

Joel Salatin: We should be creating economic and business and mission paradigms that attract the best and brightest young people to be the stewards of our air, soil, water and food. That's a fact.

Diego: Hello everybody, and welcome to the Permaculture Voices Podcast. I'm your host, Diego, and this is episode number 15. 15! Tonight on our show we have a very special guest, America's most famous farmer, Joel Salatin Salatin.

Joel Salatin's going to be talking about his new book, *Fields of Farmers*. It addresses a lot of issues, like how can the older generation get out of farming and still allow the younger generation to get in?

The younger generation might be wondering, "Well, how can I get into farming if I don't have any land?" The whole key is ultimately trying to help form a synergistic relationship with that older farmer.

Joel Salatin also talks about a lot of other issues in here; why we have a cultural stereotype against farming, why aren't the brightest and best people going into agricultural ventures?

Why are they discouraged against going into those ventures? Only to go on to college to do a job they hate, then they're 28 years old working in a cubicle realizing, "Hey, this is isn't what I wanted to do my whole life. Now I'm applying to be an intern at Polyface Farm."

This is a pretty motivational episode. Joel Salatin talks a lot about the different strategies that it takes to ultimately get in the business and the right mindset that you have to take.

This point, if you ever wanted to start an agricultural business and you haven't yet, listen to this episode and when you're done you'll realize, "Hey, you either got to put up or shut up." Let's join the conversation with Joel Salatin, get his advice. I'll jump back at the end and fill in any gaps.

Diego: Joel Salatin, let's set the table; why did you feel the need to write this book *Fields of Farmers*?

Joel Salatin: Everywhere I go and of course in my own agricultural community here, the average farmer is almost 60 years old in most of the developed world, and certainly it is here in the U.S., almost 60 years old. Business books tell us that any economic sector in which the average practitioner exceeds 35 years of age is an economic sector in decline. You can tell the health of a business for example by the average age of the people, the employees or the team working in that business.

Well, sixty is a far cry from 35, and what that means is that we have a terminal vocation here. People go into it and you can't get in. What's happened is that mainline agriculture, the capitalization cost and the entry level just capitalization are so high that young people can't get in. And when young people can't get in, then old people can't get out. That's what's manifesting itself with this 60-year-old problem. There's a real successional conundrum here.

I think it's one of the big elephants in the room regarding whether you're environmental farming or not or using chemicals or not or organic or not or whatever. If we don't figure out a model that in which young people can easily get in so there's fluidity, multigenerational fluidity within the vocation, then it's a vocation that's in trouble. That's where we are in farming.

Diego: Now I'm an 18-year-old guy and I want to get into that system. Where should I even start? Should I go interning? Should I go into the welfare system? What should I do?

Joel Salatin: A lot of it of course depends on your resource base, your own educational level. Let's take a couple of scenarios. One of the reasons that I'm linking in the book *Fields of Farmers*, the reason I'm linking it to interning and mentoring approaches is because I see that as one of the most efficient, efficacious way to make that successional transfer.

The fact is that 90% of the assets in agriculture are owned by people who are 60 years old. Those people have a lot of assets, they have equipment, they have buildings, they have lands, and believe it or not, they have a lot of experience.

The young, the 18-year-old that wants to get into this is lacking in all of those things. Partnering up, partnering up in an intern program, whether it's formal or informal or just a friendship partnership, partnering up with an older person puts you in the leverage position for all of these, the assets, the experience and all of that.

The interesting thing about this is that most of the wealth transfer is actually not going to be kept in the family, because many if not most of the farmers who own the land, their children don't want to run the farm. Interestingly, a lot of these kids don't want to lose the farm, you know, fourth generation or whatever. They're looking for people to lease or rent that land and utilize it. They don't really want to sell it.

And so we're big believers in divorcing land ownership from farming. That's one of the biggest themes that you'll see me present is separating land ownership. That's a totally different business than actually farming. There's nothing about having to own land that is required for you to farm.

Say you're an 18-year-old and you simply devote yourself. What we see is that most people who want something don't really want it bad enough to go to the mat for it. You still have to be on your Netflix and be ... whatever, in the cultural center.

I would just suggest that you need to be able to live in a yurt, live on nothing, grow your own food, grow all your own fuel and essentially become as self-reliant as possible. Most people aren't willing to go to that extreme. But you have to go an extreme today.

What we're trying to do, what we're trying to model here is a multigenerational partnership, whether it's formal, family, or just friendship. Then leverage that partnership into a second or third or fourth farm business leveraging the equity, the land, the buildings and the equipment, leveraging that equity with a totally self-contained entrepreneurial farm business. Whether it's pastured poultry under an orchard, whether it's farrowing pigs on pasture around the edges of a beef cattle farm, whether it's a grain farm running its grain instead of to the local elevator at wholesale, running that grain through pigs and chickens.

A produce operation, a sprouting operation on the edges, the outskirts of an existing farm, all of these are self-contained, entrepreneurial, agricultural enterprises that can be done without any land ownership and with very, very little capitalization. How you structure those relationships, how you create those relationships obviously varies from person to person. That's what we're trying to talk about is to get the young person without the experience, without the capital to be able to build a business on the existing asset base of the older generation.

Diego: Now I know a lot of people will hear that and they'll say, "Yes, I like the idea of leasing but a lease is temporary, I can't plant things like trees. And how can I work around potential changes in land ownership? If the original land owner dies, it goes down to his heirs."

What advice do you have for a younger person when they're going to set this up? Should they try and lock up a few years ahead to get that experience? Should they keep themselves extremely mobile so if they have to get up and leave they can just pick up and move? How should they go about doing that part?

Joel Salatin: Yes to all of those things. First of all, I think that it's critical to keep as much of a farm portable as possible rather than building stationary buildings and infrastructure, make it portable.

Of course this is what we've done with the whole pastured livestock thing is to have portable control mechanisms with electric fencing, portable shelter,

portable feeding, even mobile processing units for mobile processing and value adding. Keep the whole farm as portable as possible. That is a problem when you start planting something with a long life like trees. That is where you would ... Obviously you have to start somewhere, and what you have to start is to create a track record.

Interestingly, in Europe of course there's tenure-age, Prince Charles runs all of his lands in the Duchy with 99-year leases. Of course Great Britain probably leads the world in this 99-year lease thing. In fact in the U.S., there's now discussion about 99-year leases. It's the next permutation past the land preservation and easement unit, the idea. There's been tremendous amount of work done on creating essentially easements into the future, a long, infinity for that matter.

