but combined with official seals or other graphic elements.

As I began to collect the story from the various parts of the label into one textual area of a document, it became clear that the story was usually spread out all over the label or package of a food item, while the other two levels, the ingredients list and the company information, were not. They were found only in one area, with the exception of company information that may appear in one or two other places (see The Credibility below). By textualizing the story I was able to better keep track of the whole story in one area while still illustrating, through the spatial acronyms indicated, how the story is spread out to all areas of a label in order to promote its message ubiquitously. Further, being able to review the story in one tight text on a page helps to see all the claims the story is trying to make while being able to compare those claims with the evidence of the ingredients list and sometimes company information as shown directly below it.

The Reality

The reality is so named because it is the ingredients list, and although some manufacturers do their best to disguise dubious substances within the legal requirements of listing an ingredient, for the most part the items in the list are transparent. Although I found the ingredients list level as coming last in the second tier of food label reading as discussed above, I chose to render this section, the reality, next because it directly correlates with the claims made in the story. As the story carries the emotional appeal of the product, the reality carries the logical appeal of the product. Once the consumer has bought into the story, they may look at the

reality, but with natural and health foods shoppers, the story is sometimes completely overlooked in favor of the reality.

I found the reality in only one section on any given label, and usually on the BOL or sometimes a SP. Rarely one finds the reality right in the middle center FOL, obviously to prove the point by the manufacturer that they understand consumers bypass the story and only care about the reality and to proclaim that the manufacturer is proud of the reality and has nothing to hide. I did not find any of these labels during my data collection but I have seen them appear on shelves from time to time.

In rendering the reality I chose to list every individual ingredient on one line in sequential order. This enabled a closer analysis of this sometimes almost illegible list on the label in order to really understand and see what is in the product. Sometimes an ingredient was listed that required a second indented level of listing in order to represent all the ingredients. An example of this might be cheese as a single ingredient listing, so that its own sublist might consist of milk, rennet, salt, and enzymes. This sublisting is relevant to the reality because it reveals extra ingredients and a more involved process in the manufacture of a food, and perhaps indicating its level of being more highly processed in comparison to other foods as well.

The Credibility

The credibility is the information about the company, manufacturer, and/or distributor of the food item. Even though I found this as the second level in the first tier of reading food labels, I list it last in my rendering of food labels because I interpret the credibility as going beyond just the company name as listed on the FOL. The credibility is the ethical appeal of the product, and provides a base not only in the textual rendering but also for the product itself by assuring the consumer that there is a solid foundation standing behind the food item, its story, and its reality.

If the story is a narrative about some product, then the credibility is the author of that story, and also reveals how easy the company is to access as well as how inviting they are to the consumer to contact them for more information.

I found the credibility usually on the BOL and sometimes on the SP. Usually it is just the name of the company, a physical address, a toll free number, and a website. Almost any company is easy enough to look up on the Internet, but it is revealing to see how willing some companies are to be involved in consumers' lives. Sometimes the credibility includes country of origin, and many times invitations to engage with their various forms of social media or to collect recipes from their websites. Even though some of these invitations or websites could be found in bits and pieces on one or two other parts of the label, I decided not to indicate where they were found because usually it was only in one place. Rendering the credibility in this way allows for seeing all the textual information gathered in one brief place for closer examination.

Rhetorical Stories of Food Labels

While rendering food labels I found that there are three distinct types of food companies in the drive to capture the organic or natural foods market; I call these types the organatural food industry. The first type of organatural is the Big Food company that keeps its name but alters its story or its reality in order to appeal to the growing natural foods market. They are not hiding that they are still Big Food as those that are in the second type, they are just adding a product line to capture every segment of the market. The second type is the organic company that has sold out to Big Food and retains the same name and story in order to keep its customer base, what I named Trying but Lying. Sometimes the design of the package will change slightly which is a signal to the consumer to scour the reality (ingredients list) for any changes made to the contents of the product. The third type is the actual, honest organic company trying to be diligent in the

fight to keep organics authentic and supportive of organic agriculture. I named this type Truth and Label Equivalence, or TALE.

Sixty-seven food labels were rendered from my collection of over about 150. Every food label is of interest, but as my collection grew I became more selective of those that would render the most interesting rhetorical results. Because there are so many interesting stories on food labels, I simply had to put a stop to collection at some point. It was at this point that I realized many of the stories I had collected were repeated in some way, or generally had the same message as the others in its organatural food type as distinguished above.

Labels were then sorted into the three types resulting with 14 in Big Food, 16 in Natural Flavors, and 37 in TALE. The parameters used to sort labels into Big Food were brand recognition or store brand foods (credibility), into Trying but Lying based mostly on the appearance of natural flavors (reality Level 6) or inconsistencies between the story and the reality, and into TALE by the equivalence between all three levels (story, reality, credibility). The reason I ended up with so many more numbers in the TALE type was probably due to the collection process itself. As mentioned above, I sought out and rendered those labels that seemed to have the most interesting story, and since I collected first, rendered second, and sorted last, that was the point at which I saw how the numbers resulted. This progressive, bottom-up style of research is known as qualitative methods. (The amount of labels I ended up with in each category is less important to my analysis than the quality or type of information found.)

From these numbers I selected three representative examples in each category in order to illustrate and develop the rhetorical stories of food labels. (See Table 3) The examples I selected best served the purposes of illustrating how the three different organatural types differed. As I perused the rendered labels found in each of the sorted types I also tried to select those that

differed within each type enough to show the breadth of variation. For example, I aimed to select various food types, variety in reality or ingredients listings, and varying levels of credibility. The results of the selections are discussed thoroughly one by one below.

Table 3

Organatural Types

Types	1 – Big Food	2 – Trying but Lying	3 - TALE
Examples	Shoppers Value	Earth Balance "butter"	Thousand Hills beef
	Lindt chocolate	Health Valley chili	Harold's pickles
	Land o Lakes butter	Republic of Tea	Honor the Earth wild rice

Although it is not my intent to research all the backgrounds of every company represented in the rendered food labels, it is important to be aware of the organatural types in uncovering the rhetorical nature of food label stories. Stories can be affected and modified depending on their organatural status, an awareness that is made keen because the companies know that the consumers know about the shifting of ownership amongst and between smaller organic startups and Big Food monopolies. It is simple enough to find this information through non-profit awareness groups like Cornucopia Institute as well as tapping into the Internet while shopping the aisles and finding lists like "The Grocery Store Blacklist: 12 Food Companies to Avoid (and 95 Sneaky Aliases)" from The Organic Pepper. Organatural status is very dynamic and is taken into consideration briefly as one part of the story, reality, and credibility as we move forward in our discussion.

Big Food

The following example is used as a baseline to illustrate a conventionally produced and labeled food in order to show the progression of conventional food labels as they migrate

towards type 1 organatural as described above. This label belongs in the Big Food organatural type because it is a store brand. Consider the following:

Story

[FOL]

Shoppers Value microwaveable BBQ Rib Sandwich. Boneless pork patty with barbecue sauce on a bun. Fully cooked.

