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**[00:00:01] Voiceover:** Welcome to *Sound Bites*, hosted by registered dietitian nutritionist, Melissa Joy Dobbins. Let's delve into the science, the psychology, and the strategies behind good food and nutrition.

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**[00:00:22] Melissa Joy Dobbins:** Hello and welcome to the *Sound Bites* podcast. Today's episode is about the myths and misunderstandings of modern farming. Today's guest is Michelle Miller. You may know her as The Farm Babe on social media. She is an author, keynote speaker, and online influencer as a full-time advocate for agriculture, giving science a bigger voice in the food and farm space. Welcome to the show, Michelle.

**[00:00:51] Michelle Miller:** Great. Thanks for having me.

**[00:00:52] Melissa:** So excited to talk with you. I want our listeners to know that this episode is not sponsored. I had the pleasure of meeting you at the IFT first meeting last summer, that's the Institute for Food Technologists. You were speaking with Kevin Folta, who is the well-known professor, scientist, and host of the *Talking Biotech* podcast.

You have a uniquely interesting story about doing a 180 from City Girl to Farm Girl. I would love for you to share that story with our listeners. I think that this is what makes you so relatable and people can really say, "Hey. She used to think this. Now that she is on the farm, and she knows farmers directly, it has a way of relating to what myths and misunderstandings are out there." I would love to have you share your story with our listeners.

**[00:01:45] Michelle:** Yes, absolutely. I grew up in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and I was in 4-H, so a lot of my friends were farm kids. Even though I wasn't a farmer, my friends were, so I was involved in agriculture in middle school and high school. Then in high school, your teachers and guidance counselors, everybody says, "You should work in agriculture." You take those aptitude tests or whatnot and they were all like, "You should be a farmer. You should work as a veterinarian or something."

I actually ended up moving to Los Angeles, and I got a degree in fashion and worked for Gucci on Rodeo Drive. I was about as far removed from the farm life as you could be. I lived in downtown LA and downtown Chicago for about 12 years, most of my 20s. Then I moved to Florida, and I was traveling the world, and was bartending on a little white sand beach, a little tiki bar, and living my best life.

I ended up meeting a farmer when I was there. I was his bartender. Sometimes when you pick up the bartender, it actually works. Doug and I dated for about seven or eight years. I moved to the farm in Iowa for him. He was a farmer, and together we were farmers. My tagline was "Rodeo to the Rodeo." I moved to Iowa and we were raising sheep and cattle, and we grew corn, soybeans, oats, hay, rye, a little bit of everything up there in northeast Iowa.

I started The Farm Babe as a way to better bridge the gap because I went from believing every myth under the sun about food to learning the real truth direct from farmers. I realized that I wanted to take a stand and have a platform for the farmer's voice and for the scientist's voice because so many people just hear the misinformation like I once did. I was an anti-GMO activist. I would only buy organic and non-GMO and gluten-free and whatever, just because that's-- I thought the food labels were truthful. Come to find out they're not. That's where it all started, Rodeo to the Rodeo. [chuckles]

**[00:03:39] Melissa:** I love it. It's a great story. Would you say that your focus and your knowledge is more on crops, or animal ag, or both?

**[00:03:47] Michelle:** It's both.

**[00:03:47] Melissa:** Okay. Great. That's nice because both are important, and they're very different, so it's nice that you have knowledge of both. As you said, you were raising cattle and sheep and what kind of crops again?

**[00:03:59] Michelle:** In Iowa, corn and soybean. I know. A shocker, right?

**[00:04:01] Melissa:** That's what I thought, yes.

**[00:04:02] Michelle:** Yes.

**[00:04:03] Melissa:** I can relate. I was born in Iowa and grew up living in many Midwestern states.

**[00:04:09] Michelle:** Yes, same. Yes, lived in the Midwest for 30 years. I like to focus on everything, so I'm traveling the world pretty regularly.

**[00:04:17] Melissa:** In a different way than you were before.

**[00:04:19] Michelle:** Yes. Anything from agriculture, I'm interested in highlighting it.

**[00:04:23] Melissa:** It's great that you had that 4-H foundation as well. That's neat how it came full circle. You were attracted by the shiny things with the fashion industry, and that sounds really exciting as well. I bet there's probably some things that you learned in that world that you pull into this world. Is there anything that you can share with us on that?

**[00:04:45] Michelle:** Yes. I think that's what's been so interesting about it all, is I really connect with a non-farm audience. I can understand what it's like to be on both sides of the spectrum.

**[00:04:56] Melissa:** Yes, or both sides of the fence.

**[00:04:58] Michelle:** Yes. Sometimes I feel like farmers are disconnected from the disconnect. They've never gone grocery shopping in downtown LA. If you do, your head will binge to the point where you're like-- There's so much misinformation. It's like, "What other labels can they fit on this package?" It's like they're just using anything they can to try to sell a product. It's really sad because a lot of those labels are very misleading or bullshit.

**[00:05:20] Melissa:** Yes. We're going to talk about that because I know that-- I had already thought to ask you this question, and then ironically, I saw that you recently did a reel on this, so we're definitely going to talk about food labels, but you make a good point. Oftentimes, we think about how the consumer is so removed from the farm. Most people don't have the opportunity to visit a farm directly, but the farmers have some disconnect too, as far as what the average consumer struggles with. You're bridging that gap.

