



Episode 314: Why We Need Meat (& So Does the Planet) With Anya Fernald

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Katie: Hello and welcome to the "Wellness Mama" podcast. I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and this episode is all about why we need meat and how it can actually be good for the planet as well. It will be, maybe a little controversial, but I think you'll really enjoy this one. Anya Fernald, I hope I'm saying her name right is the co-founder and CEO of Belcampo. Belcampo operates a 27,000-acre organic farmland in California and processes its own livestock for sale in its own butcher shops and restaurants. Anya has two decades of leadership in entrepreneur experience in high-quality organic and premium foods. And her list of accomplishments is long and impressive. She's been recognized as one of Inc. magazine's 100 female founders, one of the 40 under 40 by "Food and Wine," she was named a "Nifty 50" by "The New York Times," and has been profiled in "The New Yorker," served as a regular judge on "Iron Chef America" since 2009, and has a cookbook called "Home Cooked" which was released in 2016. And we're gonna go really deep on this topic today and talk about how the human body needs meat and how it can regenerate our planet when it's grown and cared for properly. So, let's jump into this episode.

Anya, welcome. Thanks for being here.

Anya: Hey, thank you for having me.

Katie: I'm so excited to chat with you today because I think you have such an amazing and unique set of knowledge around a topic that is increasingly important right now. And that is the role of meat in both animal wellness, environmental wellness, and human wellness. And I know we can go deep on so many areas related to this. But to start, I wanna give people just a broad level of just how important this is, and how animal wellness and human wellness are so connected.

Anya: You know, I think about it, as these are animals that we share, you know, 99% of our DNA with, right? So on a genetic level, we're very aligned. So it's intuitive to me that any kind of environmental impact that make animals gain weight extremely rapidly that then we eat, we wanna be extra cautious about, right? The way that animals are raised right now is effectively an obesogenic environment. So they're put in a place where they're under stress. They're fed a maladaptive diet that causes them to be inflamed and gain weight really quickly. And it's actually basically an extreme inflammatory and heightened cortisol response.

So they're put in areas without access to natural light, no social connection, competition for resources. And then really given a lot of antibiotics to suppress, you know, their body's response of sickness to these inflammatory conditions. And that actually creates obesity. So, you know, chicken growing in that environment can reach the optimal weight of two and a half pounds in just over two weeks, compared to in a natural environment like at our farm and that's at 8 to 10 weeks, right? So weight gain at four times the speed.

So just thinking of a human connection, it's like, well, we share a lot of DNA with this animal, you also functionally are the same, you know. It's not like an earthworm where your digestive system is actually quite different. You know, the way that chicken digest is quite similar, they need a microbiome, you know, they have a circadian clock, so there's a lot of similarities to how we function. So I think there's a need for people to be extra attentive to the condition that the animals are raised in simply because our whole body and digestive system is aligned with how they function. So for us to be well, it makes sense that we're gonna wanna eat animals that have been raised in a way that's well and healthy with a normal weight gain and normal functioning and natural environment.

Katie: That makes perfect sense. And I think that's something pretty much everybody across the board can agree on. I think that's really important in the nutrition world because it can get so controversial and so polarizing. People tend to focus on the little things we disagree on. But I think most people would agree that we should treat animals well and in line with their natural biology. Whether we eat meat or we don't, I think that's a really important point. And I don't think, you know, anybody is in favor of treating animals poorly or a lot of the feedlot situations. But I think also people maybe don't realize just how drastically the way that we raise animals has changed even only in the last few decades from what I understand, is that right? Like, have we really changed the food supply so quickly?

Anya: Radically. And you know, Katie, if it doesn't say something very specific on it, about how it's raised, or have the actual name of a farm that you can Google and is the name of a farm, not just like a packing house, or you know, a facility that cuts up meat and wraps it that's called a farm, right? Unless it's really very different and costs more and has a lot of different claims on it, it is absolutely commodity meat that's raised in a feedlot. That's the biggest takeaway. You're right, people understand intuitively, animal wellness and human wellness are connected.

That makes sense, right? That's just like a no brainer. Not only for putting in your body but also people living near animal confinement feeding operations have heightened risk of low birth weight, higher miscarriage rate, higher endocrine-related disorders including cancers, right? So it's a no brainer, animal wellness, human wellness, connected. But then people say, "Oh, you know what, I buy from a really good grocery store." Well, that means nothing, right? Or "I only eat meat at expensive restaurants," also means nothing.

So you have to be extremely activist as a consumer to ensure that you're getting meat that's not the status quo. If it's not stated very clearly, I can guarantee it's not just happening that that supermarket or that restaurant is buying better quality meat, it's not.

Katie: That makes sense. And I have so many follow up questions, we're gonna go deep on. But first of all, if people are trying to be conscious consumers here, is there any regulation on these labels? So I think that's a great tip of look and make sure it's a verifiable farm that you can find out about the practices. But do any of these other labels actually mean anything?