Reality

[ingredients list]

Charbroiled boneless rib shaped pork patty with smoke flavoring added:
- pork,
- barbecue sauce:
  - tomato paste,
  - highfructose corn syrup,
  - water,
  - corn syrup,
  - distilled vinegar,
  - molasses,
  - salt,
  - mustard bran,
  - natural hickory smoke flavor,
  - spices,
  - onion powder,
  - garlic powder,
  - sodium benzoate,
  - caramel color,
  - sugar,
  - natural flavor
- water,
- seasoning:
  - tomato powder (dehydrated tomato)
- dextrose,
- brown sugar,
- artificial vinegar:
  - malic acid,
  - sodium acetates,
  - lactose,
  - fumaric acid,
  - artificial flavorings
- powdered Worcestershire sauce:

corn syrup solids,
salt,
garlic powder,
sugar,
spices,
soy sauce solids:
wheat,
soybeans,
salt,
maltodextrin,
caramel color
tamarind,
natural flavor
spices,
spice extractive,
onion powder,
natural smoke flavor,
garlic powder,
textured vegetable protein product:
soy protein concentrate,
caramel color,
zinc oxide,
niacinamide,
ferrous sulfate,
copper gluconate,
vitamin A palmitate,
calcium pantothenate,
thiamine mononitrate,
pyridoxine hydrochloride,
riboflavin,
cyanocobalamin
salt,
sodium phosphates
Sesame seed bun:
enriched bleached wheat flour:
wheat flour,
niacin,
reduced iron,
thiamine mononitrate,
riboflavin,
folic acid,
enzyme
water,
sugar,
soybean oil,
sesame seeds,

contains 2% or less of:
yeast:
yeast,
sorbitan monostearate,
ascorbic acid
salt,
calcium propionate (preservative),
monoglycerides with ascorbic acid and citric acid (antioxidants),
calcium sulfate,
enzymes,
wheat starch,
ascorbic acid

Credibility

[author information]

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If you actually took the time to read through all of those ingredients you are to be congratulated. Unfortunately, anyone who purchases and consumes such a product probably does not. The reason is either because of the quote at the beginning of this chapter referring to liking the taste of a food item, or because the price is so cheap, or because it is impractical to read through such a lengthy and obfuscating list. Notice how the rendering process took into consideration the various levels within levels of food ingredients as listed on the label. This food label is the epitome of a Big Food product with no concern for the provenance, process, and contents of the food. Notice how short the story is, especially as compared to the reality. There is no story. Notice how the credibility is also very brief—when there is no story, there really is no author to credit. Eat at your own risk.

Next is an example of a European company that started small but eventually grew into a Big Food company. As the first example was a blatant illustration of basically a "non-food" Big Food item, the following shows more refinement as the Big Food organatural type moves

progressively into their own claims to the organatural niche. Lindt belongs in this type because it is a large international brand that is readily recognizable.

Story

[FOL]

Lindt Excellence chili dark chocolate infused with natural chili flavor.

Reality

[ingredients list]

Sugar,
Chocolate,
Cocoa butter,
Milkfat,
Soya lecithin (emulsifier),
Chili extract,
Artificial flavor.

Credibility

[author information]

Manufactured for Lindt & Sprüngli (USA) Inc. Stratham, NH 03885
For nutrition information call 1-877-MY LINDT

Again, the story is simple as in the first example with a notable exception—the brand name, which really carries the story. As with many Big Food companies, the name is the story. Think of names such as Hershey's, Coca-cola, and Kellogg's. Generally, there is no great amount of text if any at all to read or render. The lack of story and presence of a Big Food name is a good indication that they are operating by their own standards with little to no regard of more niche market forces. What always stands out, however, is the use of the word "natural," which is an undefined and unregulated term in the food market. In some of the niche markets, which are becoming more are more omnipresent (organic and health food shoppers), the use of the word

"natural" is a signal to stay away from the product. However, let's compare "natural chili flavor" with the reality.

In the reality we find two items that refer back to the story of "natural chili flavor;" that is, chili extract, and artificial flavor. This is a good example of the dissonance between the story and the reality in many Big Food products. All of a sudden we see natural chili flavor reduced to chili extract, which could be considered a type of natural flavor, alongside artificial flavor, which somehow negates the effect of anything natural being present. The author information is sparse again, and basically just iterates that this originally Swiss product is now manufactured in the USA, with no invitation to comment or engage with the company or product other than to find out nutrition information, which wasn't available on the label because the product is so small.

Finally, we review a rhetorical story that's based fully on the first type of organatural food companies: a Big Food product that has changed one of its products or invented a new one to cater to the organic and health foods consumers. This label belongs in this category because even though it is a locally produced product it is a large conventionally produced brand, not adhering to any organic agricultural practices.

Story

[TOP]

Land O Lakes spread. Butter with olive oil. Only sweet cream, olive oil and salt. (Native American female caricature in nature background full color design)

[FOL]

Spreadable Land O Lakes butter with olive oil. Only sweet cream, olive oil and salt. (same design as above)

[BOL]

Taste the simple goodness of creamy butter with olive oil. Made with only 3 simple ingredients: sweet cream, olive oil and salt. Give you the fresh butter taste you love. Spreadable right out of the refrigerator. (color photo of bread with butter)

[BOP]

(recyclable '5' symbol)

Reality

[ingredients list]

Sweet cream,
Olive oil,
Salt.

Credibility

[author information]

Go to landolakes.com for recipes and more.
Box Tops for Education is a registered trademark of General Mills used with permission.
For recipes and serving suggestions, visit www.landolakes.com
A product of Land O' Lakes, Inc., Arden Hills, MN 55126
Satisfaction guaranteed 1-800-328-4155

Here we see a Big Food story worth listening to. The butter, olive oil, and salt combination is emphasized, a story of only two ingredients that every person would recognize. Emotional appeals are not only evident by stating three ingredients, but also by the phrases "simple ingredients," "simple goodness," and the terms "fresh," "taste," and "love." This is a very appealing story, and as a shopper I am hoping the reality supports it. And it does: sweet cream, olive oil, salt. Of course, organics is not mentioned, and some Big Food products may carry organic materials, but in this case in doesn't. However, the attempt by Big Food to make such an offer is sweetly appealing and the credibility shows that even though we're dealing with Big Food, it is a local Big Food. We're offered all kinds of interface with the company through recipes via their website, encouraging support of our local community with the Box Tops for

Education program, and a guarantee of our satisfaction of the product. I grant that this is a very satisfying rhetorical story for a Big Food company, and though the package is plastic and the cows are suffering in a confined, intensive dairy operation, it is a step in the right direction, with no "natural flavors" or other unintelligible ingredients.

Natural Flavors – Trying but Lying

The second category of food label stories involves companies that try to sound like they are part of the burgeoning organic and health food market, but fall short of the mark. I witnessed more "natural flavors" in this category than anywhere else, even within Big Food labels. The reason for this is that natural flavors is a category of a wide variety of substances that fall under this umbrella term as allowed by the FDA in its manufacturing and labeling codes. Also, the term "natural" is part of this ingredient and holds a powerful rhetorical appeal not only for manufacturers labeling their products but also consumers who ultimately pass over the term as meaningless.

Unfortunately, the term is neither so meaningless nor benign as conscientious eaters would hope. Unless a consumer has the legalese prowess to unravel what all is included in this category, they will be eating a substance that is basically present for the sole purpose of flavor. There is nothing wrong with a food tasting good, but the addition of a virtually unknown substance in order for good taste will signal the savvy consumer into asking two questions: what exactly am I eating, and why does this food product need to have this ingredient in it? Is it because the food would taste so horrible without it, or is it because there are addictive substances in "natural flavors," or both?

The following food label epitomizes the Trying but Lying because there is so much story all over the package, yet there are discrepancies between the natural health claims and the reality

in the list of ingredients. Not only is there story present on the FOL and BOL, but also on the TOP and SPs, and sometimes this usage begs caution for a wary consumer because it can look overly "pushy."

