



FOOD BULLYING

How to Avoid Buying B.S.

MICHELE PAYN

Contents and Overview

Introduction—Are you buying B.S. (Bull Speak)?

Section 1—Understanding the playground of food bullying

Chapter 1: What is B.S.? Bullying preys on fear created by B.S. about food.

- How have you been made to feel about food?
- Bullying is different than conflict
- What does food bullying mean?
- Dinosaur eggs & well-intended zealots
- Food bullying levels
- Judging others on food
- Taunting around the food plate
- Food shaming
- You can't have that!

Chapter 2: Who are the victims? Food bullying victims span all levels of income and generations, pushing groupthink instead of personal choice.

- Bullying: emotional, social, verbal, and cyber
- Evangelizing online
- How do activists evangelize, taunt, shame, & bully?
- Where are nutrition experts on the playground?
- Misinformation leads to far-reaching consequences
- Food bullies pressure brands
- Group think = victims

Chapter 3: Do we really need a \$5.75 trillion playground? Chaos rules on the playground, creating confusion with overwhelming food claims.

- Marketing capitalizes on fear
- Chaos rules the playground
- Keyboard cowards & cyberbullying
- Media adds to the chaos
- Different levels of bullies on the playground

Chapter 4: How does food bullying affect us? Bullying creates confusion, guilt, distrust, higher priced food, a growing disconnect from the farm, and overall stress.

- Weenie water & psychology
- Fear trumps truth in food
- An obsession with healthy food
- Negative eating emotions have consequences
- Enjoying food is good for your health
- Parental lunch competitions
- The playground is chaotic, but food doesn't need to be

Section 2—Recognizing food fairytales & folklore

Chapter 5: Can you find the wolf or the ugly duckling? Food claiming “free-from” is Bull

Speak (B.S.) and is not a healthier eating choice.

- An absence of truth in food
- Gluten-free
- Preservative-free
- HFCS-free
- Is genetic engineering the ugly duckling?
- Can genetics help humans?
- Difference without distinction

Chapter 6: Are hormones the wicked fairy or Sleepy Beauty? Hormones are the chemical messengers required for life, found in every food, and should not be feared.

- Are hormones Maleficent or mainstream?
- What about your hormones?
- The truth about hormones in farm animals
- Is milk a hormone cocktail?
- Do animal hormones cause early puberty?
- Bullies make hormones a best seller

Chapter 7: Is Jack or the giant a more sustainable farmer? There is no singular “right” way to sustainably grow food.

- Are animals abused on large farms?
- Is “big” bad and “small” bucolic?
- There is no perfect farm size

Chapter 8: Are cow farts folklore? Eating & drinking milk is not environmentally irresponsible.

- Cows = Recycling
- Animal agriculture decreases carbon footprint
- What about your personal gases?
- Sustainability is more than just the environment

Section 3—Building your own story to understand food bullying

Chapter 9: Who are the players? Who is influencing you through the implied power of position, platform, or product?

- Eat your Brussels sprouts!
- What is implied power?
- Do they really know food & farming?
- What are they selling?
- Is one food superior and the other inferior?
- Naming the bullies

Chapter 10: What are the motivators? Influence can change to bullying when food claims target your need for belonging and esteem.

- Hardwired for survival
- Is your trust misplaced or abused?
- Chain of command
- Influence changes to bullying
- The big business of food
- Physiological: Nourishment is a necessity
- Safety: Food Safety is invisible
- Belonging
 - Altruism
 - Tradition
 - Activism
- Esteem
 - Authority
 - Affirmation
 - Platform
 - Prestige
- Self-Actualization
- Is this food nutritious and safe?

Chapter 11: Why does it matter to your brain? Mind games are being played to assault your senses and get you to buy Bull Speak.