Anya: So the labels mean something, words mean nothing. So you know, every word is regulated. For Belcampo too, for my company, anytime we put any word on a package, like keto-friendly or free-range or anything, I have to write a letter to the government that explains why. But that letter to the government... I mean, Tyson has natural on all of their products and they're absolutely...the worst of the confinement operators is Tyson. Foster Farms also a large-scale confinement operation, says natural all their products.

So the regulation of the words they can say, I don't know what case they're making, but it's like, "Hey, we're not feeding them plastic, right? it's natural," you know. So most of the words are totally unregulated. And that's the problem for consumers. You know, keep in mind that the USDA is run by an ex-executive from Perdue massive, massive agribusiness. Definitely not an animal wellness company, right?

So there's just vested interest in keeping consumers in the dark and to make consumers settle. And that's what you're being asked to do in America. It's like settle for unsafe meat, okay, guys. Hey, Mom, settle for a product that you have to cook to the point of killing all the pathogens on it. That's what they're asking you to do. Settle for a product that's probably dirty, but we're gonna tell you to cook it to 165 degrees. So your kids actually are kind of be like, "Well, I don't really like this," right, because it's overcooked and dry. And you need to settle for that though because we're not gonna guarantee that it's clean product. That's what you're being asked to do.

So, you know, you think of the labeling context, it's a situation that's stacked against you as a consumer. So when you're looking for a label, you need to look beyond a word like natural or free-range and you need to look beyond, you know, what I consider claims and look for real certifications. Certified organic is a good place to start, but it doesn't have anything to do with free-range. For free-range, that's where I say you need to look for an actual name of a farm that you can verify, or of a group of farms that you can verify.

So that would be...there's actually not really any national players beyond our company that...and there's probably some specifics in like lamb and poultry that do ship nationwide. But in your local grocery store, you will find that many groceries are trying to stock at least one option of that like actual from a farm, and a greater level of traceability, and a greater commitment to animal wellness.

Katie: That makes sense, and I think people have maybe heard of the idea of hormones being in meat and dairy products. For instance, is that a concern to actually worry about? Like are animals that are not raised well...do they have different levels of either artificial or natural hormones that we should be worried about?

Anya: It's a great question about hormones. The reason that you shouldn't be... Let me start probably from the top. So great question about hormones. In the U.S., it's actually illegal to use hormones in the production of chicken or pork. So when you see a pork chop for sale, it says "No hormones," that just means they're complying with the basic law in the U.S. The question of why don't they allow the use of hormones isn't that the USDA is being particularly health-conscious. It's just that the hormones do not create as effective and rapid weight gain as antibiotics do. Antibiotics do a better job at causing rapid weight gain than hormones do in pigs or chickens.

So we don't use hormones in the U.S. in those two products simply because antibiotics, tetracycline and amoxicillin, are more efficient. In beef, beef do not respond as well to antibiotics for weight gain as they do to hormones, so beef are allowed to use hormones. So producers do use hormones to cause rapid weight gain in beef. So the idea that we get... I feel like the hormones are kind of like a red herring, where a lot of producers are getting away with saying, "Oh, no growth hormones and no prophylactic antibiotics," right. That's a claim you see in a lot of mass-market protein, right, you've seen that in the grocery store, "No hormones, no extra antibiotics."

But the truth is, hormones aren't allowed because they're not efficient. And you might say you're only using antibiotics when the animals are sick. Well, guess what, if you're in a hoop house, you know, that's 300 feet long with 19,000 other chickens, you're at risk of dying of sickness every day because of the toxicity of the environment that you're in. So to give animals antibiotics in that is actually necessary for them to stay alive. So the claim that they're not using antibiotics, they only use them when the animals are sick. Well, there's veterinarians on payroll that are able to say constantly, "Yes, all these animals are sick or at risk of getting sick because of toxicity in the environment."

So that's where those claims of antibiotic and hormone-free, they're both meaningless. And that's why... You know, the thing that kills me it's like, as consumers, if you see a mass-market meat brand all of a sudden have a bunch of new claims, but the price is the same and the product looks the same, you better call bs on that, right? It's actually not any meaningful change. Changes in the production system of animals are typically cause the product to grow more slowly and therefore becomes much more costly. So when you see a Tyson or a big player changing their claims, but the price point stays the same, you're getting ripped off. It means you're really actually being sold false goods.

Katie: Wow. And I think that's such an important point, too, you brought up about antibiotics because it really makes me wonder. I know we've seen all these news stories about overuse of antibiotics in humans and how this is leading to superbug, superbugs, and antibiotic-resistant bugs. And then you mentioned that these antibiotics help animals gain weight. So is there any concern with this transferring to humans? Is this gonna cause humans to gain weight and have antibiotic resistance?

Anya: That's it, Katie, that's right. Yeah, so the antibiotic resistance is freaky, right, because, I mean, you can die of stuff. These are serious, serious illnesses. And now people are getting...they're having to use antibiotics for pretty minor sicknesses because antibiotics are so prevalent in animal agriculture and then they get into the water. I mean, they find tetracycline in the drinking water, three to five miles away in the drinking water, right, because there's so much antibiotics used in those animal farms.