**[00:05:45] Michelle:** Yes. Well, I think farmers, that's what they know, right? They're born and raised on the farm, they're multi-generations. It's like all they know. They live it, eat it, and breathe it all day, but it can be easy for them to be really annoyed with the non-farm crowd because they don't really connect with them either. They may say, "Oh, those city people, they don't know anything. They're just snobby and they're whatever. Ugh, screw them." I'm like, "No, we have to have these conversations."

Just because they're misinformed doesn't mean that they're stupid. It might mean sometimes more people need to be less intellectually lazy. [chuckles] It's like, just because somebody says something, don't take it at face value. A lot of times when somebody says something that's not true, I'm like, "Where did you hear that?" They're like, "Oh, I don't know," but you should know. Unless you heard it, we need to talk to farmers about farming, and talk to scientists about science. Not just like, "Well, somebody somewhere told me something," and then you take it at face value without fact-checking. For the love of God, people, fact-check. [chuckles]

**[00:06:44] Melissa:** Critical thinking, which is not easy. You talked about lazy thinking. I think you and I connected on this before, but I know I've brought it up on the podcast before, is the *Thinking Fast and Slow* book by Daniel Kahneman. We have these mental shortcuts because, otherwise, we couldn't get through the day. To slow down and be more of a critical thinker does take some skills and some energy.

To your point about the farmers, I really think those days are gone. It's not just farmers but the mainstream medical community. When we hear something that we know is not true, or that is conspiracy theory, or is just misinformation or disinformation, gone are the days where we can just say, "Well, that's BS, and I'm not going to address that, and I'm just going to keep moving forward."

I think we've learned the hard way that we have to continue to bust those myths and put the accurate information out there. I imagine as a speaker, you do a lot of speaking that you're talking to both the public consumer audiences and also farmer audiences. I'm curious how each audience is different and what your goals are for each audience.

**[00:07:59] Michelle:** Yes. When I get in front of non-farm audiences, those are just my favorite. I'll do a myth-busting in the grocery aisle section, which just talks about debunking these food labels one by one. During the Q&A, every hand goes up. People are just like, "What about this? What about that?" I think people's minds are just blown when they're like, "Wait, organic uses pesticides? There's no such thing as hormones and chicken? All meat isn't antibiotic-free, GMOs aren't bad? At what point are we watering down all these food labels to the point where there's not going to be any trust left?"

It's really important that we advocate. Then when I'm in front of farming crowds, I'm encouraging them to advocate. We all have to think about how everybody votes. Everybody has a role to play in policy. If our society isn't educated, this is where it's regulating farmers right out of business. We have to fight back and push back against the food companies that aren't being good and true to local US farmers. It drives me crazy. Like in Florida, I live in Florida, and down here it's like there'll be strawberries, beautiful fresh strawberries in season, but the grocery stores won't buy local. They'll buy from product of Guatemala.

It's like, "Seriously?" we have this very small window that fresh produce is in season, but a lot of the food corporations, they just look at the dollars and they say, "Well, why would we source from here when we can get it from Guatemala or Mexico for pennies on the dollar and make more profit?" I think just raising awareness on the importance of keeping farmers farming, keeping USA-grown.

When I speak to farming crowds, I'm telling them, "You guys, we have to speak up." Here are some social media tips. Here are some communication tips. Here are ways to get involved. Here's why this is important. How do we go about doing all that? It's about educating the consumer and encouraging to support local USA-grown whenever possible, but then also just bridging that gap. Cultivating connections, how do we do that?

**[00:09:55] Melissa:** Yes. I've said this on the podcast before. When I worked for the Dairy Council for eight years. That was a while ago, but we really had some major efforts to get farmers to speak up and tell their stories. Completely relate to the fact that they just want to be out in their fields doing their work. We've had to encourage them and explain to them the importance of them getting their voices out there. I think that was the topic of the talk that you had with Kevin Folta was how to get voices out into the social media credible.

**[00:10:26] Michelle:** Yes.

**[00:10:27] Melissa:** Evidence-based voices out in the social media. As you know, my listeners are a mix of the general public and health professionals. Any quick tips for those health professionals listening to get their voices out into social media. It's a-- I don't want to say crowded space, but it's a tricky space and you're doing such a great job. Would love to hear any tips that you have for our listeners.

**[00:10:48] Michelle:** Yes, thanks. I think first and foremost, collaboration is really important to doing something like this, because you're going to be posting about me, I'm going to be posting about you, and then our followers are going to learn about each other from following. I think that's really important. When it comes to communication, it's really just important to be yourself and think about what type of content wouldn't go viral.

When I do hot topics, like doing a pro-GMO post or something like that, like that's the stuff that people might be surprised by, or that's the kind of stuff that goes viral, or you get a lot of chatter in the comment section, which boosts your algorithm. A vast majority of my followers are on Facebook. It's called social media. You have to engage with your followers. The more buzz there is in your comments. For every friend that comments on a Facebook post, that post then shows up in their friend's posts and their news feeds. Well, not always, but usually.

You're just getting more eyes on the content . If you can tag and collaborate with other people, a lot of my followers, I felt from somebody else sharing it that has a way bigger following than me and vice versa. I use a lot of social media groups also to connect with others, so I'm in a science-based women in Ag, or my job depends on Ag or just some other science and skeptics groups, or G-M-O-L-O-L or whatever. Just different ones like that. Where you get a mixture, if it's not just a farming audience, but it's a way to connect with people outside of the industry that you can collaborate with.