- What is littering your brain?
- Focusing in a very noisy world
- Are you being conditioned to buy?
- Do negative associations litter your mind?
- The disgust factor
- The mind games of food
- Health halos sell food
- Assaulting your senses
- What does our brain tell us?
- Cleaning up our brain litter

Chapter 12: Where does bullying happen? Identify where those with implied power are working to overwhelm your emotional brain and create confusion.

- Finding elephants on the playground
- Implied power of position
- Implied power of platform
- Implied power of product
- Answering the where

Chapter 13: When are you the most vulnerable? Changing stages in life or diet needs can leave you vulnerable to the food bullying cycle.

- How can the food bullying cycle predict your vulnerability?
- Disconnect = vulnerable to zealots, judges, and evangelizers
- Distrust = vulnerable to being evangelized, taunted, or shamed
- Fear = vulnerable to bullying
- Bullying = running elephant
- Check your buying behavior

Chapter 14: How do you stand up to bullies? Be aware of how you process information and work to keep your brain focused on rational decisions.

- Know your brain
- Set boundaries
- Control your own story
- Developing your food story

Section 4—Thinking through B.S. to overcome bullying

Chapter 15: Defining food labels & looking for B.S. Know which food labels have measurement and meaning, disregard B.S. labels.

- What are B.S. labels?
- Which labels are FDA monitored and measured?
- No B.S. labels

Chapter 16: Evaluating food claims Go back to the basics and ask “Is this food nutritious and safe?”

- FDA on false & misleading label claims
- Put labels on the food buying needs hierarchy
- Is this food nutritious? Understand the Nutrition Facts Label
- Is this food safe?
 - Allergens
 - Ingredients list
 - Food date labels
 - Processing codes
- How do you handle all of this information?

Chapter 17: Managing information literacy Develop the skills to locate, evaluate, and effectively use food information.

- Why information literacy?
- Like Socrates, assume you know little or nothing
- Beware of the Dunning-Kruger effect
- Control for personal bias
- Managing food information

Section 5—Finding your own solutions

Chapter 18: Thinking critically to navigate the playground Connect with people who have firsthand expertise and critically evaluate information.

- Information overload

- Turn toward firsthand expertise
- Discerning science from B.S.
- Why critical thinking is critical
- There is no one “right” answer

Chapter 19: Building a plan to overcome bullying Use the six building blocks of a story as an action plan to overcome food bullying.

- Synthesizing your own plan
- A real-world case study
- Fear is easy to sell; science isn’t

Chapter 20: Will you be part of creating a better food story? Know your own health, ethical, environmental, and social standards to overcome bullying and elevate the food conversation.

- A farm girl’s story grows
- Find the real stories and ingredients
- Setting your own standards
- Lose the bad feelings
- Use WHY? as a fear filter
- Filling the space with a better story
- I believe in choice. And civil conversation.

Final thoughts—Standing up for what is right

Introduction—Are you buying B.S. (Bull Speak)?

Is non-GMO, gluten-free, antibiotic-free, fat-free milk better than regular milk?

Are “all-natural” corn chips better for you?

Does anyone really need organic, natural, hormone-free cat litter?

“No” should be the quick, simple answer to each of those questions. No to milk carrying too many label claims, no to all-natural corn chips, and, most certainly, no to kitty litter B.S. (Bull Speak) marketing claims. And no to the bullying that is clearly happening across dinner plates, grocery aisles, and food deliveries.

However, I recognize that saying “no” is difficult, just as it is on the playground. People feel judged and bullied around food. Hundreds of examples of food bullying poured in while I was writing this book. Friends, people on social media, and audience members were happy to share because every food experience has a story. What’s yours? Is your food defined by image, what your friends tell you on Facebook, the brand on the bag, or the simple sensory pleasure food provides? How do others influence your food story? Where do you need to say no?

We all love a good story. Whether it’s reading a fairytale to a child and watching her eyes light up, spinning stories to entertain your friends over cocktails, the folklore found across family traditions, or losing yourself in a movie—who doesn’t enjoy a story? Stories make us feel good, provide us with connectivity, and drive emotional decisions.