Story

[TOP]

Powered by plants.
(U parve symbol)
Earth Balance natural buttery spread. Organic whipped. 78% natural vegetable oils.
(USDA organic symbol)

[FOL]

Spread, fry, sauté, bake. Great buttery taste. (repeat of brand and product information as above)

[SP]

Vegan, lactose-free, non-GMO, a gluten-free food, expeller-pressed oil.
Certified organic by QAI. (symbol)

[BOL]

At Earth Balance, we believe that plant-based eating is a delicious way to enjoy food while respecting the planet. That's why all of our spreads are made from plant-based ingredients, providing tasty alternatives that allow you to savor your favorite foods. Plant-based diet friendly. Made just right by Earth Balance. (color photo of green beans with butter)

[SP]

Excellent source of ALA omega-3, 320mg, 20% of 1600mg DV. See nutrition information for fat & sat fat content. Non-GMO, vegan, 0g trans-fat, naturally gluten-free, non-dairy. The taste you crave. The rich buttery taste of this Earth Balance Spread makes your favorite foods simply delicious. Our creamy buttery spread will delight your taste buds and win your heart. Without the worry. The patented blend used in Earth Balance Buttery Spreads is naturally free of hydrogenated oils and has zero grams of trans fat.

Reality

[ingredients list]

Natural oil blend:
palm fruit* oil,

soybean* oil,
canola* oil,
olive* oil,
Filtered water,
Pure salt,
Less than 2% of natural flavor, derived from:
corn,
no msg,
no alcohol,
no gluten,
Crushed soybeans*,
Soy lecithin*,
Lactic acid non-dairy,
Naturally extracted annatto* for color.
*organic ingredients

Credibility

[author information]

Owned & distributed by Earth Balance, a division of GFA Brands, Inc., 7102 LaVista Place, Suite 200, Niwot, CO 80503, 201-421-3970, EarthBalanceNatural.com
Interested in learning more about plant-based living, cooking tips and recipe ideas? Visit our online community, MadeJustRight.com (QR code)
earthbalancenatural.com, madejustright.com (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Pinterest symbols)

To begin with, this is the second type of organatural company as discussed above: one that has bought out a smaller organic or natural foods company or created a new label that sounds like one. In this case, it appears that Big Food company Smart Balance has created the Earth Balance label to compete in this market. Looking at the story, most would never guess. First, take the phrase "organic whipped." Many Trying but Lying food labels will plaster the organic term all over the label in order to appeal to the sentiment it engenders. Further, 78% natural vegetable oils sounds good but natural as we know has no meaning, so basically the label might just as well say vegetable oil, which is not very exciting.

The story is definitely appealing to the vegan shopper because of the frequent use of the term "plant" along with an occasional "planet." There is also a lot of "no" rhetoric claiming all of

the things that are not in the product. Further, take note of the certifications and claims—there are two organic certifications along with the claim of non-GMO. Remember, only 100% organic means non-GMO, and only Non-GMO Project Certification, even without any organics, means no GMOs anywhere in the product. And even though a product has been certified organic, that does not mean all the ingredients are organic. Let's take a look.

The reality is very evident and much easier to see in a rendered food label as presented above. Note the asterisked items are organic, which gives consumer confidence, then we come to "less than 2% of natural flavor." This "less than 2%" is a phrase that also has become ubiquitous in food labeling. It follows an FDA code that allows manufacturers to use the phrase, which is of course accurate but leads to the false assumption that if something is less than 2%, even if it doesn't sound that great, it's o.k. because it's such a small amount. Remember the non-GMO claim? Here under the "less than 2% of natural flavor" we find corn listed, and any corn grown in the US that does not say organic is GMO. Further, why list "no msg, no alcohol, no gluten" in the ingredients list area? It simply doesn't make sense to list these "no" items here, which should appear in the story. This type of rhetorical maneuvering is meant to divert attention from the obviously GMO corn to focus on the other nasty items that are not present.

Matching up the credibility of the story we see the author as GFA Brands, which any Internet search will yield as Smart Balance. There is a lot of contact information, and even a separate online community one can join. I appreciate this kind of inviting rhetoric on a food label by the author; however, it diverts the attention of the audience into fun, social activities associated with the product and away from the actual substance of the product itself.

The next example in this organatural type looks good to begin with, but again we find natural flavors in the reality list. This label is a good example of why the rendered text method is

useful because right in the middle of a list of ingredients that all begin with the term “organic,” an obvious “natural flavors” is like a red flag waving at the consumer. However, other consumers may find comfort in the list of so many organic ingredients and not mind so much the single natural flavors listing. The rhetorical inference can go both ways in persuading the consumer to buy (or not).

Story

[FOL]

Health Valley Organic. New vegetarian chili, no salt added, 3 bean chipotle. Nutrition scorecard (per serving) sodium 125mg, fat 1.5g, fiber 8g, antioxidant 20% DV*, Vitamin C. Non-BPA lining*. [UDSA Organic seal] Certified Organic by Quality Assurance International (QAI). [no QAI seal]

[BOL]

Health Valley Organic vegetarian chili gives you a hearty, satisfying taste without added sodium. Our Organic Three Bean Chipotle Chili is a mild chili with an authentic smoky flavor and made with kidney, pinto and black beans. This chili is an excellent source of fiber (8 grams) and vitamin C (20%) and a good source of protein (10 grams). [Graphic of a thermometer and the word “mild”]
This Health Valley Chili contains 125 milligrams sodium per serving. Other leading brands contain 780 milligrams sodium or more per serving. Made with no genetically engineered ingredients. *Can lining not derived from BPA.

Reality

[ingredients list]

Filtered water,
Organic tomatoes,
Organic onions,
Organic kidney beans,
Organic black beans,
Organic pinto beans,
Organic tomato paste,
Organic brown rice flour,
Organic soy protein,
Organic evaporated cane syrup,
Organic corn starch,
Natural flavors (with yeast extract),

Organic garlic powder,
Organic grain vinegar,
Organic spices,
Organic chipotle pepper,
Organic paprika.

Credibility

[author information]

Manufactured for distribution by: The Hain Celestial Group, Inc. Lake Success, NY 11042 USA.

Now here is an interesting label, with various competing rhetorics. First is the story, which basically sounds like one found on a Big Food label, proclaiming the general tastiness of the food, as well as touting important nutrition facts pertaining to the contents. There are a couple of organic seals, but not as part of the textual story. Also, a point more nebulous to many shoppers is that the can liner is BPA-free. Then we turn to the reality and see much more important information than the story had: everything has the term "organic" in front of it, which is very appealing until we hit a term sandwiched in the middle of the list: "natural flavors (with yeast extract)."

A shopper may wonder what has happened to the neat little organic Health Valley package when they come to the credibility, delivering the bleak and abbreviated Hain Celestial. No invitations for contact, no social media, no QR codes. There has been much controversy about this company that was once a small organic and health food label, so much so that most conscientious shoppers in this market niche avoid that name altogether. Products from Hain are mostly distributed in major supermarket natural foods sections of stores, from what I have observed. This food label story sports a very odd conglomeration of mixed rhetorical messages indeed. I'm not sure the Health Valley label even knows what it is trying to be.

The last example in this organatural type is the ever-popular Republic of Tea. It belongs in this category because it is trying, and every so earnestly, warmly, and friendly, to be the type of product natural foods consumers want to use and feel good about, yet the omnipresent natural flavors appears not only in the reality, but also in the story. I find this interesting because usually natural flavors appears to be somewhat hidden in the list of ingredients yet by using the term in the story as well it has a tendency to rhetorically normalize the term, or somehow render it harmless.