What's the missing part of that is, all right, so now we've got the land locked up in some easement, but if we don't have a farmer to be on the farm then the farm simply becomes a wilderness area. One of the things that I so deeply appreciate about Permaculture is that it takes a very active role in environmental participation. We live in a time where too often to be an honorable, credible environmentalist, the only land use approach you can advocate is environmentalism by abandonment, you know, lock it up, put it in a state park, a national arboretum or whatever.

The thing that Permaculture does is to create land, is to create environmentalism by participation, participatory environmentalism through massage, through caressing this ecological wound. Obviously you want as long a lease as possible. There are some very long leases being done. I attended an environmental group here in Virginia that actually did a seminar on 99-year leases. I have a friend in China, mainland China who leased a farm for 99 years, 1500 acres, get this, 1500 acres for 50 bucks a year lease.

Diego: Wow.

Joel Salatin: I would ask a young person that says, "I can't farm unless I own the land."  
Would you like a 99-year lease on 1500 acres for 50 bucks a year? I'd take that any day.

What that does is, it creates entry-level opportunities. Now, I'm not an expert in how all those tenure-age things are structured, but I do know they exist and I do know that there is thought that the U.S. may be moving more toward a European type of system where the land is owned essentially by a gentrified class and is actively farmed by a management by a management class.

That's okay. It'd be nice if everybody could own something. And I certainly encourage people when they can to own something, at least to have a spring

board or an anchor or a place to have a core, to live and have your food and your basics.

If that were all people really went for instead of putting all of their nest egg, for example you're 50 years old and you want to farm. What I see too often is people have a nest egg of 800,000 or a million dollars and they put it all in the land, and then there's nothing left to build ponds and make swales and really make the land profitable.

Then of course they're going back to town to work and the land just sits there and spins its wheels, because all the equity was put in the land and a house. If we reverse that and create as small a spot as possible to own and then have all the equity that we have that's fluid going to build infrastructure and leverage the resources that we have, cisterns, irrigation and whatever, then I think that's going the right direction.

Diego: So before somebody wants to go out and lease the land, they're going to need some experience? They're going to want to get on an intern at a working farm.

Joel Salatin: Yes.

Diego: In addition to working on that farm, what could that 18-year-old be doing on their own to ultimately increase their chances of success?

Think of it like basketball, you're going to, on your own you can shoot free throws, that's not game experience but you're practicing one specific skill, where on farming you're working on the operation of wherever that farm is, you're learning that knowledge, but what should that person also be doing on their off time to try and help increase their chances? Should they be taking some business classes on the side? Should they be reading books on a specific thing? What do you suggest there?

Joel Salatin: They should be doing what everybody should do who wants to be a successful entrepreneur, read widely. Information is probably the best investment you can ever make, going to attend really good conferences, investing in books, magazines.

Obviously a lot of stuff now is free over the internet and you can just see a huge amount of information, but read widely, invest in yourself, do your self-help stuff. Maybe join a local team, Toastmasters group that teaches public speaking skills and so you can market and tell your story better.

Join a local theater company and do some plays so you'll learn to lose yourself and enjoy being in front of people and telling your story because ultimately

much of this depends on communication, marketing, sales, the ability to sell yourself, whether it's to an investor, whether it's to a potential patron, client, customer, whatever, to be able to tell your story in an engaging, and give your mission, in an engaging passionate and whimsical way to attract people to what you're doing.

Those are the same whether you're farming or developing a plumbing business or internet business or whatever, it's all the same. Beyond that, you just want to start doing things that gain you experience. Find out what you enjoy. Interestingly, most farmers are not both horticulture and animals. Normally farms and people's temperament moves them either toward plants or toward animals, obviously not exclusively by any means but generally.

You don't normally see the same farmer being a guru in both animals and plants. Good farmers that are really focused on one will then try to figure out how to develop a partner who will then focus on the other. Then you have a whole package, including silviculture, including entertainment or woodworking or whatever.

I'm just a big believer in food clusters, in land management clusters, where we actually team up with people who have strengths where we have weaknesses, loves where we don't in order to create a symbiotic business and income stream.

Diego: You start building those skills, you start doing all these things, you make your relationships, how do you know when it's time to pull the pin and go from being an intern to making a go of it on your own as a farm entrepreneur?

Joel Salatin: I think there you just have to look at what opportunities come to you. There's a place for patience. Plenty of people are impatient and jump too fast. You can't be where the older generation was, it took them a generation to get there. Be willing to be patient and let things develop.

Movement creates movement. Once you start moving and once you start, what you're trying to do is create a track record of excellence. When you have a track record of excellence, people will invest in you whether customers or whether it's opportunity that you have.

If you have a good track record, if you can make a piece of land beautiful and productive, you will never lack the land to work from. That takes patience and time to let that track record develop; you can't do it in a day. Many times you can't do it in a year. Many times it takes three or four years.

I always tell people, I say, "Look, go where you can." People are always wanting to move someplace else. Chances are wherever you grew up, where your family

is and you have relationships, as long as you weren't the bank robber in the community, you probably have a lot of equity. You're keen on relationships, they have connections.

Going into a place where there are connections or staying in a place, bloom where you planted in the place where you already have emotional equity, business equity and relational equity and relational equity. Staying with that usually will get you much further than going to that El Dorado out there that you think is somewhere where there's some paradise and it's got to be easy.

Let me tell you something, it isn't easy, it's not easy anywhere. Every place has its asset and its liability, brittle environments like Arizona have their own assets and liabilities just like places like Rabun Gap, Georgia, that gets 102 inches of rain a year. That has its own issues, its own problems and its own assets as well.

When I start looking at where am I going to actually leverage my time and experience and all that, I always encourage people to try to bloom where they've planted first rather than just fly the coop and assume that it's got to be easier somewhere else.

One of the biggest temptations that all of us has, I'm guilty of it and everybody is guilty of it, is we look at other people and we assume that it just had to be easy for them. They got the right education, they found the right community, the community that likes to buy organic food, whatever. They married the right person, they went to the right school, they knew the right connection, whatever. The fact is, that like Pa Ingalls and Laura Ingalls Wilder in the *Little House on the Prairie* books, said he spelled luck W-O-R-K. Generally, that's the better approach.

