NATURAL FLAVORS: RHETORICAL STORIES OF FOOD LABELS

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The Supervisory Committee certifies that this ***disquisition*** complies with North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

What is in our food? What can food labels tell us about what is in our food? This dissertation applies rhetoric in the everyday human act of reading food labels and making decisions about what to eat based on those labels. Rhetoric is continually operating from the beginning of the food manufacturing process, to designing and writing food labels and packaging, and finally to the consumer reading the label in the store.

"Natural flavors" is an ingredient listing that appears more frequently on food labels, especially in the organic and natural foods industries. I collected food labels and used qualitative methods as I rendered labels textually into Word documents in order to see the discursive elements of food labels away from the sometimes elaborate graphic design. I found that food labels contained three elements: the story, the reality, and the credibility. The story of the food label lures the consumer into an emotional response in either purchasing the food item or putting it back on the shelf. The reality of the label is in the ingredients list, or what is actually in that food item. The credibility is the availability of the manufacture in connecting with the consumer and to what extent they have transparency. By comparing these three elements on a textual page, we can see if there is truth and label equivalence between them, with "natural flavors" as a central component when it appears in the ingredients list. To the extent that there is or is not equivalence is explored through qualitative rhetorical analysis and briefly discussed by engaging Brummett's rhetorical homologies.

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INTRODUCTION

'Natural flavors' is a widely used ingredient in many manufactured foods. This so-called food ingredient is a USDA regulated term signifying a group of substances that manufacturers are allowed to put in food. It is a single terminology, a single listed ingredient that serves as a way to protect a proprietary formula used to enhance the flavor of highly processed, shelf stable, refrigerated, and frozen food. 'Natural' can mean anything but natural; the government does not regulate the definition or use of the term in food production and manufacturing. However, the rhetorical impact of reading or hearing the term 'natural' resonates with consumers, understanding that anything natural must be healthy and that its opposite, 'artificial,' is not. 'Flavors' as a listed ingredient, whether combined with the 'natural' term or standing alone, is not even a substance, it is nothing tangible in the physical sense, nothing one can pick up and examine. It is a quality or a property that a specific food contains that affects the human sense of taste.

Considering these two words that make up the single ingredient 'natural flavors,' the terminology really suggests a description of a quality more than a specific ingredient one can identify readily in the natural world or one's garden. Rhetorically then, 'natural flavors' is an intangible quality, and economically it is a proprietary goldmine. The manufacturer is not obligated to specify the exact combination of ingredients used in this umbrella term, so no one really knows exactly was this ingredient comprises. (The FDA website lists all the substances that are allowed under this blanket ingredient listing in their food code.)

This leads to the research question, "What is in our food?" or more specifically "What is in our *manufactured* food?" It is difficult in this era of advanced agricultural practices and a post-industrialized society to find out exactly what comprises even basic food commodities, such as

carrots for example, because of the changing chemical composition of air, water, and soil as a result of these practices and industry. But when manufacturers process food for mass consumption, they must abide by USDA rules to include a list of ingredients that specifies all that the packaged food product contains. To get consumers to keep purchasing and eating their products they must somehow create a combination of substances to make shelf-stable and some perishable foods palatable. So then, "What can food labels reveal about what is in our food?"

Food labels are rhetorically interesting because the persuasion element is so strong and is used in such a variety of unique and sometimes incoherent and especially misleading ways. One way to approach an examination of this type is to think of the rhetorical *story* that food labels tell. In Ann Vileisis' *Kitchen Literacy*, she introduces the idea of the story of food in its general and historic sense, basically searching for the original source of different foods. The title of her introduction, "Missing Stories," suggests that each food not only has an origin story, but also how food became what it is today. She asks, "Why did I *think* the way I did about my food?" finding it difficult to take responsibility for her lack of awareness about the foods she ate every day because the "whole supermarket system seemed to make it almost impossible for me—or for any of us—to know about the origins of our foods" (4). The stories about food she uncovers begins with a historical exposé on how our food culture got where it is, where it might lead, and why being ignorant about from where food comes became the norm.

