

4th & Heart: Leveraging the Possibilities of Ghee and Third-Party Certification for Increased Brand Awareness

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Roberts, T., Pendergrass, K. (2022). **4th & Heart: Leveraging the Possibilities of Ghee and Third-Party Certification for Increased Brand Awareness.** *Third Party Certification Research*. The Paleo Foundation.

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KEYWORDS

- Third-Party Certification
- 4th & Heart Ghee
- Keto Certified
- Certified Paleo
- Brand Awareness

THIRD-PARTY CERTIFICATION RESEARCH**4th & Heart: Leveraging the Possibilities of Ghee and Third-Party Certification for Increased Brand Awareness**Tobias P. Roberts ¹  | Karen E. E. Pendergrass ² ¹Department of Standards, Paleo Foundation, Encinitas, CA²Department of Standards, Paleo Foundation, New York, NY**Correspondence**Tobias Roberts
Department of Community Research,
Paleo Foundation, El Salvador**Contact**¹Email: karen@paleofoundation.com¹Twitter: @5WordsorlessKP²Email: tobias@paleofoundation.org**Abstract**

4th & Heart, a health food brand dedicated to crafting high quality, grass-fed ghee sourced from a cooperative of farms in New Zealand, presents an interesting case study in how health food brands can use third-party certifications to build brand awareness.

KEYWORDS

Third-Party Certification, 4th & Heart, Ghee, Keto Certified, Certified Paleo, Brand Awareness

1 | BACKGROUND

While past decades saw butter consumption drop considerably as Americans replaced natural butter with margarine products made from cheap vegetable oils and emulsifiers, today millions of consumers are returning to more natural diets based on real foods, including butter. A 2014 study found that Americans consumed around 23 sticks of butter per capita each year, which amounted to almost 900,000 tons of butter consumed nationwide [1]. That figure has only grown as the \$2 billion butter industry continues to show sharp signs of growth [2].

At the same time, however, up to 50 million Americans suffer from some sort of lactose intolerance, including about three-quarters of African Americans and almost nine out of ten Asian Americans [3]. For this enormous percentage of the population, are those cheap margarine sticks loaded with chemical additives the only alternative to butter?

Founded in 2014 under the name Tava Organics, LTD, the health food brand 4th and Heart has stepped in to fill an important void within the butter industry. Their wide range of ghee products have taken the country by storm and are now sold in dozens of retailers around the country, including Whole Foods, Sprouts, Ahold, Kroger, Wegman's, Fresh Thyme, Erewhon in Los Angeles, as well as online via their online store, Thrive Market and Amazon.

4th & Heart is also an interesting case study in how third-party certifications can be utilized to attract new customers and develop better brand awareness.

2 | WHO IS 4TH & HEART?

Ghee is a type of clarified butter that is made by removing the milk solids and water from traditional butter. It has long been a staple of Indian and other

Middle Eastern cuisines, and was an important part of Ayurvedic medicine and diets. While making ghee does take more time than making butter, it is also a lactose-free alternative that can be eaten by people who are sensitive or allergic to dairy products. Some people have described ghee as coconut oil with a buttery taste.

For cooking purposes, ghee has a much higher "smoke point" than butter (around 485 degrees Fahrenheit). This means that ghee can safely be used as a substitute for vegetable oils without having to worry about your vegetables and meats becoming imbued with an unpleasant smoky flavor that can happen when sautéing with butter. Ghee also doesn't have to be refrigerated, thus giving it a much longer shelf life than butter or other traditional dairy products.

According to their website, the ghee that 4th and Heart produces is sourced from the highest quality grass-fed butter that they purchase from a cooperative of farms in New Zealand. "Grass is naturally high in Vitamin A, D, E, K and CLA. When the cow's milk is rich with these vitamins, it goes directly to the butter and therefore the ghee," they state [4].

Essentially, then, ghee offers a more plentiful dose of the good fat that is found in butter, is able to be consumed by people with dairy allergies, and has a longer shelf life due to the fact that it doesn't need to be refrigerated. While ghee hasn't been shown to be able to lower cholesterol levels, it certainly does not increase bad LDL cholesterol levels while adding significant amount of the fat soluble vitamins A, D and E. Despite the numerous benefits associated with ghee, overall levels of consumption have historically been low, especially when compared to butter and margarine. The food brand 4th and Heart saw an

opportunity to introduce a healthier, more nourishing product that would instantly appeal to the millions of people adopting diets focused on natural foods that are low in carbs and high in healthy fats, including the Paleo Diet, the Keto Diet, and the Whole 30 Diet.

