

Mapping 100 Years of Narrative Formation

The anti-seed oil narrative didn't emerge from a single campaign. Two decades of layered media, niche science, and shifting consumer culture built the infrastructure to bring a fringe nutritional argument mainstream.

THREE PHASES

PHASE 01

1911-1990s

The Origin Story

Cottonseed oil repositioned as food, the mid-century shift from animal fats, and 1990s fast food tallow switch: the genuine industrial history that gives the narrative its emotional foundation and most durable origin myth.

PHASE 02

1990s-2010s

The Intellectual Scaffolding

The Weston A. Price Foundation, the trans-fat vindication, the "Hateful Eight" framing, and the rise of Paleo, CrossFit, and Whole30 condition millions of consumers to treat animal fats vs. industrial seed oils as a moral divide.

PHASE 03

2018-2022

The Viral Infection

A false EU canola ban rumor becomes foundational lore. The Rogan/Saladino crossover brings it to mass audiences. By 2022, seed-oil avoidance is an identity marker, not a diet.

The seed oil narrative is an example of how discourse about a singular ingredient can cross from wellness fringe into federal policy. CCOs and public affairs leaders at food and consumer brands face real exposure, and a closing window to act.

PROTECT

Defend Your Current Position

- Know your exposure before a crisis hits. Map which of your products and brands are already appearing in ingredients discourse, and in which communities.
- Brief leadership now. This is a coordinated narrative operation amplified by affiliate economics and political capture, not spontaneous consumer concern.
- Prepare reactive messaging in advance. When a reporter or influencer names your brand, improvised responses accelerate damage.

PREVENT

Stop Escalation Before It Spreads

- Don't engage fringe amplifiers directly. Responding legitimizes the claim, grows the audience, and hands them a new story.
- Audit your owned channels for content that can be screenshot, stripped of context, or repurposed as evidence against you.
- Build industry coalitions now. Isolated brand responses are far weaker than coordinated sector-wide positioning, and competitors face the same threat.

WIN

Take Back the Narrative

- The policy window is closing. MAHA's influence over FDA and dietary guidelines is accelerating: companies that engage the policy arena now will shape outcomes.
- Invest in third-party scientific credibility before you need it. Brand voice alone will not move public trust in this environment; credentialed validators will.
- Build a positive nutrition story. Audiences respond to what your products contribute to health, not just what they don't contain.

Monetized Misinformation

Thousands of creators, podcasters, clinicians, brand founders, and politicians independently arrived at the same “industrial” seed-oil threat, not solely through coordination, but because the incentives all pointed the same way.

THE NARRATIVE’S ORIGINS

The popular narrative that seed oils are uniquely toxic is the product of roughly two decades of layered alternative-health media, a maturing affiliate-marketing economy, and the post-COVID collapse of trust in public-health institutions, eventually consolidated under a political MAHA banner.

THREE CONVERGING FORCES

01

Two Decades of Alt-Health Media

Paleo, keto, carnivore, and ancestral-diet communities conditioned millions of consumers to treat animal fats vs. industrial seed oils as a moral divide.

02

Maturing Affiliate Marketing Economy

Affiliate networks incentivized thousands of creators to repeat identical claims. Sincere belief and financial grift became nearly impossible to disentangle.

03

COVID Trust Collapse & Political Capture

Post-pandemic distrust of institutions primed audiences for the argument. MAHA politics gave the narrative federal legitimation it could not have achieved alone.

 Industrial Origins Intellectual Scaffolding

1911

 Crisco Launched By Procter & Gamble

Cottonseed oil, an industrial byproduct, is repurposed as food. The origin of the “seed oil as industrial product” narrative frame.

1980s

 America Shifts From Animal Fats To Vegetable Oils

Ansel Keys’ diet-heart hypothesis and the 1980 Dietary Guidelines accelerate a decades-long transition away from lard and tallow.

1990

 Fast Food Chains Switch Tallow To Vegetable Oil

Pressure from public-health advocates ends fast food chains’ beef-tallow fry formulas. Now one of the most cited symbolic origin stories in anti-seed oil rhetoric.

1990s

 Trans-Fat Scandal Vindicates Fat Critics

Genuine vindication of part of the industrial fat critique; seeds broad distrust of nutritional orthodoxy.

1999

 Weston A. Price Foundation

Keeps the case for traditional fats alive in fringe circles. Builds infrastructure of books, conferences, and practitioners.

2007

 Good Calories, Bad Calories (Gary Taubes)

Reopens the saturated-fat debate in mainstream nonfiction, provides a citation base everything downstream draws on.