Positioning one food as superior to another

Food, once cherished for nourishment, has become a chaotic playground filled with claims to bully and demonize people around their eating choices. The need to position one food as superior to another lies at the heart of food bullying. Fat-free marshmallows. Gluten-free water. Grass-fed peaches. Hormone-free salt. Vegan water. No-salt added, boneless bananas. Somehow, our hunger for a feel-good story about our food has led to these ludicrous labels. I call B.S.!

Sixty percent of Americans say food labels influence their food purchases. Consider this scenario in your meat case or butcher shop. Company X decides to proclaim its chicken is “antibiotic-free.” Suzie consumer is left to wonder what is wrong with the other chicken. Are there antibiotics in it?

“Am I doing the right thing for my family?” is Suzie’s first question. As a mom, I completely understand that question—and ask myself that frequently. Instead, I suggest you start with “why are they making this claim?” I call this the “WHY? fear filter” and explain it in Chapter 20.

If you don’t pause to ask yourself about why there is marketing on labels, you have just been bullied by an inanimate object—in fact, the label itself. How? In the “antibiotic-free” meat case example above, there is nothing wrong with the other chicken; all meat goes through the same federally-mandated approval process to protect you from antibiotics.

However, company X’s label claim infers superiority and creates fear about the other products. Remember, a company wants to differentiate its product so you spend money on its brand. Fear and suspicion are keys to bullying; both create a vicious cycle that leads to more B.S. food and behavior.

It’s tiring. I’ve watched that bullying cycle continue in restaurants and across the grocery store, from meat to milk to eggs to produce to grains. It’s time for food bullying to stop—and that starts with you not buying B.S. food.

Five ways to avoid buying B.S. food

I’ll take a deeper dive into each of these throughout *Food Bullying*, but I wanted to give

you a handful of quick tips because I know your time is short. I'll be covering each in further detail with examples throughout this book's twenty chapters.

1. **Ignore food claims.** Just as you don't want food with empty calories, avoid food with empty label claims such as "____-free," "all-natural," "farm-raised," or "sustainable." For example, all milk in the grocery store is non-GMO, gluten-free, and antibiotic-free. Those labels are not measurable or meaningful, but are used to make one product seem more attractive than another. If you want to know facts—not B.S., flip the package over, and read the Nutrition Facts Label, which is scientifically true.
2. **Understand the journey.** The journey of your food is an amazing story—and usually not the negative, sensationalized claims you saw on YouTube or Netflix. Sometimes, many hands are involved in producing your food. In other cases, such as a bag of apples, the last hand to touch the apple was the one that picked it from the tree. In every case, rules are in place for proper food handling to ensure it is safe and nutritious when it reaches your table. Rather than buying B.S., get to know the rigorous system and science in place to protect your food safety.
3. **Stand up to the bullies.** Often a food claim is communicated in a way designed to create an extreme emotional response. People become scared; even well-intentioned neighbors and friends can pressure you to change your eating and buying habits. Celebrities, wellness gurus, or gym nutritionists often proclaim their way is the only right way. Who are they to say your food isn't good enough? Your family's nutrition is your business. Just as bullying is a real threat in our schools, food bullying is getting out of hand and takes advantage of insecurity. Make your food decisions based on science and find experts with firsthand experience to help you, such as a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN), food scientist, or farmer.
4. **Get to know the people.** Have you watched a documentary on farmers abusing animals, damaging the environment, or operating huge factory farms? In reality, 96% of today's U.S. farms and ranches are still run by families; they are the people who can give you the real story about how food is raised, without the B.S. Seven out of 10 Americans believe it's important to know the farmers who produce their food. And yet, in the earlier chicken meat case example, a common question is: "Why are farmers pumping antibiotics into chicken?" If you talk with a chicken farmer, you'll find that it's often cruel to withhold medicine when chickens are sick and they are not pumped full of antibiotics. That farmer can also explain the many steps he takes, under federal requirement, to be sure all your chicken isn't chocked full of antibiotics—even the meat in the packages without an "antibiotic-free" label.
5. **Make your own decisions.** Have you felt pressured by groupthink? Define your own health, environmental, ethical, and social standards when it comes to food. And measure all claims against YOUR OWN standards rather than falling prey to B.S. claims and behaviors.