I suggest that the labels on our highly processed, manufactured food tell a story about not necessarily *how* our food got to be where it is now, although I look at terms such as "grass-fed" that are prominently displayed on the label, but *what* story the manufacturers are trying to 'feed' us in order for us to happily buy and consume their products. Is the story factual or a fictional one? The context in which these stories are told are most interesting within the realm of the

natural foods industry, one of the fastest growing areas of the manufactured food market and one of the most lucrative. Many consumers are drawn to specialty foods for reasons of health, including organic, gluten-free, vegan, and heart healthy to name but a few. The bulk of the food labels examined here is within this segment of the market.

To find the answers, I look at the story, or sales pitch, that's encountered on the front of the label of a product. Then I compare that story with the ingredients list, usually on the back of the label, to see how the ingredients do or do not back up the sales pitch. Most consumers never look at the list of ingredients on any given product they purchase and consume, part of Vileisis' observation of consumer ignorance. Finally, I want to see how manufacturers may or may not allow us to take more responsibility for our lack of knowledge about food, and how they may behave responsibly themselves, by offering more information about their manufacturing process and/or invitations to contact them.

A departure point for the rhetorical story of food labels is Aristotle's three species of *pisteis*, or proofs. As outlined above, the front of the label is the main story of the food, the portion that is meant to persuade the audience, or consumer, with promises of something good to eat inside through the use of *pathos*, by leading them to feel emotion about the product. The ingredients list on the back of the label is *logos*, put there by law for the manufacturers to show or seem to show what is actually in the food. In offering invitations to contact them, manufacturers can show availability or transparency by how easy or difficult it is to get information about the product, using *ethos* in the way they develop their character. Sometimes this is shown through abundance of communication avenues (mail, telephone, social media, etc.) or a friendly tone. With others there can be almost a complete lack of information.

Health is a basic human right. In order to be healthy, humans need fresh air, clean water, and nutritious food. Using rhetorical research to understand how consumers make their food choices, what is actually in that food, and the willingness of manufacturers to disclose more information is important for human health and contributes to the relatively new field of food studies. Examining food labels shows how nutritionism, or fragmenting nutrition information while ignoring other components of food leaves "the door to misleading marketing…wide open," while labeling strategies such as these lead to individualizing the responsibility for eating habits squarely on the shoulders of each consumer (Knezevic 252-253). This dissertation aims to add to the discussion of how food consumption choices are made through reading food labels, comparing that choice with what is actually in the food as revealed by the label itself, and how manufacturers and the food industry aid or inhibit that process.

Chapter 1 begins the journey with my own food story, along with an introduction to some of the basic approaches I will be taking in my examination of food label stories: authenticity and homologies. Chapter 2 provides the context for the entire study—Big Food. It examines how our food became so processed and the mechanisms that allowed for this to happen. Chapter 3 then continues with a closer look at food labels and how Big Food uses them to their advantage. It shows how we can and cannot know precisely what is in our food and how food labels provide or do not provide the appropriate information and why. If Chapter 2 answers the question "What is in our food?" then Chapter 3 provokes a further question "What can food labels tell us about what is in our food?" Chapter 4 outlines and develops my personal research with food labels, from collection to dissection. I illustrate some examples from my texts and introduce the term "organatural." Chapter 5 discusses three different ways in which to look at the food label stories from the previous chapter, followed by a brief Afterword.

CHAPTER 1: FROM GARDEN TO GROCERY

The time is coming soon, if not already here, when few will have been raised on anything but pre-packaged, manufactured food items. Indeed, many cannot even identify the difference or level of degree between processed food and whole food procured in its most simplistic, natural state. The epitome of overly-processed, contrived food items for sale on super-market shelves today can be found as a simple, unassuming phrase found on food labels in the ingredients list that cries out to be ignored: natural flavors. This menial, hard-working epitaph signifies a conglomeration of the height of proprietary food chemistry preparations standing in for any semblance of real food substances that would otherwise be readily recognizable. To illustrate, follow back to a time and place where everyday food was simply sourced, and journey forward to a time and place where food provenance is not only unknown, but also unknowable.

Garden

The Fruit Room

When I think about food and mealtimes growing up on a North Dakota farm in the 60s and 70s, I think about hard work, sunshine, and rain. We had a fruit room, but never did I hear the word pantry. The fruit room was in the farthest corner of the basement of our rented farmhouse. As one lowered oneself over the creaky, open-stepped wooden stairs towards the cool bottom floor, finished only with a roughly poured slab of cement, there was a coal-burning furnace to the right and shelves of general storage, as well as a deep freeze, to the left. Behind the stairs was kept fairly unencumbered in order to accommodate the family during tornado events.

