



The Sheer Ecstasy of Being a Lunatic Farmer

Joel Salatin

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Foodies and environmentally minded folks often struggle to understand and articulate the fundamental differences between the farming and food systems they endorse and those promoted by Monsanto and friends. With visceral stories and humor from Salatin's half-century as a "lunatic" farmer, Salatin contrasts the differences on many levels: practical, spiritual, social, economic, ecological, political, and nutritional.

In today's conventional food-production paradigm, any farm that is open-sourced, compost-fertilized, pasture-based, portably-infrastructure, solar-driven, multi-speciated, heavily peopled, and soil-building must be operated by a lunatic. Modern, normal, reasonable farmers erect "No Trespassing" signs, deplete soil, worship annuals, apply petroleum-based chemicals, produce only one commodity, erect Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, and discourage young people from farming.

Anyone looking for ammunition to defend a more localized, solar-driven, diversified food system will find an entire arsenal in these pages. With wit and humor honed during countless hours working on the farm he loves, and then interacting with conventional naysayers, Salatin brings the land to life, farming to sacredness, and food to ministry.

Divided into four main sections, the first deals with principles to nurture the earth, an idea mainline farming has never really endorsed. The second section describes food and fiber production, including the notion that most farmers don't care about nutrient density or taste because all they want is shipability and volume. The third section, titled "Respect for Life," presents an apologetic for food sacredness and farming as a healing ministry. Only lunatics would want less machinery and pathogenicity. Oh, the ecstasy of not using drugs or paying bankers. How sad. The final section deals with promoting community, including the notion that more farmers would be a good thing.

The Sheer Ecstasy of Being a Lunatic Farmer Details

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Andersreads says

Joel Salatin and his way of farming were featured in the movie Food, Inc., and the book The Omnivore's Dilemma. In this book Salatin discusses the methods he has developed over the years, and how they work to enrich the land through good stewardship and by using methods that enrich the soil. Salatin is very opinionated, and although I didn't agree with everything he wrote, I agree with the basic premise that factory farming (both livestock and crops) destroy the very land that supports them. And I'm going to build an egg-mobile this summer.

Katie says

I loved this book. Salatin has a wonderful sense of humor and shares his completely biased opinion with gusto. Whether you agree with him or not you have to appreciate his passion and admit that perhaps the conventional world view can use some shaking up. I believe in much of what Salatin stands for (local, ecological, land-healing, small-scale farming) but I still found my paradigm to be challenged in many areas. The only negative thing I can say is that the book could have used some editing. Salatin tends to follow rabbit trails and does quite a bit of ranting which makes it longer than it needs to be. However, this is obviously his personal style and does not detract too much from the overall concept. I'm looking forward to his next book!

Darrell says

A fun read. If you have already read several of Joel's books, then this one is still worth reading. There are stories I found here I did not find in other books as well as some new viewpoints. If you have not read a book by Joel yet, I do not recommend this as a first. I think perhaps "You Can Farm" is a much better introduction to Joel's writing.

Stephen says

Joel Salatin is crazy and glad to be so; in print and in media like Food, Inc and Fresh, he gleefully rejects what the late 20th century produced as conventional farming. The Sheer Ecstasy of being a Lunatic Farmer is a defense of farming, and in particular a defense of his kind of farming. While grounded in traditional knowledge, Salatin's delivery incorporates a lot of modern ecological connections. His style is folksy in the extreme, the narrative a conversation. Salatin is no rube, though, His and his father's approach redeemed a swath of dead land, turning it into a thriving business -- and Salatin himself has become a leader in the local foods movement.

Sheer Ecstasy opens with a history of how Salatin's father gave new life to their purchased farm. They made the foundation of their farm not a good range of machinery, but the health of the soil. Take care of the

soil, and everything else will follow. Salatin's work emphasizes closing the nutrient cycle as much as possible; while some nutrients invariably escape (their selling as food being the point of a farm), modern farming is dominated by inputs and outputs. After importing seed, farmers rely on mountains of fertilizer, pesticides, and antibiotics to bring the crop (be it corn or cows) to its marketable size. Every stage relies on finance and import, and nothing from the farm's crop is used to sustain it other than its sale. Salatin's Polyface Farm is different.

Instead of taking his cue from a machine, Salatin looks to nature. Deeply religious, he sees a providential plan in the design of nature, and holds that any human plan that goes against it will ruin itself eventually; it is patently unsustainable. While the libertarian Salatin disdains the label 'organic', being now a certified label issued by a government he regards with contempt, the approach is nevertheless one inspired by life. Salatin relies on an ecological understanding of plants and livestock to power his farm. While he never lays out his entire plan of operation in the book, each chapter reveals another element, and taken together Salatin appears a genuine maestro conducting a symphony of eating and excreting. Cows graze a field, and chickens follow, removing parasites that spread disease. The cows' winter bedding packs are mixed with corn and given over to pigs to root in, creating compost. Instead of being penned in one place, animals are moved on a daily basis in a simulation of their species' natural grazing patterns. His animals aren't merely the ends of the farm; they are its means. Salatin sees them as cocreators, with man and beast working together for their mutual advantage. Salatin's life-inspired approach applies toward disease prevention; while the natural parasite removal and mock-migrations do their part, he also employs the time-honored method of selective breeding to produce stock that is robust and naturally disease-resistant.