Bloom where you're planted and movement creates movement. The hardest step is the first one. Once you take the first one then you'll see a lot better where the second one goes, you see a lot better where the third one goes. Once you become, once you're moving and you have some experience under your belt, you'll be surprised at the things that will come your way.

Diego: Yes. There's a lot of great points in there. I like the whole movement idea. That's actually something I'll circle back to later with some questions because that's something that's lacking in the agricultural sector.

For somebody who now has gone out, they get their land, they've moved on from being an intern, too many people have this unencumbered enthusiasm at the beginning and they aren't focused and they want to do too much too soon.

What should they focus on right at the beginning regardless of the enterprise? It doesn't have to be chickens or pigs or whatever but what should that person really focus on just developing one enterprise and get that enterprise really running efficiently before they try and do too much?

Because people want to come in and do everything they've ever read in every book and they end up never doing any of it and the whole system falls apart?

Joel Salatin: That's such a great point because today, today, everyday it seems like I get asked, "Where are your solar panels or where is your biodiesel deal or where is your bio charge unit?"

Goodness, you know what? I'm interested in all that. If I could snap my fingers and have it all tomorrow, from aquaponics to pyramidal greenhouse to whatever, I'd have it tomorrow.

The fact is that innovation is very expensive and you cannot innovate in every facet of your life or you'll go bankrupt. What you have to do is pace yourself, get one enterprise up and running well. Then when it's making a good profit and a good margin then let that enterprise finance the next one and then the two will finance the third one and you'll be able to develop one step at a time.

The other thing that's really critical is identifying what the true weak link is. I liken it to going to a trade show one of the best ones ever is Acres USA, go to Acres USA Conference, everybody should go to an Acres USA Conference.

You go there and they got this huge tradeshow and there's 50 people there that are doing something on soil or plant amendments. It's everything from humates to electromagnetic fish emulsion to basic mineralize calcium, biochar whatever you name it. There's everything.

You go down, you talk to everybody, they're all nice, you get their brochure. You go back to your hotel with your, your room with your significant other, you spread these brochures out on the table and you say, "Man, how do we know what our weak link is?"

You end up the way you, what you decide to buy is, "I really liked that guy in boots so to say, he's just this really nice guy, I think we'll buy his stuff." Of course that's not very scientific.

Here's my thought on that, don't buy anything, force yourself to look at your operation and say, "What can we leverage here without spending anything?" Hydration is a big deal. You've got to get control of water whether it's flood



water, whether it's from a flood or a drought or whatever, investing in hydration and control of water.

One of the biggest variables in farming is weather; one of the biggest variables in weather is moisture. If you invest in hydration, it pays dividends for a long, long time.

Number two, look at the carbon cycle, where are the leaks in my carbon cycle? It's typical to go onto a farm and the first thing you do is start buying fertilizer. No, the first thing you do is start creating that carbon cycle whether it's with animals, with controlled grazing, or whether it's a compost pile, whether it's chipping some junk trees to create biomass or hugelkultur or whatever.

The point is to look at your carbon base, where is your carbon base and insource your carbon rather than outsourcing your carbon. Instead of looking at how can I bring it in from outside? How can I get a handle on the carbon that's growable, that's doable here?

When you start down this path of the resource base and you focus on that resource base, look at your aspect, south flow, north flow, I'm just talking the basis of permaculture here.

Begin appreciating, there's a shed here, that shed has a sun reflective metal siding on the south side, guess what? We can put a hot house there or put a cold frame there and get an additional zone garnered because of reflective capacity of the sun on that southern exposure.

What about drip lines under a shed, situate your shed on high grounds so you can put on a cistern with it. Think about hydrating gravity downhill, water, those things.

As far as specifically what to produce, what to grow that sort of thing, I always tell people, grow what you really like to eat, because you might have to eat your way through your inventory.

There's no reason to do something that you don't like to do. Whatever has fired your heart to make you want to go this route, you're going to find, when you start making a list of here is what I really want to grow, you're going to find that list and you'll be able to do it.

Finally, fourth I would say be willing to do whatever it takes to make it work. In the early first couple of years here, I helped some people build fence for pay, I planted trees for pay. Fortunately, we were living cheaply enough that if I picked

up 500 or 600 bucks doing a little custom job, maybe you build a porch for somebody, clean out somebody's gutters.

There's plenty of just odd jobs, different things that you can do if you have skills where you intersect where you're experienced, what you're good at and what you like to do, where those intersect, that is a sweet spot, and that's where you'll have enough passion to carry you through the dark days.

Diego: Yes again really great points there. That's a lot of actionable stuff in there. You got to put in the time, you got to do the work and all that. How important do you think it is to start cultivating your customer base from day one and developing that?

Joel Salatin: If you're not going to be in the commodity program, if you're not going to be in commodities obviously cultivating a customer base is great. That said, it's important to understand that there is a place for the commodity business. Certainly, some of the big grazing outfits from holistic management to ranching for profit had been extremely successful in the commodity approach.

One of the beauties of the commodity program is A) You don't have to market and B) You can grow as fast as you want to because the commodity business is big enough to absorb any new player.

If you're not, if you're going to be a small operator then you have to develop a high growth margin of your products because you can't play the volume game on low margins.

Commodity is based on high volume at low margin. You have a huge turnover of widgets or pounds or whatever you're producing. The smaller operation needs a much larger margin which means you need to direct market, develop a market or some sort of a collaborative market.

There are now some amazing online farmers' markets, virtual farmers' markets coming on where people are I call it electronic aggregation so that we're getting some really neat local economies of scale in distribution and marketing. That's been a long time coming and it can't come fast enough, it's absolutely fabulous.

At the same time what you're looking for, ideally you actually cultivate customers that will pay retail. What happens then is if you have a higher margin and you have customers who will pay retail.

A) Those customers will quickly buy something else if you want to produce it or make it. Somebody that wants to get heirloom tomatoes also wants to get

handmade grapevine reeves for Christmas decorations or ornaments or floor dolls or whatever.

There's that diversification of your marketing portfolio. Second, what it does is it loads the equity of your farm; your farm equity is now not loaded in stationary highly capitalized infrastructure. Your equity is loaded into management and customers.