Now, for your own... I'm not a nutrition expert but I know from animal agriculture that antibiotics increase weight gain by a factor of two, at least. And this has been shown in humans as well in some very interesting studies that were done in the military right after World War II. A bunch of studies that showed that just regular prescription of amoxicillin and tetracycline in low doses made young men gain weight much more quickly. So it's got the same effect on humans.

And it has something to do... What I've heard from people who know more than me, but I encourage you to do your own research on this. It has something to do with suppressing your microbiome. So effectively, you become less efficient at digesting your food, right? So you're without a complex microbiome, which gets suppressed by your antibiotics, you actually convert your food into adipose tissue more quickly, so you gain more fat and more weight.

So that's the short story, but it's absolutely got a similar effect on humans, right? I mean, it's been shown in humans in the 1940s in the studies. But as a mom, I'd say if you can avoid antibiotics for your kids, absolutely do because it's definitely connected to human weight gain. And it also has a three-month pale. So even a regular...like you got a sinus infection, you get a dose of whatever little thing they give you, that six-day package, that's got a three-months pale on your microbiome. In terms of how long your system...the minimal amount of time your system is gonna be suppressed through the antibiotic, of course.

Katie: That makes sense. Okay. So there's two things I wanna make sure that we cover. We're gonna get to the environmental side of this, so if you guys are interested in that, definitely keep listening. But first, I wanna talk about the role of meat in human health because I think a lot of people realizing all these problems with feedlots and realizing how horribly animals are treated, understandably think, "Okay, well, maybe I should just not eat meat and then that's gonna be better for me." But I think in doing that, we absolutely throw the baby out with the bathwater. So let's talk about the role of meat and why it is so important, especially for a lot of the listeners who are moms, who are pregnant, or nursing or have small children.

Anya: Yeah, I mean, there's amazing data about this. The number one thing for me as a mom that just blew my mind was that a mother's access to high-quality animal protein is a higher indicator of her child's IQ than the country that she lives in economic index. Okay. So I'm gonna resay that because it's stunning, this is out of UC Santa Barbara. So a mother's access to DHA and omega-3 rich, high-quality animal protein is a greater indicator of her child's performance on standardized tests than the country that they live in, like Sweden versus Ethiopia. Is that crazy?

So to think of like, what's important for your health. The things that were stunning to me are just around...you know, for women, if you are a vegetarian from early puberty, from 12 till when you have children in your 30s, you will actually pass essential amino acids that you can only get from meat on to your fetus. Your body has evolved to hold on to those from early childhood for eventual childbearing.

So, I mean, those two facts to me are also amazing, I mean, on the mother of things. I'll send you the study, it's incredible, or I can give it to you to link for your listeners. Again, there's one gentleman at UC Santa Barbara, who showed, again, major intelligence correlation with young children and the quality of their mother's breast milk, being high in omega-3 and DHA. So these are really impressive, amazing, you know, data that connects... It's primarily around essential aspects of animal proteins that then contribute to brain growth and brain health. And that's really for you as a mom, right?

And for us as mothers thinking about how do we facilitate healthy, happy, balanced, smart kids. And animal protein appears to be a really crucial part of that. And really, the essential amino acids and fatty acids from animal protein. That data is locked down on that subject that you're gonna be doing a disfavor to your child by being a vegan or vegetarian around your childbearing years. In terms of your own nutrition... I mean, for me, it's just kind of basic, that animal protein is extremely healthy, it's very nutrient-dense, and it gives you a wide range of essential amino acids. And that's kind of all I can say on it.

It's also demonstrated that there's animal protein that's good for you and animal protein that's not so good for you. And the better and slower the animals are growing, and by slower, I mean just like the natural rate of growth of muscle mass, the healthier that muscle mass is gonna be for you as a consumer. I'm not a nutritionist, I'm an active, avid, you know, cook, and mom and all those good things, so I encourage you to do research on this with people who know more than me. We were discussing Chris Kresser as a great resource on this as well. But animal protein is a really high-quality, excellent source of lots of different nutrition for you.

Katie: Absolutely. And my background is in nutrition and just realizing especially like you said, in those childbearing years, your body is gonna do everything in its power to pass on the nutrients that you're growing baby needs, even at the expense of your own body. So if you're not getting those nutrients, you're also putting yourself at risk. And I think this topic that you bring awareness to is such an important one for our time because it is very much about quality, and amount, and sourcing. It's not just about getting the meat and getting the protein. And like I said in the beginning, I think we can all agree that we don't wanna treat animals poorly, we don't want animals in feedlots, nor do we wanna feed that kind of meat to ourselves or to our children.

But realizing there is a biological need for these amino acids, and it's extremely difficult, maybe nearly impossible but extremely difficult to get enough of those proteins during pregnancy and during nursing and as a developing child. And you have to be extremely, extremely careful if you're even trying to do that. Whereas it's so much easier if you can just find high-quality meat.