After a lifetime on a farm and, more recently, writing two books about food, I've come to realize that I am confident in my standards because of my firsthand understanding of the science, source, and system behind food. I hope to share enough of that with you to help you become as equally as clear about your own standards. Those standards and knowing your own food story, are your answer to bullying.

Why this book?

Many people will tell you a beautiful story about how food is raised on perfect farms by

wonderful people, making you feel good about your eating choices. However, truth in food matters more to me than simply helping you feel good. It's more important to me that you understand where food comes from and how you've likely fallen for B.S. food in pursuit of a perfect story.

I see my friends confused, people questioning what has happened to food, and the bullying getting increasingly out of hand after 18 years of working to connect farm and food. I also know how the chaos around food has hurt family farms and want to do something to help people who are raising our food.

In short, the fascination in finding the “perfect” food story that makes the “right” social statement has led to an inability to discern B.S. from meaningful information. I wrote this book to equip you to find the signposts of food bullying, make more rational decisions, and avoid buying B.S. on the chaotic food playground.

Elevate the food conversation

Food is a basic necessity, not an opportunity for manipulation. It is time to elevate the food conversation above B.S. so you can avoid frustration and anxiety the next time you are making eating choices. Hopefully, *Food Bullying: How to Avoid Buying B.S.* will help you do just that!

The book is arranged to first frame food bullying, including an examination of different levels of bullying and then to offer familiar examples of bully figures in food fairy tales and folklore. The third section outlines the who, what, why, where, when, and how in understanding food bullying, including what it's doing to our brains. The fourth section includes food label descriptions—and how you should manage and evaluate those to avoid information overload. The book's final section offers specific tools to help you find your own solutions, including your personalized action plan to help you create a better food story.

If *Food Bullying* gives you pause and compels you to ask “Why is that claim on my food?” whenever you make eating choices, I'll consider my mission accomplished. Hopefully, exposing the food bullies and their manipulation will inspire you to have greater confidence in your food-related decisions, as well as a more civilized conversation about food and farming. Ultimately, that will lead to even greater food appreciation and enjoyment. After all, no one deserves B.S. in their food!

Chapter 20—Will you be part of creating a better food story?

Know your own health, ethical, environmental, and social standards to overcome bullying and contribute to a more positive food conversation.

Our lives are comprised of many overlapping stories, big and small. You get to choose what stories matter most in your life, but beware of how a single story can limit your thinking. Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie discovered this after she was welcomed by her American college roommate with pity and expectations that Adichie would love tribal music and be unable to speak English or even use a stove. The roommate had clearly developed a stereotype of Adichie based on very limited information about African history and culture.

Adichie's Ted Talk, "The danger of a single story," is a powerful example of how we often judge others based on a single story when, in fact, she had more similarities to than differences with her college roommate. Adichie talked about how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story—and how believing a single story takes away the possibility of building human connections. She suggests we "reject a single story" while also providing examples of single stories leading to false assumptions and even disconnect.⁸⁷

The same is true with food. When you believe a single story, it becomes the only story—like the millennial RDN, Danielle, exemplified in the previous chapter. You stereotype food and farming based on very limited information. You reject the opportunity to understand new stories and leave yourself open to bullying.

As Adichie also wrote, "Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person." This final chapter will explore the power of the food story you choose to believe and how your own standards create a deeper, richer food story.

