



Farmacology: What Innovative Family Farming Can Teach Us About Health and Healing

Daphne Miller

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What can good farming teach us about nurturing ourselves?

Family physician Daphne Miller long suspected that farming and medicine were intimately linked. Increasingly disillusioned by mainstream medicine's mechanistic approach to healing and fascinated by the farming revolution that is changing the way we think about our relationship to the earth, Miller left her medical office and traveled to seven innovative family farms around the country, on a quest to discover the hidden connections between how we care for our bodies and how we grow our food. *Farmacology*, the remarkable book that emerged from her travels, offers us a compelling new vision for sustainable health and healing—and a wealth of farm-to-body lessons with immense value in our daily lives.

Miller begins her journey with a pilgrimage to the Kentucky homestead of renowned author and farming visionary Wendell Berry. Over the course of the following year, she travels to a biodynamic farm in Washington state, a ranch in the Ozarks, two chicken farms in Arkansas, a winery in California, a community garden in the Bronx, and finally an aromatic herb farm back in Washington. While learning from forward-thinking farmers, Miller explores such compelling questions as:

What can rejuvenating depleted soil teach us about rejuvenating ourselves?

How can a grazing system on a ranch offer valuable insights into raising resilient children?

What can two laying-hen farms teach us about stress management?

How do vineyard pest-management strategies reveal a radically new approach to cancer care?

What are the unexpected ways that urban agriculture can transform the health of a community?

How can an aromatic herb farm unlock the secret to sustainable beauty?

Throughout, Miller seeks out the perspectives of noted biomedical scientists and artfully weaves in their insights and research, along with stories from her own medical practice. The result is a profound new approach to healing, combined with practical advice for how to treat disease and maintain wellness.

Farmacology: What Innovative Family Farming Can Teach Us About Health and Healing Details

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Erica says

Like most books on health, soil, and the food system, Farmacology is the hero's journey of a sympathetic outsider who profiles the lives and tactics of various food renegades, extols the reader to eat real food it's good for you something something farmers markets, and learns along the way that it was really all about friendship.

Doesn't mean it's not worth reading (or going to farmers markets, because QFCs are dens of food depression), it's just that I've read this book before and I think they should make a new genre at the bookstore called Miller-Pollan-salatin-guilt.

Lauren Palmerino says

Fascinating book. I'd checked it out from the library, but I will be purchasing a copy to have on hand. The perspective in this book is so fresh and timely. I have nothing profound to say, but do highly recommend it to others. We, as humans, are undeniably connected to the natural world. The author does an incredible job diving in to that concept with expertise and honesty about her thoughts during this learning process.

Catherine says

This was so exciting to read. I want to read all her references, and go to all the farms.

Dr. Miller is a medical doctor who grew up the child of two urban parents turned (unsuccessful) farmers. For her, an interest in farms and an interest in medicine were linked - watching sick, suffering livestock as a child. She forgot this initial spark of interest until she picked up a book called The Soul of Soil - she was interested in "the detailed description of a soil ecosystem where the nutrient exchange between soil, microbe, and plant sounded curiously similar to what takes place in our own intestines."

That book ultimately inspired her to look to agriculture for models of complexity care to be applied to medicine - rather than focusing on one issue at a time to solve.

"But most of the time our health needs are more complex and dynamic, just like the soil, and most of what ails us today - depression, anxiety, diabetes, heart disease, fatigue - is multifactorial, chronic, and not well served by a static and highly focused approach. On one level there is our physical makeup: our DNA and the hormones, nerves, and other tissues that manifest this coded information. These structures and chemicals have an imbalance that can be measured and corrected - such as blood sugars, blood pressures, or hormone levels. But addressing these discrete issues, while important, is only one piece of the puzzle and rarely translates to optimal health."

Each chapter is focused on a different farm. Each farm has an illustration of its set-up.

She interviews farmers and medical researchers and cites studies to try to come to a full, complex understanding of health. It's hard to summarize, because I don't want to lose any nuance captured by combining these different approaches. The real fun is watching all these ideas collide and sparking insights - for which you just have to read the book.

Topics Covered:

Chapter 1: Biodynamics, microbiota, testing specific nutrient levels

Chapter 2: Organic ranching/holistic grazing, allergies, more microbiota, the family/community influence on children/calves in getting healthy diets

Chapter 3: Pasture raised hens and stress management, plasticity

Chapter 4: Integrated pest management and new ideas for cancer care

Chapter 5: urban farming and community medicine: longevity, crime prevention

Chapter 6: aromatic herbs, sustainable beauty ("The skin mirrors the soil in structure and function")!