According to 4th and Heart's co-founder Raquel Tavares, "I chose ghee because I'd spent the better part of a year deciding what type of company I was going to start and through the process of elimination chose ghee. Ghee fulfilled many of the critical components to launching and succeeding in the food industry, some of which were authenticity, shelf stability, familiarity and innovative. [5]"

Tatiana Nesello, brand manager for 4th & Heart, tells The Paleo Foundation that "the motivation for starting 4th & Heart "was inspired by a mission to revolutionize the modern-day pantry with the versatile superfood, ghee butter. Our line of artisanal ghees were thoughtfully created to nourish consumers and inspire a healthier and more fulfilling lifestyle."

Raquel's mother was Registered Dietician and Ayurvedic Practitioner and introduced her to the wonders of ghee in her early 20's. While 4th and Heart has expanded into new health food products, their line of ghee-based products continues to be the mainstay and staple ingredient of their product portfolio.

The ghee-based products that were available to consumers before 4th and Heart launched were almost all simple, unflavored products. To make ghee more appealing and engaging to the general public and especial health food enthusiasts, they carefully sourced raw ingredients, improved upon the manufacturing process, and introduced a wide range of flavor profiles to make ghee a much more versatile product in the kitchen. Among the flavored ghee products offered by

the brand, consumers can find California Garlic, Himalayan Pink Salt, and Madagascar Vanilla Bean.

During the manufacturing process, 4th and Heart slowly cooks the grass-fed butter until the milk solids become crisp and the water evaporates. A double filtering process ensures that all the milk solids are removed, making the product 100 percent free of lactose.

Raquel goes on to say that “interestingly enough, it’s the feed (grass versus grain) and the type of cow that indicate the butter’s and therefore the ghee’s vitamin profile, fat profile and the color of butter/ghee! You’ll find all of the omega-fatty acid profiles in ghee, but what makes it special is the butyrate it possesses that isn’t found in coconut oil, margarines or other everyday vegetable oils. While it’s still in butter, it is more concentrated in ghee as we are removing about 20 to 30% of water and milk solids out of butter to make the ghee. [6]”

Tatiana also mentions that “grass-fed butter contains a much higher level of nutrients, including antioxidants, vitamins, fatty acids and conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), which can improve gut health and biochemistry. Grain-fed cows do not deliver these powerful benefits.”

The high butyrate content found in ghee is yet another added health benefit of ghee. This fatty acid is naturally found in the lining of the human gut, and is often depleted or even completely removed due to the high level of consumption of processed oils, which are an unfortunate staple in the modern day diet. By replacing highly processed vegetable oils with ghee, the butyrate levels in your gut will naturally replenish, thus aiding digestion while adding essential minerals to your diet.

3 | ATTENDING TRADESHOWS TO FIND INVESTORS TO GROW THE BRAND

Introducing a relatively innovative food product into the health food industry comes with a set of challenges. While some investors might be eager to support brands that venture into already-established products within the health food industry, “selling” a new product idea to investors will require a solid business strategy and confidence in your product.

Tavares and her co-founder started 4th and Heart with about \$80,000 of personal savings, allowing the company to begin the process of experimenting with product development and testing local markets. The company really took off after presenting at the 2015 edition of the Expo West Tradeshow. Expo West is one of the largest trade show events within the natural foods industry, and is a proven opportunity for food brands to reach natural, organic and healthy lifestyle buyers. The event (unfortunately cancelled this year due to the ongoing pandemic) offers opportunities for startup food brands to connect with retailers, distributors, health practitioners and food service professionals.

According to one recent study, more than three-quarters of the executive decision makers for retailers who attend tradeshow claimed to find at least one new supplier at the last show they attended [7]. For Tavares and her partners at 4th and Heart, the booth at the 2015 edition of Expo West allowed the brand to capture important investor attention. The company secured their first deal with UNFI, one of the leading organic and natural food distributors in the company.

This original deal gave the brand traction to continue attracting important and strategic investors. Shortly after an intensive rebranding campaign, 4th and Heart

also attracted more investor capital through a Series A crowd-funding campaigning. In 2016, the company secured over \$2.2 million in revenue and was well on its way to becoming an established brand within the health food industry.