**[00:12:18] Melissa:** Those are great tips.

**[00:12:20] Michelle:** Yes. Just be true to yourself. People love memes, they love to laugh. They Love storytelling. What makes a good movie? It's the hero and the villain. It's the feel-good. It's the sad. It's something that evokes an emotion. If you look at corporate-type social media and the engagement, it's usually very low because it's like very generic, boring, safe. It's just corporate, right? They have the legal teams and the corporate and the hoops, and that's why their content isn't fun. .[laughter]

When you have an influencer like myself, it's us. It's our voice. We don't have to answer to the corporate America types. Well, usually, we don't have to. The corporate America types, or the lawyers, it's just like, "Hey, I'm going to have some fun with this because this is who I am. You just have fun. That's what gets people excited or engaged. To want to share your content and get more eyes on the information."

**[00:13:13] Melissa:** I must say-- Do you still have to follow FTC guidelines and all of that. I know that you do that. I know that it's definitely more engaging to have one single person and their brand and their personality shining through. I'm surprised to hear that you have the most engagement on Facebook. I do see that that's where the majority of your followers are. You have a huge following on all kinds of platforms. You're even on TikTok. God bless you.

**[00:13:38] Michelle:** Yes.

**[00:13:39] Melissa:** Thank you for being out there. I have a random side question about things going viral. I don't know if I told you about this, but I might have. I got my Black Belt recently.

**[00:13:50] Michelle:** You did tell me that. Congrats. That's so cool.

**[00:13:53] Melissa:** Thanks. I thought this would be a great opportunity, because I've asked all my friends who have quite a following on Instagram, my karate Black Belt reel. I consider that it went viral because I have less than 4,000 followers on Instagram, but the reel has 360,000 views, more than 5,000 likes and 5,000 shares. I will say I did did have to shut the comments down because people were being mean. None of my friends, of course, but random strangers saying mean things about me getting my Black Belt. What do you think happened there? W ould you consider that viral based on the number of followers I have? What did I tap into, and how can I recreate that with something nutrition-related?

**[00:14:36] Michelle:** Yes, absolutely. Which platform was that, that you got that many views?

**[00:14:40] Melissa:** Instagram.

**[00:14:40] Michelle:** Instagram. Yes, I know. It's like the unsung wonder of that, sometimes how that works, but I don't know. It's just something to do with the algorithm. I've had it happen to me too. I had a video on TikTok that had 800 or 900,000 views out of the blue too. I don't know. You can try using different hashtags, but again, people comment and share and then that might show up on their algorithm. It's really hard to say.

Instagram and TikTok, I feel are just one of those things that you just get lucky. It's weird. Facebook is more algorithm. I think there's a little bit more control in some of the other platforms. As far as that goes, it sounds like you just had a lot of people commenting on Instagram just chose to show that to a lot of people.

**[00:15:26] Melissa:** Yes. Okay. Thanks.

**[00:15:28] Michelle:** [laughs]

**[00:15:28] Melissa:** Just curious. A little side story there. Listeners, if you want to check. It's only 15-second reel. I think that was part of the magic of it. I used some trending audio, 15-second reel.

**[00:15:37] Michelle:** Yes. With Facebook, I know that people can share 'em into groups. If I ever get attacked by-- One time, I got attacked by vegan animal rights activists really bad, but it was easy to track because at the bottom of the post it shows how many shares. It's like, oh, 694 shares. A vast majority of those were people just blasting them into vegan groups. That's why I had like 9,000 angry vegan comments.

**[00:16:02] Melissa:** Geez.

**[00:16:02] Michelle:** Yes. I was gone. I was on a flight that day, If I wasn't even looking at my social media until I landed and I opened it up. I was like, "Oh, what just happened here?" Facebook is like when you share into those groups, like attack, it's bringing an army onto somebody. Instagram, you don't really share into groups. It's different because people can share them on maybe like a story or with friends or something. Maybe somebody shared that and then it just went viral on their community. Hard to say.

**[00:16:30] Melissa:** Well, thank you. That brings up a really good point. All of us to some extent, but you really deal with a lot of haters on social media. Whether our listeners are the general public, or a health professional, I think they would appreciate hearing a little bit about-- because you and I had talked about this before. I have a crisis communications background, so I have a sense of strategy there. Case in point, since this reel that I had that went viral was about karate, it was nothing really to do with my business. I did handle it a little differently.

If I was getting a lot of hateful comments on something nutrition-related, I would've chosen. Okay,. Is this a comment that is reasonable enough questioning, maybe, somebody wanting to learn more. I would engage with it a little differently than just some of these personal attacks. I know that you deal with this a lot. Any advice that you can share, or insights about dealing with haters on social media? I know that based on our previous conversation, I really respect how you approach this.

**[00:17:34] Michelle:** Oh, thank you. First of all, I don't think I get like a lot of haters. I think what-

**[00:17:38] Melissa:** Good.

**[00:17:38] Michelle:** - we as people just do though, is that we put too much emphasis and thought into the negativity. You can have a million people, literally a million people say you're amazing, and one person to tell you, "You suck." We are wired to put so much of our focus into that one person that sucks, and we can't. We have to remember that we have no idea who that person is. They could be drunk or on drugs. It could be a fake profile or a troll. It could be somebody in another country. Maybe they don't speak the language. Maybe they're having a bad day and they just took it out on you.

