

POLYFACE FARM BLOG

THIS IS THE OFFICIAL JOEL SALATIN AND POLYFACE FARM BLOG.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 18, 2005

Is HSUS cage-free egg campaign really the answer?

So there I was, sitting in the posh boardroom, deep in the bowels of national headquarters, Humane Society of the US (HSUS), Gaithersburg, Maryland, sandwiched between in-house attorneys and more branded dress shirts and ties than I've been around in awhile.

Invited to the inaugural and historic meeting to launch the NO BATTERY EGGS campaign Apr. 28, I was one of half a dozen egg producers from around the nation brainstorming with the top leadership of HSUS on how to proceed.

Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of HSUS, said this was the "first [time] to bring HSUS and producers together," creating a "new level of engagement."

Paul Shapiro, HSUS manager of the Factory Farming Campaign, emphasized that the whole goal is "no cages." Period. "That's all we're asking."

The other producers were huge cage-free producers, and they were nice enough. But I felt like a total ugly duckling, and at the risk of pouring cold water on this campaign, I will relate a couple of disturbing comments that made my hair stand on end--what little I have left. And I will confess, as I told them, that this discussion did not help my attitude toward bureaucracies--even those as wonderful-sounding as HSUS.

The meeting began at 9 a.m. and lasted until noon, and most of the discussion revolved around integrity, accountability, and certification through an accreditation program. All the other producers were salivating over more market--one admitted he was sitting on 700 cases (that's 21,000 dozen) per week right now that he doesn't have a market for. The logistics of paying \$7,500 per SKU (standardized bar codes required by supermarkets) and breaking in to the Wal-Marts of the world consumed the discussion time.

I waited patiently, listening to all this corporate wrangling, and finally raised my hand and dropped my bombshell. "Folks, I'm afraid

ABOUT ME



JOEL SALATIN
SWOOPE, VIRGINIA,
UNITED STATES

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PREVIOUS POSTS



I'm the Ugly Duckling here, but I don't want my customers going to Wal-Mart, period." As you can imagine, this went over like a lead balloon. Everybody looked at me like I was a leper. Do we really want people going to Wal-Mart instead of the local Farmers' Markets or patronizing the buying club on their street, or a Community Supported Agriculture, or a local farmer?

All the logistical nightmares they were dealing with were all a direct result of trying to deal with a supercenter marketing concept, which I reject as fundamentally flawed. In my opinion, these people should be steering folks to New York City's greenmarkets, not Wal-Mart. These producers were still operating under the western disconnected fragmented reductionist Wall-Streetified model. Not to mention they weren't pasture-based.

When asked if they could really supply the market if this campaign were successful, one producer leaned forward and said proudly: "I can supply the entire market of the mid-Atlantic region." What a telling statement. I would consider such an assumption actually detrimental to decentratized, accountable production. So we replace one giant corporation with another. Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

The second statement that gave me pause was right at the end. An HSUS executive asked: "Are all the players that need to be here actually here?" His good faith question sought to make sure no stone had been unturned in their quest to get the producers represented. And producers came from all around: Illinois, New England, Colorado, etc. The answer from the kingpin producer was this: "Yes, everybody is here." That's not a direct quotation, because there was an adjective I missed. I can't remember if she said everybody necessary, or meaningful, or with integrity. But be that as it may, the point was she intended that the campaign would promote only those of us at the table. She expected a business bonanza.

I quickly countered (my second statement of the day): "I disagree. I'm going to speak for the thousands of 100-500-bird pastured growers across this country who are not here today. I will confess that my biggest fear is that as a result of this meeting and the ensuing media attention that will be focused on this issue, the big players at this table will reap the benefits and you will consider it a great victory to figure out how to transport cage-free eggs from a 10,000-bird house across five states to a market within 5 minutes of a local pastured egg producer. And that would be using your fraternity to further impede a truly decentralized, local, accountable, holistic-based small farmer production system."

That was received coolly as well. One other little tidbit I'll

share. The lead producer used the metaphor of David and Goliath, saying that this campaign really could topple the battery egg production industry. She meant it to be an encouragement to everyone. But here's my take on the metaphor: David was successful because he did not use conventional weapons.