When the equity of your farm is in your ability to manage something and your ability to market something, that is a farm that becomes portable, when a farm is portable, it becomes a dynamic spontaneous place as opposed to highly capitalized immovable stuff.

Diego: Do you think in this day and age, if you're a small operator, that you need to develop and stack your system with multiple manageable symbiotic enterprises to survive?

Joel Salatin: Oh, absolutely. The fact is, this is one of the things that I go into in *Fields of Farmers*, when I talk; we've talked a lot about young people in this conversation. We haven't talked at all about the old farmer, what I call the old hermit curmudgeon farmer because that's the other side of this equation.

The reason that having a young partner or when you start down this path of succession, the regular old farmer says, "I can't produce anymore on this farm. I'm already working 100 hours a week, what do you want me to do? Quit eating and sleep?" They go off on this tangent because the farm can't produce anymore.

I spend a fair amount of time trying to explain that there is not a piece of land anywhere in the world that is being fully leveraged to its productive capacity, because you have to get over that hurdle.

A hundred-acre farm that's only generating one salary is simply not being leveraged to its full potential. That doesn't mean the existing 60-year-old farmer has to do all that extra work or build that additional business, what it means is you have to think about what else can be leveraged on here.

If the older farmer is running an orchard for example, there's no reason why you can't start some sort of pastured livestock operation in that orchard or start turning the orchard into jams, jellies, insider or whatever, value added products and all that is simply symbiotic.

The whole idea of stacking enterprises, there's a whole chapter in the book just on stacking enterprises but the whole idea of stacking enterprises which of

course Permaculture in its early days of Dave Holmgren and Bill Mollison was all about tiering your trees, shrubs under the trees, then grass or produce under that.

You're harvesting sunlight, intercepting with more leaves, multi-tiering that sort of thing, taking a marsh and putting a ten-foot-deep pond in it. Suddenly you're stacking different strata of all sorts of hydrologic plants and animals that would live in one foot, two foot, three foot, four foot, water levels. Many of us in Permaculture are aware of that idea of stacking, synergism and multi-speciation diversity that way.

We also need to think in those terms when it comes to a profitable farm and the ability to stack whether it's through concessions, subcontractors, partners, employees, there's all sorts of different ways to structure this but to stack the additional elements on the farm.

Almost any pretty productive farm inherently can develop a recreational business. People like to come and visit really cool, productive, what I call esthetically, aromatically, centrally romantic farms, they're attractive. People can be drawn to that.

You can do school tours, weddings, on farm picnics, farm to table specialty dinners, bus tours, get with the Sierra Club or whatever and offer bus tours. You can see the people and just these things just grow.

If you think that I'm working so hard on this farm, there's no way that it can produce, do anymore, then you'll never ever get that multigenerational, that successional, you're never get that successional hurdle.

We all have to just look at our places, whether it's one acre or 10 acres and say, "I'm not beginning to stretch the surface here on potential."

I remember before Dad died in 1988 way back, 30 whatever years ago. We actually sat down in the early stages and brainstormed the salaries that we could get off of this farm. That was 30 years ago and we just brainstormed in a jam session, 25 white collar salaries that can come off of this little farm.

My sense is and I pull that list today and we haven't even scratched the surface, most of them we still haven't even tapped into. All of those are available. Can you allow, can you create, and of course the book has templates in it for what we call memorandums of understanding with our team players so that each of these people is not an employee, they're rather independent entrepreneurs, which allows each person to have their own fiefdom.

You and I, all of us love to have a fiefdom. People are really self-actualized when they have a fiefdom. How do we make a farm be able to produce lots and lots and lots of fiefdom?

What we're seeing is that the interns and apprentices that come through here, A) Not a single one of them has ever had any trouble finding land and number two, the opportunities for partnering and creating independent systems is just absolutely limitless. Those are the stacking, synergistic opportunities from a business standpoint we need to be looking at.

Diego: It seems like everybody in the sustainability in the sustainability Ag space is in the Ag but they're not into the business side of things. There's so much opportunity out there like you're saying, to stack this it just takes creativity.

You look at places out here like Silicon Valley where there is just so many startups, there's so much creativity it's mind-blowing, why don't we see that in the Ag space? Why aren't the people that get into Ag of the mindset that, "Hey, I got to try and figure out ways to make this work, invent new systems, improve upon old, stack the systems like you're saying." Do you see that?

Joel Salatin: To answer your question. It's a very astute question because it strikes right to the core of where we are. Two things, one is that our best and brightest young people are being drummed out of any idea regarding farming because number two our culture has stereotyped the farmer as a dumb D student.

The number of stories of for example school guidance counselors who literally demonize smart kids who want to farm is just all over the place. It happened to me, it's happened to friends of mine, it's happened to people that I know.

I've had 4H and FFA talks about I went to guidance counselor and she went to apopleptic seizure because I wanted to farm. You're going to waste your brains. We have this cultural stereotype that dishonors farming as a non-noble vocation. It's not a credible vocation.

In fact we had an apprentice that left, went back to farming in Washington State, fell in love with a girl across the line in Canada wanted to get married bring her across the border. He had to fill out immigration paperwork to bring her across the border.

He put his occupation as farmer. They said she couldn't come across the border because farming was not a credible vocation. He had to start driving trucks so that he could prove that he can earn enough money to bring a bride across the border from Canada.

That's the kind of prejudice, it's real. Think about the last time a group of soccer Moms, strutting their stuff and exclaiming about the ability of the little child prodigies, think about the last time one of them proudly explained to the others that her little Amy or Johnny or whatever was going to be a farmer.

Nobody encourages people to be farmers. You've got an incredible cultural discrimination, a prejudicial discrimination against the very vocation of farming. The best and brightest young people, the sharp ones, they don't want to let down their parents.

We see it even in our own interns and apprentices where parents sometimes don't want their young people to come here because that's below what we ... You're smart, you're bright why in the world, you're going to embarrass the family, drag the family name through the mud, through the poop if you're going to go be a farmer. You've got this cultural persona.

In addition to that, not only do you have the prejudice discrimination but then you have the stereotype that there is no money in farming, it's long, it's drudgery, it's blah, blah, blah.

As a culture, as a sophisticated culture, we now are so proud of the fact that lesson one between the population of farming in fact we have far too many people incarcerated in prison as we have farming and this indicates a measure of success because farmers are once step below inmates.

