



What Happened to Our Food?

Guest: Joel Salatin

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WOODS: Let's start by having you give a two-minute overview of what makes you different in terms of your views on agriculture. A bird's-eye view, and then we'll go through point by point.

SALATIN: [laughing] Well, where do you start? I mean, I'm a heretic. I'm a heretic. I actually wrote a book called *The Sheer Ecstasy of Being a Lunatic Farmer*. So we believe that nature provides the template, so when we look at natural systems, we see they're primarily perennial, not annual, and of course all of American agriculture worships at the altar of growing annuals, not perennials. It is animal-centric; there is no animal-less ecology in the world, so a farm without animals is probably an oxymoron if it's going to be ecological. Nature is primarily carbon-centric and carbon doesn't move very far, so our soil's fertility is generated onsite rather than from offsite. So the point is to look at solar conversion to biomass and convert it onsite rather than offsite. We believe in hydrating the landscape, that rain is actually water and we can do things like ponds or catchments to actually ameliorate floods and droughts. If we want a carbon-centric system, we're going to build water-retentive capacity in the soil, so our whole principle of farming is one of soil building rather than soil depletion. You know, eventually you actually wear out farms—really, our farms should be getting more and more productive. We believe that the default position of nature is wellness, not sickness. In other words, nature is not broken so that we need Monsanto to fix it. Actually, nature runs very well, thank you very much. If we will approach our foodscape from a humble place of natural patterns, we believe that farms should be places of bustling people and activity, not an abandoned place of a bunch of hermit curmudgeon geezers wandering around with nobody to work with, and actually most of the middle-agers working in town to be able to support their farm addiction. We think that typical things on farms that our ancestors used to do for value-adding should be done on farms, that farms should not just be colonial peasants producing raw commodities to be value-added and merchandized by smart people in the cities, that actually the worth of our nation should be centered in rural areas, not in urban areas. So, is that enough for starters?

WOODS: I think that should get us going! Well, let me play devil's advocate as I so often do on this program to make things interesting. Let me present to you the typical case for what we might call the other side, which would say to you, that it's all very nice the bucolic picture that you paint here, but this is the twenty-first century and we have billions and billions of people to feed, and frankly the practices of our ancestors are simply not up to that challenge. We need to use growth hormones for the cows, we need to have non-organic practices, we need to use all these pesticides, we need to use all these chemicals if we're going to be able to feed the world inexpensively.

Okay, now I assume I've got you ready to go here. I've lined this fat softball right over the plate. Let's let you

go now because I honestly am curious: what is the answer to that?

SALATIN: Yes, that is absolutely the most common question I get asked, both in conference speaking and on programs like this from media, journalists, whatever, because ultimately if our system can't feed the world, then it's not credible, and so we have to be able to address that. Interesting, the last word you used in your litany of requirements was "inexpensively." Now, I don't have any problem with anything else except that. The United States right now spends less on food than any other culture in the world per capita. Anywhere in the world. We spend more on health care than any other country. I wonder if there could be a correlation between those.

WOODS: Very interesting.

SALATIN: Is it possible? In the last 35 years, we've exchanged 18 percent per-capita expenditure on food with nine percent per-capita expenditure on food, and in that same amount of time we've gone from nine percent per-capita expenditure on health care to 18 percent. Those numbers have inverted. I would suggest that there is a correlation between those two. In other words, you can't have your cake and eat it, too—we could go into a bunch of clichés here; you get what you pay for.