Story

[TOP]

Naturally Decaffeinated
Eco-Friendly CO2 Process
(outline graphic of a woman sitting cross-legged, hands folded in her lap, with the words 'Decaf' on the front of her dress and a teapot for a head)

[FOL]

Decaf ginger peach longevity tea. Fine naturally decaffeinated black tea blended with spices and natural flavors. The Republic of Tea. Steeps 50 cups. Natural, unbleached tea bags.

[SP]

I am told that in Western cultures there is a preoccupation with youth, but that you have not yet discovered the timeless effects of tea. How can it be? A single sip of tea has the power to carry you back to the time before time. Now that's young. The Minister of Leaves.

[BOL]

The praises of peach. This tea offers the lushness of a fancy peach seasoned with the tingle of spicy ginger. This fresh and flavorful cup will make the head wiggle with delight without the effects of caffeine. For thousands of years, the peach has been China's darling of longevity. Only sustainable ingredients are used. Save this recyclable, airtight container to store refills. Sip by sip rather than gulp by gulp.

[SP]

Caught without your teapot? Use the Republic's round, unbleached tea bag. (Followed by directions for steeping.)

Reality

[ingredients list]

Fine decaffeinated black tea,
Natural peach flavor,
Ginger.

Credibility

[author information]

For a free catalogue of our teas, herbal blends and nature-inspired teaware, call: 1-800-298-4TEA or write: The Minister of Supply, Post Office Box 1589, Novato, California 94948-1589. Website: www.RepublicofTea.com.

Republic of Tea is a widely known popular brand of tea, and the story delivered tells the care with which the tea has been decaffeinated through "eco-friendly" processing. We have a made up story within this story from a mythical "Minister of Leaves." Sustainability of the product and longevity of the consumer are claimed in the story. We are even entreated to save the container so as not to pollute the earth. The story has a very friendly, calm, delightful and somewhat upscale tone to it. Unfortunately, the reality paints a different story, once again of "natural peach flavor." This phrase may be a bit less offensive than the full out "natural flavors," because rather than a conglomerate, we have just a single natural flavor, that from the peach. However, there may be other allowable substances in the flavor, and while we feel good about the eco-friendly CO2 process of extracting out the caffeine, can we feel equally cozy about the solvents or other substances used to extract out the "natural peach flavor" from the peach, even if we knew what they were? The credibility seems harmless and inviting enough, so from what can be extracted from this story is a food product that might be consumed with a bit less anxiety that many of the others.

The natural flavors category of food label stories seems to be the most problematic when viewed with a rhetorical lens. Big Food at least is not trying to hide anything, even when they are attempting to develop organic and health food lines. However, the category of "trying but lying" as exemplified by the rendered stories reveals hidden layers of dubious ingredients lists and a type of organatural food company that is trying to be something it is not.

TALE

The truth and label equivalence category of food label stories contains those that come closest to what the organic and health food consumer looks for when shopping. Some of the items in this category may only be found in health and specialty stores, but some may be found in general supermarkets. The following label is found in both types of retail establishments, and belongs in this organatural type because the story, reality, and credibility all match up. Even better, it is produced locally and the owner of the company is the rancher and makes local public appearances.

Story

[FOL]

Thousand Hills Cattle Company 100% grass fed beef made with no antibiotics, no added hormones, no grain. Ever. Ground beef, 85% lean 15% fat. Born, raised & harvested in the USA. [US inspection seal]

[BOL]

Know 100% grass fed beef. Now you can enjoy wholesome and delicious grass fed beef from Thousand Hills Cattle Co. Our products are made using only 100% grass fed beef from family farms we hand select based upon humane animal care and sustainable grazing practices, proven meat quality, and strict adherence to our requirements of cattle raised with NO antibiotics, NO added hormones and NO grain—ever given to the animal. Our cattle live freely on grass pastures in the summer and have access to hay in the winter. Thank you for choosing our product. Todd Churchill, Founder. [Todd's signature]

Reality

[ingredients list]

100% grass fed beef

Credibility

[author information]

Distributed by: Thousand Hills Cattle Company, Cannon Falls, Minnesota 55009
To learn more about our 100% grass fed beef: ThousandHillsCattleCo.com or find us on Facebook. [Facebook symbol]

Although this is not a national brand, it still may be found in a larger supermarket as opposed to a health food boutique. This is one of those products rife with the "no" rhetoric, because it is a niche of the Big Food economy, beef. As such, the rhetorical force of the story is to let consumers know that it has none of the negative qualities of factory-farmed cattle. Along with everything the product does not contain is the emotional appeal of an animal happily grazing on its natural food in an open field in summer, and the dried hay for its mealtime in winter. The signature of the founder farmer is included as a final note underlining and emphasizing the sincerity and trust inherently implied in this story. There is a single ingredient listed, the brevity of which can be found in many products in this category. There is a physical address, a website, and social media to engage in cementing relations with the consumer through the credibility. Thousand Hills Cattle Company is a good example of the TALE, or Truth and Label Equivalence, because the food and the label claims match up.

The next example is a story that does not necessarily appeal to the organic niche market, yet still belongs in this category. The item was found in a 45 year old locally owned natural foods store, so the company wholesales to these types of retail outlets, although it can be found in a few select supermarket chains. It belongs in this organatural type because even though it lists

no organic ingredients, the list is “clean” and has none of the ingredients that are typically found in Big Food pickles.

Story

[TOP]

(on clear cellophane circling the jar cover) Made with solar power. (repeated over and over again) [sun with rays graphic]

[FOL]

Harold’s Texicun Gormay Pickuls. “These cukes cood be a might hot fer ye!” Purdy hot [graphic of two red crossed peppers with a checked box next to it]. Dern hot [graphic of four red crossed peppers with an unchecked box next to it]. Sugar free, gluten free, preservative free. [graphic of an “oldtimer” with a pickle and one foot on some crate boxes with the words habaneras and cukes]

[SP]

No preservatives.

Reality

[ingredients list]

Cucumbers,
Water (tap),
Vinegar,
Salt,
Red Chili Peppers,
Dill.

Credibility

[author information]

Distributed exclusively by: Conscious Choice, Dallas, Texas. 214-390-3113. www.consciouschoicefoods.com. Go Texan [graphic outline of state of Texas]. QR code.

This story is interesting just for the fact that it does not directly appeal to the average health food shopper, yet as shown by the story certainly fits with the category where truth and the label are equivalent. It contains some health messages, such as sugar free, gluten free, and

preservative free, yet it appeals more to the hominess in us, with its colloquial language and image of an oldtimer munching on a pickle. The only other organic niche phrase used in the story is "made with solar power." The reality is brief and there are no ingredients listed that are not basic food substances. However, where some manufacturers list the ingredients of the vinegar in an item, this label does not. The credibility has a homey quality as well, coming from Texas with the name of Conscious Choice. The whole story together is a very unique one compared to others in this category because it is appealing to the greater good of the consumer, yet not proclaiming some of the standard rhetoric of the niche, which insists on all organic, non-GMO, and other such indices. Basically, the story says, "buy me because I'm traditional and local, just like in the good ole days before major manufacturing practices." It is very appealing.

Finally, I was lucky enough to be given this last food item from my sister who purchased it directly from the hands of the executive director of the company. Again, this label belongs in this organatural type because there is truth and label equivalence between all three levels: story, reality, and credibility. The following example also epitomizes and is emblematic of the TALE type because of the extensive story, no ingredients list necessary, and easily accessed company.