I have never put much faith in fundamentally changing entrenched institutions on their terms. I think history bears out that real change requires brand new institutions. Totally new models, paradigms. Wouldn't it be wonderful if HSUS would put its weight behind local pastured eggs? Now there's something that can fundamentally change things--and bring thousands of farmers into the fold. I got the distinct feeling that the parties at this table on this day were far more interested in transporting cage-free eggs across five states to a Wal-Mart than in emptying Wal-Mart as a model and filling local CSA's, farmers' markets, buying clubs, and farmgates with cheerleader customers.

I know that many would accuse me of being negative on this, but I confess to being frustrated at the feel-goodism over form instead of substance. All of us are guilty of this. We look for the easiest road to guilt assuagement rather than the real paradigm-shattering shift--the 180 degree turn. I know all turns can't be made overnight, but if we get satisfied too easily, we quit really wanting to truly get converted, so to speak.

POSTED BY JOEL SALATIN AT 7:33 PM

47 COMMENTS:

Farmer Buie said...

Very nice post. I'm sure that this blog will be a valuable resource as I strive to be a farmer. Thanks.

9:18 AM

Herrick Kimball said...

Hi Joel,

It is nice to see that you now have a Blog! I hope you will write in it more often. You have a lot of eager students out here!

Best wishes,

Herrick Kimball

The Deliberate Agrarian

12:29 PM

Anonymous said...

Joel,

As one who is sitting on a case or two of eggs from late May and June, I'm going to go give them away at the farmer's market today so they don't get wasted and maybe some more people will get to try real food for a change.

Thanks for speaking up for those of us with a few birds trying to serve our locality. That's me and other people I know.

Because I did a few things in what I realize as the wrong order, i.e. buying land instead of renting it until I could have it free and clear, and not wanting to give up our investment in farming this land, I'm stuck playing in the organic milk market. Which despite all the federal regulations isn't at all what most people assume it to be. Some of the regulations actually tend to promote poor cow care (using bad science...) sigh.

I take some solace in the fact that my goal is to do without Horizon/Dean Foods as fast as possible by building local markets for my meats, eggs and milk and milk products. At least raw milk is legal in PA. It does seem like swimming up hill.

For instance, I got a visit from a food cop a while back. Apparently, I had to be inspected to sell meat from my house. I figured that'd been taken care of when I had the meat slaughtered, cut, wrapped and frozen at an USDA inspected plant, one of the few I could find without driving forever. Noooo. My freezers had to be below zero. And, I'm supposed to prove the potability of my water. I was so stunned by the whole affair, and the inspector was a nice guy who thinks the regulations are silly, that I forgot to ask why I had to have my water inspected not the meat processing plant's. I never handle the meat itself, it is wrapped.

Anyway, I best go pack up my coolers for the market.

Mark Lichtenstein

5:23 AM

The Modern Homesteader said...

Joel, will we be reading some new info on your blog anytime soon?

1:41 PM

Oak Spring farm said...

You hit the nail on the head sir!

There is nothing I can add-all our troubles come from greed and pride.

Will we ever learn?

Kay

4:26 PM

Walter Jeffries said...

Good post. I am leary of anything backed by the Humane Society. They have to many fanatics and closet terrorists, er, I mean P.E. T. A people in their ranks.

Back to the issue at hand, I forsee this just being another steamroller that big businesses use to flatten the smaller competition. They know we've got something good going and they're trying hard to hijack the market without providing the quality.

Keep fighting the good fight.

2:27 PM

Lisa Culbertson said...

I discovered "cage free eggs" in WalMart one evening. I had run out of eggs and wasn't able to stop by the egg lady's house that day. Of course, to me, "cage free" meant free range eggs. I was surprised to find those "healthy", high priced eggs at WalMart!!! Just had to try them. When I cracked open my first egg, I was shocked, and disappointed to see a pale yolk, and watery white. It finally dawned on me that cage free meant raised on the barn floor, not on fresh green pastures!!! you can bet I won't be fooled again. I can hardly wait for my chickens to start laying. Dogs massacred my pastured chickens and rabbits. I'm starting over with new fences, chickens, and Silver Fox meat rabbits. I'd like to hear more about pastured rabbits. Thanks for all you do!

9:27 PM

Barbara Keech said...

Joel,

I am so new at this (farming) that its scary. I am reading and trying to understand. My goal is to grow food that is nutritious and can be grown with enhancing the soil not tearing it down. I am not saavy on cage free, free range etc., but are you offering any affordable classes in the near future that would help someone like me?