The empirical science is in: that food like we produce is far more nutritious, it's far superior. Okay. So let's talk about the production itself. First of all, right now, as we speak, the world is producing twice as much human edible food as is necessary. For the first time in human history, 50 percent of all human edible food never reaches a mouth. That's never happened before. Why is it happening right now? Because for the first time in human history, the average morsel of food travels 1500 miles from field to fork. During that amount of time it spoils, it gets blemishes. There are all sorts of problems and issues. And, in fact, chemicalization creates all sorts of problems. In North Carolina, I talked to a lady the other day who lives next to a place where she watches them dump a tractor trailer load of milk every day that's got some sort of problem with it—she lives next to a yogurt plant. And it could be a little bit of antibiotic residue that tested out, it could that's it's a little bit of funky spoilage, whatever, it could be a sell-by date or whatever. The point is there's a massive, massive, unprecedented amount of food waste in the world, primarily due to this segregation between farm and plate.

So if we go to a local-centric system, shorten that chain of custody, then we get far less waste. That's number one.

Number two, our country, just the U.S., what was our country if you took our boundary line 600 years ago, produced more pounds of animals than it does today even with all our chemicals, corn, soybeans, John Deere and everything else. Because there are certain patterns in nature—very intricate, symbiotic, relational patterns in nature. When you break those up and go from multi-speciation, with intricate, complex symbiotic relationships, to mono-speciation—oh, it makes amazing pictures to watch eight combines going down through a thousand-acre field of wheat, and we get this heart palpitation and feel real machismo, like *wow, this is really amazing*, but in actuality, there is far less production there per acre than when it was being harvested from tall grass prairie perennials through bison, elk, antelope, wolves and coyotes. That is a fact. Number two, the United States has 36 million acres of lawn and 36 million acres housing and feeding recreational horses. That's 72 million acres. That's enough to feed the entire country without one single farm or ranch. In order to tap into that, though, it would require an integrated food system, and right now in our techno-sophisticated culture, we don't view food production, or actually getting your hands in the dirt, as something that educated white people do. We only view that as something that the lower echelons of society participate in. I mean, sophisticates join soccer leagues and ballet and do all

that stuff. But farming is for dumb people and brown people.

WOODS: All right, let me play devil's advocate here once again. Let's imagine any situation involving international trade. Let's suppose we get a lot of pencils from South America. On the surface of it, it may seem silly that we would get our pencils all the way from South America; I could make a pencil in a factory down the street. But it could be that the efficiency in producing pencils is so great in South America that it swamps the cost of transportation. The cost of transportation is trivial next to the gains from trade to be gotten from producing pencils in South America. So on the surface of it what may seem absurd may make a lot of sense. Likewise with food, if you've got a profit-seeking enterprise on your hands, why wouldn't they have an incentive to minimize spoilage, to minimize blemishes and waste? If they themselves are enduring it, it must be profitable; it must be worth it to them even to have all this waste, because the system must be generating enough profits that the waste must be from their bottom-line point of view trivial. Why is the profit-and-loss system not translating into the kind of agriculture that you say is the most sensible?

SALATIN: Well, the reason is because the profits are skewed. Right now, the entire system floats on cheap energy. Until the last century, with the discovery of petroleum, we have never in the history of mankind had cheap fuel. Whether it was firewood or animal power or whatever, transportation and fuel, energy, were always extremely expensive—until today. And so, we're actually mining you could say old, stored solar energy in order to create an artificial façade of efficiency. I'm sure you're familiar with the term "externalized cost." The supermarket costs are not actually reflected in the price of the product. I mean, we're even willing to send troops to the Middle East and to have our young people shot up and wounded in order to make sure we have cheap fuel. That's how much we're willing to invest to prop up this crutch of seeming efficiency. I don't know if fuel is going to continue to be cheap; I don't know. But it seems like it would make sense to do whatever we could to reduce our dependence on non-renewable energies regardless of how long they're going to last, we shouldn't just be using them up like a bunch of drunken sailors. I mean, prudence would dictate, hey, we've got this bonanza, let's use it as gently as possible so it lasts as long as possible.