Salatin has been fighting convention for so long he embraces it on purpose. This sometimes brings him to the border of quackery, as when he investigates the possibility of a tool that collects 'cosmic energy' and prevents drought. It doesn't work, of course, and he cheerfully admits it, but he's impressed by the salesman's dousing taking him straight to the spot that Salatin would have picked to stick it. This is an example of being in tune with the land. More skeptical minds (mine) would say it's an example of being cold-read. I would not be surprised if the douser picked up on Salatin's body language that inclined him toward a spot, visual tics that told a sly mind when he was getting warmer to Salatin's ideal spot. Salatin only prescribes advice that is based on evidence, however, on his careful study of the landscape.

On the whole, *Sheer Ecstasy* is a fun first look at how agriculture can adapt to sustain itself.

Helen Lyons says

This is absolutely the best book. I cannot put it down. I am a 73 year old grandma who lives in town. I was raised in the country and I miss the down home really tasty food. It is not available here in the local grocery stores! If it is it is like looking for a needle in a haystack! It is such a lonely feeling, the ladies at the book club will not be reading this book. Most of what they are reading is meaningless trash. Hey Joel and I have something in common. I think I am a lunatic grandma who knows the sheer ecstasy of reading a meaningful book.

Terri says

Joel Salatin raises animals on his farm with the integrity that used to be the norm in the American rural farm

lifestyle. He believes in leaving his land better than he found it. You can tell he LOVES his farm. And that includes the chickens, cows and pigs. He believes in allowing the pig to enjoy the very "pigness of the pig." The cows are chickens are pasture fed and allowed to roam. The cow chews the cud that most cows don't even know exists anymore and the chickens delight in big juicy earthworms and other insects--all while rejuvenating the pasture land with their rich manure. Who needs chemical fertilizers when the animals provide a much richer, healthier form?

Everything supports the life on the farm. It's one big happy circle of life. I wouldn't mind going to visit the farm myself. And lucky for me (and anyone else who wants to) the farm is open all year round for anyone who might want to "drop in."

This book is for anyone who believes there is a better way to raise farm animals than industrial farms with their cramped quarters. Where the animals stand in their excrement and are never allowed to roam. The whole time I read the book I kept thinking it was like a Disneyland for farm animals.

Mr. Salatin is VERY opinionated about his way of doing things. Most of the time (OK pretty much all of the time) I agreed with him. But I can see how his personality could rub some people the wrong way. He's pretty pissed off with what's going on in our country with farms. And he lets everyone know it. I found my own government to be suspect in their farming regulations that encourage industrial scale farming with no thought to the future of our country's food quality. This book will make you want to shop the Farmer's Market if you don't already.

If you've seen "Fresh" or "Food, Inc." Mr. Salatin's farm is shown as the ideal farm model for this country.

So, if you really want to know what goes on in our Government and in our current food system--read this book. If you don't want to know, don't read it.

Be prepared to be one pissed off citizen.

David Galloway says

This is my fifth or sixth Joel Salatin book, and every time around two-thirds of the book is a rehash of the rest of his work but I don't care as his books are always informative and entertaining.

In this book Salatin mostly writes about how farmers who don't use herbicides, artificial fertilizers, and CAFOs are considered lunatics by Big Ag. Salatin takes us through all the differences between his rolling meadows with happy pigs and chickens to the fecal ponds of industrial Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) where chickens get their beaks cut off and are never given enough room to stand up, cattle are fed manure mixed with corn syrup to make it taste sweet, and other horror stories.

This book is also about how instead of the Jeffersonian idea of the educated gentlemen farmer our society in the last fifty years has pushed bright kids away from agricultural pursuits which partially explains why it has been so easy for Big Ag to manipulate farmers and make agricultural policies that favor mega-producers like Tyson and Smithfield while not letting family farms compete fairly.

For example, Salatin has to charge \$15 for a pound of bacon because due to current policies he is not allowed

to butcher the animals on his land and must transport them 100 miles, if he doesn't want the butcher to use standard nitrate and MSG-laced curing salts Salatin must provide sealed packages of such (from only one current supplier), he must then pay for the same packaging and labeling as you see in grocery stores; this is based on economies of scale so he pays much more by volume for packaging than larger corporations. Finally, in order to sell this bacon on his farm he must have an air-conditioned retail building with public restrooms and handicapped parking. It's no wonder that smart kids look at the situation and leave the family farm for greener pastures.

Linda says

Who could resist a book entitled, The Sheer Ecstasy of Being a Lunatic Farmer, by Joel Salatin?

The Bottom Line

The author's joy in farming and in life are woven throughout the book. Why does he call himself a lunatic? Many of the philosophies and practices employed at Polyface Farm are not accepted by industrial agriculture. I am thankful for lunatics like the Salatin's and other farmers following a similar path.