Anya: And the number of women who I've talked to who were vegetarian, couldn't conceive, and then start eating meat and got pregnant like a month later. I mean, I've heard that story now so many times, it's like, yeah, that's your body saying, "Yeah, you don't have the micronutrient base to make this happen, lady," you know. And then they start eating meat...even just minimal amounts of like bone broth, right and will conceive. So the mojo around your fertility, your ability to raise and raise healthy children without completely...you bring up a good point, Katie. There's a way to do it with you got your own body and lose your teeth and lose your hair, right? But to do that, with the way that you say healthy and sound, animal proteins just appear to be crucial.

Another piece, too, I wanna call out, it's not just protein period, right? Something I learned recently, which is just amazing to me is your ability to extract glutathione which is, you know, the body's master amino acid...you probably know a lot more about this than me, Katie. But glutathione is super crucial for wellness and health. And essentially, it's one of the reasons we eat meat, right? Now, your ability to metabolize that glutathione in your lean muscle that you eat is actually...there's a rate-limiting component in your ability to digest, which has to do with the availability of collagen protein.

So if you're just eating lean muscle and not eating connective tissue, like stews and braises, and bone broth, you're not actually gonna be able to extract the nutrition. Right? So there's another type of like...I call it almost like...it's a form of vegetarianism where you're like, "Ah, I'm suffering, so I'm gonna start eating just like boneless skinless chicken breast." Well, that's actually not doing your body any favors. So if we're talking about eating meat, we're talking about also getting access to the other mojo in meat, which is bone broth, braises, connective tissue. I'm not sure if marrow and liver are your jam, but it'd be amazing if they could be. Right?

But I think the base is at least getting some collagen-rich connective tissue rich foods, and you can also take collagen powder, which is typically made from animal hides. So collagen powder is available commercially, it's extracted from hides. You know, it's an animal source product. In general, stuff that you're eating in its natural form is easier for your body to integrate and metabolize. So I would absolutely recommend, you know, a mix if you're looking especially at fertility childbearing, like collagen-rich bone broth or soups, plus your chicken breasts or your New York steak or your pork loin or whatever you're gonna have which is your classic like, lean striated muscle.

For me too after my second child, I went on a much more intense bone broth regimen than I'd ever done before. Because we actually opened up a Belcampo restaurant next to my office and I started to drink about a quart of bone broth a day. Because I have a policy in my company, every employee gets a big cup of bone broth for free every day. So I'm like, "Well, I'm gonna sign up for that." So I had been producing it more for my audience, less for myself, started to drink it a quart a day and massive changes. In terms of like my breast tissue coming back after breastfeeding two kids in four years, I had gone down two cup sizes. And just that collagen-rich within a month and a half, I was back to my pre-baby one cup size. Despite, you know, that usual kind of like weight loss, weight fluctuation, your whole body is moving around.

But I also started to get just much more much...like improvement to my skin tone, you know, a nice like plumpness in my face that despite, you know, losing the baby weight. So that collagen as well I think of it as like a beauty juice too because it kind of gets... It's great for your hair, skin, nails, breasts, especially with all the kind of like, just the body wrecking that happens through childbirth and breastfeeding.

Katie: Absolutely. And I think that's another important distinction that we don't talk about enough in the modern world is that for most of history, we ate all of the animal, we used every bit of it. We made bone broth like you talked about. And that's something that's changed. We didn't, for most of history, eat just ground beef and chicken breast. I love the book, "Nutrition," she really talks about this and just how important getting that variety and especially those different types of amino acids that are in broth are to balancing out the muscle meat. And I think that is, you're right, another piece that people really, really miss.

And also, on the note of quality, it's important to note when people start quoting these studies about why meat might not be good for health, or people seeing these changes, these studies are not separating at all based on quality of meat, they're almost always using just conventional meat, which we've just explained has all of these bad things in it that people tend to think like, "Oh, well, I can't see the hormones, I can't see the antibiotics, so I'm not gonna worry about it." And it always kind of boggles my mind because people will take a Motrin, which is this tiny pill and expect it to have this huge effect on them. And then ignore that same amount of something in meat, and then think it's gonna be totally fine. And so I think that quality is the missing key when it comes to that.

To shift gears a little bit, though, I think it's really important that we get into the environmental side as well because I'm sure you're even more aware than I am, all the press and publicity lately, blaming meat practices for climate change, and for a lot of things going on in the world. And saying that raising animals for food is

really bad for the climate and bad for the environment. And I personally take a much different view, knowing a little bit I know about regenerative agriculture and the role of animals in permaculture and in our entire our ecosystem. But I know you can speak to this much more from a firsthand perspective and from a place of knowledge. So let's talk about the role of raising animals in environmental stewardship.