2008

 “Hateful Eight” Coined (Dr. Cate Shanahan)

Deep Nutrition singles out canola, corn, cottonseed, soy, sunflower, safflower, and grapeseed. The definitive shorthand.

2014

 The Big Fat Surprise (Nina Teicholz)

Brings saturated-fat revisionism to a broad audience. Combined with Paleo, CrossFit, and Whole30, conditions millions to read every label.

Inflection Points:

Missed Windows for Counter-Action

Late 2018

The EU Canola Ban Rumor

A false claim that the European Union had banned canola oil as carcinogenic began circulating online, pushed by pseudo influencers and their communities. It was never true, but became foundational lore before the broader narrative had crystallized.

Counter Action:

Fact-checking partnerships, surfacing EU regulatory clarifications in search, and direct outreach to creators could have prevented this claim from becoming lore. Low cost, compounding effect.

2020

The Rogan / Saladino Crossover

The moment the narrative crossed from niche to mainstream visibility. Tens of millions of listeners heard seed oils framed as "industrial waste" driving chronic inflammation.

Counter Action:

Defense required getting credible counter-voices — Peter Attia, Layne Norton, or Stephan Guyenet — into similar tier podcasts within weeks. Mainstream nutrition science had no podcast-native communications muscle.

2021–2022

Affiliate Network Maturation

Financial conflicts of interest were now dense enough to expose at scale. Identical scripts across unconnected accounts, undisclosed affiliate links, and brands paying for testimonials presented as personal opinion.

Counter Action:

FTC-style disclosure pressure, or simply publishing the network map, would have raised the cost of participation. The peer-reviewed analysis documenting this was published in 2024; the work could have been done in 2022.

2023

Political Alignment

Once RFK Jr. began campaigning on MAHA and the Means siblings entered elite political circles, the contest stopped being a consumer information problem and became a political communications problem.

Counter Action:

The last meaningful window before federal endorsement. Few organizations equipped for the former were equipped for the latter. After this point, the megaphone outscaled any private communications budget.

How a Narrative Takes Over

From fringe wellness forums to federal food policy: the anti-seed oil movement as a model for how health narratives build, cross into the mainstream, and reshape markets.

THREE PHASES

PHASE 01

2020–2021

The Signal

Fringe podcasts, COVID trust collapse, crunchy-mom communities, and affiliate network formation

PHASE 02

2022–2023

The Spread

126M TikTok views, Tucker Carlson, political adoption by RFK Jr., identity entrenchment

PHASE 03

2024–2025

The Impact

Steak 'n Shake switches to tallow, MAHA Commission, 216% market growth, state disclosure laws

2020

Paul Saladino on Joe Rogan, seed oils reach a mass podcast audience

PODCAST

Claims about seed oils as 'industrial waste' reach tens of millions of listeners. The single highest-reach moment in the narrative's journey from niche to visible before any political figure or brand had touched it.

2020

COVID collapses institutional trust, the narrative's biggest accelerant

HEALTH

A large bloc of consumers emerges from the pandemic convinced public-health authorities misled them on COVID, making them unusually receptive to the argument that the AHA had also been wrong about saturated fat for 50 years.

2020–21

"Crunchy mom" and MAHA mom communities adopt the narrative on Instagram

SOCIAL

Wellness-oriented parent communities seed the demographic that will later become a political constituency. Identity formation begins here before any political figure adopts the frame.

2021–22

Affiliate networks mature: identical scripts across unconnected creators

SOCIAL

Hundreds of mid-tier TikTok and Instagram accounts promote tallow brands using near-identical copy — the signature of a coordinated affiliate network, not organic discovery. Financial conflicts go largely undisclosed.

2022

#seedoils hits 126 million TikTok views — avoidance becomes an identity marker

SOCIAL

Driven by anonymous accounts like Carnivore Aurelius, seed-oil avoidance transforms from dietary preference into tribal identity. This phase shift makes the narrative far more durable — and far harder to counter.

126M+

TikTok views · #seedoils

2022

Tucker Carlson brings the narrative to conservative mainstream TV

MEDIA

The narrative crosses from podcast culture into primetime cable news, reframing seed-oil avoidance as part of broader skepticism of institutional food science, opening a new, non-wellness audience.

2023

Casey & Calley Means enter Silicon Valley and Washington DC circles

POLITICAL

Good Energy bridges the gap between wellness influencers and policy infrastructure. The narrative gains access to elite institutional networks for the first time.

2023

RFK Jr. adopts the MAHA platform — the last window before federal endorsement

POLITICAL

The contest stops being a consumer-information problem and becomes a political-communications problem. The window to counter the narrative with science alone has effectively closed.