A farm girl's story grows

I grew up thinking that food had only one story—and that was the story found on the magical place known as our family farm, with pretty black and white cattle as the center of my universe. My story involved working 365 days a year with my family caring for those creatures, learning tough lessons in entrepreneurship, perseverance, compassion, and work ethic. I am thankful to be able to raise my daughter on a farm so she, too, can learn these lessons.

When I started my career, the world literally opened up while I worked internationally. I discovered the power of other cultures' stories and the vast food needs of a world outside of America. My story again diversified when I began speaking and writing to help people understand where food comes from. As I started working with people around the food plate, I realized my belief in a single story, forged during childhood, had limited my perspective and connections.

A few years later, when I became a mom, I questioned the story I had always thought to be true about food because I was so worried about making the "right" choice for my family. I found mothers with vastly different opinions than mine, books which informed me that I should only purchase one kind of food, and more 'mom judgment' than I had ever imagined. My early parenting experiences not only deepened my understanding about food, but caused me to research and determine my own standards for food. Those standards, continually evolving and adapting as I learn more about the science, source, and system of our food, have served as a solid guidepost on the chaotic playground of food marketing.

But I must say that writing *Food Bullying* has added more depth to the story than I would have imagined. Listening to a formerly homeless woman share her struggles in finding affordable

food for her toddler, researching the many effects of false food labels, interviewing neuroscientists, and researching psychology brought mind-stretching dimensions. Pulling together the research for this book helped solidify the reality that we so often believe only one story about food—and become uncomfortable when encountering stories different than our own. Over time, we define our nutrition and, sometimes ourselves, by that one story. Yet, food done well is an amazing synthesis of both ingredients and stories.

Find the real stories and ingredients

The ingredients of food are likely more well-known than the real stories of how food is grown. The stories of people who care for animals in the middle of the night, the stories of a little girl who stands in her father's shadow hoping to someday take over decisions for land her great-grandpa once farmed, the stories of families who risk millions of dollars to produce food for a society who often questions them. I would ask that you consider the authentic stories of how your food is raised as a fundamental part of creating your own food story.

Like everyone, I don't have all the answers, but I do believe the experts consulted and evidence provided in this book include the ingredients of a recipe for creating a better food story to stop bullying. I realize you may have never heard of food bullying before opening this book. It's a new concept, but one of the most challenging trends in food, nutrition, and farming today. Rest assured, the food bullying playground will become larger and more chaotic if we don't address the issue head-on.

If we can stop bullying, we have the opportunity to return food to its rightful place of celebration. I challenge you to find a broader, deeper story for yourself and stop the judgement around food. My hope is that the tools and ideas found in *Food Bullying* help you understand how you've been manipulated in your eating choices, the importance of stopping the B.S., and what you can do about it, beginning TODAY.

Setting your own standards

Fat-free marshmallows. Gluten-free water. Hormone-free salt. Grass-fed peaches. Vegan water. No-salt added, boneless bananas. All B.S. As discussed in the introduction of this book, the need to position one food as superior to another lies at the heart of food bullying. These label claims fly in the face of my food standards (and drive me crazy); so I turn away from food with these types of claims. It's an example of how overcoming bullying begins with knowing your own food standards and using them as guideposts on the chaotic playground.

Below are the four standards I've referenced throughout this book, with a key question associated with each standard for you to consider. I've provided my own beliefs for each standard as an example; use them, if you choose, as fodder in developing your own standards.

Health standard

- *Example: I do not believe food is medicine, but do contend that care of our health must be proactive. Understanding the science of nutrition, eating a balanced diet, and exercising are key to my family's health. I believe food should be experienced with joy, not guilt, and should also be a central part of our family traditions (especially chocolate and ice cream). Further, I believe we have a responsibility to ensure the health of global citizens through adequate nourishment.*
 - What health priorities influence your food choices?
-

Ethical standard

- *Example: I believe that animals and the earth deserve honorable care, but I do not value*

either above humans. I believe ethics in food should include taking responsibility for a safe product, seeking truth from experts and identifying more honest marketing. I trust the system in place to protect our food and I believe that improvements come from science. And I take ethical issue with those who try to bully others at any level, particularly those who slander farmers and ranchers in order to advance their narrow, self-serving agendas.