It's more so a reflection of them than it ever is on you. Your followers are always going to be your cheerleaders. A lot of times if somebody says something negative in the comments, usually my followers are there to correct or come to my defense before I even get a chance to read it. I don't even read most of my comments anymore. Once you get to a certain point, you just realize that it's not even worth your time anymore, or you don't have the time to, but you just have to let it roll off your back, because it's a more of a reflection on them than you.

Sometimes, I try to not block people. Blocking is my last resort, but you can maybe delete, or hide, or do whatever, ignore, because people are going to come to your defense anyway. Don't even put that much emphasis into it. I do respond a lot of times too. If I look at at their profile and they seem like a reasonable person, or a rational person, I'll definitely do my best to engage. I think it's always really important to lead with comments of empathy being like, being like, "I totally understand." You have to be on their side. You have to treat everybody as if you would treat them like a friend.

**[00:19:10] Melissa:** In-person, face-to-face?

**[00:19:12] Michelle:** Yes, or even on social media, I do it too.

**[00:19:15] Melissa:** We forget sometimes.

**[00:19:16] Michelle:** Yes, all right. Like that. Yes, yes, yes. For sure.

**[00:19:19] Melissa:** Like I'm dealing with a real person here?

**[00:19:21] Michelle:** Yes, they're real people. I had a woman the other day in my comments who said "This brodd, I don't think this brodd's ever even been to a chicken farm. I responded. I said, "First off, I'm not a brodd. Second of all, I've been to many chicken farms, but it sounds like maybe you haven't. I completely understand why you feel this way." There is a ton of misinformation, but it's like I've been touring these farms and writing about these topics for nearly a decade now. How many chicken farms have you been to?

That's not what I necessarily said in the comments, because I try to be very respectful, but in my mind, this is what I'm thinking. Like, "No." I think just responding back and putting them in their place, being like, **"**I'm not a brodd. Don't call me that." That's not okay.

**[00:20:03] Melissa:** That's not okay.

**[00:20:04] Michelle:** You're in my house. Would you allow somebody in real life to talk to you like that? No. I won't allow that in my comments either. If you want to be a jerk, go be a jerk with somebody else. I'm not playing that game. Just being polite and respectful is very important, but I'm not afraid to put somebody in their place either, because they probably weren't even expecting me to respond. I'll be like, "Oh yes, I responded, and I'm not going to tolerate it." [chuckles]

**[00:20:27] Melissa:** Great. Very good. Talking about myths, misinformation, and disinformation, and for people listening, if you're not familiar with those terms-- Well, I know you're familiar with myths and misinformation. The disinformation, I actually have a related episode. It is episode 243, I believe, about misinformation and disinformation. Just real quick, disinformation is when people knowingly spread information that you know is wrong.

**[00:20:56] Michelle:** It's more of a planned attack, like an animal rights campaign that comes out all on the same day across all these major media outlets. That is like a disinformation campaign where it's planned, where they're like, "We are going to target brand A on October 13th," They won't fact-check it, but they will-- That's their goal. Then they'll say, "Donate. Donate. Donate. Donate to our cause and go vegan."

That's a lot of how fundraising efforts are done, where it's more of a disinformation campaign that's done on purpose. This is what I understand. Correct me if I'm wrong, but this is the way that it's been described to me. Then the misinformation is more so like people are well-intentioned but misinformed. They've just heard about it. For example, Joe Kool in downtown Chicago thinks that GMOs are bad because he heard it somewhere. Whereas the non-GMO project does specific targeted budgeted ads, including influencers, including a very targeted specific fear-mongering, fear-based disinformation campaign to try to sell the non-GMO butterfly products.

**[00:22:01] Melissa:** Yes, that's interesting. Along those lines, it seems like every single documentary about food and farming is really slanted in a negative light, and in my opinion, sometimes downright conspiracy theory promoting. I get so tired of my kids coming home from school and saying, "Guess what we watched in our class today?"

**[00:22:22] Michelle:** Oh gosh. [chuckles] The worst.

**[00:22:25] Melissa:** What's your take on these shockumentaries? Are there any out there that you think are credible and balanced, or just if we see something like that on Netflix, should we just keep scrolling?

**[00:22:37] Michelle:** Generally speaking, most of them are nonsense. The ones that are good, there's one called *Before the Plate.* There's one called *Farmland*. There's one called-- Oh, *Temple Grandin* is wonderful. There's one called *No Farmers No Food: Will You Eat the Bugs?* that I just watched. That was really interesting. I even have to do a little bit of fact-checking on that myself. *Food, Inc.* is the absolute worst.

**[00:23:00] Melissa:** *Fed Up* is pretty bad too.

**[00:23:02] Michelle:** Yes,*Fed Up'*s really bad. *Cowspiracy*, *Forks Over Knives.* There's *Super Size Me 2* is pretty bad. There's one called *Kiss the Ground* and there was some good information in there, but it's not balanced.

**[00:23:17] Melissa:** Is that the one that Woody Harrelson narrates?

**[00:23:19] Michelle:** Yes. Their experts are Gisele Bündchen and Tom Brady. Seriously?

**[00:23:25] Melissa:** Thank you, no.

**[00:23:26] Michelle:** Can you please not talk to celebrities about farming? The farmers that they have on there are friends of mine or acquaintances, and I went-- Gabe Brown is one of them, and I said, "Gabe--" Gabe's really good with the regenerative farming movement. I'm all about regenerative as long as we're being honest and kind with the marketing efforts. I was like, "Gabe, what the hell?" He's like, "Michelle, you should have seen it before they got ahold of me." He's like, "It was way worse." He's like, "I got them to soften it a lot."