Barbara Keech

10:52 AM

Anonymous said...

Joel,

I could not figure out how to "Blog", so I am typing this anonymously. I guess my take on this is that some of the people present may have had good intentions (some were obviously only interested in their own gain), but they were miss-guided and short-sighted and allowed their dislike for caged facilities to block their view of the larger issue. I do not think such a compromise would accomplish much other than to further complicate matters for the small, local farmer. Most people just don't take the time to look beyond the surface and think about things a bit more thoroughly before jumping in.

Chris

1:18 PM

Anonymous said...

Joel,

One more thing I thought I'd mention, and it shows through in this article as well, which is why I thought I'd mention it...

It seems to me that one of the greatest stumbling blocks found in agriculture today, at least with respect to true change, is pride. So many farmers consider their farms a monument unto themselves and work hard to build up impressive-looking homesteads that are nothing more than thin veneers over a rotting core. Many farmers also work hard to establish great expanses of acreage under till so they will look impressive compared to their peers. I see it all the time, people caring

more about their egos and what others think about them than what really matters, which is to say, how they can make a difference to better the world for our children and our children's children. It has almost become a cliché, but it is true that this is what we should really be concerned about, or at least it should be one of our primary concerns.

I am not a farmer (yet!), but I grew up on a diversified farm and live in farm country and work part-time for a pasture-based dairy/creamery operation here in southern Minnesota. I can gladly say that this issue of pride vs. what is best for our families and our future does not exist on the farm I work part-time. This farmer has the right perspective and has been making the better decisions for the last 30+ years, long before it became cache to do so. And, he was told by many that he'd go broke in short order going against the establishment. But, guess what, he's still here and as strong as ever while most of the nay-sayers are long gone or have been heavily assimilated into the agricultural machine, just like the Borg from the new Star Trek series that used to air...no longer individuals but clones, human "machines" really, who's only purpose is to serve the industry and do as directed, or be destroyed. I guess this leads to another issue for some farmers...fear, but that is another subject altogether.

Chris

2:07 PM

Anonymous said...

Joel,

One more thing, read any (and I mean ANY) of the more popular farm publications published for the mainstream farmer and tell me that pride is not one of the greatest marketing ploys put forth to entice farmers to spend more. And, everyone seems to buy into it. It is so juvenile!

Chris

2:14 PM

Anonymous said...

Joel,

Fear is number two. Farmers are all the while reminded of how

perilously close they are to loosing their farms. No wonder so many are peranoid about making changes, especially dramatic ones at that.

Chris

2:15 PM

shawntaft1354036043 said...

I read over your blog, and i found it inquisitive, you may find [My Blog](#) interesting. So please [Click Here To Read My Blog](#)

<http://pennystockinvestment.blogspot.com>

7:29 AM

Anonymous said...

It's working Joel.

I was out on one of the farms I visit with the dogs, and the famers wife said he is going to grow chicken feed and raise layers in mobile pens out in God's own daylight. "Had he heard of Pollyface Farms" Oh yes! Modeling the pens on their stuff.

Not a huge operation -- a couple of hundreds chickens -- just the perfect size for locally sustainable food and a ready local market.

Real food grown by good people who got a few good ideas from you.

Brilliant! Let the revolution begin!

As for HSUS, they are a direct mail scam. They do not run a single animal shelter in this country. Their entire budget is produced by cutting down old growth forests in Canada (the source of that brillian white paper they use) and sending 7 pounds of finished unrecyclable paper (100 one ounce direct mail packages) to people in order to get a single donor.

Glad to see you didn't need a weatherman to tell you which way the wind blows!

P. Burns

PBurns@erols.com

Arlington, Virginia

3:11 AM

Anonymous said...

Yours is a good kind of radicalism. I can see that those good-doing folks of the Humane Society haven't read all there is to read to see that the enemy is bigger and more deeply entrenched than they know. The broader more informed view they need and some have has not washed over them yet. I hope that if they were given the right list of readings they would become enlisted in the "Righter Cause" (I, like you, have a fondness for neologism when the invented word seems to fit). They are a big organization that hasn't discovered the ability to think like the most humble individual. Perhaps if they are wooed with patience and understanding they could be brought to see the bigger, less-corporate view they need to see. Smaller is better...and righter.