- What ethical principles influence your food choices?
-

Environmental standard

- *I believe sustainability is multi-faceted. I believe soil is a farm's greatest asset, in both modern and traditional farming practices that protect our environment. I also believe animals are natural recyclers, efficiency in production matters and that true sustainability includes long-term economic viability for businesses. I take personal responsibility for my environmental impact and hope to improve that for future generations through science. However, I will continue to question the 'quick-fix' campaigns so often proposed.*
 - What environmental concerns influence your food choices?
-

Social Standard

- *I deeply believe in personal choice. I believe in making decisions for the benefit of my family and the good of society, but I will not participate in groupthink. I seek and value my community's input, but I do not rely on it to make decisions for my family or about our social well-being. I do not believe a marketing claim equates to social responsibility for a company, but that actions speak louder. I hold myself to the same accountability. I also believe that food and drink are central to our social gatherings and are integral to celebrating family and friends.*
 - What social connections influence your food choices?
-

Knowing and trusting your own health, ethical, environmental, and social standards will help you stand up to the bullies and take fear out of the food equation. What do you believe about the food you put into your body? You don't need to have a long mission statement around food. Just know where you stand and don't allow fear mongering and unethical marketing to sway you. Take a few minutes to come up with your general beliefs for each standard so you have guideposts. They don't have to be eloquently written, but getting them on paper will help you solidify your own food standards.

Lose the bad food feelings

Once you know your standards and what you believe to be true about food, remember this from author Brené Brown: "Shame is the most powerful, master emotion. It's the fear that we're not good enough." Food should never be about shame. Food should never be a statement about whether you're good enough. And others should never be shaming you about food. Really.

Nor should you be shaming yourself about eating choices and that one negative story we tend to repeat over and over. Is it what you were told as a kid? Or a hurtful statement that was made to you a decade ago? Is it the definitive story of your nutrition choices?

"I'm fat and need to be on a diet. I don't deserve to eat tasty food."

"X will give me cancer."

“I can’t cook, so buying fresh food is a waste of money.”

“My children will be damaged if I don’t feed them Y.”

“I’m unhealthy, so it doesn’t matter if I eat unhealthy food.”

“I’m not going to buy fresh produce because it rots.”

“My kids are only happy when I buy Z.”

“I’m too busy to cook healthy food.”

The point is, don’t overlook the possibility that you may be bullying yourself over that one-line-story that was told to you a decade (or more) ago. I know I have been guilty of self-bullying. If it’s words you wouldn’t tolerate others saying, why are you saying them to yourself?

Use **WHY?** as a fear filter

It’s time to lose the bad feelings about food and walk away from the story shaming you about food. Food is a basic necessity, not a political statement. Unfortunately, disconnect and distrust have created a food playground filled with fairytales. Asking WHY can help you filter a lot of fear around food.

Keep your anti-bullying “WHY? fear filter” on as you have the tough conversations about eating choices. Here are seven simple ways to break the bullying cycle, with some examples for each:

- **Listen for stories:** Ask people to share stories about their lives, interests, family, etc. Identify what’s important to them and why so you can develop a personal connection.
Example: Why would a grocery store employee take dinosaur eggs out of a shopper’s hand? Concerns for safety and fear create knee-jerk reactions.
- **Examine the intention:** Differentiate between the person’s intent and the impact on you.
Example: Why would Chipotle produce a video to make people question how food is produced? Likely because they want to sell food, branded with their claims.
- **Know when you don’t know:** Consider context instead of drama and sensationalized misinformation. If you don’t know what you don’t you know, ask someone with firsthand experience. Always ask why.
Example: Why do farmers dehorn and trim tails on animals? It may appear incredibly cruel, but it is crueler to allow animals to injure each other or the people working with the animals.
- **Check your biases and motivators:** Pay attention to your own reactions and keep the emotional brain in check. Where does the food claim fall on the hierarchy?
Example: Why would a superfood, weenie water, or special supplement make me feel better and look younger? Consider if any biases are clouding your judgment.
- **Change the interaction:** Find common ground; seek comic relief when you need to break the tension. Try to take the conversation off of emotional center, if possible. Remember that’s it’s O.K. to disagree—and that others are watching.
Example: Why would one farmer who chooses to farm conventionally want to talk to one who farms organically? Talking regularly helps them find common practice, learn new ideas—and “shoot the breeze” to laugh a little while blowing off steam about the pressures of farming.
- **Call out a food bully:** Use the food buying needs hierarchy to identify moments of bullying. Help others to do the same. Turn away from food packages with bullying labels.
Example: Why are they removing food choices? A school system makes noise about being more environmentally friendly by proposing a ‘Meatless Monday’ policy while failing to provide a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables every day—an example of putting

misinformed 'groupthink' before nutrition. Work with other parents to find the environmental and nutritional truth for the proposed policy, send emails to the school board and administrators, and make a point to attend meetings to express your concerns about nutritional choices being available. Speak out when food bullying is used to create regulations that make food more expensive.

- **Find and tell your own story.** It matters, more than you know. We need a playground filled with truth that supports choice in eating, not the chaos of food bullying.

Example: Why does your story matter? Stories built on strong health, ethical, environmental, and social standards keep bullies at bay. Consider Danielle, once a zealot terrified of food while searching for belonging, who eventually finds her way through the various food buying needs to self-actualization. She no longer associates food with fear and, as a RDN, helps others do the same.

Pick which of these ideas apply to you and your situation. Use them to create a better food story, always after you've asked WHY? After all, if we could have a civilized food conversation, perhaps we could also find a way to create more civility in our politics, personal lives and professional communications. Are you in? This is your chance to engage.

Filling the space with a better story

Stories can lead people down the wrong path and create a powerful division around food, as demonstrated time and time again throughout these pages. Stories can also unite people and return food to a place of celebration and tradition. It is time we find a better food story.

However, if you take away one story about food misinformation, research shows you have to fill it with another story. "When people hear misinformation, they build a mental model, with the myth providing an explanation. When the myth is debunked, a gap is left in their mental model. To deal with this dilemma, people prefer an incorrect model over an incomplete model. In the absence of a better explanation, they opt for the wrong explanation."⁸⁸ It's important to note that explicit warnings reduce but do not eliminate the continued influence of misinformation.

In other words, your brain will revert to the false information if you leave a blank space where that story once existed. The only way to solve this problem, in relation to food bullying, is to be really clear about your own food story. Clarify your story by identifying your own standards, using WHY? to filter fear and giving yourself permission to mentally stand up to 200,000+ bullying claims.

Here is an experiment for the next time you buy food. Let's call it the "**No B.S. Food Challenge**" to help you fill the space with your own story.

- How easy is it to find food without B.S. labels?
- Can you fill your plate with choices made without bullying influences?
- Share #NoBSFood photo, Facebook live, or a tweet to help others and show me how you're putting *Food Bullying* to work.

I believe in choice. And civil conversation.

I believe that a cornerstone of any food story is choice. Eating is a deeply personal choice, as is farming. You may choose to eat or farm completely differently than me. But does that mean we cannot engage in civil conversation? I hope not.

It's time to change the dynamics of how we handle disagreement and elevate the conversation around food. That starts with you. The next time you're involved in a discussion about eating choices, use these tools to identify the other person's behavior, but also check your own. It's difficult, but essential, if we want to have civil discourse.

