

The below post appeared on a now defunct blog, La Vida Locavore

Subject: Ending Foodie Fat Bashing, by Linda Bacon, PhD ([www.lindabacon.org](http://www.lindabacon.org))

It's rare to find a blog committed to sustainable agriculture that isn't studded with references to an "obesity epidemic" as visible manifestation of a food system gone wrong. Kudos to Jill Richardson for being thoughtful on this topic and setting the tone for a kinder, more evidence-based community on La Vida Locavore. (And thanks, Jill, for calling attention to my book and research in past blog posts; I'm glad to know that I was influential here.)

Because so many in the foodie community do use obesity as a rallying call – and with damaging unintended consequences - I provide the below information to help educate.

We want to make our food system more sustainable - and we value improved population health. And **we care about social justice**, believing all people deserve access to nutritious, sustainable foods – and respect. **I am concerned, however, that many of us have bought into myths about health and weight that get in the way of achieving these goals – and are causing more harm than good.**

To inject sound data into the discussion and public policy around health and weight, I co-authored this peer-reviewed article just published in *Nutrition Journal*: <http://www.nutritionj.com/content/10/1/9>. (For a shorter, less academic read, some of the science is summarized here: [http://www.lindabacon.org/HAESbook/pdf\\_files/HAES\\_Manifesto.pdf](http://www.lindabacon.org/HAESbook/pdf_files/HAES_Manifesto.pdf) and in a targeted press release that can be found here: <http://www.lindabacon.org/pdf/DietDogmaMisguidedPR022811.pdf>.)

On the same topic is an **open letter to the sustainable food community** that appears in my book, *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight*. You can read it here: [http://lindabacon.org/HAESbook/pdf\\_files/HAES\\_Message%20to%20Foodies.pdf](http://lindabacon.org/HAESbook/pdf_files/HAES_Message%20to%20Foodies.pdf).

The basic idea is this: **regardless of whether we consider the science behind weight and health or the social justice concerns, the conclusion is the same: trumpeting obesity fears, predicating our work on "obesity prevention," and encouraging people to lose weight is not just misguided, it's downright damaging.**

I understand that this is something that too many in the sustainable agriculture and health communities would rather ignore, because the data refute longstanding, widespread - and incorrect - notions about health and weight. Like the "fact" that thin people live longer than fatter ones. Or that fat is a primary driver in metabolic disease. Or that weight loss prolongs life. Or that "obesity" is costing billions in health expenditures. (None is true. See the peer-reviewed article for evidence.)

Sure, "obesity prevention" brings attention (and even funding), but at what cost? What if otherwise healthy people are dieting and weight-cycling their way toward health problems because of our judgments? What about our contribution to the damaging and widespread body insecurity that plagues people of all sizes? And what about the thinner people who get the message that as long as they're thin, what they eat doesn't matter?

Can you imagine what it feels like for fatter people to be pummeled on a daily basis with news that their bodies constitute a horrifying health crisis (it's not) – and how that might dampen their interest in participating in our movement? One (self-identified) fat friend of mine declined to join me on a

sustainability listserv on those grounds. "I'll bet I'm as big a 'foodie' as anyone on that list," she emailed, "organic-buying, community-garden-growing, SlowFood locavore that I am. But I cannot tolerate the wholesale unexamined assumptions that get made in that community about people who look like me."

Or consider the feelings of a teenager at a school with an active "prevent childhood obesity" campaign who recently asked me through her tears, "Don't they understand how it feels to walk through the halls and be confronted with signs that say, 'we don't want anyone to look like you'? Don't my skinny friends need to hear the message that eating well and being active matters?"

By encouraging good food policy on its own merits, we can address real health concerns, giving both fat and thin people the respect and support they deserve.

There are many free resources to educate yourself on the Health at Every Size movement, listed above, and also in the HAES Community Resources ([www.HAESCommunity.org](http://www.HAESCommunity.org)). I encourage everyone to visit the HAES Community Resources to at least sign the "HAES Pledge" and let others know that there is a large community of us who support this shift in focus. More information can also be found in my book, *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight* ([www.HAESbook.com](http://www.HAESbook.com)). I'm also tweeting ([www.twitter.com/LindaBaconHAES](http://www.twitter.com/LindaBaconHAES)) and FaceBooking (<http://ow.ly/3X2Sh>) on these issues regularly.

In solidarity,  
Linda Bacon, PhD