There's a real reason, there's a very, very specific reason why we had this. I like to ask the urban folks at farmers' market or going to whole foods or whatever, do you really want your farmer to drive a Mercedes Benz?

What would you think when at your farmers' market stall next week; your farmer drove in with a brand new BMW or a brand new Mercedes Benz? What would you think? Be honest.

Because if you think that he's a farmer, he doesn't deserve that then you're part of the problem and not the solution. We should be creating economic, business and mission paradigms that attract the best and brightest young people to be the stewards of our air, soil, water and food. That's a fact. Whatever it takes to attract the best and brightest, that's what we've got to do.

One of the best ways to do that is to have a model that economically incentivizes young people to go into it. Young people will go; they follow where the money is. Where is the opportunity, where is the place that's, to be able to put shoes on my feet and take their wife out to dinner once in a while and that's, where is that? If they could imagine it in farming, we'd see a lot of them drawn to it.

I can tell you in our intern applications which we just finished here last week, we're in the selection process for our 2014 season right now, we had 269 applications for eight spots.

I would say 60% of them were young people between 28 and 38 who had already put in five to 10 years in their Dilbert cubicles and all they ever wanted to do was something with their hands.

They wanted to do something physical, visceral, build something, grow something, make something and their family told them you got to go, you got to go to college, you got to get this degree, you got to go to the Fortune 500 company, get your 401K plan and pay for vacation and da, da, da. They did that, they put in their five or 10 years and the Dilbert cubicle is crushing their spirit.

The next thing you know here they are applying for an internship. We see it all the time. This idea that smart people don't work with their hands, they don't get calluses, they don't want to do 'blue collar' stuff is absolutely crushing the vitality, the spirit and the innovative capacity of a whole generation of landscape, food scape, agrarian, artisanal craft type entrepreneurs. It's crushing their spirit and it is an evil thing being done to our young people by our culture.

Diego: I couldn't agree with you more. You see that now with things like this whole peak college, how expensive it is to go to college. How many people now take on college debt for probably to just get a degree that they're not going to use to go to a job that they're going to ultimately hate?

Obviously that's not everybody but it's a lot of people. They waste all that money, all that time and they suck all that spirit out to only come and apply to be an intern at your place at 28. It's like you should have done that 10 years ago, saved all the money from college and look at how much further ahead you'd be and how much happier you'd be.

Joel Salatin: Yes, that's exactly right. Unfortunately it takes several years for that spirit to gradually grow. The thing is most these young people have never, every time they've expressed it they've been like a nail that sticks up out of a floor and you pound it down.

They've never been able to express it and then they come across something like permaculture or Eliot Coleman or one of my books or something. Suddenly, this little flicker of wow, maybe this is possible.

Certainly from the land rent university system, from the, I call it the U.S. duh, from any of the mainland things, the Ag publications, there's not a flicker of real hope that an agrarian vocation can actually do anything but make you barefoot,

impoverished and living in some shredded yurt somewhere on the back side of a field.

Diego: Yeah, I hear you there. To wrap up this part of the podcast; what would be one final word of encouragement for that young person out there? Make your final case to him, “Hey, do what you want to do, here is the opportunity, go for it”?

Joel Salatin: Yes. My final pitch, one that we haven’t mentioned yet is to don’t be too picky about your mentor. The fact is that these old I call them hermit curmudgeon farmers possess a lot of wisdom and knowledge.

A trailer backs up behind a pickup truck or a tractor. A trailer backs up on organic farm, a Permaculture farm or for that matter a Monsanto farm the same way a trailer backs up on any place else. There are lots of skills that you can learn.

The main thing is to realize you’re not a victim and you’re going to have to be the change that you want to see. As long as you sit around and wait for a grant, a tax break, an agency, a bureaucrat, a plan to fall into your laps, you’re never going to make it.

What you have to do is turn off the TV, forget the mall. Do you know that it is now a cultural statistic that American Diegos between the ages of 25 and 35 years old average 20 hours a week playing video games? That’s the most productive time of life. That’s when you’re most physically, whatever, virile, active, strong. At 25, you have the most creativity, great ideas, blah, blah, blah and we’re squandering it.

So you know what? When your friends want to go out and get drunk and party and watch Netflix, you go over to the neighbor and say, “Can I work for you for nothing? I’ll drill fence post holes. I’ll cut wood, I’ll prune a tree, I’ll plant a tree, I’ll help you birth a calf, I’ll help you castrate calves, I’ll move fence.”

You focus on that, on cultivating that passion and that movement will create the movement that you want in your life. You’ve got to want it so bad that you eat, drink and sleep it. When you want it bad enough you’ll find it.

Diego: Well said. Where can people get more information on your book and also some of the upcoming workshops like you’re doing with Darren Doherty there, the Fields of Farmer workshops over in Australia? Talk a little bit about the book, a little bit more about this workshops.

Joel Salatin: The way to keep up with where I am and what I’m doing is on our website [polyfacefarms.com](http://polyfacefarms.com), they have my speaking schedule there, where I’m going to be and then often there’s a link then there to whatever that, if there’s a seminar



like the Darren Doherty stuff that I'm doing. There's a link there to that. That's there on the website.

As far as the book is concerned, the book is available through Amazon, from your local book stores, through Acres USA, from our own Polyface Gift Shop. We have an online gift shop that we operate. It's available lots of places and wherever the books are sold.

Diego: Great. Everybody should go check it out. From here let's transition a little bit. I took a bunch of user questions or our listener questions out there. I'm going to pitch them out to you, answer as you see fit here.

I know you're a broad acre guy but here's a question; what would be your first steps to take a one acre residential homestead into an income producing homestead?

Joel Salatin: Great question. I would look at my big expenses. The big expenses are going to be heating, cooling, food and utilities of course. You can start wherever you want to start, first of all start with what you can do and you can certainly start with growing your own food, have your own garden.

I would include in that maybe some poultry, certainly for eggs for your own kitchen scraps. Your kitchen scraps will be far more valuable as chicken feed turned into eggs than as just feed stock for compost.

There are some fabulous, fabulous little residential-scale aquaponics systems now where you can feed the fish, the fish feed the plants, and then you have all seasonal construction. So think about extending the season. That means putting a solarium on the south side of your house. Every single house, every house should have a solarium on the south side. Certainly if it's anywhere above whatever Arkansas, it should have a solarium, then you can grow your mesclun mix in there.