Across the way to the far side of the basement was the fruit room, encased by an old wooden door with rows of wooden shelves inside. It was quite small and quite dark as well as

cool, perfect for winter storage of all we had laid aside in the fall. Sometimes Ma would try her hand at homemade wine or what she would call champagne…in any event, it was a bizarre collection of dark glass gallon jugs topped with balloons which inflated with fermentation gases from the slow bubbly brew inside. Every so often one would burst, and I remember there being a kind of disappointment; perhaps that meant that particular jug was ruined. The liquid stunk from my youthful point of view, and since my parents have never been drinkers I don't know what the fuss and effort was all about, apart from yet another way to utilize freshly grown produce.

The main treasure held by the fruit room was jars of harvested fruits and vegetables from the garden and from nearby wild fruit-bearing trees. Mostly this was quarts of tomato soup and whole tomatoes, rows of dill pickles, and pint jars of wild plum jelly, chokecherry jelly, and rhubarb sauces and jams. On the cool ground lay gunny sacks of potatoes, a combination of red and white, dug from the garden in the fall. Many buttercup squash lay alongside, and Ma frequently cooked and served both together at the same meal with a large slab of beef chuck roast, the fluffy white-flesh of the potatoes edging into the sweet, brown-sugared squash together on the plate, with butter, salt and pepper intermingling both.

In the deep-freeze was the corn and green bean harvest. Putting up the corn was an annual event, overtaking the kitchen for a few days while Ma, Pops, and my brother would take turns removing the bright yellow kernels, same color as the kitchen walls, from the cobs of corn, waiting their turn freshly shucked in bushel baskets on the kitchen floor. The green beans were blanched and put up at an earlier time in the growing season, and didn't call for such a magnitude of operations.

The Garden

The garden lay a few yards from the house, over the lawn, past the swing set, and beyond the nearest shelterbelt. There was an old abandoned horse-drawn wagon next, the wood all gray and weathered beyond splinters so we could play on it without regard. The best climbing tree was next to the wagon, providing a nice place to shade between hot, sunny work in the dirt.

We grew all sorts of vegetables, as well as harvesting the established perennials of asparagus and rhubarb patches at the far end. Our mainstay veggies were carrots, onions, beets and potatoes; green and yellow beans, sweet peas and radishes; a huge patch of buttercup squash, volunteer dill, and a host of multi-colored zinnias and other assorted hardy flowers; Ma loved to decorate the house with vases of them after the rush of freshly cut lilac branches in the spring. We ate off these fresh vegetables, a whole family of six, all summer long. For me the word garden meant vegetable garden, and it wasn't until I was well into adulthood that I understood others used the word to mean the front or back yard, which we grew up knowing as the lawn and bushes.

The Red Owl

Grocery shopping was once a week at the local Red Owl on main street in the small town five miles from our farm. At the time I thought of it as a treasure trove, with rows of pristine canned and boxed dry goods and the candy counter at the front of the cash register counter. Today that tiny store servicing a whole rural community would fit inside any respectable convenience store, but it carried the basics we needed that our garden didn't provide. We also had to visit the creamery for our dairy, overseen by a corpulent red-faced man in overalls with one glass eye.

The Red Owl also supplied us with meat, which was supplemented by fresh fish my uncles caught when they went on fishing trips in Minnesota lakes close by. They also hunted duck, goose, and deer in the fall and shared that with us as well. Pops didn't hunt nor did he farm livestock, so we came by our meat when our neighbor livestock farmers butchered a pig. These farmers also sold their fresh meat to the local meat locker and butcher, who made wonderful German sausages, ring bolognas, and liverwurst, which we bought whenever we could.

Grocery

Into the Food Lab[yrinth]

Eventually our family came to know and use processed foods more and more. Early on, processed foods were shunned for their expense and low quality—we just couldn't afford them for our family of six and the foodstuffs were either old or not pure, homemade quality. Some foods we used were breakfast cereals, served either cooked or cold, packaged noodles, canned soups, and of course baking staples such as flour and sugar. Ma baked our own bread, rolls, and kuchen well into my teenage years. I don't remember much fresh fruit, which made fruit and nut baskets at Christmastime a real treat, not just a traditional gesture as they are today.