WOODS: Joel, let me run this one by you. What about people who say that the interest in organic food and a lot of the negative attention that genetically modified food has gotten is really not justified by the peer-reviewed literature? They say, show me some peer-reviewed literature that shows that people's health is harmed by non-organic food or harmed by GMO-type food. Show me the demerits and show me the benefits of doing it the other way. They say, yeah, sure, growth hormones may not sound particularly appetizing to have in your burger, but it doesn't seem to harm human health and the price is right. How do you answer that?

SALATIN: [laughing] Well, how you answer that is, like Teddy Roosevelt used to say, it's really hard to get a person to change their mind when their paycheck depends on believing something else. And the material that I read, which is very peer-reviewed, shows that there are all sorts of problems. I mean GMOs alone had 74 reports come out impugning not only the empirical claims of the industry, but also showing direct, direct links.

Let me just give you one example to show you how science is not objective. Science is extremely subjective; it's extremely political. Let me give you one example. When Monsanto was testing GMO potatoes for government approval, they ran a feeding trial on rats, which of course was required by the FDA bureaucrats. So they set up the experiment very carefully and chose geriatric rats. These were very, very old rats. I don't know if there are rat nursing homes, but anyway, these were extremely old, old rats. They fed them for 30 days or 60 days, whatever it was, and nothing. It didn't show any changes or any difference. When the exact

same experiment was repeated in Scotland with exactly the same parameters except using juvenile rats, my goodness, there were organ-weight differences, stress differences, emotional differences, all sorts of issues showed up. The point is, you're not going to see a difference in brain function or organ development in a geriatric rat. I mean, they're not growing anymore anyway. That kind of deception has been repeated over and over and over again in all sorts of scientific things.

Mother Earth News commissioned a scientific study four years ago over two years of pastured eggs. They sent them to a lab and took about 12 items—folic acid, riboflavin, and a couple different things in pastured eggs—and compared to what I call the U.S. Duh official label [TW note: he is pronouncing USDA as a word], it didn't even look like the same product. I'll just pick one, folic acid, which is a really important one for pregnant women, the USDA official dietary label is like 38 micrograms per egg, and our eggs measured about 1050 micrograms per egg. That's off the charts. We've had the same kind of thing happen with grass-finished beef; the same thing kind of happened with pork. We had a chef do a displacement test. He took a bunch of our pork and put it in a beaker of water, a certain number of pounds, and measured the displacement. Took industrial pork from a hog factory and did the same thing. And ours displaced way less water than the one from the industrial factory—i.e., ours is denser, more nutrient-dense, and the factory stuff has no muscle tone and it's slovenly. It's cellulose, it's not nutrition.

Dr. Don Huber from Purdue University is traveling the world, I think he's speaking virtually every week around the world, showing the devastating effects, including links to autism. You know, autism is spiking all of a sudden. Why is autism spiking all of a sudden? We've only had GMOs for about 14 years; this is year 15, I think, and it took 14 years to definitely isolate the DDT connection with infertile frogs, three-legged salamanders and eagle eggs that wouldn't hatch. It took 14 years for that science to finally catch up for a causation. We're now in the fifteenth year of GMOs, and there is a juggernaut, a proliferation of studies from around the world impugning not only the claims, but the ill health effects from these. Dr. Don Huber has documented the glyphosate function with spontaneous abortions, infertility. All these things happen. They don't happen over 60 days feeding geriatric rats; they happen over time, and there's an accumulating effect of these. So the fact is that how you set up the scientific experiment and how long you choose to run the experiment has a direct effect on what the experiment shows. So the people that are saying, "Where's the science, where are the double-blinds?" They're simply reading the Monsanto pabulum; they're not reading the other side. There's a huge portion of the other side, and you just need to take a look at it.

WOODS: Joel, you have a book called *Everything I Want to Do Is Illegal*. I love that title; it may be one of the best book titles I've ever heard. I want to say something about raw milk before you go. Can you start off by giving us the one-sentence definition—what is raw milk?

SALATIN: Raw milk is the way it comes right out of the teat.

WOODS: So there's no pasteurization done to it?