That solarium is going to create passive solar heat. Now you're going to reduce your heating bills. That solarium can be something that's a kit that can be somewhat pricey sometimes, it looks very pretty, it can be something as crude as cattle panels bent in an arc down to a wooden base.

This doesn't have to be anything fancy but a solarium nonetheless and it will generate a tremendous amount of passive heat in the winter time. You can add of course normal bath with barrels painted black for water to put feeding trays on it and create thermal mass in there.

Grey water systems, for sure we need to be retrofitting our plumbing so we're not putting portable water in the toilet. Run your shower water into a pump back into your toilet. That reduces your water bill especially from public water system. If you can drop your water bill into half, that's a wonderful, wonderful thing.

You can bleed off your grey water and use that to water the plants in the solarium and in, so you reduce your fluid way down. That food of course is going to include putting in a couple of fruit trees, nut trees, put in, concentrate on perennials, berries, those things but look at what you eat.

Try to eliminate your food bill, eliminate your heat bill, and eliminate your water bill. You start doing those and suddenly your whole domicile, instead of being what we call a land yacht, it becomes an actual asset.

Diego: Great points. Here is a follow-up from somebody else that's tied into that. "On a home scale if you're raising broilers, how can you raise them without being tied to feed?"

Joel Salatin: Probably the best book written on that subject is Harvey Ussery and I can't think of a title of it right now. If you check Harvey Ussery's backyard book, it's a fabulous book, everything from raising soldier flies to earthworms, that sort of thing.

The beauty of being small is if you can do things that you can on a commercial scale. It is possible actually to raise, to actually raise chickens for examples with a fairly large vermicomposting bed.

You start picking up some garbage around in the neighborhood and let it be known that people can, that you'll accept people's kitchen scraps and things like that. Leaf, you can do a lot with that, soldier flies is another.

Generally, feed your grey relatively, historically just be glad you don't live in the Middle Ages, grey now is extremely cheap. My caution here, I understand it and I understand self-sustaining, you could go comfrey, dry comfrey, you can do that. If you got to get your energy, you got to get those poultry; they got to have some starch and some energy.

Don't become so much of a purist that you miss the big opportunity of being able to become 80% self-reliant. If you can't get the other 20, don't worry about it. That's better than a paralysis by analysis than never even starting to become 20% self-reliant because if I can't have the whole loaf I'm not going to eat any of it. No, half a loaf is a whole lot better than no load at all.

Diego: Totally, too many people worry about getting it 100% right and they never end up doing it in the first place so I agree just go out there and start. Here's another one, it is said it takes a community to raise a family farm, what do you think is the role of the community in rebuilding functional family farms?

Joel Salatin: My sense is that I'm not sure the question is, I don't want to denigrate the question it's a focus group question. I'm not into focus group stuff. When we started here, we're in a farming community but the farming community thinks we're bio terrorists, I'm not sure the farming community has been a real asset to us.

Our support group came from our customers. Our customer base has, is and probably will be for a long time our support structure. Our adjacent neighbors, not all of them but many of them actually believe that we're going to destroy their livelihood because our unvaccinated free range animals are going to impregnate theirs with some virulent pathogen and destroy the plants food supply.

I feel like our farming community has been about as much as a liability as much as an asset. That being said doesn't mean that we don't try to cultivate neighbor friends. We do have some farm neighbor friends, we can share equipment, we can share expertise, share labor.

We've done all of those things in the past. We still do. We hire our neighbors to help bale hay, that way they can own the equipment and we don't have to. We integrate that.

I will say that there is an asset in a farming community just because there's support structure, there's tractor shops and equipment dealers and things like that.

However, there are also advantages there's no paradise. Remember other advantages in none agricultural communities in that since nobody knows anything about what you're doing, you don't have quite as many people looking over your shoulder and B) There's a lot more land available.

Greg Judy wrote the book, The No Risk Ranching book while he was in Missouri, there are no farmers there. It's all just, the land is all owned by doctors and lawyers from Kansas City who use it to hunt and fish on but they want their farms to be maintained pretty.

He rents five or six farms there literally all contiguous to him and two of them pay him to lease their farms because by putting animals on them they get land

use taxation and they save so much in taxes that it's worth them paying him to lease their farms.

It's another one of these cases where my community, your community, another community, I'm not sure it makes a whole lot of difference. What makes the big difference is your attitude, the relationships you've cultivated and your dedication and passion going forward.

Diego: Makes sense. Here's another one I get a feeling you probably get asked this one quite a bit. How do you set up a farm with animal production but still be able to leave the farm with your family from time to time to travel.

I love the idea of farming with animals but from the observation it seems that a farmer must continuously choose to walk or must consciously choose to walk away from his ability to take time away from the animals' constantly needing care. Do you have to dedicate your whole life to the animals?

Joel Salatin: Yes absolutely. A couple of things, one is seasonality helps a lot. You're generally not completely sprinting the whole year. There are down times and up times. You schedule your times away during slower times. That's what we did early on before we had a community of staff, interns and all that.

I would say my first answer to that is that's one of the reasons why you need to be cultivating partnerships. The biggest, the most normal response when I start talking about partnerships even in sustainable Ag groups is, "Me and Matilda came to this farm to not have to talk to anybody and do this all ourselves. We don't want anybody around here."

There's this sense that, this self-made, farmers we're our own worst enemies because we're the self-made individualists and that's good as far as it goes but it gets you locked into this trap.

The first element in there is if you want animals that's well and good but immediately start cultivating friends, find friends, find your neighbors, your neighbor's child, anybody older than nine can ...

Teresa and I took off; we went and got an award in D.C. when Daniel was about eight years old. He stayed with my Mom. We had a herd of 100 cows and he moved them by himself while we were gone with Grandma.

It's extremely important to cultivate those partners that can spell you absolutely. That's a big deal. It's one of the reasons why so many people go into produce because you don't have to be there every day and you can take the whole winter off.

The only problem is when you hit 45 your knees are worn out and your back's shot and you're out of business. There's no free lunch. I encourage people, cultivate your partnerships early so you can pace yourself and move on into older life without totally being worn out.

Diego: Here's a marketing one. Where do you set the limits on niche marketing, new farmers are often desperate to make buying local easy for people, as easy as going to the grocery store but without limits a farmer can go broke just in fuel costs.