Local is the way to go but those used to just going to the supermarket also need a way to access what we more radical folks are pushing for.

Perhaps advocates like you need to exercise a bit of compassion by meeting the somewhat uniformed do-gooding folks of the HSUS half way and bring them into the fold gradually. Activists sometimes need to reign in their self-righteousness and try to understand their perceived "enemies" for who they are...people with different backgrounds. Attitudes can be re-shaped through education but dig in when attacked.

Just some thoughts! Good luck. Be open to the possibility that a softer less championing way might be useful at times....

10:25 AM

simone86meghan said...

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With all of the attention that this news has been generating, I wouldn't be surprised to see this loophole closed very soon.

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12:28 PM

Gail Philbin said...

Wow. Excellent commentary on the HSUS approach to dealing with factory farms. While I'm appreciative of ANY efforts to improve the situation of farm animals, I feel that the HSUS and other national groups often try to put a bandaid on the factory farm problem when the system itself is inherently unsustainable.

I formed a group here in West Michigan called Farms Without Harm that tackles the issue from the grass roots up (consumer/public education end) rather than the top down (legislative means). Our goal is to foment a consumer revolution by educating people about the myriad issues that factory farms impact in their lives -- health, environment, local economy and, if they're inclined to care, animal welfare.

It doesn't matter if you're a tree hugger or vegan or health nut or conservative Christian. Factory farms affect all of us and are shaping the quality of our life and our future.

I truly believe that if people knew what the true costs of their food were, many of them (those who can afford it) would change their buying habits IF THERE WAS AN ALTERNATIVE TO FACTORY

FARMED FOOD (therein lies the rub--unless you know where to look, it's not easy to find local and sustainable food).

Farms Without Harm seeks to offer consumers local, sustainable alternatives to the industrial food supply and promotes small local farmers. We're also trying to rebuild the connections between local farmers and area restaurants, stores, educational institutions etc. It's hard work, but we have no choice. Our survival depends on it.

I'll get off my soap box now. Thanks for listening!

6:42 AM

joemorgan23192778 said...

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6:38 AM

Anonymous said...

Hi Joel.. From a Old farmers Grandson.

I first got exposed to your farm from its part in the book "The Omnivore's Dilemma" whoes author spent a week at your farm. I was completly fascinated by what you are doing on your farm.

If my grandfather was any indication, there were intelligent men that saw what was coming and happening to argiculture, knew at heart it made little sence for the long term but got pushed to change, or pushed out.

My Grandfather was son of a Austrian immigrant farmer, and farmed

himself his whole life. He was not a educated man, but he knew in his heart what made sence on the big picture of life and food production.

I rember him telling about when the dairy board (Canada) told him they couldn't take his eggs any more cause of changing standards.

They told him he needed to produce more, get more out of them, and do so had to keep them cooped up and all feed the same food to produce an egg that looked in shape and size and color like what the stores wanted. They told him eggs made like that were healthier then letting chikens run arround and eat whatever they wanted.

I fondly rember him saying to me...

"It made no sence to me that chickens cooped up all day could make healthier eggs then chickens that ran arround in the sun eating bugs and whatever else they wanted. So I got out of eggs"

He didn't know the science of nutritian at the time, (but did latter before he died, he was very proad of being right 50 years ago.) but he just knew what made sense, common sense to a man that knew his earth and his animals.

My grandpa would have loved to have meet you, keep up the incredible crusade.

10:17 PM

Anonymous said...

We have exactly the same problems in Australia. It makes no sense to transport eggs halfway across the country when there are local producers ablke to supply markets. We sell most of our eggs at Farmers Markets or deliver direct to customers.

Phil Westwood

www.freeranger.com.au

4:26 PM

Anonymous said...

Joel,

I was delighted and surprised to see an article on Polyface and Joel Salatin in Mother Jones magazine come across my desk. I grew up outside Staunton and my parents have been fans of yours for many years. Hoping the publicity will lead to positive things. Keep up the

good work!

All best,
Jennifer Waltz

9:32 AM

ogd said...

your post really speaks volumes about how just about any large organization gets sucked into the big corporation vortex. The challenge is to make sure more well intentioned people understand the difference between cage free and free range / pasture raised animals. This twisting of meanings doesn't surprise me, but it still makes me sad.