SALATIN: That's correct. Nothing.

WOODS: Okay, so first of all, that makes me wonder: what was the point of pasteurization, why did people celebrate this as a great scientific breakthrough? We're all taught to admire Louis Pasteur for having designed it. That was a step backward, rather than forward?

SALATIN: Well, no. What happened was that during the late 1800s, from about 1860 on as the Industrial Revolution gained steam and the urban centers became more populated, this was all happening prior to

refrigeration. And so the way to have milk and breweries—both of these were liquids that obviously were very fragile without refrigeration—the breweries and dairies moved into the cities with confinement feeding, in fact with the dairy stock eating the distillers grains, the refuse from the beer. And that distillers grain set up an acidosis in the rumen of the cow, which was very conducive to changing the pH and changing the internal structure of the cow, which made her very prone to brucellosis and sorts of problems. So there was a period of time there where the dairies were filthy, the milk was filthy—we were just discovering bacteria, I mean we were still debating at that time whether a doctor should boil his surgical instruments between amputations! We were deciding should you take a bath once a week or once a month; we didn't have indoor plumbing, stainless steel, refrigeration, none of those things. There was a slice of time during this extensive urbanization of the country, without refrigeration, without the infrastructure, that created a real problem in the food system.

Well, during that time farms like the Mayo Clinic built its reputation using pastured milk, grass-fed, raw milk. That's how they got their start. The Mayo Clinic started at that time using healthy, non-urban grass-fed raw cow milk as the antidote for all these problems that people were having.

Okay, so fast-forward to today. Today, what we have now is refrigeration, stainless steel, electric fences, water pipes, nursery shade cloth, pastured systems—extremely clean hygienic systems, monitoring systems, microscopes, litmus tests, little litmus papers you can check mastitis and all sorts of issues. And so we now have a system in place that is extremely hygienic. I mean, in many countries in Europe you can put in euros in vending machines and get glasses of raw milk out of vending machines in the Netherlands and in other places. And so the food safety laws that were written to be a catch-all kind of thing during this blip in food development and urban development history 100 years ago, those laws are now *completely* obsolete.

WOODS: Okay, so they have outgrown their usefulness and yet they stick around. This seems to be the case with a lot of government laws. They just stick around. There's a whole institution that develops around them, and interest groups that develop around them. Why do you think, then—I assume it's your view that raw milk is not a danger to human health, but yet you're not allowed to buy raw milk from your neighbor, you're not allowed to traffic in it—what possible explanation could there be for maintaining this ban?

SALATIN: Oh, because the bureaucrats have all read the 1920s literature, and they're absolutely paranoid. I differ from a lot of my colleagues on this who think there's some big conspiracy. No, there's not a conspiracy. These are some fair-minded, truly they absolutely believe that if they unleashed raw milk on the population that we would have mass, you know, whatever, mass death. And nothing could be further from the truth. But that's their mindset. Which is why the answer is not trying to convince the government to quit trying to pasteurize milk. No, forget that. All we need is a food emancipation proclamation to de-enslave food from the inquisition that's being foisted upon you and I in denying us the freedom to choose the food of our choice from the source of our choice. If we would allow people to actually own their own bodies again—in other words, I'm responsible for me, not you, not the government, not somebody else. If we could allow people to have the freedom to be responsible, if they wanted to be—if they don't, then absolutely, go get the pasteurized, government-approved source, that's fine—but if you want to opt out, if you want to be a heretic, if you want to be on the lunatic fringe.... You know, how a culture treats and handles its innovative lunatic fringe absolutely defines whether a country is a tyranny or a place of liberty. And a country that cannot abide some loose cannons around its edges is a country that's vapid, timid, paranoid, and operating on fear rather than faith.

WOODS: And isn't that funny, that's exactly how they describe the lunatic fringe, with exactly those adjectives, but perhaps they ought to turn that magnifying glass on themselves.