Anya: So the data that companies like Impossible Foods and Beyond Meat are putting out about carbon impact of beef is 100% correct. Right? Conventional beef is terrible for the environment. I wanna be clear that I'm not contradicting their data at all. What they're not telling you as a consumer is that there's a different way of producing beef in all ruminant species and all types of livestock that is carbon impact positive. And it is the way that beef and other ruminants have been produced for millennia. And that is raising them with regenerative practices.

So our farm at Belcampo, we farm 27,000 acres in Northern California. And our farm has been third-party documented as carbon impact positive. Which means that our practices actually increase the density of carbon in the soil. And to get to how that's different from a conventional system, it's kind of a long story.

But I'll say, in short, conventional beef, you're feeding animals crops that you've raised by tilling soil, to digging it up, planting very nutrient-dense food like corn or wheat. And then using a lot of nitrogen and how its raised, and harvesting it and tilling it up, bringing it to a cow that's on cement in great density, like, you know, hundreds of animals in these feedlots and then feeding it to it in confinement along with a lot of other crap. Like, you know, skittles candy, and sawdust, and plastic shavings are all used in conventional cow feed. You can Google that stuff and see about it.

So that's the conventional system. They're not on grass, near grass, eating grass for most of their lives. Although the calf, right when it's born...many of those cow-calf operations are on amber grass. So for the first six months, they might be outdoors but then for the remainder of their life, they're in confinement in this fast-paced, animal weight gain context.

Animal weight gain is based off of a really nitrogen intensive and resource-intensive crop. The only reason why it makes sense to feed such a costly food to cows is because of the subsidy system. So these crops are subsidized so effectively, we're able to feed expensive food to cheap meat. That's it. And it's a total fake economy.

Our system along with many other regenerative small-scale farms in America and around the world, we're raising beef on perennial pastures. So we've got grasslands with hundreds of species of grass. We don't till them, we never disrupt the soil. These grasses have root systems that are 30-feet deep, okay, that's how they sequester carbon. The animals are low-density and they're moved from pasture to pasture. They don't spend a whole season on one pasture, getting it muddy, right, and turning it into basically just kind of dirt. We move them from pasture to pasture. They eat a little bit, they move to another pasture. And then animals are brought back to that first pasture after a break of two or three weeks to recover.

So that's more like mimicking a typical migratory pattern of how ruminants evolve, right? They would evolve by walking through a field and eating some stuff and then keep on moving. They drop a little bit of their manure, they till the earth a bit with their hooves. But you're not talking about 1,000 beef all dumping manure onto an acre and then it being left kind of devastated. So you're talking about a low-density use. So we mimic a natural migratory pattern for the animals and we do it on perennial pastures. And we're not the only ones doing this, I mean, literally, there's hundreds of regenerative livestock branches around the U.S. And they're all practicing this and they're all carbon positive. They're just not very many of them. We're less than 1% of the beef supply system.

But we're actually...we've been tracking our carbon in our own farm using a third-party research group for five years now. And in that five-year period, we have increased the carbon density in our own soil, which is just something, you know, beyond proud of.

Katie: That's amazing. And that has a long-term environmental positive effect as well. And I think that's another just important correlation for people to understand, it's just like the quality of the meat matters so much when we're gonna consume it. It also really, really matters for the planet. And to compare regenerative agriculture and how beef is raised in that environment with feedlot, it's like you're comparing entirely separate...like they're not even on the same playing field.

Anya: It's like saying, oh, for me to get to work is X pounds of carbon, sometimes I take a helicopter to work and sometimes I walk to work, but it's X carbon. Like that's how...it's like conflating two totally different things with totally different impacts. Helicopter versus walking. That's the feedlot beef versus, you know, the regenerative beef. And it kind of kills me when I see the stats and I see people just bashing, you know, meat, "You're killing the environment," and then all those little pictures of the gallons of water and I'm like, "Damn, we don't use one gallon of water."

Like we have like rain that fills catchment ponds. I mean, there's some stock water. But you know, it's so minimal. There's actually not even stock water usually, the animals are just drinking out of puddles out there in the fields, you know, and streams, right?

So it's such a different environment, it kind of drives me crazy. But I'm happy, like I'm happy because I see people starting to pay attention. I feel like the whole movement of the alternative, like the fake meat, the highly processed vegetable meat, those guys are pulling aside the curtain a little bit, and they're showing consumers just how bad things are. So I feel super grateful for those products existing. I feel like we're kind of fighting the same fight in some ways, you know.

But I think that many of those consumers for the first time have their, like, the light switch gets flipped on where they're like, "Wait, what the heck is going on? What am I eating" and they just really hadn't thought

because they're like, "Well, I shop at X grocery store. It's not the worst grocery store." So they probably use better stuff and they don't realize that it's all bad, unless it's really expensive and really different, you know. So it's been useful, I think, in the broader education. It's really not true about all beef, however.

Katie: Yeah, such an important distinction. And I'm glad you brought up these alternative meats that have gotten so popular and certainly have been extremely highly funded and publicized. Because to me, that brings up two things. You're right. It's shedding light on some really important stuff that we definitely all need to be aware of and to kind of unite around fixing both for ourselves and for the planet.