Oct 2024

RFK Jr. posts “Make Frying Oil Tallow Again” — monetized viral moment

POLITICAL

What began as a wellness claim is now campaign infrastructure. The framing shifts from dietary advice to political identity, and monetized posts follow.

Jan 2025

Steak 'n Shake switches to tallow, appoints a “Chief MAHA Officer”

BRAND

A national fast-food chain becomes a movement standard-bearer. “Seed oil free” begins its transformation from niche wellness copy into mainstream marketing hook, generating enormous earned media.

Feb 2025

Trump signs EO 14212, MAHA Commission established by executive order

POLICY

A narrative born in alternative-health podcasts reaches the White House. Federal legitimation represents the highest-stakes inflection point for food brands and the seed oil industry.

May 2025

Seed Oil Free Alliance launches certification — market surges 216% YoY

BRAND

“Seed oil free” becomes the fastest-growing clean-label claim. SPINS data shows 216% year-over-year growth in Q1 2025. Early-mover brand advantage is now measurable.

+216%
YoY growth

Jun 2025

Texas & Louisiana pass mandatory seed oil disclosure laws (SB 25, SB 14)

POLICY

Disclosure laws take effect 2027–2028. The market moved first; government followed. Legislation is the lagging indicator, not the leading one.

The ecosystem is layered; no single tier could have produced the current environment alone. Together, they form the audience funnel that turned a nutritional argument into a political identity.

GROUP 1

Credentialed Contrarians & Intellectual Anchors

Key Figures:

Dr. Cate Shanahan, Gary Taubes, Nina Teicholz, Loren Cordain, Robb Wolf

Dr. Cate Shanahan provided the “Hateful Eight” shorthand — canola, corn, cottonseed, soy, sunflower, safflower, grapeseed, and rice bran — through *Deep Nutrition* (2008), giving the movement its most durable naming convention. Gary Taubes and Nina Teicholz reopened the saturated-fat debate in mainstream nonfiction: *Good Calories, Bad Calories* (2007) and *The Big Fat Surprise* (2014) respectively. Loren Cordain and Robb Wolf supplied the paleo academic framing that connected ancestral-eating philosophy to opposition to industrial oils.

These figures provided the citation base everything downstream draws on, and their work is substantive enough that simple dismissal is unpersuasive. Any counter-messaging that failed to acknowledge the legitimate core of the critique consistently failed to land. The saturated-fat reopening was based on genuine research that could not be legitimately suppressed; the key question was always whether that work supported the extreme claims being built on top of it.

This tier occupies a different category from the grift-adjacent tiers below. They are credentialed researchers whose work introduced real complexity into nutrition science. The problem was not their findings; it was the ecosystem that weaponized their findings far beyond what the evidence supported.

GROUP 2

Functional Medicine & Clinical Layer

Key Figures:

Dr. Mark Hyman, Dr. Will Cole, Dr. Josh Axe, Dr. Frank Lipman, Casey & Calley Means

Dr. Mark Hyman (founder of the Cleveland Clinic Center for Functional Medicine and host of *The Doctor’s Pharmacy* podcast) is one of the most important bridges between functional-medicine ideology and mainstream health audiences. Dr. Will Cole, Dr. Josh Axe, and Dr. Frank Lipman gave the movement credentialed voices while building supplement and coaching businesses that depend financially on the same anti-industrial-food narrative.

Casey Means (*Good Energy*, 2024) and her brother Calley Means represented a generational evolution of the model: combining medical credentials with Silicon Valley networks and direct access to political circles. Their entry into federal advisory conversations in 2023–2024 marked the moment the narrative transitioned from consumer-health discourse to active policy-shaping.

The key structural feature of this tier is the combination of genuine clinical training with supplement-commerce incentives. This makes the credibility claims difficult to dismiss while creating persistent financial motivations to maintain the narrative. Practitioners whose businesses depend on a consumer base that believes conventional dietary advice is compromised face direct financial risk from any correction of the narrative, making this tier simultaneously influential and structurally resistant to self-correction.

GROUP 3

Podcast & Biohacking Amplifiers

Key Figures:

Joe Rogan, Paul Saladino, Mark Sisson, Dave Asprey, Ben Greenfield, Bret Weinstein, Jordan & Mikhaila Peterson, etc.

Joe Rogan is not anti-seed-oil per se, but The Joe Rogan Experience is the cross-platform laundering machine that confers mainstream credibility by association, and a single appearance by the right guest can push a claim from fringe to mass awareness overnight. Paul Saladino (Carnivore MD) is the single most consequential popularizer: his 2020 JRE appearance was the highest-reach singular moment in the narrative's arc.