By the mid-70s we were well on our way to subsisting on mostly processed foods: Shake n Bake chicken and pork shop coating, canned soda pop, chips and snack crackers of every variety, ice cream, candy, cake and pudding mixes, Jell-O, cold cuts, Velveeta cheese, frozen pizza, and boxed macaroni and cheese. By then too of course, margarine had totally replaced butter in virtually every household. Processed foods, along with the ensuing fast food culture even in the rural areas (usually a Dairy Queen brazier in the nearest town) was now not only much cheaper, but better, more consistent quality as well as a sign of modernity and even

prosperity, because only the lowest on the [rural] economic scale made their own food because they "had to."

Homemade food was labor intensive and a sign that you had no viable employment outside of the home. As teenaged farm kids, we eschewed the rural lifestyle, suffered through summer chores (interior and exterior painting, hoeing a quarter mile of five rows of newly planted shelterbelt, building grain bins, mowing endless expanses of lawn, and washing cars and farm vehicles) and couldn't wait to pop a frozen pizza in the oven with some store-canned baby gherkins as a late night treat. By this time, building our own pizza from a boxed kit was passé.

Enter Organic

Fast forward a couple of decades to the new millennium, where the industrial food complex has reached the level where they've developed Soylent, a substance (one can hardly call it food) that the manufacturers purport to maintain human bodily functions and surreptitiously replaces all stages of food procurement and standard consumption in order to save consumers unnecessary and troublesome time eating to staying alive, to the local foods movement, where farming, local farmers markets, food preservation, and the term "foodie" has taken oppositional stance. These two areas of food production and consumption reflect the cultural-political polarization currently plaguing the human food supply.

In between the white lab coat manufacturing and denim bib overall farming is the organic foods industry. This industry encompasses the gamut of anything referred to as natural foods, a term which is sometimes used to label an offshoot hybrid food item developed by mainstream manufacturers to describe one of their standard products that has been modified to meet a new demand in this niche market. So called natural foods, on the other hand, developed by the organic and natural foods industries sometimes also culminate in the most up-to-date consumer

informed products, meeting the demand for local, grass-fed, gluten-free, raw or wild, vegan or vegetarian, no added hormones, BPA-free packaged, no high fructose corn syrup, whole grain, low glycemic, high fiber, low-carb, non-GMO, heart-healthy, organic, all-natural, fairly traded, sustainably raised or ethically sourced food products.

From the original health food and hygienic movements at the turn of the century to the granola-eaters of the boomer generations, the organic foods industry has in turns moved from whole grains and other foods purchased from bulk bins and poured and weighed into consumer-brought jars and bags, to hermetically sealed, individual sized portions of pre-cooked ready-to-eat or –microwave natural foods products sporting a seal of organic certification. These historical shifts raise some questions that consumers may or may not be aware of when making selections at the grocery store or online: What's really in that particular food item? Can I find out the truth of what's in that item by the information given on the food label? Why does all the food, even a bag of nothing but dry split peas, still have a food label? Might there be something in that food item that will not be revealed on the food label? Can I trust the food label? Can I trust the food? Can I trust the food packager or manufacturer? If I buy a food item from a health food store, can I be sure that it is healthy? These are some questions that consumers, including myself, anguish over every time they shop for food. This anguishing over and questioning about our food choices, fueled by a history and trajectory of massive changes in how our food is grown, packaged and manufactured, drives the present study. Answers may be found by rhetorically addressing food items and how they're labeled, focusing on the organic foods industry products and their labels.

The Rhetoric of Food Labels

I don't remember exactly when I began reading food labels in order to decipher or ascertain what was in my food. Perhaps it began in the 80s and certainly by the 90s when I was diagnosed with cancer. In the 80s my concern for the contents of food was more in keeping a healthy family of three—my husband, my son and myself. In the 90s my concern about food and heightened attention to ingredients was due especially to the wry comment by my surgeon at the conclusion of conventional medical treatment for cancer: "What do you mean, are you cured? Only hams get cured!" Because conventional medicine failed to give answers about why I got sick and how to prevent recurrence, I turned to investigating preventive measures, such as mind/body medicine and the quality of food I was ingesting on a regular basis.