Story

[FOL]

Pipeline free manoomin. 100% pure natural hand-harvested and wood-parched Ojibwe wild rice. Uniquely indigenous to these lands. Our manoomin (wild rice) the food that grows on the water. Ojibwe traditional wild rice. Minnesota tribal harvested. Traditionally harvested and parched by Ojibwe people since before America's discovery. Experience the smell of the pristine crisp lakes and the unique nutty taste. Honor the Earth. [graphic design of a thunderbird, flowers, and wild rice] [USDA 100% organic certified]

[BOL]

Each time we knock the rice into our canoes, we say miigwech miigwech miigwech to our Creator. "Our wild rice is who we are, to protect our wild rice is to protect the waters of our Mother Earth," Winona LaDuke, Executive Director, Honor the Earth. Our Manoomin is hand-

harvested by the Anishinaabeg from the 1835, 1855 and 1867 treaty areas and beyond. We are proud to bring you this natural gift from the earth. Miigwech (thank you).

Delicious, unique and vibrant tasty treat, where a little goes a long ways. Our Ojibwe-harvested manoomin or wild rice, known for its unique nutty taste, offers a touch of excitement to menus with its unusual flavor and texture. As a dish, it can easily stand alone or be served in combination with a variety of other foods for breakfast, lunch, dinner or snacks. Manoomin adds texture and piques the taste buds with its wild, nutlike flavor.

The Ojibwe people and Honor the Earth are in strong resistance against four large oil pipelines and new mining projects which threaten the heart of the largest wild rice watersheds in the world. The fracked oil and tar sands pipelines also threaten the Great Lakes, a 5th of the world's fresh water.

Our manoomin, "the food that grows on the water," is sacred to us. Ojibwe migration stories tell of how the people were told to keep moving until they came to a place where food grew on the water. Wild rice is an integral part of our lives. It's there for us for our ceremonies, for daily living and a tradition we have had for thousands of years.

In August to September, at the time of the wild rice moon, Manoominigiizis, lakes team [sic] with a harvest crop enabling us to perpetuate our legacy. The flavorful nutty green seeds of the wild rice plant are more commonly known in the Ojibwe language as manoomin, meaning "the food that grows on the water." It has a profound and historic relationship between the Anishinaabeg and our Mother Earth.

Manoomin, or Zizania aquatic, is the only grain indigenous to North America. We continue to campaign to protect our manoomin from genetic engineering. White Earth's wild rice is USDA organically certified by the Minnesota Crop Improvement Association. [full color photo of a young Ojibwe boy, smiling, shirtless and out of doors, holding a package of manoomin that says "pipeline free" on the package]

[BOP]

Pipeline free manoomin.

Reality

[ingredients list]

[none listed]

Credibility

[author information]

See our website: www.honorearth.org for more information. 607 Main Avenue, Callaway, MN 56521. (218) 375-2601 info@honorearth.org www.honorearth.org [Facebook symbol] Facebook [Twitter symbol] Twitter @honortheearth. Design by littleredfeatherdesign.com.

As far as food label stories go, it doesn't get any better than this. The story tells us about the First Nations of this land, their traditional food found where they lived, and their traditional methods of harvest. There is also a strong political message about the struggle between tribal peoples and Big Government (including Big Food, one presumes) that has carried on since the encroachment of colonizers. This struggle has culminated in the very threatening of not only traditional foodstuffs, but also an entire species of crops that is found only in a few small areas. This story represents the purity of the food and the corruption of those who seek to destroy it as a byproduct of progress and economic growth and development.

The reality of the story is absent, because it is not needed: the story is the reality. The credibility is also basically just a website, address, and social media, because most of the authorship is included within the story itself. This is a very holistic food label story in that sense and epitomizes and exemplifies how the truth is the label and the label is the truth—the ultimate in equivalence, and a real TALE.

The final discovery in researching the rhetoric of food label stories may not be learning what is in our food, but perhaps what is not in our food. As we saw in the first category, there may be no end to the substances that can be put in our food; in the next, we find the emphasis on what is not in our food, while what is in it is hidden. Finally, the true stories are ones that equate the label with the truth of our food. Rhetorical homologies are useful in deciphering those equations.

CHAPTER 5: TRUTH AND BELIEF

"Non credo." – George Ohsawa

A pioneer in one of the many health food movements through history, George Ohsawa is known to have often told his students "non credo" when they questioned some of his ideas. He meant to teach people that whatever he said, or any others for that matter, "do not believe." Instead, he encouraged people to try things out for themselves, to know firsthand the truth of their health, their food choices, and their lives. Ultimately that is the goal of this work, to uncover the truth of what we may believe about our food based on what we can learn from food labels, and sometimes that isn't enough. Do not believe: find out for yourself.

Rarely does one find authenticity in the large multi-national billion-dollar-manufacturing sector, where profits are generally the motivational factor. However, start-ups, the smaller more innovative companies motivated by problem-solving and niche markets may come closer. In Chapters 2 and 3 we saw how Big Food controls what we eat and how food labels are rhetorically fashioned to exploit our trust in our food choices, as well as what we have come to believe about what is healthy to eat. In Chapter 4 we examined just how those rhetorics played out in a textual examination of food labels. Some of the food labels are indeed from smaller companies that are trying to make an impact—trying to gain and keep our trust in the authenticity of the food, and not simply our belief in the food label. Now we turn to an explanation of what was found.

In order to orient the rendered food labels, a brief look at a previous study will aid to understand the types of food labeling elements that are taking place followed by a framework to help contextualize those elements. Then, from a discussion of rhetorical homologies will stem my own interpretation of what was found in the rendered food label texts. Examples of food

labels from the previous chapter will be referenced that may be illustrative in uncovering the connections in the rhetorical stories, realities, and credibilities.

Convenient Categories

An author in food label research has provided some interesting and convenient ways to organize food labels into readily accessible categories for sorting and analysis. Richard Pearce offers basic and intuitive categories, some of which have already been evident in unraveling food label stories in the previous chapter. He describes seven situations where Big Food uses asymmetric information on food labels. As shown previously in Chapter 2, asymmetry operates frequently in the food industry (cf. Freudenberg and Winson).

Pearce defines asymmetry in the marketplace when "one party knows more about a product than the other" (26). This pertains particularly to food labeling because it is the manufacturer who has much more information about their products than the consumer. They try to make a "version of reality" in their packaging that is achieved through "connotation and association" (26). Asymmetric information is usually what drives regulation in the food industry, but the main point here is to show a number of dimensions of food labeling where "the 'information' is more complex than the contents of the label" (27). These situations are as follows:

"The Illusion:" when front of packaging doesn't explain what is really in the food product, because in most cases, anyone buying the product would rather not read the label because they can guess that it is probably pretty awful (27). Part of the illusion is the wide-open definition of particular ingredients that can mean more than one thing. In the U.K., the ingredient "meat" means "'flesh' or 'anything that originates from an animal carcass'" (28). This tack takes advantage of asymmetric information and/or lack of consumer education (28). Many consumers

may rather not have this information because the higher cost of whole meat products forces them to have no choice but to buy the less expensive tinned, frozen, or shelf stable items. The illusion is the story of the textualized food labels in general and is expanded upon in the section on discourse below.

"Weasel Words:" use of words that don't have any real meaning; such as, "natural," "traditional," and so forth. These are positive sounding words that, if legally defined, would end up cluttering up the label (29). "Fresh" was another one of these words that was ultimately taken off labels as a result of a lawsuit, in conjunction with describing fruit products specifically (cf. Welford). In my current food label research, the term "natural" is still used frequently, among others such as "simple" and "simply," along with "authentic," unfortunately.