Where do you set the limit and how do you try and set it up so it's cost effective not cost prohibitive where you're not driving the farmer's markets everywhere trying to appease everybody?

Joel Salatin: What a great question. I'll say something here that will be very, very controversial and that is that's why I'm not a friend of farmers' markets. Farmers' markets have tremendous built-in inefficiencies. In fact I would even go so far as CSA, Community Supported Agriculture.

I'm a friend of farmers' markets, love them, CSAs, a friend of them love them but they're extremely inefficient because they have built-in hurdles that make it difficult for the retail interface to happen as freely as it can other places.

Where I am with farmers' markets for example is if you're not taking in \$2000 from a farmers' market, if you took the time that you spend at farmers' market and you invested that in hardcore marketing, when I say hardcore marketing, I mean make a hit list, find your tribe, who thinks like you?

If you're in the artisanal niche marketing food business, who thinks like you? Think about the alternative medical community, the alternative wellness community from western place to slow food to chiropractors, naturopath, aromatherapy, acupunctures, there's an entire sphere, a whole echelon of people that think like this.

You do some hardcore marketing, if you're at farmers' market 50 days a year. Imagine if you took 50 days a year and did hardcore marketing, cultivating some metropolitan buying clubs, some outlets, some restaurants, some serious customers, unless you're taking in \$2000 per farmers' market business, you would be much better served creating a direct customer base.

That's my opinion. I might be off by some money, I might be off by some time but you don't generally see really successful direct market farms going to farmers' markets. We don't go to any.

Why? Because they're extremely inefficient, they're often in the wrong location, they're very crony, they're very fraternal, many times the market rules won't let us, bring much competition coming the market, where somebody's offering something for sale that you have, they won't let you sell it.

It's in opportune times, it's on the weekends, it's not year round. You have to start up in the spring and drop off in the fall, people eat year round. There's just a lot of issues, they're more social gatherings, that's why they're dominated by food nibblers not food buyers from a customer standpoint.

They're dominated by the vendors tend to be hobby farmers who just love to go down and hob-nob with buddy and that's great, that's fun. That is not the place where the food interface is happening.

My encouragement to people is we've got to get collaborative distribution. As soon as I say collaborative I can hear people resisting because of the individualistic, independent farmers.

We got to get away from that idea. If we can get more diversified product on a vehicle and take it to a customer and have essentially a rolling supermarket, then we get economies of scale in production and in distribution.

I absolutely agree that the weak link, it's not, a weak link it's not the weak link of a local food system is that inefficiencies of the distributions network and the most inefficient part of that inefficient local distribution is a farmers market.

What we need to do is create, is go to where people are, there are people now doing door-to-door sales, there are people, us we're doing eight times a year drops. There are people doing online marketing.

It's Amazon.com has now launched its AmazonFresh in California, launched it in the Bay Area, now they're down in San Diego. They're planning to roll it out nationwide. I've heard some pretty savvy people in the food business say that in five years AmazonFresh is going to pretty much run Wal-Mart out of the grocery business.

Time will tell, we'll see. The online shopping cart ability is huge now. There will always be a place for people who want to come and socialize, mingle, walk their dog and get their little jar or their little thing of arugula.

There are more and more people that are ready to really step up and buy their groceries from a local farmer or a local vendor and more and more of those are coming in the form of an internet shopping experience, taking the technology developed for internet for global shopping and localizing it as the ticket in for a

non-bricks and motor interface. That's where this is headed. We need to be savvy of getting to it.

Diego: I agree with you there, I've seen a lot of new innovations that people are working on to help facilitate the connections between chefs and farmers, consumers and farmers. There's a lot headed down the pipe.

Here's a the very last one to finish it up and this will probably wrap up everything, if you could boil all of your life's work down and write only one chapter about regenerative agriculture and permaculture, what would you want to say in that one chapter?

Joel Salatin: I would say that the answers are within not without. From an ecology standpoint, I just think that the regenerative capacity of a leveraged resource base exceeds anything that you can imagine coming in from outside.

This is a message of permaculture. So many people as soon as they think farming they're thinking about inputs whether it's fertilizer, whether it's expertise, genetics, equipment, all sorts of things.

That idea that the land doesn't have the capacity to heal itself, that the sun can't grow biomass here. Yes it can. It needs our massage strategically to maybe control water better or extend the season more, which could be both root cellar or a solarium. All those are season extensions, using the little climate niches of a place.

Goodness, we're building a shed right now on the farm. Like a couple of the others, this thing is pretty good size, it's 32 feet by 120, I'm sorry 32 by 90, pretty decent sized shed.

We're going to build it essentially for about 50 cents a square foot. Why? We're using our own locust poles from our own woods that we fenced the cows out of so the leguminous locust will grow if you graze your woodlot you won't have any locust trees because they taste as good as alfalfa [inaudible 01:18:30].

All the farmers around us are spending thousands of dollars on pressure treated poles and posts and things. We just go up to the wood; they're grazing the woodlots so there's no productive locust there.

We fence our woodlots out so we've got all these wonderful locust trees that grow because we didn't plant them they just grow when you go to a better, a longer-term land measure policy. That's just a tiny example.

There are tons of them in which the regenerative capacity of any given piece of property is just off the charts that the weak link is not the capacity of the land, the weak link is the ingenuity and the savvy of our own imagination to imagine how to touch it, how to participate in it in a way that will unleash its regenerative capacity. That's what I would love to say.

Diego: Great point. I really want to thank you for coming on tonight and look forward to seeing you next March at Permaculture Voices, really excited about it. Thanks again Joel Salatin.

Joel Salatin: Super, okay. Thank you very much.

Diego: Thanks again.

Joel Salatin: Take care, bye.

Diego: That was a pretty hard hitting episode. There was a lot of great information there by Joel Salatin, so many great points in there. Why as a culture do we stereotype against farming? Why is there so much innovation going on in places out here like in Silicon Valley where they're constantly innovating and coming up with new ideas yet we don't send any of our brightest and best people into farming? We don't encourage them to do that.

Why can't we take that same creativity, that same innovation and apply it to agricultural systems, apply to agrarian base systems, apply it to permaculture base systems?

Take an existing agricultural enterprise, modify it using design techniques from all the various disciplines, be it Keyline, permaculture, transition, everything just like Darren Doherty said to really optimize that system and get it running.