**[00:23:54] Melissa:** Oh, my gosh.

**[00:23:55] Michelle:** Apparently, now they're doing a *Kiss the Ground* part two, and Gabe is actually heading that.

**[00:24:00] Melissa:** Oh, great.

**[00:24:01] Michelle:** Gabe is a regenerative farmer, and he's written a bunch of books. He's pushing for the right things, but he's not doing it in a rude way. He does a lot of things right, but if we continue to put down-- *Kiss the Ground* in the first few minutes-- Oh my God, I can't believe I made it through the whole thing.

**[00:24:17] Melissa:** Yes, it's very sensational.

**[00:24:19] Michelle:** Yes. They compared conventional agriculture to chemical warfare of the Nazis.

**[00:24:24] Melissa:** Oh.

**[00:24:25] Michelle:** I'm just like, "Are you freaking kidding me?"

**[00:24:27] Melissa:** Wow.

**[00:24:28] Michelle:** How are we supposed to get more farmers to sign up for regenerative practices when you lead with insane insults and hyperbole in the first five minutes? Everyone's going to shut it off. Most farmers did, and so a vast majority-- It's always a matter of follow the money. *Food, Inc.* was funded by Stonyfield. It was funded by the same corporations that looked to be the hero in the hero-villain story.

A lot of the animal rights activists-- HSUS lobbies $140 million plus a year trying to put animal agriculture out of business, right? There's hundreds of millions of dollars being funneled into these shockumentaries.

**[00:25:05] Melissa:** This is the Humane Society of the United States- [crosstalk]

**[00:25:09] Michelle:** Yes.

**[00:25:10] Melissa:** - but most people think that they're donating to their local humane society with the little puppies and the kitties and stuff like that, and this is a completely different organization and agenda.

**[00:25:20] Michelle:** Correct, yes. HSUS is not your local humane society. Correct, but they can go off that name because people think that it's good, and it's not. They're one of the worst organizations out there for sure. A lot of them are not very truthful, and that's where I think we're really dropping the ball in agriculture. We've got a PR issue.

If you look at what's going on in agriculture, like I said earlier, there's a lot of disconnect from the disconnect, and when you have a bunch of old-- The demographic of agriculture, it's generally older White men, and they are not in tune with social media or Hollywood or anything like that. They're about as far removed from that as you can be. I've been there. I know what it's like to live in downtown LA and work in the movie industry because I did, and then you are in this small town and you're like, "Wow. You guys really don't have any idea what's going on with Hollywood," but they're the voices, right?

**[00:26:14] Melissa:** Oh, yes.

**[00:26:14] Michelle:** The animal rights groups will pay Ellen DeGeneres, and Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Gisele, and all these celebrities,millions of dollars to feed their narrative like we used to. Remember when dairy was so cool in the '90s because we spent 40 million on the "Got Milk?" campaign just to launch it off the ground.

**[00:26:31] Melissa:** The milk mustache with the celebrities.

**[00:26:34] Michelle:** Yes. We had every celebrity. That was a very expensive celebrity campaign, but it worked in the '90s. I was a kid, and I was like, "I want to look like Cindy Crawford when I grow up. I need to drink milk." There was no question that milk was the best, most nutritious drink out there. Where is the money being funneled now? Now, Kim Kardashian is the new face of *Beyond Me.* Now, the next milk campaign from Silk is the kids of the Got Milk campaign celebrities doing the next milk. .It's like, who is feeding who, what money trail behind fearmongering and disinformation campaign and food? We've got to get back to talking to farmers and scientists about farming and science.

**[00:27:18] Melissa:** Yes.

**[00:27:19] Michelle:** Stop Googling it.

**[00:27:20] Melissa:** Nothing irritates me more than my favorite actor just starting to spew forth nutrition misinformation in an award show. I'm like, "No, please stop."[chuckles]

**[00:27:31] Michelle:** Yes, it's the worst. Joaquin Phoenix and Natalie Portman at the--

**[00:27:37] Melissa:** Oh yes.

**[00:27:37] Michelle:** I think it was the Academy Awards, was it?

**[00:27:38] Melissa:** Yes.

**[00:27:39] Michelle:** Joaquin Phoenix is like, "We need to go meatless."

**[00:27:42] Melissa:** I'm like, "Joaquin, please stop."

**[00:27:44] Michelle:** We need to go meatless for the planet." Did you ever notice how there's no anti-coffee movement?

**[00:27:50] Melissa:** Yes.

**[00:27:51] Michelle:** The carbon footprint of coffee is insane.

**[00:27:54] Melissa:** Wait, or they'll say, "We're not serving any animal products at this award center." I'm like, "You flew in on your private jet. Please."

**[00:28:02] Michelle:** Yes, and you drank your Starbucks this morning that was picked by God knows what hand labor in Columbia shipped here with this crazy carbon footprint, and diner is just dumping it by the pot load down the drain. Oh god, *Food Waste* drives me crazy.