"Rose Tinted Spectacles:" the outside of the package looks a lot better than what you find when you open the package. Pearce refers to this as "enhancement" (29-30). In the U.S. for example, this is compensated for by the use of subtext underneath the attractive picture of a bowl or plate of prepared food that says "serving suggestion." Pearce further indicates that the "food is mass-produced and therefore lacks the mark of individuality that maps out 'true aesthetic content'" as well as de-emphasizing "evidence of the industrial process" by "adoption of non-food signs" such as country scenes to imply free-range or kitchen scenes to imply hand-made (30). This dimension illustrates the use of narrative discourse on a food label (30), one that has been explored in the rhetorical study of organic food labeling presented briefly in Chapter 4 (cf. Baker). The textualizating of my food labels does allow for a notation of some of these images in the bracketed information found in the story, exemplified by the old-timer on one of the food labels that also stated "made with solar power" (see Chapter 4, TALE).

"The Bluff:" when the label says something is left out that is actually a normal state for that particular product, such as when something says it is free of preservatives when the product never uses preservatives anyway; for example, dry pasta (30). Another example seen frequently in the meat section of a grocery store are labels that state "no added hormones" or "no added antibiotics" when there is other print on the label indicating that it is against the law to add these anyway. The bluff happens frequently on food labels and is easy to spot when aware of this asymmetric "information."

"The Hidden Truth:" when important information is hidden on a label in a place that is difficult to see. Pearce comments that companies assume that consumers would rather not know this information or that it would make the label "unwieldy" (31). In my research, I place the hidden truth in the reality of the food label, or the ingredients list. The print is usually very small in comparison to the rest of the label and usually on the BOL.

"The Half Truth:" using words to describe what is not in a product; e.g., "fat-free," especially when the label lacks information on how much fat is too much to consume in a serving. This can be very harmful, especially to the "nutritionally illiterate" (31). There are many examples of this on food labels in the nutrition facts panel, which was not covered in my research. Currently there is legislation to resolve some of these nutritional half truths and the nutrition facts part of the label is being revamped across the board.

"The Small Print:" the information companies are required to put on their label that is not the "hard sell" part of their narrative. It is not lack of information, as Pearce notes, but how the information is presented (31). Obviously, companies get more for their advertising dollar on the label by presenting branding and other information over legal requirements (32). Even though manufacturers are required to put nutrition information on the label, that still does not affect

those individuals that *want* to consume foods that are high in sugar and fat (34). In my research, the half-truth and the small print are operationally the same, as illustrated in the reality part of the food label.

Labels create products. As Pearce notes, they are created on the package. This is especially important when the food itself is not visible through the package. However, in post-industrial times, "consumers do not always approach shopping for foodstuffs as a process that merits much attention or reflection" (34). Regulation is not really the best solution, because it requires enforcement to be effective and governments rarely have the resources to enforce regulations and address legal recourses of companies (35). Therefore, asymmetrical food labels become the tool of Big Food, so rhetorical stories of food labels is my way of evening that unbalance of power.

Framing Food Labels

Irena Knezevic writes about the failures of the food industry to accurately portray what is in the package of food they are selling through the use of food labels. She describes food as a basic human right and as such criticizes Big Food for its disregard for environmental problems, human health issues, and inequalities in food economics as it strives for its singular goal of profits and growth (247). Further, food labels are the only link between these giant entities and the individual consumer—they might look to be on the surface an aid to purchasing, but in reality act as a rhetorical tool of the industry. They shape conversations about food through their symbolic power, advertising more while revealing less, and act as mediators of consumers' relationships with their food (248). The food industry as described above is a further example of asymmetry as Pearce defines it, using food labels to further blur our experience of that

inequality. Knezevic organizes her framework of food labels into four areas: discourse, distancing, fragmentation, and responsibility.

Discourse shapes our understanding of food by use of text (as well as symbols) on food labels. Food companies draw in various consumer audiences through food labeling and advertising; for example, luring in those who desire to purchase local food by the use of "product of [country]," where the bulk of the product might come from another country but is assembled or packaged in the so-called "local" country. Food labeling laws allow for this deceptive practice, because some food items are required to have only a certain percentage of that food item to be from a particular country (Knezevic 248).

Further, Knezevic argues that while food labels are supposed to be an informative message to the consumer, they are in practice an effective advertising tool for the manufacturer, "and as such can really serve only one master faithfully—the industry that needs them for its very existence," while other labels and their texts complicate the message of the food as they interact with each other (249). The discourse of food labels is geared towards what the consumer wants to hear and by including only that which is required by law, as well as being restricted to using only language that is not misleading, manufacturers can include those persuasive elements and at the same time exclude those elements that would reveal more about food and what's in it and where it comes from, leaving out items they think would deter consumer purchasing (249). The fact that they don't include full information on the product implies that it is okay for consumers not to know, and to rely on and trust in the supplier (249).

The first of the four frames—discourse—is the launch point for food libels as presented in Chapter 4. By textualizing food labels, I can get at the discourse that Big Food is throwing at consumers. As shown in the rendered food label stories, the discourse of a food label is contained

in all three levels: story, reality, and credibility, and through its discursive interplay conceals what the consumer does not want to know (the reality) while increasing the emotional appeal of the story. Even the credibility becomes part of the story through discursive practices by again concealing the parent company of the food label name (in many cases in the second type of organatural as introduced previously) or by inciting enthusiasm by provocative use of Internet engagement invitations.

Distancing is described by Knezevic as value-added food and is a condition where we are distanced from our food because it has been processed from its original state, thereby requiring a label to connect us to the original. This is where brand identification is important in imprinting on consumers' buying habits (249). Again, trust in Big Food is involved in order to provide consumers with reassurance as the labels provide a means to "maintain the distancing without major objections" (249). Mandatory labels; that is, regulations manufacturers are required to follow, are "easily surmountable" and "actually provide [the system] with a cloak of legitimacy" (250). Voluntary labeling such as "low in fat" or certification processes such as organic are regulated, usually by third parties, but again actually work for the manufacturers as extra advertising that is loosely regulated (250). This is especially the case when they use the term "non-GMO" in the ingredients list or elsewhere. It means absolutely nothing and has no testing or certification to back it up, unless it has the "Non-GMO Project" certification seal.

Basically all packaged or processed food is value-added food, and although there are many legitimate locally produced value-added products, Big Food and in many cases Big Organic, which is part of the second type of organatural food company, uses tactics from the categories listed above as presented by Pearce. An example from the previous chapter showed how "non-GMO" labeling was used to connect us to this distant and odd margarinic food

substance, but in reality used GMO corn in order to make it taste palatable. Rhetorical stories of food labels use discursive elements to close the distant gap between us and what we used to know as food. This idea will be further explored in the discussion of rhetorical homologies.

Fragmentation in food labeling, continues Knezevic, refers to information regarding specific nutrients like calcium or cholesterol, and is another way for manufacturers to sell the consumer their product on a particular attribute while downplaying lack of nutritious quality elsewhere. (This is referred to as "nutritionism" in Chapter 2, cf. Scrinis; and "half-truths" in Pearce above.) A product may be high in a desirable nutrient yet low in another; or even worse, high in an undesirable nutrient or nutrients (252). This effect is compounded when governments step in and pronounce a certain product as "heart healthy," allowing the manufacturer to use a certain icon on their product (253). The item may be low in sodium and cholesterol, which is attributed to being more heart healthy, but high in sugar, for example, which could lead to other chronic illnesses.