6:53 AM

Dan Dright said...

I visited your farm today, with my wife and son. We were very impressed. My son, four, got to see where *real* food comes from, how animals *should* be treated, and that food comes from hard work. Of course, he was more thrilled with the chicks than anything, and a little scared of the big pigs, but I think there was a great lesson in there, too.

We got home and he wanted to have hard-boiled eggs right away, so I cooked up six. I sliced into them and was overjoyed to see a beautiful yellow yolk. He ate two whole eggs. That's a lot for my son, who is a skinny thing and tips the scales at about 35 pounds. (I wish I had that problem.)

He then asked if the eggs were chicken babies, and I had a pretty good explanation for him, I think, though a lot probably got lost in translation. We'll have the chicken and hot dogs later, and I'm really looking forward to it.

You've got a new customer in me, plus anybody I can evangelize to go down there.

Thanks!

6:02 PM

Anonymous said...

Hello Joel,

I enjoyed your comments and views as related by Michael Pollan in "The Omnivore's Dilemma".

Please consider adding a Guest Book to your Polyface Farm site ... then I won't mess up your blog comments with off-topic posts.

:~)

Keep the faith.

David H
Cincinnati Ohio

1:15 AM

Moonbear said...

Yeah, watch out for those "new levels of engagement!"
You are my hero Joel and I'm so glad you have a blog I can check in to.

2:56 PM

John McNeil said...

Joel,

You have made a difference in this city slickers life. I was not raised on a farm nor new much about proper animal care or production models. I have always been thrilled with the thought of feeding my family from what I could produce from God's good earth and the animals he placed here.

So after talking to a friend of mine about some ideas I had, wanting to start using a back acre we have, he introduced me to Poultry Profits and that was it. Three years later, dozens and dozens of free range chicken's eggs, along with the chickens :), and a yearning to continue to learn how to better use what God has provided are all due to your influence and willingness to share your knowledge.

You have impacted my life and my family's lives so positively that it is great to see your site and read your blog. We are healthier and happier thanks to you. Any chance I get I am trying to share what we have learned from you and spread the news that we can change the current food production model and land use for the better. Even if it is one family at a time.

I am still learning and am greatfull for what you have shared. We wish you the best!!

8:17 PM

Ken Eyler said...

My father is fond of the "absolute power corrupts absolutly" quote. He should know, he worked in the government for 35 years and witnessed a lot. Do you think the founding fathers ever imagined a government without common sense?

7:10 PM

Anonymous said...

I would suggest that the fact you were invited to the discussion speaks louder than you think. Cage free is just another novel term in the marketing vocabulary of "BIG AGRA"...the eggs still are low quality from big qauntity producers.

6:59 AM

WetcoastBob said...

Up here on Saltspring Island BC the provincial Ag people decided that local farm produced eggs could not be sold in stores without inspections. They could only be sold at the farm gate. (Go figure!) The local market was also tabu for the eggs. So many farmers disobeyed the "not at market ruling" that the Ag people caved in. The stores are still a no-no

Speaking of the stores; you can buy eggs from "Veggie Fed" chickens, organically fed chickens or free-range chickens. Still no guarantee for the quality of the product. Also brown eggs are 10 cents a dozen more than white eggs. I asked a store clerk if this was because the brown eggs were whole wheat? He didn't get it.

Cheers:

Bob

10:14 PM

BlueEggFarmer said...

Thank you very much for taking time out of your schedule and speaking to HSUS and the "big guys". It sounds like an impossible task tryint to convince the large egg produces to not get involved with even larger walmart.

For ourselves - It has taken us a long time to become a locally sought

out source of true food. And as I see there is little that can change the way big business works I can only hope that the public can be educated soon enough to understand the difference between the walmart organic and the importance of purchasing from the local farmer, I would really hate to see more of us growing housing developments instead of good wholesome,locally raised food just because the consumer has not been fully informed.

5:54 AM

Green Living Radio said...

Hello Polyface Farm:

If interested Organically Speaking a Seattle base website has released a conversation with Michael Pollan podcast (audio conversation). Interesting tidbits on farmers markets, CSAs, and more!

Some Podcast Show Note Questions:

Q) Why the price difference between conventional food and organic and how do we go about bringing down organic food prices?

Q) How can small local organic farmers remain local in a capitalistic system?