But also, it always is ironic to me of like, if humans didn't have a need for meat, if we were supposed to be vegetarian, why do we need to spend so much time and money trying to make plants tastes exactly like meat if we don't have a need for that. I think, you know, it's an indicator that we actually are hardwired to need these kind of proteins, especially at certain phases of life, like we talked about, or for kids when they're growing.

And like I said, multiple times, it goes back to at the end of the day, for both the planet, for ourselves, for all of it, for the animals, certainly, it's all about the quality and how they're raised. And so I love that there are practices like you guys that are really revolutionizing and getting back to kind of how it's always supposed to have been done when it comes to that.

Anya: Yeah, that's a great perspective that the Beyond Meat and Impossible exist because there is that kind of craving. I too I'm really perplexed by the need to make vegetables look like meat and the kind of genetically modified hyper-complicated processes that go into them. It seems like every time there's kind of like radical innovation and something that is sort of too good to be true and fake and magical. It's like, well, margarine and asbestos and like, there's lots of like oh, yeah what was that crazy fat that you couldn't digest and so you'd eat all chips you wanted? You know, those things, they tend to have a pretty short life cycle.

But it is interesting the amount of...like its appeal to almost like it's captured the popular imagination in certain ways. Because the idea as well that you can kind of have limitless meat kind of for free with no need for processing an animal or the responsibility of an animal dying. Yeah, that would be an amazing solution were it not as fraught with challenges as it really is.

Katie: Exactly.

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Katie: And I wanna talk about the kid aspect a little bit more as well. Because, like from nutritionally, kids have a higher protein demand per pound of body weight than adults do, and especially during phases like when they're in puberty or any kind of growth spurt, they need a certain amount of protein. And that's really, really vital for them to function optimally. I also know as a mom, and I'm sure you can probably relate to this. Kids don't always necessarily want to eat what you want them to eat.

And so realizing this and realizing that like this is really important for our kids, do you have any tricks as a mom or as a business owner in this industry, for helping kids be introduced to these kind of things and getting them to like it? Because like, in my house, for instance, bone broth is pretty much the first food for all my babies with the understanding that babies naturally have a semi-permeable gut. And this is really important, actually, because when babies are breastfeeding, that's how a lot of stuff can transfer through. And they can develop their immune system this way, and it's a wonderful design.

But because of that, you maybe don't wanna put some foods that can be slightly inflammatory as the first other food they get in their gut. And so I always start with bone broth, because of its ability to soothe the gut. But I'm curious how you have integrated and when meat products with your kids and if you have any tips for that?

Anya: So I'm pretty radical on this front, I mean I ate raw meat with actually both my kids for too long with bone broth. And my kids to this day love raw meat, and love marrow, and love liver, and heart. It has to do with availability. But I also think, Katie, it has to do with it tasting really good. You know, I don't think my kids

would like liver if they were eating... I don't know what kind of liver you can buy at the standard American grocery store, but it can't be very good. It's probably old and frozen.

So getting really delicious, fresh product is the first thing. I think that the kids have a natural ability to taste health, you know, they're more in touch. I think in pregnancy, we as women have a little bit of that taste where we start to taste what we need. You know, and cravings, we talk about cravings as like this sort of crazy thing. But cravings actually, if we're really eating intuitively, we should have them all the time and they're very healthy for us, you know. And kids have those cravings too. And they actually listen to them more, you know, like that demand that they have where they're like, "I'm really hungry right now. I really wanna eat a lot of that one thing." Like they're more in touch with that.

So my approach with my kids has been to really make them delicious food and super high-quality proteins. And you know, my daughter at seven can eat like six drumsticks. We eat a lot of meat and she loves it. My son is a little bit more of a carb lover, but also will just eat every type of meat. And I don't have a good... It's such a battlefield on this, you know, you don't wanna judge other people's choices. And also, there's just... I live in a very, like, luxurious context where I have access to this really high-quality protein, you know, so I don't know what I would do if I didn't have that.

But in my own home for my kids, my major goals as a mom are to cook them breakfast every day and to cook them dinner for the most days, and to have their lunch be homemade leftovers. That's what I try to get to. And I achieve it, you know, we have like three things that we make for breakfast and it's always from scratch. Dinners, we do a lot of different things. I also have no refined carbohydrates snacks around my house at all. And I found... And I also don't... This is gonna sound a little crazy, but I don't carry snacks for my kids. You know, the pinch will throw a banana or an apple in a bag, you know, but I don't carry boxes of raisins, or bags of goldfish, or any bags of Cheerios, or anything. And that's in part because we don't do any refined carbs.

But it's also just by doing that I find that they're... I think a lot of the reason that kids are picky is that they don't experience being hungry. And so I like to be sitting down for dinner and the kids are like, "Oh my god, I wanna eat dinner." If I've been feeding them snacks all day, they're not gonna enjoy dinner in the same way.