The whole idea of fragmenting our food into healthy or unhealthy qualities should be abolished entirely, unless all processed food is considered unhealthy. Fragmentation is so culturally engrained that when encountering any form of popular discourse on the subject we find that we should eat an apple, for example, because it is high in fiber or contains natural sugars as opposed to a fast-food "apple" pie. The list goes on and on when we read how good fish is for us, or nuts and seeds, or dark leafy greens. Why don't we just admit that eating fresh unprocessed food is good for us over processed food any day—why must we be convinced about the bits and pieces of nutritional qualities? Real food is real food, after all. Most consumers are not specifically directed by registered dieticians on what nutrients to consume and in what amounts, yet food labels are required to instruct us in just that endeavor.

Even though my analysis of food labels does not include the nutrition facts information, fragmentation can still be observed in the rendered texts. For example, the margarinic substance product in the second type of organatural Trying but Lying section provides a nutritionism example in its rhetorical story. One of the SPs touts "Excellent source of ALA omega-3, 320mg, 20% of 1600mg DV." It could be that many consumers don't know what these substances are, nor whether these amounts are significant in impacting health. However, these fragmented item descriptions contained as described on the food label suggest that this must be a good thing, and add to the overall health-promoting qualities of the food product, regardless of its high level of food processing in order to get liquid oils to stabilize in a solid form.

Responsibility in food labeling is the shifting of onus from the manufacturer to the consumer. When a company obeys all laws in food labeling requirements, the responsibility is then transferred on to the individual consumer to decide whether or not eating the food will be good or bad for them. This becomes particularly problematic with folks in poverty or with low socio-economic status, as there is a lack of education about food products, nutrition, and lack of money to purchase some of the so-called healthier options (Knezevic 253). Even though some basic nutritious staples are inexpensive, the lack of cooking and/or preservation knowledge and especially the lack of time for preparation of staple foods is a major factor in these populations (and perhaps in all populations as well, considering our fast-paced lifestyle and work schedules).

Because food labels communicate with *individual* consumers, continues Knezevic, usage of them suggests that eating healthy is determined at that level (253). If that is the case, consumption of highly processed and chemically manipulated food should not be a *public* health issue. As it is, much of the food in the center aisles of grocery stores and many items around the periphery as well are dubious at best in consideration of human health, and is primarily

consumed for taste and energy, appealing to general and mainstream shoppers. This is another way that labeling serves the industry and not the individual consumer or the good of the greater public, and another example of how asymmetry operates in Big Food to individuals via food libels.

Finally, Knezevic exemplifies her framework organization with organic food production and how those companies use food labels to their advantage. Knezevic suggests this began as a sustainable way that producers and consumers could connect more closely and third party regulators that certified organic products were not governmental but more locally situated. As organic began to grow, big companies in concert with government organic regulation and labeling took over and started growing organic commodity crops, effectively distancing the consumer from organic, lowering the level of sustainability of organic agriculture, and making it difficult for organic certifiers to regulate the industry (255) (cf. Laufer). "[I]nstead of presenting a greater challenge to the industrial food economy [organic] became a new marketing opportunity for large industrial players," and "by making it easier for consumers to identify organic products [through the certified organic label], the logo in essence restates that the distancing is fine and need not be revisited" (255).

My definitions of the various types of organatural companies stem from these concerns. Organic and so-called natural food manufacturers and their products then become the focus of food libels as sustainability on all levels is not the number one priority in lieu of profitability, even though the best sustainable practices are, or should be profitable by definition. Finally, Knezevic states "the best we can hope for, labels seem to say, is to get selected information and have *faith* (my emphasis) that we can make the right choices within the existing system" (256). Indeed, this is the crux of the matter—what can we trust, and what do we have to believe about

the information on the label in order to feel a level of trust? Perhaps this trust and belief lies in the identification of formal patterns found between food labels and something else.

Rhetorical Homologies of Food Label Stories

A bird's wing is homologous to a human's arm: they are similar in form, but not in function. Homology is a term and idea usually reserved for the biological sciences, yet Barry Brummett borrows the term to describe the nature of connections between rhetorical entities. He calls these rhetorical entities "forms" as discussed in his work *Rhetorical Homologies*. Form is something humans identify to sort, or make sense of, the more abstract concepts we encounter, and homology is the process, whether implicit or explicit, of linking forms together to make sense of cultural abstractions by sensing patterns between different manifestations of form (39). So, we encounter forms in our everyday human experience, and these forms have their own rhetorical force, or as Brummett describes it, the "centrality of form as a persuasive device" (210). Then homology allows us to link dissimilar experiences of form together in a higher order of abstraction (223).

Our experience of food comes through the food label stories, which is why they are written like they are—to meet consumer expectations. The content of the idea of processed food follows the different forms depending on the kind of eater with which the consumer identifies, or from which organatural types of food are chosen. Disparity is found when we are using the story content to resemble some sort of healthy (or not, or pretending to be) food or eating experience. Thus, the experience of reading a label is the most immediate, and the experience of deciding what to eat via the story is more patterned. The story shifts depending on what pattern we want to experience. As Brummett describes, "we must be prepared to jump the tracks laid down by the

lower, content-heavy levels of abstraction and find higher level formal links among all sorts of experiences…" (7).

Forms have varying "levels of detection," so in the form of the food label, which is an abstraction of the unseen (or *unexperienced*) food inside of the package, the levels of detection are the three levels of food label reading and rendering I delineated. Food labels are not about just what is in the product itself or how it is described, they are forms of "expectations, relationships, perceptions, and behaviors modeled on a discursive structure" (Brummett 210). In order to make sense of the abstracted concept of our ever increasingly distant and fragmented food, we rely on the food label, through its discursive content derived from rendered text, to help us choose what we are going to eat.

The three levels of detecting and rendering the form of food labels are the discursive content found in the story, the reality, and the credibility. Food labels have their own rhetorical force as a form, and as such, I found the first rhetorical homology, or linkage, between the three levels of food labels and Aristotle's three rhetorical appeals. The story, reality, and credibility were created because of the relationship I saw with those levels and pathos, logos, and ethos respectively. This is how the rendering of food labels was abstracted out in order to make sense of the rhetorical force behind food label forms. As shown in the previous chapter, the story, reality, and credibility are interrelated in their discursive content just as the rhetorical appeals rely on each other for a fully realized persuasive effect on the audience, or consumer who reads the food label in this case.

What really incited me to pursue homological connections was the homological analysis Brummett did in the *Food as Communication* collection of edited essays. His interests were very much in line with mine when he pursued the homological connections between earlier and

simpler forms of procuring food, such as hunting and gardening, with Walter Benjamin's discussion on the original work of art. This connection was in line with my ideas about unprocessed, natural food that is not in need of labels—refer back to my initial portrait on growing up with a vegetable garden. Brummett continues the parallel when he then takes the supermarket as the most common place to procure food, and compares it with Benjamin's continued discussion on mechanical reproduction. There are two levels of homological comparison here: juxtaposing natural foods with supermarket foods, to another juxtaposition by another author using original artwork with modern reproductions. The form of natural food is homological to the form of naturally composed art, and the form of processed food is homological to the form of mass produced art.