**[00:28:16] Melissa:** Oh, *Food Waste.* Yes, for sure.

**[00:28:18] Michelle:** It's because there's no well-funded anti-coffee lobby. Meat is an easier target because it's an animal, because it's easier to pull up people's heartstrings. It's not like-- There's a lot of money behind the anti-meat movement.

**[00:28:34] Melissa:** Oh, yes.

**[00:28:35] Michelle:** It's totally hypocritical.

**[00:28:38] Melissa:** And disingenuous.

**[00:28:39] Michelle:** Yes.

**[00:28:39] Melissa:** Yes, hypocritical. Anybody who's interested in learning more about the anti-animal agenda, I do have an episode about animal rights compared with animal- [crosstalk]

**[00:28:52] Michelle:** Welfare. [laughs]

**[00:28:54] Melissa:** - welfare. Thank you. Animal rights versus animal welfare. It's a little different episode than I normally do, but it's a fabulous episode, so I'll put a link to that in my shownotes@soundbitesrd.com.

Before we talk about marketing and food labels, I do want to just ask you, if you don't hear about GMOs that much anymore-- At least I don't see that percolating up-- what are some of the most common myths that you're seeing these days? Are we still hearing about antibiotics, hormones, all of that stuff?

**[00:29:24] Michelle:** Oh, yes. The anti-GMO movement settled down a little bit, but lately I've definitely seen a spike up in that again. I think that's starting to make another round of disinformation campaigns. Yes, hormones is huge. People think that chickens are pumped full hormones and antibiotics. That myth will not die. There are no hormones in chicken. There are no added hormones or steroids in chicken or pork. That myth drives me crazy, and antibiotics. If antibiotics are used, there's that withdrawal period before they can go to market, which means that all meat is - antibiotic free. I think definitely the factory farm-type disinformation campaigns really need a lot more help these days for sure.

**[00:30:10] Melissa:** Not to hate on another thing, but like that scarecrow cartoon thing from Chipotle, please.

**[00:30:17] Michelle:** Chipotle is the absolute worst. I haven't eaten there in probably a decade now.

**[00:30:22] Melissa:** Same here. I just can't.

**[00:30:24] Michelle:** No.

**[00:30:24] Melissa:** A lot of people don't even know what we're talking about. I do periodically look for that video just to show people that I'm not going to-- I wrote a blog post on it a long time ago, so maybe I'll put the link to that. There was actually a parody video that was really good. It was by Funny or Die. Are you familiar with them?

**[00:30:42] Michelle:** Yes, I think I saw part of that a long time ago.

**[00:30:46] Melissa:** They did a parody video of that. I might put that in the show notes.

**[00:30:49] Michelle:** Yes, you should. You should. I would love to watch that again because it's been a while. Funny or Die is great. They also did the video of the non-GMO l"Well, what's so great about your milk? Your milk is non-GMO." I don't think that's a thing, but they don't know that. Let's put it on and rake in the cash.

**[00:31:10] Melissa:** Okay. I interrupted you about the top myths. Anything new, like seed oils. Have you seen that?

**[00:31:18] Michelle:** Yes, a little bit. Well, tell me a little bit more about that one.

**[00:31:21] Melissa:** I just did an episode on that. If anybody wants to take a deep dive. Because honestly, I was thinking "What are seed oils? Why am I seeing all about this in the media and social media?) It's basically a seed oil is a vegetable oil that comes from a seed versus the fruit. Avocado and olive would be from the fruit of the plant. Seed would be something like canola or soybean.

They're polyunsaturated fatty acids. They're Omega-6s. Actually, all oils are a combination of unsaturated, monounsaturated, polyunsaturated, and saturated fats. They're all a blend, so they have differing amounts. Some people are criticizing seed oils because partly they're associated with ultra-processed foods. Well, okay. Then let's guilt by association or whatever. Then some extreme influencers are saying that they're really, really bad for you. They're the latest evil. That's why everybody has health problems or whatever.

**[00:32:20] Michelle:** Here we go. [chuckles]

**[00:32:22] Melissa:** Great. Here we go. That's some of the things that I've been seeing recently. Like I said, I recently did an episode on that. It is episode 248, so I will put that in the show notes as well and people can get the facts on seed oils. Let's talk about marketing and food labels. I don't intend to bash the food industry, our manufacturers, I get the concept. I was a supermarket dietitian. I'm just a shopper myself.

I understand that everybody's looking for that edge. What's great about my product and why you should buy my product over another product. It is frustrating to see a non-GMO project, or even way back in the day when I was a new baby dietitian, you would see a bottle of vegetable oil that would say no cholesterol. Well, cholesterol is only an animal products, so a vegetable oil is not going to have cholesterol.

Even back then we'd say, "Okay, that's true," but it's not really meaningful. It can be very misleading. This isn't anything really new, but maybe it's just getting out of control. How can we, and I say, how can we. I don't think that it's possible to shift away from this marketing approach to having labels that are purely just information. For example, if you are looking for protein or calcium or fiber or something that's good for your brain health or heart health or whatever, I would love to see a label that just has like, "Here's how much of this nutrient is in this product."

Then you would know, "Oh, this is a decent amount of protein for what I'm looking for, or, "This is a good amount of Omega-3s for what I'm looking for, versus this is heart healthy, this is brain healthy, this is anti-inflammatory, blah, blah, blah. What are your thoughts on that? Because I don't see this ever happening, but if I could wave a magic wand and do one thing in the foodscape, that would be-- I don't even know if that would work.