You're not going to be a dummy to pull that off. You're going to have somebody who is dedicated, smart and creative. Those are the people we need to push into farming.

If we're ever going to ultimately change our agricultural base system, we need to get more innovation and more of these innovative young people going into farming.

Same thing with entrepreneurs: why do all the entrepreneurs go into tech? Yes, there's a lot of money there but there's also a lot of money if you design a farm the right way. If you stack multiple enterprises on the same land base and you can start adding income onto that property.



Is it going to be easy? No, are you going to have some failures? Yes, over time if you keep trying at it you'll ultimately find what works and what doesn't given your market and your own unfair advantage.

Like Joel Salatin says, "Movement creates movement." You have to ultimately go and try something. Trying something doesn't mean you have to own land. That's no longer an excuse. There's a lot of places out there now where you can go and find farm land for rent.

You can go out, knock on doors, write letters, ask around, "Who has land that maybe I could use part of?" Try and form those relationships. It's going to take work. Nobody is going to give anything to you. You're going to learn a lot in the process.

Just like they said back in the mid-2000s when they were flipping houses, you had to go and put in a 100 different offers to find the one house that you finally liked, you flip that one, it's no different I don't think with finding land to lease. You're going to have to go out, approach a lot of land owners and eventually you'll find the situation that's right for you. Don't give up right away, keep trying.

Another great point that Joel Salatin hit on, Darren Doherty mentioned it too, when you're going into farming, don't start with a shopping list. Don't go out and buy anything, focus on what you have not what you think you need. Make use of what you have and start getting an enterprise going based upon that.

Buy stuff only as you absolutely need it. The most important things you need to do at the beginning are invest in your hydration, getting water under the property and increasing the water holding capacity of the soil and start building the carbon into the soil either by growing plants or by moving animals through the system.

There's a lot that you can do to get that going. Don't assume, "Hey, I need to go buy a new tractor, I need to go buy a new truck, I need this little gadget or that one." It's not like that. Just go out, work with what you have, be frugal at the beginning and like Joel Salatin says be prepared to do whatever it takes to make it work.

That might mean odd jobs, that might be putting in a lot of hours, that might mean trying a lot of things. He really stresses direct marketing. He doesn't really like CSAs or farmers' markets because they have built-in inefficiencies. That's not to say that they don't work for some people but if you can ultimately invest and market yourself correctly you can do direct marketing and you'll spend a lot more time on the farm and a lot less time out at farmers' markets.

The advantage of direct marketing is when that system gets up and running, you ultimately know when you're going to a drop how many sales you have versus just going to a farmers market where you don't necessarily know what you're going to sell that day.

The core of this all Joel Salatin really stresses it's up to the individual to make it happen. You have to go out there and do the work. You have to go out there and put in the time. Don't make excuses like he said even he's guilty of it.

Everybody thinks that when they look at somebody successful, "Hey, that person had it so easy." That's not true. Everybody is going to have struggles; everybody is going to have failures.

Go out there if you really want to do it and that could be the 18-year-old, that could be the 28-year-old in a Dilbert cubicle that hates what they're doing or that could be the 45- or 50-year-old that's just wondering, "Hey, I'm close to retirement but I don't really want to retire." Go out there, put the time in, put the effort in and make it work.

Ultimately, if you do it right, you do the research, you talk to enough people, you'll have struggles but you can probably find something that is going to work for you. Worst case like Joel Salatin said, "Grow what you like to eat because you might have to eat your inventory."

For anybody that's interested in learning more about permaculture based business, I highly encourage you to come out to the permaculture voices conference. We'll have a lot of business base talks at the conference.

We've edited a four hours spin farming class, small plot intensive farming, that gives people the opportunity to farm and get some cash flow going in urban environments in just backyards.

We have a lot of other classes out there. Jack's Spirko will be talking about making permaculture into a profitable business model. Robin Michelle Avis of Verge Permaculture will be talking about the right livelihood, finding a career within permaculture.

Javan Bernakevitch will be talking about finding your niche within permaculture, David Berman will be talking about opportunities within urban lumber. Paul Grieve will be talking about social media for farmers. Joel Salatin Salatin himself will be talking about the various [inaudible 01:26:40] involved in Polyface Farm. There's a lot that can be done within permaculture.

Ultimately at the end of the day, we all have to make money. We all have to have health insurance. We all have to pay our heating bills [inaudible 01:26:53] taxes. It's great to think, "Hey, I can just go out and practice permaculture and not worry about making money," But we really need to make money at the end of the day.

We're trying to go out, put some tools in front of you to allow you to build the framework to say, "i really love permaculture. How can I can do it for a career instead of just doing it at night or on the weekend while I really go to the career that I hate?"

Maybe just maybe this will save somebody a lot of time, a lot of money and a lot of their soul by not going to college. That's right I said it, college just isn't right for everybody.

A lot of people go to college; they spend a lot of money there. They end up graduating with a degree that they ultimately never use, they work in a retail job or a corporate job that they hate and they look back 10, 15, 20 years later and they say man, "I always wanted to do farming, why didn't I do it?"

Go back, listen to this episode, look at some of the great people within permaculture are doing, the Darren Dohertys of the world, the Joel Salatin Salatin of the world, the people up at Verge Permaculture. There's so much opportunity out there.

You just ultimately have to go and apply yourself, follow your passion, provide value to somebody else and find something that you're good at. If you can do those three things, then you can turn what you like into a possible career.

I'd like to thank everybody for listening tonight. For more information on Joel Salatin and this episode, go to [permaculturevoices.com/15](http://permaculturevoices.com/15).

If you really like what you're listening to I'd highly encourage you to go out to iTunes and give us a good review. Good reviews mean that we show up higher in the search and therefore more people can find this great information that we're trying to put out.

I'd like to thank everybody for listening, everybody for supporting the Permaculture Voices Conferences.

I hope everybody will come out next March 2014 for the Permaculture Voices Conference where you will hear great speakers such as Greg Judy, Geoff Lawton, Toby Hemenway, Paul Wheaton, Dr. Elaine Ingham and so many more, 34 hours of content, four days, it should be a great permaculture experience.

Hey, maybe you'll even start a business out of it. Of course you'll learn and be inspired by these men, America's most famous farmer.

Joel Salatin: I'm Joel Salatin Salatin and I'll be speaking at the Permaculture Voices Conference in March 2014. I hope I'll see all of you there.