Q) What is the "Food Web" you briefly touch on in your book, The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals.

<http://OrganicallySpeaking.org>

All the best,
-Ricardo

Holistic Conversations for a Sustainable World Who Share Your Passion for:

- * high quality organic food
- * natural, sustainable lifestyle
- * ecology
- * holistic health

8:52 AM

casualism said...

Right on! The local farmer/grower cannot be left out of such an equation and have it remain an ethical, sustainable alternative. If the model is merely adapted to a different technique while people remain alienated and out of touch...then how in the world will they truly be any more humane to their chickens. we cannot allow everyone to buy into the current market practice and we must steer people away...and risk some amount of collapse of the current system...let us begin to build better foundations now...before it is too late. Amazing man that Mr. Salatin!

6:34 PM

Anonymous said...

I am in the enviable position of raising chickens (LOTS of them, 300 or so) in all sorts of colors and designs, mostly rare or heritage varieties, enjoying their presence, and selling the eggs. The girls provide income for food and equipment for the whole free-range flock (not pastured, but free range, as I live in dry California and have limited grass in the summer). This is mostly a hobby, although on a large scale, and I am happy to have it pay for itself with a tiny profit thrown in.

My item of interest is my buying clientele. I moved from the Farmers' Market buyers into private selling at the end of last market season. I now deliver into town every Wednesday, 1 dozen here, 4 dozen there, as I am also doing town errands that day. In all, I distribute about 50 dozen eggs a week. I answer all over town to The Egg Lady. I am known to the entire staff at the bank, the real estate office, the school district, the dry cleaners, the USDA office, the newspaper...and am greeted warmly. Yet I have only 1 customer per office, even though everyone ohhs and ahhs over my beautiful multicolored, fresh and delicious eggs. How come more folks don't buy these eggs for \$2/dozen, actually less than Wal-Mart's brown eggs, when I even show up at their offices or stores each week?

The upshot of my business is that I always sell out, and often juggle to keep supply up to demand. But I still wonder why more people don't choose to buy good food, even when it is in-your-face simple.

3:32 PM

Anonymous said...

I have just read your article "Everything I want to do is Illegal" Man you have nailed it! I am so frustrated with life and the rat race I am caught up in. Looking for a way out. FAST!!!

7:19 AM

Anonymous said...

As a consumer, I am thrilled to be able to get an insiders view on what is truly going on behind closed doors, through your insightful and honest blogs.

I applaud you sir and give my full support for your vision and dogged determination to maintain high standards and integrity in the face of greedy opposition.

11:00 AM

moose said...

Joel

I heard about your farm and listened to you on "the food programme" - BBC in the UK.

I wish I could buy your fantastic sounding products.

do you have links with any farmers doing what you are doing and creating visionary farmed food in the UK??

If you do we'd love to know, so we could get all our good quality food from them. (we're in Manchester - North West England)

Keep up the great work and the 'resistance'

I wish you all the best.

11:16 AM

Marci said...

You sort of miss your own point,

Joel (if that's possible). A certain type of consumer shops at Walmart, pure & simple.

For all your enlightened approach to production and marketing, you're not about to change that. It's just a question of whether it's worth trying to impact these consumers where they live. I have my doubts.

10:51 AM

Anonymous said...

What's up.

I bought two books recently by these folks and thought I'd find something recent in here.

Guess there are bigges eggs to fry.

Hope to see some updates soon.

6:14 PM

Anonymous said...

This site is nothing more than a marketing gimmick to sell books.

Either take it off the Internet, or keep some interest in others who value this type of information.

6:17 PM

Anonymous said...

Wake up Joel,

You are such an extreme.

Nobody will follow your plan if you don't keep this fuckin website updated.

5:47 PM

Anonymous said...

I bought two of your books.

BIG mistake. You are nothing but a cum sucking Liberal.

Get off the airwaves dumb ass.

5:54 PM

d j said...

I'm frankly not one whit surprised by what you posted, Joel.

You really do need to write a new blog entry to address that NAIS garbage that became law without a vote in congress or the senate this summer past.