**[00:34:23] Michelle:** Yes, It drives me crazy. Well, there's some labels that don't really bother me. I know some people get annoyed by the gluten-free label for a product that doesn't have gluten

**[00:34:31] Melissa:** Like water. There's gluten-free water.

**[00:34:33] Michelle:** I think that label is meaningful for people with celiacs. There are legitimate medical reasons that people need to know.

**[00:34:40] Melissa:** Good point.

**[00:34:41] Michelle:** They have a dairy allergy. This is dairy-free because you never know. Somebody could pick up a box of cakes next to her, whatever, and it could say dairy-free or whatever. What's a good example of an allergen like nuts. Still not that many people have it. Great,I think, what is it like 0.4% of people have a peanut allergy or something? I forget.

**[00:35:00] Melissa:** I don't know the specifics, but I did a recent episode on food allergies.

**[00:35:04] Michelle:** I knew you did. I knew the girl to ask. [laughs]

**[00:35:07] Melissa:** There you go. Hey, when you're up around 250 episodes, you must have something related to something. About 6% of the population has one of the big eight, and then sesame has been added to the big eight, so nuts are within that.

**[00:35:20] Michelle:** Labels like that, I feel like are meaningful for people that have allergies. Then when it comes to something like no added hormones or steroids, or antibiotic-free, people just don't know. We have to educate. Something like the non-GMO project, when you are buying into this label, you are essentially giving money to the disinformation train. GMOs are a good thing.

What are people even doing? People think GMOs are bad, so they're trying to bite down GMO, but everything we eat is modified. There aren't non-GMO herbicide-tolerant plants. Everything has been like nothing natural. It tells you nothing about what it was sprayed. I think the non-GMO is really the one that drives me the most crazy because GMOs are good. We shouldn't be talking about that.

It doesn't tell you anything about the plant. A vast majority of food labels are just nonsense. At what point are people not going to trust anything we say anymore? What else can we fit on there? The more labels that are on a product, the less likely I am to purchase it. I encourage other people to do the same.

**[00:36:31] Melissa:** You're talking about like those little icons?

**[00:36:34] Michelle:** Yes, just like whatever. Non-GMO, I will not purchase anything that says non-GMO or organic, because organic still sprays pesticides. Organic is not any more pure than anything else that's out there. If it's got all these labels on it, I'm just like, "Okay. This is nonsense. This is misleading. This isn't true." I refuse to buy a product that is perpetuating fear-mongering in food. Because we have to educate and we can't sit there. It's easier to fool somebody than it is to convince them they've been fooled. How about we just don't fool people? How about we just have more of an education approach?

**[00:37:11] Melissa:** Here's the information. Here are the facts.

**[00:37:13] Michelle:** Really. what's important is the black and white label. How many calories, how much protein, carbs, whatever? That's relevant. The ingredients, that's important. Everything else is just creating more doubt and fear in the food supply. We need to do the opposite. We need to celebrate and uplift and understand our food supply to not put down other products or methodologies just because it doesn't like-- There's a million ways to sell a product without using fear-based marketing or putting down other production methods.

**[00:37:45] Melissa:** For anybody listening, if you feel like we're glossing or just briefly touching on a variety of hot topics, trust me, I have covered all of these in other episodes, so don't feel like we're just throwing all these out there and leaving you hanging. I promise, I do take a deeper dive on the nuances of some of these topics. You just brought up something that I just pulled up this handout that I got at my annual dietitian conference recently.

I attended a breakfast by Ketchum Public Relations. We hear a lot about different generations, Gen Z, millennials, Gen X, baby boomers, and their different preferences and things like that. They shared some information that I found, frankly, flabbergasting. Is that a word?

**[00:38:34] Michelle:** I think so. [laughs] It is now.

**[00:38:36] Melissa:** It is now. I love making up words. It's my thing, my jam. Being a dietitian, most people become dietitians because they want to help people. When I do my dietitian communications trainings, I'll say, "I know you want to be a dietitian, or you are a dietitian because you want to help people, but I want to know what does that mean to you? Dig a little deeper. What does that look like for you?"

For me, what that looked like was not fooling people, helping people who have been taken advantage of by late night infomercials. We'll leave it at that. The information that I got at this breakfast that I wanted to share-- I have children, one's a millennial, one's a Gen Z. I thought that that generation would not be as hung up on food guilt and feeling pressured about what they eat or judged for their food choices.

Their insights that they shared said that 61% of Gen Zs have felt pressures on them since childhood about their food. 46% feel pressured or judged by their mom for their food choices. I am just fascinated by this information. I want to take a deeper dive. Maybe I'll have one of the Ketchum dietitians come on the episode and talk about this. Because I'm like, "Is this part of the whole mom guilt. Moms are seeing these labels. This fearmongering has trickled into their thoughts and behaviors, and they're bringing that home, and they're giving this to their children.

**[00:40:09] Michelle:** Yes, I think that's absolutely a big part of it, for sure. Or just what's trending, because when you're a teenager or something, you're trying to fit in. If you have that sibling, or a peer, or somebody that's like, "Well, I'm going vegan," and they look up to that person. They're like, "Oh, well, I should go vegan. That sounds cool." I think that's probably the biggest part of it. It's just the social part of wanting to fit in.

**[00:40:32] Melissa:** The identity. Food is a big part of your identity, for sure.

**[00:40:35] Michelle:** It is.

**[00:40:36] Melissa:** Well, I didn't mean to go off on a tangent on that, but I just was surprised to hear that that generation is still really struggling.