So I really believe in very minimal...and we always have big bowls of fruit around. They can always have milk and water, you know, it's not like there's no snacks for them. But I don't make snacking available and I find that they may eat with a lot more enthusiasm and they're more open to trying more things, than on those days when they've been at playdates, or at, you know, the little like daycare center that I drop them off sometimes where they get fed goldfish all day, then they're just not really hungry for dinner.

Katie: I am 100% in alignment with you on that. I always say hunger is an incredible teacher. And I think you're right, kids are much more likely to try new foods when they have natural hunger. And it's great for kids to experience hunger and to learn to eat when they're hungry. And we're the same where we don't have refined carbs or sugar in our house because there's no biological need for those. I mean, carbohydrates certainly eat

some fruit, eat some sweet potatoes, but we don't have a need for refined food at all or for refined sugar at all. So I know that sounds extreme to a lot of people.

But like you, I'm not the mom who's like Uber controlling my kid's diets when they're not in my house. If they go to a friend's house and they wanna make a choice, it's 100% their choice to make. But in our house where I'm responsible for the food, I'm gonna have really high quality, nutrient-dense food, and that's what I'm gonna feed them. And I think that's an important metric that you don't have to take...like, it's not that you'll never gonna eat these foods, but in my house, I'm certainly not gonna have them.

Anya: I also find too when we do make cookies, I'm like, "Eat all you want." You know, like, I never wanna have there be guidelines around things like have... There are only cookies like once a month, you know, or twice a month. Maybe we'll make them with coconut sugar and really good chocolate and they're like, so delicious. But if my kids wanna eat 10, they will, but the thing is that now that they're...they self-regulate well. They'll have two and then they'll want one the next day, you know. So it's like I really try to have it be like when we do have something that's like a little bit different or sweeter, knock yourself out, you know, and go crazy.

I just never wanna have the sense of like... You know, I think you have a big bucket of pretzels, a big bucket of goldfish, I've seen this in friends' places and it's like this constant thing of like not now and you're constantly regulating it. And it's actually a source of anxiety and stress in the home, you know, to have like these sort of like limitless bad foods available. And the same anything goes on Halloween candy, I'm like, "Get it all, eat all you want, make yourself sick," and then a day later, I'm tossing it all out. It's like go crazy while it's there. So I don't wanna have to be the food police, you know. I wanna teach my kids a natural appetite.

Another thing that I've noticed, too, is that the whole act of preparing foods with my kids has helped them appreciate home cooking more, you know. So involving them, like they make the pancake batter, this morning we made waffles and they do it together. They really enjoy. I mean, it's sort of a no brainer. But one of the upsides of cooking from scratch is that it's more fun for the kids, you know, there's more parts and pieces. And what we do in our house is I have everything organized like in baskets. So it's like a little basket with vanilla and baking soda and baking powder, and then the flour is in a tub. So I make it easy for them to get the parts and to participate in that, which they really enjoy.

But it's hard to... You know, I was so afraid, Katie, when I had my, especially with my first, it was like, my terror that I'm gonna have a picky child. And then my daughter ate everything, it was amazing. And when she was probably three, I did my first like mom date with her best friend's at the time, her mom and we went to a pizza restaurant and, you know, we got the pizzas. And then this mom brought out like four containers and one had watermelon chunks, and one had goldfish, and one had cheese sticks and one had like apple slices and I was like, "What's going on here?" And she goes, "Oh, you know, so this child, she's really picky and so I have to bring this or else she won't eat." And I'm like, okay, I felt empathy for her. But I also felt so relieved because I realized, oh, I'm never gonna have a picky eater.

And I completely get that there are some picky eaters that are born that way or may be allergy related. But I think by giving our children limitless choice... I mean, imagine if you went to work every day and sitting on your desk was like, all of your favorite foods, right, that were prepared for you with love. And they were there all day long. I mean, I'd gain 20 pounds in a week, you know, so would you. It's not feasible to have people offering us our favorite, most highly processed delicious things all the time that we want, you know.

In this case, the mom was doing her best job and brought things that were pretty healthy and fresh, but it's still meant that the daughter didn't have to eat the pizza and try something new. Didn't have to try the pasta and she could go on and say, "I only eat watermelon cubes." You know, it can be a choice. And I just encourage people to let the child experience a little hunger, let them experience a little delight and joy with finding something that they do like. And that hunger also teaches cravings and teaches the concept of satiety, you know?

Katie: Exactly. Yeah, I think you nailed it. I think that's such an important point and such a great point to start. And I can't believe our time is flying by so quickly, but I wanna make sure we talk a little bit more about your farm, and also all your restaurants, and just all the amazing innovative stuff you guys are doing. So kind of give us a roundup of what the farms are like, how many cattle you have, and then what the restaurants are like?

