



## Literary Food Not Every Consumer's Fancy

I had an unsettling experience recently. I was visiting my in-laws, and no that's not the unsettling part, when I happened to thumb through a nonfiction book that by title and jacket appeared to belong in someone else's house. It was one of those books you sometimes see written by wormy people in concrete towers who postulate about how Mother Nature and man should live in balance "out there" in the great agricultural beyond.

Certainly not, in my opinion, should this book be in the house of a farmer or rancher. I have always been and continue to be an ardent apologist for our modern agriculture, for feeding more people with less land, labor, cost and casualty than ever before.

The book was Michael Pollan's "The Omnivore's Dilemma" and by what I've read flipping its pages to ascertain and debunk Pollan's thesis, it's an intelligent and mostly fair commentary on how our indulgent culture and efficient economy have changed the way we eat.

I haven't read the book. But I did put it on my to-read list. Not because

I agree with its premise or feel I have the least chance to concur with its conclusion. I will read it, eventually, because it's smart and it might make me more so.

What, to my surprise, I find appealing is the criticism the book gives to food marketers like Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) LLC. And the organic movement, to my delight, isn't excluded. Pollan marvels at the literary nature of today's food and correctly observes that we've supplanted direct knowledge of the farmer and his trade with a series of catch phrases and romanticized narratives meant to conjure in the consumer's mind how and by whom he would want his food to be grown. Consider this excerpt from the book:

*Like the hunter-gatherer picking a novel mushroom off the forest floor and consulting his sense memory to determine its edibility, we pick up the package in the supermarket and, no longer so confident of our senses, scrutinize the label, scratching our*

*heads over the meaning of phrases like "heart healthy," "no trans fats," "cage-free" or "range-fed." What is "natural grill flavor" or TBHQ or xanthan gum? What is all this stuff, anyway, and where in the world did it come from?*

### What consumers think

At CHB LLC we do our best to be smart about consumers. That's why we took the time and expense to study shoppers in two metropolitan areas to decipher how they interpret our language. Do the sound bite and the scenery have any meaning or value?

Here's a glimpse of what they told us about our meat speak:

**Certified** — Will make you look a little closer at the product, but really no effect

**Guaranteed** — Means more than certified

**Choice** — No real meaning

**Select** — Means higher approval, selection and premium...someone selected it

**Prime** — Just means expensive meat  
**Select** is better than **Choice**!

**Natural** just means unseasoned.

**USDA, FDA, RDA, CIA?** It's all just a misunderstanding.

"All of these are just words. I spend more time reading the label than before but what I want to read is the ingredients and nutritional value," one consumer told us.

So where did our research take us? In the coming months you'll see a series of new marketing initiatives from CHB LLC designed to communicate value to today's consumer. Right now we know they're confused by what they read and often wrong about what they know.

We also observe that their shopping behavior is having a huge effect on our business and the retail economy.

CHB LLC is committed to continual improvement. That may or may not mean changes to the nature of our product. But it certainly means a series of adaptations in the way we package and promote your beef to offer value and distinction. **HW**