My quest for knowledge of personal preventive medicine, especially in lieu of the lack of its practice in conventional medical quarters, and with a focus on the most basic form of prevention—eating high quality nutritious food and avoiding food that not only lacks nutritive and healing value but also detracts from positive health—led me to employment in a number of health food stores during the turn of the century and into the first decade. This series of jobs allowed many opportunities for informal primary research into what people are looking for and how they go about finding personal preventive healing paths, especially as it pertains to dietary regimens. Searching for the perfect food, or at least food that wouldn't cause illness, begins and ends with food labels.

Although I don't claim to be a health nut let alone any kind of expert or authority on the best dietary practices, I do carry an intense yearning to understand culturally and rhetorically what has happened and is happening to our food supply. I want to understand and rhetorically explore how the list of food ingredients compares to the stories the food labels ply, along with

the manufacturers' willingness to communicate with consumers about their products. There is also the question of authenticity and truth about our food choices—how much do we really want to know about the provenance of our food and how closely does it correlate to its natural form?

Natural Flavors

My interest in food labels culminated with a phrase that kept popping up in the ingredients list, usually toward the end: natural flavors. This phrase seems to appear in almost every processed food item, including organic and so-called natural foods products. The FDA's Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) defines natural flavors as any derivative, and there is a variety of derivation methods listed, of plants or animal products, further defined elsewhere in the code. One can easily find themselves hours later still deep into the FDA's website on these matters, tracing definitions through multiple layers of links within links, and still not feel any level of satisfaction in understanding what this phrase means, or indeed what is ultimately in our food, when viewing all of the other definitions and allowances that one finds along the way. The code is written for food chemists and legal professionals.

There is nothing inherently bad, perhaps, in any of the food substances found under the heading of natural flavors, and many scientists may complain, as reported in the popular media, of "chemophobes" decrying the ubiquitous encroachment of chemical fabrication in all areas of our lives. However, it is the language of the phrase that sounds troubling. For example, the definition of "natural" in the food industry has not been generally defined or codified, except in contrast to the definition of synthetic. The term "flavor" is defined as "flavoring constituents…whose significant function in food is flavoring rather than nutrition" (U.S. Dept. – CFR).

Beyond the FDA's industrial definition natural flavors is interesting for its synecdochical representation of something substantial enough to be listed on a food label as an ingredient, or indeed as a whole food we might recognize in its natural state. When teaching customers on how to read food labels during one of my natural foods employment stints, I would ask "what do you think natural flavors is—something that grows on the natural flavors tree?" Indeed, natural flavors serves as a place-holder for food chemistry concoctions that are there to enhance the flavor of old, dead food that has a shelf life of years; alternatively, it is there to enhance the flavor of foods in order for us to increase our consumption and purchase of them.

So why is natural flavors appearing in organic and natural foods products? Natural and organic foods shoppers are looking for food that promotes health and prevents illness, products that reflect their lifestyle or at least encourage them in the lifestyle to which they aspire. These food products need to have a level of authenticity to represent healthy choices along with differentiating from conventional, "unconscious" food choices.

Authenticity

Looking for authenticity in food is like peeling back onion layers—the more you seek it, the simpler the food gets. Take for example the gluten-free food shopper. In their search for food without gluten they seem to miss a basic point—almost all food in its simplest state is already naturally gluten free: fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains such as quinoa, buckwheat, rice, and millet, fresh cuts of meat, fresh dairy products and eggs, and a wide variety of dried beans, peas, and other legumes. What I observed while working in a health food store is that gluten-free food shoppers agonize in the highly manufactured and pre-packaged food aisles, searching and scrutinizing food labels for a gluten-free statement, an allergen statement, or a list of ingredients without the gluten offenders of which they are aware. The point is that gluten-free shoppers

might serve their needs better by steering away from highly processed foods, which almost always contain some gluten, and look for natural, authentic food choices. This is good advice for any consumer, yet certain groups of shoppers get caught up in finding "foods" in the grocery aisles instead of the periphery of the store where fresh, natural food is found.

Kara Shultz, in her chapter "On Establishing a More Authentic Relationship with Food," discusses how we can make better food choices and how this relates to rhetoric. Her analysis is based on Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, or being there, and proposes that we can understand culture through the everyday experiences of our lives, such as eating along with food choices. In order to make authentic choices, she says, we must exchange a relationship with food based on mass produced, inauthentic and undifferentiated choices for food that is unique, authentic, and differentiated. This relationship is more of a conscious, mindful application of choice over a mindless, groupthink approach to food consumption (224-226). It's as if we give our trust to large corporations along with the federal government if we don't consume consciously—if we don't look at food labels and research the companies—for if we approach our food choices that way, we operate under a tacit understanding that the government would not allow anything harmful on grocery store shelves, and if we do get sick, we have the conventional medical machine to remedy our ails. Refer back to when I made a conscious choice, after my cancer surgeon was bereft of answers as to what caused it and how I could avoid a relapse, to identify lifestyle changes that might address these health concerns.

