

# OPINION

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to [news@portlandobserver.com](mailto:news@portlandobserver.com).

## Good Food Movement Needs Science, Too

We can move forward sustainably

BY JILL RICHARDSON

Perhaps you've heard some organic food advocates say, "We should just roll back the clock and farm the way we used to" — before modern science gave us factory farms and genetically modified ingredi-

ents. Others disagree, saying that we'd all starve if we didn't use science and technology in farming.

It's a big debate. But maybe the turning of a clock isn't the right metaphor.

Instead, I thought recently of an old Chinese saying: "Draw snake, add legs." It refers to when some-

one gets so carried away in doing something that they carry it too far, ruining it by adding extra, useless things.

A study of how our food system developed over the last century appears to be a clear case of drawing a snake and adding legs.

My master's thesis is on chickens. I've dug into historical documents going back to the late 1800s to learn how Americans raised chickens over time. It's not a pretty picture.

At the start of the 20th century, breeders bred chickens for aesthetic qualities that would win chicken shows. They took no notice of whether their chickens were any good at laying eggs or valuable for meat.

That might be nice if awards from chicken shows put food on the table, but I think eggs and meat

taste better than blue ribbons.

It wasn't a great deal for the chickens, either.

A 1918 study found some American city dwellers keeping up to 200 chickens in their backyards as for-profit ventures. The researchers reported that each person interviewed claimed to take good care of their chickens. Yet examinations found the birds covered in lice.

In one instance, a woman had 60 more chickens in her yard than could fit in her coop. In another case, some of the chickens died and the owner left them to rot in the yard. A few times, the researcher noted the smell was so bad he could barely tolerate staying long enough to conduct the interview.

As late as the 1950s, scientists still didn't know everything there was to know about chicken nutrition. Chickens survived because they foraged outside to meet their

nutritional needs. Diseases that are now rare were common. Early incubators served to spread germs, so that one infected chick spread disease to all of the others as they hatched.

Have science and technology improved these conditions? Absolutely.

Did we take it too far? Did we draw legs on a snake? I would say so.

Once scientists figured out how to cope with disease and provide for all of a chicken's nutritional needs in a manufactured feed, they found they could keep them in confinement. The cooped-up birds went from having four to five square feet each in the early 20th century to just half a square foot apiece by 1966.

Stressed by confinement, chickens began pecking one another — sometimes to death. A solution, devised in 1942, was de-beaking. Breeders found that if they re-

moved the tip of each bird's beak, this kind of stress-induced pecking became less lethal.

The answer to science that leads to animal cruelty and environmental degradation, however, isn't less science. It's better science. There's no need to turn back the clock on progress, or to erase the snake and start over.

Today's science tells us that eggs are more healthful when hens are allowed to forage on bugs and grass. And odds are, if you want to keep backyard chickens, you'll be grateful for a century of work eradicating parasites and disease. So will your neighbors.

If we use our judgment, we can find a way to move forward sustainably, healthfully, humanely — and scientifically.

*OtherWords* columnist Jill Richardson is the author of *Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It*. [OtherWords.org](http://OtherWords.org).



## Changing the Conversation when it comes to Gender

Fighting the Trump insult method of debate

BY LAURA FINLEY

The "woman card." It's so much nonsense. Donald Trump is merely the latest to accuse a woman of playing identity politics because she, well, actually discussed the fact that the U.S. still has much to improve in terms of gender equality.

Trump alleges that Clinton is discussing women's issues so she

can win the votes of women. The nerve of her, trying to win the support of more than 50 percent of the population! It's like she's running for the highest office in the country or something. Clinton's response was terrific: "If fighting

for women's health care and paid family leave and equal pay is playing the woman card, then deal me in."

Other responses to Trump's comments bothered me, though. Elizabeth Warren said that Trump "wears the sexism out front for everyone to see," which is undeniably true. More than just one man's sexism, though, the whole affair is a stark reminder that we really need to change the

conversation when it comes to gender. And, doing so has to go beyond attacking people for the same things women abhor—emphasizing our looks more than our words.

For instance, Warren made fun of Trump's hair in her response to his comments. There's no need to play that same game; his remarks would be no more palatable were he to shave his head or sport a

cause of the antiquated notion that men can't be feminists.

Likewise, advocacy for gender equality should not be marginalized because the proponent happens to be attractive or even sexy, as is often the case when female celebrities like Beyonce speak out. Similarly, when we disagree with a sexist remark, like those made by Trump, we have to resist

shifting who is the oppressor or the oppressed does not challenge structural inequality.

Birth control and reproductive freedom, for instance, are not "women's issues," they are concerns for anyone who wants to (or does not want to) have children, not about males or females. Paid family leave is about families, regardless of the gender of both par-



*Birth control and reproductive freedom, for instance, are not "women's issues," they are concerns for anyone who wants to (or does not want to) have children, not about males or females. Paid family leave is about families, regardless of the gender of both parents.*

*Domestic violence is not a women's issue, it's a public health concern that costs the country an estimated \$8.3 billion annually.*

mullet. Likewise, Clinton's recognition of the importance of equal pay would mean no less were she a supermodel.

Too often, advocates of gender equality are marginalized because of how they appear. It is way past time that we worry about someone's actions, not the package in which they are wrapped. Feminists come in so many varieties, and their work shouldn't be trivialized because someone doesn't like their voice or pantsuit or be-

the urge to comment on his appearance, as it also shifts the focus and entrenches us into the same duel mentality.

It's unbelievable that issues affecting all of us are even still called "women's issues." In this patriarchal society, labeling something a woman's issue reinforces the same binary way of thinking about gender that produces the problem in the first place. Like Gloria Steinem argued decades ago in her classic piece "If Men Could Menstruate,"

Domestic violence is not a women's issue, it's a public health concern that costs the country an estimated \$8.3 billion annually. These are issues of justice and of human rights. But, it will be impossible to change the way we view these problems until we stop using the same tactics that the sexists use.

*Laura Finley, Ph.D., teaches in the Barry University Department of Sociology & Criminology and is syndicated by PeaceVoice.*

The Law Offices of  
Patrick John Sweeney, P.C.

Patrick John Sweeney  
Attorney at Law

1549 SE Ladd, Portland, Oregon

Portland: (503) 244-2080

Hillsboro: (503) 244-2081

Facsimile: (503) 244-2084

Email: [Sweeney@PDXLawyer.com](mailto:Sweeney@PDXLawyer.com)