**[00:40:43] Michelle:** Yes, I believe it. I believe it, especially now with social media where I think, I almost feel it'd probably be worse because everybody's trying to shove their views down your throat on Instagram or whatever. It's sometimes the biggest and loudest voices are the ones that are the most inaccurate.

**[00:41:01] Melissa:** For sure. Absolutely. That's why I encourage and support and educate dietitians on getting their voices out into the media and social media. As we're wrapping up, we touched on this earlier. Most people will really never have the opportunity to visit a farm in-person. There are more virtual opportunities now. Thank you, COVID, that is helpful.

People need to have a better understanding of how their food has grown, how animals are raised, but do you have any other suggestions on how people can actually connect with and talk directly with a farmer, maybe locally if they are interested in doing that?

**[00:41:37] Michelle:** Yes, I would search some popular hashtags like #harvest23, or #plants23, #AgTwitter is a good one. #factsnotfear is a good one for GMOs, and just whatever you're interested in. If you want to know more about dairy farming, just search #dairyfarmers, or #dairyfarming or whatever. Whatever it is that you're interested in, just search that topic.

**[00:42:01] Melissa:** You'll find farmers who are in that space.

**[00:42:03] Michelle:** Oh, yes. #grapeharvest, anything. Anything that you want to know about, just look for that harvest, that plant, that whatever, and you should be able to find all kinds of people.

**[00:42:16] Melissa:** Okay. We'll put some of those hashtags in the show notes too. If there is a local farm that they want to try to visit, do you suggest that they just reach out?

**[00:42:24] Michelle:** Yes, university extension's also a really great resource. If you go to farmer's markets and stuff oftentimes, there'll be like extension booth or some sort of information. Visiting those farmers is always really great but I also want to put a little warning on that too, that sometimes as much as I love small farms, sometimes they're some of the biggest sources of misinformation as well.behaved cause they're so used to doing it their way on a small scale.

Just because you have five backyard chickens doesn't mean that we're going to be able to feed the world like that. Farmers are 1% of the population, and so we need big farms. Those big farms, the more we dig at them, they do a really great job. I think it's a matter of knowing your farmer but knowing that there's a huge difference between being a gardener and a commercial-scale farmer. Where sometimes the gardeners are the ones that don't really understand what's happening on a big farm either, because they've never been to one or they don't know what's going on.

They just assume, but their assumption's wrong because they don't know, because they're judging a farm by its cover instead of actually going in and talking to the experts. Resources are good too. Beef checkoff or chicken roost or the pork board, pork checkoff, stuff like that, are really great resources as well. Just to make sure you're getting your information direct from the source. If you want to learn about #pigfarming, talk to a real commercial-scale pig farmer, and they're out there.

Just #realpigfarming. It's just, again, it boils down to people not being intellectually lazy. It's going to take a little bit of legwork sometimes. Maybe, maybe not.

**[00:44:00] Melissa:** I think if we point them in the right direction too.

**[00:44:02] Michelle:** Yes, exactly, but they're out there and they want to connect.

**[00:44:08] Melissa:** The difference is as everybody knows, I worked for the Dairy Council, so that is a checkoff program that is funded by farmers. Yes, there's marketing involved with that as well, but all of that has to go through USDA, and is very carefully reviewed so that we're not saying things that aren't completely 100% true and accurate and meaningful.

Some of these checkoff programs that you mentioned, and I'll put it-- I'll throw a bunch of links in the shownotes@soundbitesrd.co-- it's the councils, the Chicken Council and the Beef Checkoff and those organizations where the difference between that and a brand is that it is supported directly by farmers. I love your recommendation for connecting with Extension.

I love Extension. I worked in Extension when I was a graduate student, so I'll put some information in the show notes as well so that people can figure out how to find their local Extension through whatever local universities your state universities or whatever. They have a wonderful department that will answer anything that you have.

**[00:45:15] Michelle:** Such great resources.

**[00:45:17] Melissa:** Any questions you have about food and farming?

**[00:45:20] Michelle:** Yes, any sort of USDA office too. USDA FSA, they have all sorts of resources out there. People just have to go to the source. It's like if your car is broken, you go to your mechanic. If your teeth are screwed up, you go to your dentist. It's like we have to go to the source, talk to farmers about farming, and scientists are real people. That's another great hashtag, #scientistsarepeople. It's a great one.

**[00:45:42] Melissa:** Okay. This has been a fun conversation. Thank you so much. If there's any bottom-line takeaways that you want to share, and also where people can find you and connect with you.

**[00:45:54] Michelle:** Yes, thanks so much. My website is thefarmbabe.com. I'm Farm Babe on Facebook or @TheFarmBabe on any other platform. Yes, I'm here to give science a bigger voice, bridge the gap between consumers and farmers. If anybody needs anything, let me know. Thefarmbabe.com is my website that's got articles and videos, and more information about my speaking, and just everything I do as an advocate. Appreciate it. Thank you.

**[00:46:19] Melissa:** Great. We can connect and follow you there and see all the great things you're doing.

**[00:46:23] Michelle:** Yes, thank you. You too.

**[00:46:25] Melissa:** Thanks, Michelle. For everybody listening, as always, enjoy your food with health in mind. Till next time.

[music]

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**[00:47:01] [END OF AUDIO]**