

Salatin on grassroots farming

HE CALLS HIMSELF a “Christian-libertarian-environmentalist-lunatic farmer,” and if you saw him in the documentary *Food, Inc.* (which was recently nominated for an Academy Award), you might get a taste of this self-proclaimed depiction. But to fully appreciate the eloquent and fervent farmer that is **Joel Salatin**, you can meet him at the Live Green Expo on Saturday, April 17 in Plano. (See page 12.)

On his 550-acre Polyface Farm in Swoope, Virginia, Salatin raises livestock using holistic methods of husbandry, free of potentially harmful chemicals. His Web site, polyfacefarms.com, reads: “We are in the redemption business: healing the land, healing the food, healing the economy, and healing the culture.” No wonder *The New York Times* praised Salatin as “the high priest of the pasture.”

You may recognize his name from Michael Pollan’s book, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*. The author sought out Salatin when he learned that the farmer-entrepreneur refuses to transport food to locations outside of a four-hour radius. Not only does Salatin believe in fresh food, but he also believes in keeping the home-grown dollar local. In his travels across the country, he’s found that only 5 percent of the food consumed in a region is grown there.

The author of six farming books, Salatin’s latest is *Everything I Want to Do Is Illegal: War Stories from the Local Food Front*. The book sheds light on an industrial, corporate food

system and how power in only a handful of large companies discourages community-based food commerce. In the race to produce fatter, cheaper, faster food, the result may be unsanitary conditions in production facilities and poor food quality.

Salatin offers an example of a “war story” from the local food front: “We have a wonderful clean household kitchen, where we can legally make baked items for a farmers’ market, but we can’t legally use it for non-bakery items. Even though our customers would love to buy frozen boxed quiche, and we’d like to use our unsalable small eggs in them as well as surplus garden vegetables, to do so requires a freestanding (not connected to the house), inspected, code-permitted facility, and maybe a special zoning use permit, since these structures are not permitted on land zoned *agricultural*.” He continued, “The explosion of entrepreneurial cottage-based locally sourced food items—if these capricious regulations did not exist—would create a nutrient-dense, village-appropriate artisanal, heritage-based food tsunami.”



Author **Joel Salatin**.

Can you hear the passion in his words? It is inbred. Salatin comes from a line of grassroots farmers (since 1961), which is how Polyface—the “farm of many faces”—acquired its name. If you ever travel to the Shenandoah Valley in Swoope, Virginia, to visit Polyface, you’ll notice that there are no trade secrets, no locked doors, and every corner is camera-accessible...which leads us to food inspections.

The number of FDA inspections has significantly dropped since the early ’70s, and according to Salatin, this illustrates the demise of the neighborhood food industry. He said, “The Hazard Analysis/Critical Control Point (HACCP) program, instituted to create self-regulation through bureaucracy-approved paper documents, destroyed half the small-scale food processing businesses (primarily abattoirs) in the country. Because regulations are not scalable, they discriminate against smaller entities. These smaller, locally based processing facilities are the antidote to the food-borne pathogen epidemic sweeping the country.”

Salatin explained that the food safety movement is made up of two paradigms. To paraphrase, the first assumes that only the government can ensure safe food. The second assumes that neighborhood-scaled and transparent farms inherently set precautions.

Commenting on the first, Salatin argues that putting all your eggs in one basket may hurt small farms. For example, “If mandatory bleaching of beef carcasses becomes a requirement, the necessary infrastructure to protect workers is too expensive for smaller abattoirs to install. The Food Safety and Inspection Service administrators actually view their agency as becoming more efficient when there are fewer plants to inspect [but] regulatory paperwork and non-scalable infrastructure requirements always discriminate against smaller entities.”

Obviously, Salatin favors the second school of thought. To him, smaller, transparent farms keep those in control accountable, and smaller operations are easier to maintain. “Just like a home kitchen is easier to keep clean than a large institutional kitchen, the smaller village-sized processing facility is cleaner,” said Salatin, “especially when customers are personally looking in.”

He added, “A growing number of people, like me, believe that ultimate food safety is a matter of faith: In whom will you place your faith to ensure that you have safe food?”

In *Food, Inc.*, Salatin makes two strong points: “We’ve become so ignorant about something so

intimate,” and “people complain about \$3 for a dozen eggs when they’re drinking a 75-cent soda.”

There is a blurry line between ignorance and preference. Many people choose not to know about our current food system. Salatin agreed, “Many people intuitively realize that our food system is sick, but they would rather deny it than hear the diagnosis. As a culture, we’re more concerned about the integrity of a used laptop purchased on eBay than we are the integrity of the food that we’re feeding our children.”

He continued, “Isn’t it amazing that according to the government food safety police, Twinkies, Ho-Ho Cakes and Mountain Dew are safe, but raw milk and homemade quiche are unsafe? By what stretch of imagination is such a notion possible? And yet that thinking pervades the entire foundation of the government food-safety paradigm. At the end of the day, this whole food safety issue is subjective, faith based, and not even grounded in science. It’s a complete charade to control market accessibility of the locally based, transparent, heritage-honoring foods that would solve all the paranoia in today’s industrial food system. In short, the emperor has no clothes.”

— BRIT MOTT

excerpt

From *Everything I Want to Do is Illegal: War Stories from the Local Food Front*

Would-be local food farmers literally spend their days looking over their shoulders wondering what bureaucrat will assault them next. And yet, what could be more noble, more right, more good than neighbor-to-neighbor food sales?

If a little girl wants to make cornbread muffins and sell them to families in her church, why should the first question be “but is it legal?” As a culture, we should praise such self-motivated entrepreneurship.



read more of this excerpt
on planoprofile.com

John Redington, D.D.S.

We believe dentistry is important for the entire family and enjoy a range of patients from great grandparents to young children

Free Whitening
or Cleaning
with exam and x-rays
New patients only

Conservative Dentistry at its best

We Will Cater To You If:

1. Dinosaurs roamed the earth the last time you saw the dentist.
2. You had a less than pleasant experience at the dentist as a child.
3. You simply appreciate a gentle, caring doctor and friendly staff in a relaxed atmosphere.



5509 Pleasant Valley Drive, Suite 200 • Plano, TX 75023

www.drjredington.com

972.596.5903

Been a while? We cater to our patients!

CHARISSE BARTA M.D. Specializing in Adult Neurology

Fellowship trained in neurophysiology



Texas Neurology Consultants are pleased to announce the association of Charisse Barta, M.D.

Management of Nerve and Muscle Disease, Nerve Injury, Neuropathy, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, Seizure Disorders, Parkinson’s Disease, Headache and Migraine, Stroke, Multiple Sclerosis, Neck and Back Pain

Multiple insurance affiliations

Medicare accepted

New Patients Welcome

Office located on the campus of Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital of Plano

6124 W. Parker Road, Suite 336, Medical Office Building 3

(972) 403-3100

Treatment options are provided by physicians on the medical staff of Presbyterian Hospital of Plano. Physicians are not employees or agents of Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital of Plano. They are independent, sole practitioners or members/agents of an independent physician group.