

Where Did Blue Apron Go Wrong?

This past Christmas I purchased two gift certificates for my daughters to Blue Apron. Blue Apron is a company that provides all the ingredients for a meal (made from scratch) that you cook at home. It is one of the newest food trends. Because their lives are so busy, I thought this would be a service they may appreciate. They work full-time and have young children—need I say more? Unfortunately, Blue Apron has revealed their true self to me which caused me to ask, “Where did Blue Apron go wrong?”

“Food Fear”

What I realized is Blue Apron is perpetuating “food fear”—the food fear that is so popular as a marketing tactic we see frequently today. In fact, after watching one of their commercials, it appears to me they are following the same path as [Chipotle](#).

Truth Revealed

A few days ago, a Blue Apron post appeared on my Facebook newsfeed. It stated the company was going to start partnering with Bill Niman (of Niman Ranch) to source their protein. In fact, their headline stated, “Animal Welfare Pioneer Joins Blue Apron.” Blue Apron continued with, “Today as the founder (Bill Niman) of BN Ranch and as a member of the Blue Apron team, his wealth of experience, knowledge, and passion enables us to uphold a best-in-class set of criteria for the sustainable, responsible treatment of animals, and for high-quality beef . . . Bill Niman will play a key role in the development of all of Blue Apron’s beef, pork and poultry programs. Promoting high standards for animal welfare and sourcing only the best ingredients are just a part of Blue Apron’s vision for a better food system.”

A better food system? High standards for animal welfare? Responsible treatment of animals?

Does this mean those of us that don’t farm “just like the Nimans” do not have high standards for animal welfare or treat our animals responsibly? I beg to differ. Not only that, but their latest commercial states their food is better for the environment. I would love to see them back up the research on that statement.

I support food choices.

But I do not support the marketing of those food choices because they are not straight forward. In the case of Niman Ranch, they raise their animals outdoors. Sounds great, right? Be honest. No, really honest. When you think of raising animals outdoors you are picturing animals grazing on

green pastures with a bright sunny sky, 70 degrees temperatures along with a slight breeze to the face. Perfect, right? Who doesn't like that image? I mean we have a whole five days like this a year here in Minnesota.

But what is the reality?

Yes, I agree, there are days like the postcard picture. But what you don't hear are some pretty horrifying stories. In fact, just a week ago, I read a story about a young gal taking care of a sow and her newborn piglets that were housed outdoors. The mother killed all of her piglets and nearly severely injured the gal.

She feared for her life.

What and why did this happen? It started raining and she wanted to move the pigs to shelter. The piglets started squealing (like they always do) and the mother sow went into "mother bear" mode, killing and attacking everything in sight. Animals are animals—sometimes they just go off. Years ago when our pigs were housed outdoors we had a similar story. Understand this is a story (or pictures) that will never make it to their website. And also understand it's stories like this that farmers make changes to their farms.

So now what? Hint: Let's be honest

Why are we demonizing farming methods that farmers choose because it works best for them? One way is not better than another. We understand the majority of consumers are not connected to their food source. Instead of promoting food fear, let's be straightforward with consumers. Be honest and transparent. I personally know of consumers who are scared to death to buy meat from their local grocery stores because of the fear that is promoted by marketers. I can assure you grocery store meat is high quality. How do I know?

Because I am a grocery store farmer --- that is where the meat of our animals end up. All the meat in the meat counters come from farms. On our farm, we raise them using high standards with quality feed, excellent animal care (work closely with our veterinarian) and good housing environment. And in a way for our safety.

Blue Apron is taking advantage of consumers' naivety by marketing to a "food moral superiority" consumer. And by partnering with Niman Ranch's marketing tactics, they are accomplishing their goal. It's all about emotions and less on reality.

Blue Apron will continue marketing the way they do and I, in turn, will not give them any of my business. I will give my business to companies who respect and support farmers such as myself.

Minnesota Farm Living

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