

Principles of Polyface Farm

*Joel Salatin**

I am going to share with you the overriding principles at Polyface Farm, which is in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. Just so you know my pigeonhole—I can be very upfront and honest and transparent with you—I am a Christian, libertarian, capitalist environmentalist. Here are the overriding principles of our farm:

Food production should be aromatically and aesthetically pleasing. If you cannot enjoy bringing a kindergarten class out and partaking of any part in the production, processing or marketing of food, it is not acceptable. Our senses have been given to us for a reason. How do we know we have infection in a wound? It smells bad. If our food production system stinks, it doesn't bring much happiness.

Animals are healthiest when they ingest copious amounts of green material. Every animal from carnivores to herbivores to omnivores desires a certain amount of salad bar in their diet. So on our farm we move animals to fresh forage every day or two so that they can ingest copious amounts. This is the secret for polyunsaturated fats; conjugated linoleic acid; B-vitamins to go 300 percent higher than what is in the supermarket stores; and that sort of thing. There is no wonder we have obesity and cholesterol problems when we take away the exercise, fresh air, sunshine, high vitamins and minerals; and feed animals a high starch diet in a stressful environment in a fecal factory, inhumane, concentration camp farm.

The soil is a complex living organism, nourished by decomposing biomass. It runs on solar energy. Therefore we do a lot of large-scale composting, letting pigs do the work. We don't use big, heavy, metal machines to make windrow compost piles. We inject corn and let pigs do the work. Increasing organic matter is our aim. If we increased organic matter by just one percent in North America it would capture all of the carbonaceous greenhouse gas emissions since the industrial age began. On our farm, 45 years ago, our average organic matter was less than one percent; today it averages almost eight percent organic.

Nature's design is the pattern for all domestic production. What we want to do is look at nature and take it as a pattern, as a template, and cut it out, and lay that on the landscape as our domestic commercial production. For example, in nature, herbivores exhibit three patterns:

* Farmer and author of books on organic farming, USA

movement, mobbing and no grain. Yet we now have an apoplectic world dealing with bovine spongiform encephalopathy—“mad cow” disease. And suddenly the world has discovered that maybe we shouldn’t have been feeding herbivores dead chickens and dead cows. Why do we need a bunch of high-powered PhD scientists in a big high-tech, techno-glitzy laboratory to tell us that maybe we shouldn’t be feeding chicken manure to cows? We use nature as a template to create that pattern.

Another one is *movement*. We are always going to fresh ground; animals are always moving to fresh ground. It’s critical to create pathogenic cul-de-sacs through rest or multi-speciation. The world is now facing an episodic of avian influenza, especially emanating from Southeast Asia. The reason is that there are no pathogenic cul-de-sacs. People don’t clean out or put a different species in their house or in their shelter or their animal facility, wherever it is. We need to do that, and I’ll show you how we do that in our forum.

Bioregional food systems. Feed your own community first. The average food morsel travels 1,500 miles from producer to plate. The government accounting office in the US actually did something right. They did a safe food study and they determined that the vulnerabilities of the food system were centralized production, centralized processing and long transportation. You would think that the government policy would say, “Let’s de-centralize the production and have small farms. Let’s de-centralize processing and have on-farm processing, community-based canneries and abattoirs and things like that. And let’s have local community-based food systems.” You would think they would do that. Instead they just pass more rules that get in the way of local food systems.

Technology is used to enhance the biological happiness on the farm. We want to marry the techno-glitzy with heritage wisdom. We can assemble a bunch of scientists in this room to study the space shuttle—a pretty sophisticated machine, wouldn’t you say? They can tell us why every single button and gadget in that space shuttle works. But all the scientists in the world can’t come in here to tell us why an earthworm turns left instead of right. I don’t know about you, but I’m betting that the earthworm is going to be around for a long time and it has as much information that is necessary to transmit life as a space shuttle. So what we want to do is use technology like electro-fencing and things like that and allows it to create synergistic, symbiotic relationships between the plants and animals on the farm.

Balance. Ecological, emotional, and economic—all these elements have to be balanced. Part of the problem with organic certification around the world right now is that it allows empires to be built. We now

know the commodification of what was a movement. Now they call themselves “an organic industry.”

An empire by any other name is still an empire. Just because we can, should we? Just because we can, should we ship salad greens from San Francisco to Washington DC on an overnight airfreight express? We humans are clever enough to create things that we cannot morally or ethically metabolize or assimilate. That is why on our farm we are desperately trying to combine the eastern and the western, the parts and the wholes, to create the balance in symbiosis. You know, if the goals in our regular production system of “grow it cheaper, faster and higher” were the noblest goals of mankind, we would all aspire to be the fattest person in the room.

In conclusion, we want to create a habitat that allows for each plant and animal to fully express its physiological distinctiveness. When you and I achieve our greatest potential, our greatest happiness, it is when we are fully expressing our Mary-ness, Jim-ness, Tanya-ness.

I would like to sit down on the Today Show with Don Tyson and ask the simple question, “Does it matter if a chicken can express her chicken-ness?” I would like to sit down with Murphy, head of Murphy Farms Smithfield, and ask, “Does it matter if a pig can express its pig-ness?” Because when we view life and biology with no more respect and no more honour than if it were just so much inanimate, protoplasmic, molecular structure of electrons, protons and neutrons, that creates our perception of life that we then transmit to every other life form, including our spouse, our children, people in this room—cross-tribally and cross-culturally. The foundation of respecting and honouring one another as a world is how we treat and respect and honour the least of these.