Alison says

Gives you a case of the Aha's

Being plant based, I went into this book skeptical because I knew it supported animal agriculture, even if on a humane level. But I found the bigger picture and information extremely valuable.

Kathy says

Thought provoking.

I found this book very interesting. I like that this doctor went looking for a way to change the way she treats her patients...looking at the whole person and not just the part that ails them. Her connection between farming and healthcare are interesting and thought provoking and I am now looking for a doctor who thinks like an ecologist. I highly recommend you read this book for your health.

Catherine says

If you don't think that human health and food have any connection, then this is the book for you because it's a freaking education. It's written by a family physician who travelled the country visiting a variety of farming/ranching operations and writes this book to show us exactly how the medical industry and the farming industry are not only connected but maybe even mirror images of one another. If we can understand how everything is connected, how diversity in the soil and in medical treatments and even our bodies microbiome matters, then we might be able to solve many of the things that simultaneously ail our bodies and this planet both. It's a wonderful, insightful read. If you stick food in your mouth or put makeup on your face or feel ill once in awhile you should read this.

Wil says

I just finished this book and my heart is racing with excitement because I know that it will influence me for the rest of my life. I've been doubting my career path because I'm applying to medical school but I'm also incredibly passionate about sustainable agriculture and deep ecology. This book was the perfect fusion of these interests and gave me an unprecedented hope that there are like-minded doctors in the world who are pushing for healthcare to rise above the reductionism that plagues modern medicine.

Though this book resonated with me personally, I think other people might enjoy it too. It is a exploration of what sustainable agricultural practices can teach us about sustainable health practices. Its amazing how similar conventional medicine is to conventional agriculture and Dr. Miller highlights these similarities. However, most of the book delves into her experiences at family farms and community gardens around the United States and she sees that many of these places hold the key to a more holistic approach to health. Dr. Miller shows us how thinking like a family farmer can help us understand our body and our own health predicaments.

Awesome Awesome book!!

Sanju says

I really loved this book. The only part where the author definitely lost me was when she started the shameless plug for Bobbi Brown cosmetics, when I felt like I was reading an infomercial. At least she disclosed that she got a package of a lifetime supply of Bobby Brown make-up. Ugh. After all the rest of the book, this one part was so strange and out of line. And, the sad thing is when an author begins on one line of discussion and then interrupts for a commercial break, one can't help but wonder how much of the rest of the book was a commercial for some company who sends her a lifetime supply of their product or whether she is really trying to be unbiased. Why in the world would the author have included this part? It makes no sense. And, if she were going to put in such an obvious commercial part, why not at least include some commercials from other so-called cosmetics-to-the-stars companies? This one chapter shifted the entire tone of the book from a book about farming and health to some kind of fashion magazine. This was disappointing. Even so, most of the book I really liked. It reminded me of Michael Pollan's books. I found the rest of the book very interesting, engaging, and the entire book a quick enjoyable read. Would definitely recommend to anyone who also enjoys Pollan's books.

Tina says

Wow! Now to find a physician who practices "medical ecology" to begin the true path to wellness! Everything written in this work makes good, simple sense. And, yes, we focus too much on anti-aging & not on beauty, which is unproductive, ridiculous, and a waste of time! We need to think more about our connectivity to nature in order to be physically, mentally, and spiritually whole.

Karen says

This is a very interesting look at how we should be approaching health - treating the whole being not just the "disease" and how the foods we consume and the environment we live in impacts our health. Well worth a read!

Jillian (PidginPea's Book Nook) says

{ I received an ARC of this book for free through Goodreads First Reads. }

I was honestly not in the mood to read non-fiction when *Farmacology* arrived in my mailbox, but my attitude turned around right away, as I quickly found myself completely wrapped up in this book. *Farmacology* is a very interesting read about the power of farming, gardening, and nature in general as it relates to our health. There are chapters on holistic farming practices in locations including chicken farms, vineyards, herb farms, and urban gardens; Miller ties each of these unique and innovative endeavors back into ideas about holistic wellness and how the practices on these farms may be useful when applied to medicine as well. I knew nothing about these theories before I started reading, but Miller makes a very convincing case and I'm interested in learning more. Although some of the concepts would require a little more research on my own part before I bought into them, I found this to be overall a very compelling read.