Lovely. What you describe is a small scene in how Novartis, Monsanto, ConAgra, HSUS, giant grocery chains, and many other megamonolithic soulless greedy corporations are wanting to force Americans (eventually the entire world?) to have to buy 100% of their food from government/corporate approved sources. And let's not forget the USDA's guiding light in all this in the name of biosecurity. I wonder how long before USDA is wrapped in a monstrous package along with FEMA & the FDA under Dept. of Homeland Security - talk about a beaureacratc nightmare!

This NAIS mess aims at eventually not being able to grow/raise your own food on your own homeplace for your own family, much less being able to sell to your neighbors. How long after they've microchipped and satellite tracked small producer livestock before the farmer (and everybody else) is required by law to be microchipped?

Sounds like a future antitrust/racketeering lawsuit if a suitable paper trail could be found.

I am hoping to get all our foundation livestock while it is still legal for me to buy it. Joel, please return to your blog! (Maybe this winter?) Please post more information, particularly on pastured rabbits, ducks, turkeys, guineas, etc...

7:56 AM

Anonymous said...

I found out about Polyface farm through *The Omnivore's Dilemma* also. I live in Illinois, and have to comment.

In the part of the state I live in, there are very few places to purchase organic and humanely raised animal meat. Although my family does buy what we can from the farmers market nearby, we mostly end up buying our foods from stores(such as Walmart). If there was an alternative we would gladly take it, so I pose a question to anyone who can answer- Do you know of any good farms(near Chicago) in Illinois or southern Wisconsin that a person could buy from?

2:15 PM

Anonymous said...

I found Polyface Farms in the book by Michael Pollen, "An Omnivore's Dilemma." I shop the Farmer's Markets in Washington, DC and try to buy as much of my produce as I can there for all the various reasons one would have to do so. I found Joel Salatin's blog this morning and found his comments regarding the Great Egg Conference to be not only very serious but couched in what I had thought to be his unique brand of enlightened humor. Many years ago a few brave souls decided to take up the fight in the town of Concord, MA. I am glad to see that there still are a few left willing to do so.

6:26 AM

GreenEngineer said...

I entirely understand your dilemma, and the difference that you see between the "industrial orgaic/cagefree/buzzword" producers and small farmers such as yourself. And I'm very glad that you're there to speak for the small scale producer.

However, I wonder if, as a practical matter, there is really as much conflict here as you see.

The "organicification" of Walmart represents organic food's movement into the mainstream. I suspect that the result will be more people eating organic (even if it is industrial "orgaic lite"), rather than fewer people shopping at the farmer's markets. They are simply very different market segments: people who shop at farmer's markets don't *want* to go to Walmart, and people who shop at Walmart may eat organic if it is offered to them, but won't seek it out on their own. I mean, Whole Foods might lose some market share to them, but even that seems likely to be minimal. Organic food buyers are not low-price shoppers for the most part.

It seems to me that the key for small producers in the age of industrial organic is to invent new ways to distinguish themselves. If organic is now mainstream, then locally grown is the new organic.

It is unfortunate that the widespread adoption of organic food does not automatically mean a new renaissance for small farmers, but it's going to take a long time to restructure our food production system back to a more distributed format. I think that will happen in time, but the organic food meme is moving much faster than that. So the small local farmer is going to have to find a new, even more sustainable vision with which to market themselves. And thus we will move towards a more secure food system, one step at a time.

9:38 AM

Marsh said...

Joel, I hope you continue to blog--the internet needs a "voice" like yours. At the very least, what about putting your annual missives here?

8:08 AM

Anonymous said...

Mr. Salatin- Have you ever sat down to calculate how many people some large region (your state, the US, the earth) could support if your

methods were used exclusively? Perhaps you have already addressed this question in one of your books or articles...?

I am wondering what the earth's real "natural" carrying capacity for humans might be, as it is easy to be bamboozled by the pollyanna predictions of one ideological camp, or the grim prognoses of another. I am impressed by the way that you have looked into such things as natural rate of nitrogen absorption per acre, and other ecological parameters, and hope that you or someone working with or inspired by you has taken that line of thinking out to the logical consequence of establishing procedures for estimating the carrying capacity for humans per acre. I would hope that such a figure would help inform the man vs. nature debate that the global warming issue has exacerbated.

Thanks for publicizing your views and methods. I am the son of a poultry rancher, and my youthful exposure to ever-increasingly industrial farming drove me to the city. It is fascinating to see a glimpse of how life might have been, and could be for many, in the future.

7:02 PM

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