Though ghee was not exactly a household item found in refrigerators across the country when 4th and Heart launched, its retailers were extremely quick to adopt the brand and commercialize the ghee-based products. In an interview with Forbes Magazine, Tavares says that “I had an idea and I didn't know how fast it was going to take off...We were in a small category and the idea was just starting to trend. [8]”

The success of 4th and Heart is a revealing example of how small food brands can anticipate market trends and introduce healthier food products that have yet to be adopted by the general population. The fact that they are now sold in thousands of points of distribution across the country is testament to the success of their product innovation and their ability to use trade shows and crowd funding in order to attract investors that allowed the scale-up to happen quickly.

4 | THE ROLE OF THIRD-PARTY CERTIFICATIONS IN GROWING BRAND AWARENESS

Independent, third-party, impartial certifications for food products is certainly an important part of the process in establishing a sense of trust and transparency with a loyal consumer base. In an increasingly competitive health food space, brands that are able to construct this relationship of trust and transparency are better positioned to establish themselves in the market. Another often overlooked advantage of third-party certification, however, is the opportunity to grow brand awareness. The 2016 Label Insight Transparency ROI Study found that

“nearly all consumers (94 percent) are likely to be loyal to a brand that offers complete transparency. What's more, transparency ranked highest in a list of factors that motivate consumers to be loyal to a brand, with 25 percent listing it as their top factor. [9]”

Transparency and brand awareness are thus intimately intertwined with consumers recognizing those brands that they come to trust. Paleo, Keto, and other third party certification programs offer the opportunity for brands to immediately construct a relationship of trust with consumers, which is the foundation for long-term brand awareness.

4th and Heart's brand manager Tatiana Nesello tells the Paleo Foundation that the company's Paleo Certified and Keto Certified certifications have helped the brand grow and attract new consumers. “4th & Heart works hard to uphold its products' high standards,” Nesello says. “With Paleo and Keto certifications, we are able to address consumers' dietary needs and desire for transparency.”

Additionally, Nesello believes that 4th and Heart's third party certifications have led to a corresponding boost in sales and has also helped attract new retailers. “We know that our consumers feel assured seeing the Paleo and Keto certifications on our pack,” she ensures. “We always proudly share our certifications when we speak with new retailers and in new communities, as their customers are always looking for products that meet those specific needs.”

Market research overwhelmingly shows that consumers are continually demanding healthier and more nutritious food options. After decades of being bombarded with empty calories and highly-processed foods, the ballooning rates of obesity, diabetes, heart

disease, and other diet-related health issues have led to a shift in what retail grocers are putting on their shelves and offering to their customers.

In fact, a 2018 study published in the journal BMC Public Health finds expresses the following:

“Supermarket retailers, mostly representing independent stores, perceived customer demand and suppliers’ product availability and deals as key factors influencing their in-store practices around product selection, placement, pricing, and promotion. Unexpectedly, retailers expressed a high level of autonomy when making decisions about food retail strategies. Overall, retailers described a willingness to engage in healthy food retail and a desire for greater support from healthy food retail initiatives. [10]”

Besides the ability to build trust with consumers and offer products that retailers are looking for, Nesello also mentions that 4th and Heart’s third-party certifications have also opened new avenues for furthering the process of building brand awareness. Nesello mentions that their Paleo, Keto and non-GMO certifications have given the brand “the opportunity to serve and partner with health coaches, developing brand awareness. As the Paleo Foundation strives to educate consumers about the benefits of the Paleo and Keto lifestyles, our brand benefits from this communication.”

Essentially, the wider the appeal and knowledge

related to the health benefits of certain diets (such as the Keto or Paleo diets) or nutritional standards (such as avoiding genetically modified foods), the better the opportunity for brands to attract new customers and grow their brand awareness. Nesello recommends independent, third-party certification to small health food brands just getting started because she believes “it’s a good way to differentiate yourself from your competitors and start building a following based on the highest product quality.”

5 | 4TH & HEART PRODUCTS THAT FEATURE PALEO AND KETO CERTIFICATION PROMINENTLY



Figure 1: 4th & Heart product images retrieved from <https://fourthandheart.com/products/>

6 | 4TH & HEART CERTIFICATIONS

4th & Heart's third-party certifications include:

- Certified Paleo
- Keto Certified
- Non-GMO Project Certified
- Whole30
- Kosher Dairy
- Gluten-Free

7 | CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

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