Rhetoric adds to Shultz' analysis through use of the term deliberation. Deliberation, she elaborates, is used by Heidegger in place of the term rhetoric. Deliberation as used in Heidegger's interpretation of the term can lead to acting on individual consciousness by exposing habitual behavior of mass culture (230). Rhetoric, then, breaks through habits and

opens up a space for authenticity; it gives one agency (in the onslaught of mass produced food) to *deliberate* for oneself how one wants to live: authentically or blindly, taking personal responsibility, or allowing the eco-political establishment to remold the self into a simple manifestation of the masses.

Rhetorical Homologies

Patterns of form, or those habitual activities that describe our day-to-day experiences, are what rhetorician Barry Brummett redefines the word homology to describe. Sometimes likened to analogy or metaphor, rhetorical homologies go beyond comparison in that they are generative, meaning that they can dialogue with each other to generate more forms of experience. The food label as a form of experience operates on and interacts with the consumer, the manufacturer, and the product in that the forms of food labels are similar, so "probing into the characteristics of some texts and experiences in the set invites examination of other homological texts and experiences in the set to see whether the same characteristics obtain" (258). For example, when we take similar sets of foods labels, such as those from the organic and natural foods industry, and look for similarities in the components of the label, such as the rhetorical story of the food label, the ingredients listings, and the manufacturers' contact information, we can begin to see patterns unfold, thereby gaining a "fruitful way to understand new dimensions of the form itself" (258).

As we begin to delve into a close examination of food label stories through the use of rhetorical homologies, we also begin to understand more about the food we are consuming as well as how to make more conscious, or authentic choices about what we eat. Many studies have been conducted through the years on food labels as they impact human nutrition, daily food choices, and marketing tactics, but nothing has been studied on the rhetorical force of food label

stories. Recently, an English master's thesis was written about organic food packaging as a marketing genre using the three rhetorical appeals to understand how this was effective in establishing a definition of organic (Baker), and a couple of decades ago a communications professor wrote an article about the marketing semantics of large food manufacturers and how they mislead the public into purchasing their products as healthy (Welford). Both of these works tend to favor an approach that focuses on marketing forces. This study endeavors to understand where we are in the current context of mass marketed food choices, how food labels "speak" to us with stories and how they compare with the truth of what's really in the food, and finally to understand how we can begin to become more authentic in our daily lives by not being fooled by the stories we tell *ourselves* about the food we eat.

CHAPTER 2: AMERICAN CUISINE = PROCESSED FOOD

The truth about our food is in its provenance, and also in its packaging. We rely on food packaging to give us clues about its origins, how it was made, manufactured, contained, and ultimately labeled. Most people don't look at food labels, not to the extent that I do and that many other concerned consumers do. When we see food labels and compare the rhetorical strategies used in convincing us to buy, eat, and buy the product again, we can be sure that marketing forces are at play in the big game of Big Food.

Many of us have read or are familiar with Michael Pollan's and Barbara Kingsolver's criticisms of the food industry, and they are well met. However, it would be provident to dig deeper into the underpinnings and machinations of the way our food is produced and mass marketed in order to take back control of what we ingest in order to take back control of our public (and personal) health. These are big issues that are at stake in reading about and understanding the rhetorical stories of food labels, and are the present task of this chapter.

American Cuisine

American cuisine strongly features processed food. Since the time of exploration and trade, we really cannot discuss the idea of local or regional cuisine with any degree of finality. But first, why should we even care? What does cuisine have to do with our food choices? Cuisines organize our food choices into cultural as well as familial menus. Long ago we were raised on a limited amount of what we considered edible in our immediate worlds. Some things were good to eat, or healthy to eat, or not. This is what cuisine does for individuals; for nations, it creates an identity as well as an economy. As I will illustrate in subsequent chapters, food labels may help us to decide what foodstuffs belong to our cuisine.