"We cannot solve our problems with the same think we used when we created them," said

Albert Einstein. Little did he know how true those words would be in the 21st century. Isn't it time that we use a different "think" to recognize food bullying for what it is and stop buying B.S.? Today is a great time for you to begin creating a better food story!

Final thoughts

Standing up for what is right

The food playground is bigger than I realized when I began writing *Food Bullying*. 50,000 words later, I have learned that the chaos reaches well beyond than the typical players arguing about food and topics du jour. The playground of food bullying includes more psychological maneuvering than most of us understand. Throw on some neuroscience, and the playground becomes a virtual cauldron of heated debate.

Our brain's response to information about food is fascinating and in the earliest stages of research. I am excited to look further into the intersection of our brain behavior and the various influences on that behavior. Given the \$5.75 trillion business of food, I am certain this neuroscience information will be exploited as a marketing tool that will lead to even more bullying. The anecdote to bullying is standing up for what is right.

Today's contentious food environment involves a lot of manipulation. I don't pretend to have all the answers, but I do believe in standing up for what is right. That is the truth in food. I know if readers stand for truth and employ the tools outlined in this book, we can start breaking the bullying cycle. Keep sharing your stories and #NoBSfood images with me (@mpaynspeaker) about how you are able to overcome bullies and Bull Speak. As more people are aware of food bullying, the playground will become less chaotic and healthier for all of us.

I happen to believe food—and the choices we make—should be simpler. Don't you? It's time to stand up for what is right.

About the author

Michele Payn, an international, award-winning author, brings clarity and common sense to the emotional food conversation. Known as one of North America's leading voices in connecting farm and food, Michele helps you simplify safe food choices.

She is an in-demand media resource whose work has appeared in *USA Today*, NPR, CNN, Food Insight, *Food & Nutrition Magazine*, *Grist* and others. Michele has spoken before hundreds of groups including dietetic Associations, universities, Aetna, Michigan Vegetable Growers, Farm Credit Council and farm bureaus in 40+ states—helping thousands of people around the world connect farm and food. In addition to a lifetime on the farm, Michele has:



- Authored two books: *Food Truths from Farm to Table*, selected as a bronze medal recipient from among 5,500 books entered in the Independent Publishers Book Awards (IPPY), the world's largest book contest and *No More Food Fights!*
- Earned the Certified Speaking Professional designation awarded to less than eight percent of professional speakers globally, after speaking to 500+ groups.
- Founded AgChat and FoodChat, virtual communities connecting more than 20,000 farmers, dietitians, chefs, foodies, agribusinesses and ranchers from 20 countries.
- Received B.S. degrees in Agricultural Communications and Animal Science from Michigan State University, where the story of her impact has been featured in a Spartan Saga alumni profile.
- Worked with farmers in 25 countries, raised millions of dollars for education and built a successful business, Cause Matters Corp.

Widely recognized for connecting the people to the science of farm and food, Michele Payn is a mom who is tired of food bullying. She enjoys working on her small farm in Indiana with her “city slicker” husband and cow-loving daughter, as well as cooking, making memories with friends, coaching 4-H & FFA members, traveling and cheering on the Michigan State Spartans.

Connect with Michele

Has *Food Bullying* changed the way you make eating choices? Do you have food bullying stories you'd like to share? Are questions popping up as you buy food with a personal plan and heightened awareness? Michele would love to hear from you at book@causmatters.com.

Want to bring her *Food Bullying* expertise to your conference, company or organization? Discover for yourself why audiences rave about Michele's high energy, interactive speaking programs and unique ability to engage everyone around the food table. Learn more at www.causmatters.com or connect with @mpaynspeaker across social media.

- Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/mpaynspeaker>
- Facebook: <http://facebook.com/causmatters>
- Instagram: <http://www.instagram.com/mpaynspeaker>
- LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/mpaynspeaker
- YouTube: <http://youtube.com/mpaynspeaker>

Thanks for helping clean up the chaos and keeping bullies off the food playground.