The second level of homology I see in the rendered texts of food labels is reminiscent of Brummett's comparisons except that in the stories we find a pretext of specious discourse (along with images and certifications) that lead the consumer into believing there is a level of authenticity in the manufactured food itself; indeed, is even healthier, especially because of fragmentation (nutritionism) of something garnered from the garden. Food label stories rhetorically romanticize the food inside the package to become what we want it to be based on the narrative that touches our very existence, our health (or our pleasure). The homology, then, is the higher level of abstraction between the form of the story on the food label with the form of the food inside the package. They both obtain the same form, but one functions as a story and the other functions as actual food. The romantic appeal includes the whole rhetorical stories of food labels, including the reality and the credibility, because they work together to create the illusion of what we want to eat. This is the epitome of living to eat, as opposed to eating to live.

Basically, the homology of the rhetorical stories of food labels is the comparison between the story on the label with the story in our head, the reality on the label with the reality in the package, and the credibility on the label with the actual practices and processes of the company. "Natural flavors" becomes the emblem for this homology because it is meaningless. If the FDA does not legally define the term "natural", is it not spurious for them to define such a nebulous phrase that describes such a vast array of substances as "*natural* flavors?" The answer is emphatically yes, for the simple reason that "natural flavors" is a form that homologically corresponds to the form of governmental regulation categories. When a shopper sees that term on the reality portion of the label they think of some so-called natural substance that is creating flavor to their food, not that it is purely a legally defined category of substances and not actual food itself. This doesn't imply that consumers should learn all the regulations; however, it does suggest that the FDA should not be using the term "natural" in the phrase "natural flavors" because of this definitional dubiousness. Further, it may behoove a shopper to consider why their food needs to be enhanced with any flavor at all, which would be a signal that the food is probably not worth consuming if it needs all manner of additives to be palatable.

Considering the first type of organatural food label, Big Food, take the Land o Lakes butter example. A consumer may be quite enticed by the simplistic story of three basic ingredients: butter, oil, and salt. The homological abstraction varies with the type of consumer—if it is a conventional Big Food consumer, the abstraction resides with the company, because it is a conventional local food producer, and simple, basic ingredients usually sit well with anyone. If the consumer is an organatural one, and they are looking for what they abstract as a healthier choice than full-on butter, they make overlook the inconvenient idea of the conventional producer, even though locally based, and prefer to defer to the abstraction of the ingredients list,

imagining that the form of three simple ingredients translates into three ingredients they could easily purchase separately. In this case, the consumer has chosen to allow the company to combine the three simple ingredients into the homological form of a "healthy" butter, and is thereby rhetorically persuaded.

Looking at the second type of organatural, Trying but Lying, consider the Republic of Tea example. In this type, the homological distance is more interesting because the story becomes almost like a fairy tale, a land presided over by the "Minister of Leaves." The phrase "natural flavors," which defines this food label type, appears in the story (not just in the reality, as with most in this type), and becomes normalized by its presence there. We also have "naturally decaffeinated," which adds to the distancing of the word natural with the product. Then when we come to the ingredients list, it seems only "natural" that the peach flavor is also natural. As mentioned above, when the term "natural" is not legally defined, a company can lose their credibility with the overuse of the phrase while at the same time creating a compelling homology in the consumer's mind of the (false) authenticity of the story provided.

Finally, in consideration of the homologies discussed above, what can be said about the ultimately authentic food label story of the wild rice? The first level of comparison was with the story, reality, and credibility with the rhetorical appeals. Certainly the three of these not only correlate but also coalesce: the story is the reality is the credibility. There is nothing to hide; in fact, the product in this case becomes a vehicle to promote a political, socio-cultural, and economic message. The second level of comparison is between what the story is on the label and what the story is in the shopper's mind. Again, they seem to be the same. The consumer can see the product through part of the label, and also come to know its *exact* provenance, including where it was grown, how it was gathered, and how it was processed (native parchment on

location). The only thing left to find out is where and how the wild rice was packaged, which would probably be easy enough to find out, given this is such a small company.

I would like to be able to say that all members of the third type of organatural company, to which the wild rice product belongs, have this level of authenticity with their products. To be sure, a consumer should be able to detect these companies' products with a little research and a quick comparison of the levels of food label reading. We need to close the distance between an agricultural product and a supermarket rendition. We need to be able to trust what is in the package and not just believe in the rhetorical story on the food label.

AFTERWORD

"There is no history, story, tradition, or aura to the stuff of the supermarket." – Barry Brummet

When I go into the health food stores of today, they are almost unrecognizable from conventional supermarkets. And when I go into conventional supermarkets today, I see many items on the shelves from organatural companies of all three types. It would be nice if this synthesis represented a change in the way people eat, but I'm sure it's not. When both sides of one whole aisle in the supermarket are dedicated to bottled sugary drinks, and another aisle (both sides) dedicated to chips and snacks, the situation of our processed food is simply not getting better. Even when staying on the periphery of the supermarket, which is what many health conscious advocates advise us to do, we see a good percentage of shelf space in the produce section filled with bottled drinks, prepared "fresh" produce chopped and packaged in plastic, bottled salad dressings, pre-mixed tossed salads, and packaged dried fruits, nuts, and candies (think "yogurt" covered raisins). The meat, dairy, deli, and bakery sections are no better, and actually even worse. The only section of the supermarket on the periphery that seems the freshest and most authentic is the floral department, and their items are relatively safe if only because we don't eat them. As Brummett is quoted above, you won't find any food there with a story.

The health food stores are no better. It used to be that one could walk into a health food store, build a relationship with the owner, and trust that everything in the store had some health benefit to it, since it was all natural. Most of the items were bulk dry goods, or fresh local produce. You can still find bulk goods in some of these stores, but there are much more brightly packaged items, many of which are conventional, and many of which are trying but lying, full of natural flavors. If our locally owned small health food stores can't teach us about health by carefully selecting what they put on their shelves, then we must keep seeking. One major health

food store chain opened up recently in our area, and the new employee proudly proclaimed to me as I was shopping, “Everything in this store is organic!” I guess she didn’t know to whom she was talking, and who was I to curb her enthusiasm?

If we must look elsewhere, it is to the farmers markets and community supported agriculture, or other innovative solutions (cf. Pol). But buyer beware, because even the local outdoor markets can be rife with value-added products with dubiously labeled items, harboring msg or natural flavors or—even worse—“spices.” I want to know what’s in my food and if I can’t find out, I want to make my own food. How can we all accomplish the goal towards more authenticity?

Harkening back to Kara Shultz from Chapter 1, she reminds us that rhetoric “can be utilized to reinforce the status quo or to invite one to explore a range of other potential meanings about what matters most” (230). That’s what I attempted with producing some rhetorical stories from food labels, to show whether we might not just settle for what we read or what we want to *feel* about the food we eat, which may not be real, or whether we might discover for ourselves what matters most in our food choices. Shultz continues by suggesting “within rhetorical action is the potential for the creation of a counter-public committed to awakening others to their authentic selves. The role of rhetoric lies not in constructing the possibilities for being but in opening up and inviting others to open themselves to the possibilities” (231). In order to realize our authentic selves, we must choose to eat authentically, and share those values with others by setting an example. The cheapest “food” available is usually the most highly processed (think ramen noodles and day old doughnuts). Something’s askew in the marketplace when that happens, especially if the equation looks something like: cheap food + ill health = expensive medical care.

Ultimately, everything comes down to the stories I tell myself. What is it I'm thinking when I lovingly cradle that organatural type 3 food product into my grocery cart, the label full of good wishes for my health and political righteousness to boot? How is that story different from conventionally processed foods that are cheap, quick, and full of addictive flavor? One person is committed to living the good life on this planet; the other is in a hurry and broke. Until we can correct the homological error that correlates food label stories with imaginative food, we must continue to be vigilant in creating new stories that provide for authentic food choices, and thereby authentic lives.

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