Anya: Absolutely. So our farm is just shy of 30,000 acres in Northern California. It's all organic certified. We have 3,000 beef, about 2,000 lambs, 2,000 pigs. And we produce about 50,000 chickens every year along with goose, duck, and turkey in smaller quantities. All of our meats are sold through our own channels, which we have six restaurants, butcher shops, one in New York and five in California. We also sell through select retail partners. So currently we're selling through Erewhon, which is a great grocery store in Southern California. We're expanding right now with grocery partners in Northern California and New York. So we're looking to be in probably 100 stores by this time next year with all of our meats as well.

We also sell on belcampo.com direct from our own slaughterhouse. We have our own USDA slaughterhouse adjacent to our farm that's certified humane and certified organic meat processing plant. And so we sell at belcampo.com, you can go online and it gets shipped to you directly from our meat plant in Yreka, California. Or you can go to williamsonoma.com and they sell some really awesome like gifting bundles as well as Belcampo.

But our claim to fame is I'd say we're the first and only truly vertically integrated farm to table meat operation with animal wellness as its core. I consider Belcampo fundamentally an animal wellness company providing optimally healthy meats in support of optimal human nutrition. And really, you know, the why of it in all this complexity, man, we've built something insanely complex that's also fun. You know, like this Christmas, I'm launching a line of animal fat-based moisturizer, and in beer bone and things that are... I actually developed this line when I was pregnant with my second and got kind of freaked out by the creams and things that I use and started to make my own using animal fat and now we're selling them.

So we can do neat little line extensions like that, because of having the whole animal. But you know, we started from a ranch in 2012. And the idea was like, great, how do we get this product to the consumer in a way that honors it through the whole supply chain? And we can't ship it to a massive consolidated slaughterhouse, you know, where thousands of animals are killed in an hour. There's no traceability, there's the animal handling processes are inhumane. So that was okay, let's build a slaughterhouse. And then how do we get it into retail? And it's, build a restaurant, so let's give people a completely own supply chain so they can have absolute comfort in the quality of this product.

And it's been so cool too, you know, we're best burger in LA from "LA Magazine," best in SF from "SF Magazine." Like we've been winning on taste for years. And that's sort of been the neat upside. You know, we started this around wellness and doing the right thing. And then wow, you do the right thing for the environment, for people, for animals, and it tastes a heck of a lot better. So that was a nice kind of like, positive upside of it, that our meat is consistently renowned for just tasting really awesome.

Katie: I can vouch for that. I've been to the LA restaurant and the burger is amazing, so is the steak. Definitely wanna get back and try a lot more things. But I'll make sure that links to all of your websites are in the show notes. So if you guys are in or near any of those places, you can find the restaurants or you can go to the website.

Anya: Yeah, I'll hook you up with a discount code for your audience as well.

Katie: Amazing. So yeah, you guys check the show notes at wellnessmama.fm for that discount code, and I'll also post it on social media. But yeah, I can definitely vouch for the quality, it's amazing and delicious. And I love that it's run by a female founder and mom who is just really pioneering in this world. I think it's incredible. Selfishly, there's another question I love to ask toward the end of interviews because I'm always looking for new book ideas. And that is if there's a book or number of books that have really impacted your life. If so, what are they and why?

Anya: First book would be "On Food and Cooking" by Harold McGee. It's an oldie but goodie, published in the '80s. And it was the first book that really got me thinking about the science of food and the microbiology of nutrition and food. So it's "On Food and Cooking" by Harold McGee. And then Fergus Henderson's book "River Cottage Meat Book" is amazing. And talking about just grass-fed operations and how different they are. That's a really amazing introduction to free-range everything.

On the other side, there's an incredible book called "The Meat Racket." Racket like a tennis racket, "Meat Racket." And that's about the whole environmental and economic system around how Tyson farms its chickens. And what I learned from that is just how involved the USDA is from a financing perspective with all these farms. And also, that these confinement operations are almost exclusively now run by Southeast Asian immigrants who are really locked in to a lose-lose situation from an economic perspective with, you know, in over their heads with debt, owing money to Tyson and only having one client, was also Tyson.

So it was amazing to me just thinking about the kind of...the bad tentacles of the conventional operations. It just gave me a sense of, wow, this isn't just about animals, this is human wellness and human stability is being threatened by the confinement system. So if anybody wants a real downer, I recommend the "The Meat Racket." It's pretty depressing, but it's also just like kind of blew my mind to read about how the system actually works.

Katie: Love it. I will make sure all of those are linked in the show notes as well. I think this has been such a fun episode and such an important topic. And I love, like I said, multiple times, I love that you are providing such quality products and education. I think this is a really important topic, especially for moms and children. And I love that you are leading the way for this. So thank you so much for all your work, and for your time, and being here today.

Anya: You know, it all depends on people like you making a different choice, you know. I can offer the different choice, but people have to make a choice. So I'm just really grateful that you're using your platform to support me being able to share my story and what we're trying to do.

Katie: I love it. Well, thank you again for your time. And thanks to all of you for listening and sharing one of your most valuable resources, your time, with us today. We're both so grateful that you did. And I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of "The Wellness Mama Podcast."

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