When 'farm to table' is not so much truth as fable

The trend toward local, sustainable food “with a story” has launched a proliferation of so-called “farm to table” restaurants that position their menu items as picked or raised right around the corner.

Laura Reiley, the *Tampa Bay Times* food critic, often sung the praises of such restaurants. However, in a [three-part series](http://www.tampabay.com/projects/2016/food/farm-to-fable/restaurants/?utm_source=nextdraft&utm_medium=email) the newspaper launched this week, in her own words, Reiley said, “But I’ve been had, from the snapper down to the beef.”

“This is a story we are all being fed. A story about overalls, rich soil and John Deere tractors scattering broods of busy chickens. A story about healthy animals living happy lives, heirloom tomatoes hanging heavy and earnest artisans rolling wheels of cheese into aging caves nearby,” Reiley wrote. “More often than not, those things are fairy tales. A long list of Tampa Bay restaurants are willing to capitalize on our hunger for the story.”

As research, Reiley did a lot of fact checking, calling suppliers, even putting food samples into plastic bags in her purse and having them DNA tested by scientists at the University of South Florida.

The results aren’t pretty and can be read [here](http://www.tampabay.com/projects/2016/food/farm-to-fable/restaurants/?utm_source=nextdraft&utm_medium=email).

In the second installment of Reiley's series, she takes on [Farmers' Markets](http://www.tampabay.com/projects/2016/food/farm-to-fable/farmers-markets/), finding items grown not only outside Florida, but in other countries being characterized as local.