Jordan and Mikhaila Peterson's 2018 carnivore adoption pulled the narrative into a more politically engaged, right-leaning audience that overlapped with their existing base. Andrew Huberman and Lex Fridman function as trust-amplifiers: their audiences are primed to believe they are receiving cutting-edge, contrarian science. Peter Attia is notable for being skeptical of the strongest seed-oil claims, yet his audience heavily overlaps with the movement, creating implicit validation through adjacency even without explicit endorsement.

Collectively, this tier functions as a megaphone that amplifies and legitimizes content produced by the credentialed contrarians and clinical layer. The key mechanism is audience scale: a single episode can expose tens of millions of listeners to a claim before any mainstream correction can reach a comparable audience.

GROUP 4

Carnivore, Keto & Ancestral Influencers

Key Figures:

Shawn Baker (MeatRx), Dr. Ken Berry, Dr. Anthony Chaffee, Jimmy Moore, Liver King (Brian Johnson), Gary Brecka, Carnivore Aurelius (anonymous X/Twitter)

These figures built identity communities around seed-oil avoidance as a litmus test for health authenticity; a tribal signal that distinguished "real" ancestral-health adherents from mainstream consumers who remained uninformed or complicit. The anonymous X account Carnivore Aurelius became the rhetorically extreme node on social platforms, distilling the "industrial poison" framing into highly shareable, emotionally charged content designed for virality rather than persuasion.

Shawn Baker (MeatRx) and Dr. Ken Berry command large online audiences that function as seed-oil-avoidance communities, not just information channels. Gary Brecka's biohacking framing connects seed-oil avoidance to performance optimization, expanding the audience beyond traditional wellness demographics into business and fitness communities.

Liver King's (aka Brian Johnson) later exposure for steroid use is instructive: it did not meaningfully deflate the broader narrative. By 2023, the movement had grown larger than any single figure. Individual discrediting events, which might have been decisive earlier in the arc, had ceased to be significant inflection points. The narrative's identity-marker character made it resilient to personal scandals that would have collapsed a more information-based movement.

GROUP 5

Conspiracy-Theoretic Infrastructure

Key Figures:

Mike Adams (Natural News), Dr. Joseph Mercola (Mercola.com), Alex Jones (InfoWars), Vani Hari ("Food Babe")

Mike Adams and Mercola had been publishing anti-seed-oil content for over a decade before it went mainstream, and both run supplement businesses. The Center for Countering Digital Hate identified Mercola as one of the "Disinformation Dozen" responsible for the bulk of anti-vaccine content during COVID. Alex Jones folded seed-oil messaging into a broader "globalists are poisoning you" frame. Vani Hari pioneered the "if you can't pronounce it, don't eat it" style of consumer activism that primed audiences for exactly this kind of claim.

GROUP 6

Affiliate-Driven Creator Economy

Key Figures:

Mid-tier TikTok & Instagram creators promoting tallow brands, "crunchy mom" Instagram groups, "trad-wife" content creators

Hundreds of creators use near-identical scripts to promote tallow-skincare and seed-oil-free food brands, the signature of a coordinated affiliate network rather than organic discovery. Functional-medicine TikTok, "crunchy mom" Instagram, and trad-wife homesteading content absorb the message through skincare and "clean eating" framings. A 2024 peer-reviewed analysis found risks were rarely mentioned, scientific evidence was minimal, and financial conflicts were routinely undisclosed. Sincere belief and grift are hardest to disentangle here.

GROUP 7

Political & Institutional Actors

Key Figures:

RFK Jr. (HHS), MAHA Commission, Steak 'n Shake ("Chief MAHA Officer"), Texas (SB 25) & Louisiana (SB 14) legislators

RFK Jr. moved the topic from podcast guest spot to HHS policy. The May 2025 MAHA Commission report hedged on the science but functionally validated the popular narrative. Steak 'n Shake's January 2025 tallow switch turned a fast-food chain into a movement standard-bearer. Texas and Louisiana legislators converted the messaging into law. The market moved first; government followed.

Important Caveats

The ecosystem is not uniform: Robb Wolf, Mark Sisson, Peter Attia, and Mark Hyman are in a different category from Mike Adams or Alex Jones. The narrative reached the mainstream because it bundled credentialed voices with the grift. And the critics are not wrong that the original anti-saturated-fat consensus involved its own disinformation; any durable response must concede what is genuinely strong in that critique before defending the rest.