

# Panera Bread Takes a Page from 'Food Babe's' Playbook



By Alex Berezow, PhD — July 13, 2017



Panera Bread ad on Twitter

Vani Hari, the infamous "Food Babe" who says that we shouldn't eat anything that we can't pronounce, has a new emulator: Panera Bread.

It pains me to write this article because I love Panera Bread. They know me by my name at the restaurant at which I typically eat. However, their management and marketing team have decided that mocking science is the best way to sell food, and this loyal customer is going to fight back.

A few years ago, Panera launched a "[clean food](#) [1]" campaign. That sounds innocent, but the implication is clear: Our food is clean, and *their* food is dirty. Scaring people about the safety of our food supply is a dishonest tactic shamelessly deployed by organic activists and companies such as Whole Foods and Chipotle.

In both cases, that strategy backfired. The very companies that Whole Foods accused of selling dirty food are now [beating Whole Foods at its own game](#) [2]. And things went even worse for Chipotle. After it bragged about going GMO-free, [Chipotle poisoned its customers with \*E. coli\*, \*Salmonella\*, and Norovirus](#) [3].

So, from a purely strategic viewpoint, Panera is making a huge, unnecessary gamble. If and when a food poisoning outbreak happens at one of their restaurants, it's going to make their "clean food" campaign a target of derision.



Now, Panera Bread has decided to up their anti-science tactics. On Twitter, they are mocking big, scary-sounding words from chemistry -- a page straight out of the Food Babe's playbook.

They are taking aim at butylated hydroxyanisole, more commonly known as BHA, a widespread artificial preservative. Is there anything wrong with BHA? No. The [FDA says it's safe](#) [4].

But it doesn't matter what the FDA or scientific data says. Panera Bread is declaring war on "artificial" ingredients because it knows that there is money to be made hyping the widespread, unscientific fallacy that "natural is better." And if it has to throw science under the bus to make a few extra bucks, well... that's just business. It's nothing personal.\*

That attitude is infuriating. Our society is woefully illiterate on scientific matters. Yet, instead of taking the opportunity to educate customers about the benefits of food science, some companies have chosen to cash in on public ignorance. How very disappointing.

*\*Note: I contacted Panera Bread for a comment. They did not respond.*

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**Links**

[1] <https://www.panerabread.com/en-us/articles/100-percent-of-our-food-is-100-percent-clean.html>

[2] <http://www.acsh.org/news/2017/05/10/whole-foods-free-range-chickens-have-come-home-roost-11261>

[3] <http://www.acsh.org/news/2015/12/09/2015-chipotles-year-from-hell-a-peno>

[4] <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfCFR/CFRSearch.cfm?fr=172.110>