

Over at *Forbes*, we find an article entitled, "The Kobe Beef Lie."

The article points out that while there is a large business in the US (in particular) providing Kobe Beef, there is actually no such thing as Kobe Beef. The reason that an entire industry has taken root in the US has to do with regulation rather than reality. Here's the key point the article makes:

"How is this possible?" you ask, when you see the virtues of Kobe being touted on television food shows, by famous chefs, and on menus all over the country? A dozen burger joints in Las Vegas alone offer Kobe burgers. Google it and you will find dozens of online vendors happy to take your money and ship you very pricey steaks. Restaurant reviews in the New York Times have repeatedly praised the "Kobe beef" served at high-end Manhattan restaurants. Not an issue of any major food magazine goes by without reinforcing the great fat Kobe beef lie. So how could I possibly be right?

The answer is sadly simplistic: Despite the fact that Kobe Beef, as well as Kobe Meat and Kobe Cattle, are patented trademarks in Japan, these trademarks are neither recognized nor protected by U.S. law. As far as regulators here are concerned, Kobe Beef, unlike say Florida Orange Juice, means almost nothing (the "beef" part should still come from cows). Like the recent surge in the use of the unregulated label term "natural," it is an adjective used mainly to confuse consumers and profit from that confusion.

This matters because the reason food lovers and expensive account diners want Kobe beef, and are willing to pay a huge premium for it, is because of the real Kobe's longstanding reputation for excellence. The con the US food industry is running is leading you to believe that what you are paying huge dollars for – like the \$40 NYC "Kobe" burger – is somehow linked to this heritage of excellence. It's not.

Here we see, once again, that regulation has results that are far different than might have been expected. Regulatory authorities have allowed regulations to be used to create a faux-industry that likely would not otherwise exist – or certainly not in its current brazen condition.