Niya says

For anyone with an interest in holistic health, the book is a must read - especially if you're general outlook on life is a Cartesian divide and conquer approach. The text is a well researched, powerful reminder that much as we would like to consider things as discrete and removed from the world, the truth is not that simple. Life is relative, and as such, health is relative as well - whether it's cancer, allergies, or wrinkles - each benefits from looking at the "problem" within its environment and considering all of the factors, instead of just the immediate problem. The concept of medical ecologists that Miller raises is a powerful one, but one that will only happen if consumer demand it - and I think it's time we do so.

Dniecebear says

I got to hear Ms Miller in person before I read her book. That the woman speaks passionately of both "tilth" and "chi" warms me and all my microbes.

I remember once being on a church committee for health and envisioning bringing a farmer to speak to us. The doctor on the committee was livid: what would any farmer know about health? We go with Ms Miller to a kind of no-man's land, where that doctor on the committee and no doctor has gone in recent times, to a place between two fields of inquiry. I think some farmers know that place well, but, doctors?

This doctor visits sustainable farmers and farms as well as other doctors and researchers to focus on health. When Ms Miller converses with one who studies factors that influence food preference, especially in children, we hear this lesson:

... "you can't just focus on the kids. The unit is really the family and the community.' ...After our conversation, I thought about Julie Mennella's final message: Producing healthy eaters is a job for an entire family, an entire community. What she proposed was much more involved than the USDA's 'Five a day' or 'Fruits and Veggies: more matters' campaigns, which simply urge parents to put more produce on their children's plates."

The multifaceted, community approach needed for healthy eating is much like approaches the farmers we visit with Ms Miller have instituted on their farms, thinking of their farms as a systems, less testing and inputs of any kind, and honoring the microbial life of the soil. I'm excited about the calves able to grow up with their mothers (instead of being weaned and bottle fed) and all the other ways farmers are listening to what nature requires of them in their specific places and finding what nature helps them to do.

Yes! Soil IS the placenta of life and health.

William Torgerson says

I've been interested in sustainability and nutrition for several years and it's this book that finally got me over the hump to planting my first garden.

I learned about the idea of a biodynamic farm where all parts depend on one another. It was especially interesting how Daphne connected the process of how soil is healthy to ways in which the body can achieve health.

Glad to be referred to localharvest.org

The structure of this book worked well in that there would be a section about farm life and then a section that followed in which the lessons of the farm were applied to the health of the human body.

Going to see what a mindfulness program is.

A wow stat that reminds me of what I learned in the documentary film, Food INC: There are two major egg hatcheries in the United States today while there were over 13,000 hatcheries in the 1930s.

A new idea to me: cancer as a chronic condition to be kept in check rather than something to be cut out or poisoned. I'd like to ask Daphne in what sort of cases she favors surgery. Breast cancer comes to mind right away. Interesting theories that I want to take a harder look at. Tampa's Moffitt Cancer Center is specifically mentioned.

Here's a sentence I'd like to think about how to apply to undergraduate education: "So in 2007, when he was offered the job of revamping the radiology department at Moffitt, he accepted on the condition that he could dedicate a portion of his workweek to building and directing a mathematical oncology "collaboratorium," which would take a multidisciplinary approach to understanding and treating cancer."

I tried to think about how an interdisciplinary undergraduate major could be designed. The first thing that comes to mind reading the above is that it could be problem/solution oriented. These programs exist. My

reading of this book will prompt me to investigate further.

Rachel says

Key points for me:

- Sustainable farming is very important - sometime more so than organic farms because not all organic farming is sustainable and they deplete the soil of nutrients to supply big box stores
- Support your local CSA
- Soil quality is VERY important
- In one study breast fed babies had a more expansive palate than formula fed
- start them with fruits and veggies young they may love them forever
- minimize antibiotic and steroid use
- ear drops made of olive oil infused with mullein and garlic - helped an ear infection as long as there was no pus or discharge from the ear.
- Stress - low grade stress but chronic stress is not good. vs. others who have high stress for a little amount of time.
- chickens and their stress level is very important to keep low.
- stress reduction in humans - join the flock - do something you love for yourself
- Integrated pest management is amazing!
- IPM and cancer care - treat it as a pest not a killer (control the disease for the long run)
- lots of vegetables - little meat
- cancer thrives in acidic environments - sugary environments
- Eat a light dinner
- Hydrosols are great for skin (rose water)