Prior to writing The Sheer Ecstasy of Being a Lunatic Farmer, Salatin had written 6 other books with equaling intriguing names like, Salad Bar Beef and Everything I Want To Do Is Illegal: War Stories From the Local Food Front. His latest book Folks, This Ain't Normal: A Farmer's Advice for Happier Hens, Healthier People, and a Better World is sure to be informative and entertaining.

Read the whole review at: <http://greengroundswell.com/the-sheer...>

Stephany Wilkes says

I hereby nominate Joel Salatin for President. Though it's hard to wish such a terrible job on such an intelligent and accomplished true patriot, and though he'd have to leave his farm, the good that would result for our nation would be worth it. Maybe just one term, Mr. Salatin? Please?

Here I am, going along in life feeling like the lone crazy one, calling my representatives to ask for a true free market (no federal subsidies for any industry or business, ever, whether corn, defense contractors, or anything else; no bail outs, ever) and laying equal blame on not just government bureaucracy but on the far too great power of corporations. Here I am, loaning money to farms and being paid interest in vegetables, and having my family tell me it's a probably a scam. Now that I've read this book, I know I'm not the *lone* crazy person. Hallelujah!

But I digress. The book is about farming and freedom, true freedom and independence of the kind most of us working stiffs don't have. Even better, if you've read Michael Pollan's books and seen some documentary films about industrial food and think you've heard it all, I promise you you haven't. This book has opened my eyes to the specific, highly innovative, and many different ways in which good food can be produced and to

how utterly nonsensical and, almost worse, economically foolish industrial food production is (if it's not good for farmers or animals or consumers well, then, why...). There's a LOT about the "how" of good food production that you just won't know about unless you've farmed yourself. Great stuff.

You will laugh so hard you'll have tears running down your face when you thought you were going to have a nice, pleasant read about happy farm animals right before bed. I've tried to read some of the funniest passages aloud to my husband but am often laughing too hard (yes, laughing so I can hardly breathe) to get through them. Excellent! I can't wait to read more of Joel Salatin's books. Next up on the list: Everything I Want To Do Is Illegal.

I've tried to be more judicious with my five-star ratings, but this book has earned it for its voice, uncommon subject matter, laugh-out-loud humor, and cultural urgency and significance.

Justin says

Few books have ever spoken to me on such a deep level as this one. You won't find the level of wisdom in here that you will in The One Straw Revolution, for example, or even in the writings of Bill Mollison on Permaculture. Salatin's is rather a homegrown, from the hip wisdom born from combining biting common sense with a passion for way out of the box innovation and most importantly a pure joy in making animals happy.

He understands how land and animals thrive and creates optimum conditions for every living thing to do what it does best in a way that helps others also do their best. This includes the farmers because they have to see themselves as one of these beings in the orchestrated dance that heals all that participate.

His analysis of the farmer mentality is second to none - farmers sell their future to the Tyson's of the world and in the process stink up the neighborhood and scare their children from the profession. We now see these processes as normal, just as we see certain grades of obesity, coronary heart disease and diabetes as normal components of our modern culture. If we take a step back, though, Salatin will help us see that normal is a condition defined by how the land and our bodies worked before the industrial revolution. The fauna within us have a precise diet and when they are fed industrial food they simply don't know what to do with it and the consequences of this process are manifested in the modern problems like diabetes, obesity and coronary heart disease. The same concept can be applied to dirt, the living membrane of the planet that sustains all life. It has a specific diet, works optimally when it is mobbed, grazed and then left to grow back. With both diet and farming, optimal care heals and builds fertility.

Any book that explores this concept with such insight is a welcome read. But Salatin goes beyond this to suggest how complex learning takes place, how the economy should be organized, how farms need to go beyond producing things to become community stewards in the broadest sense of the word through direct marketing and of course how hens should truly express their hennness. Exploring the pigness of pigs alone makes this essential reading for anybody remotely interested in animal rights, farmers and farming and food issues. In fact these ideas help me understand my lifelong attraction to compost. Composting permits all living things involved do what they are supposed to do, it puts them on their natural cycle and moves them towards fulfilling their purpose.

I haven't seen anybody else look at farming with such a penetrating comprehension of its true purpose to heal society.

Visionary and essential.

Jonathan says

Great look at sustainable farming from one of the great trailblazers in the US. Salatin is certainly not your average environmentalist, aligning more with libertarianism than any other political view. While I wouldn't agree with quite everything in here, or his way of expressing his views sometimes, from a holistic perspective he clearly has an amazing model that I wish all farmers would take as the example. There are many more philosophical books on this topic, but this book is terrific from a practitioner's perspective.

Claudia Turner says

"Preserve the pigginess of pigs" ... Once again the visionary Joel Salatin, the "lunatic" farmer from Virginia, has written a cohesive and diverse account and mini-handbook of a solar-driven, locally-marketed, synergistic farmer. With takeaway points, and anecdotes, nearly anyone could quickly absorb the ideas described here. Basically, while still considerably "righteous" this most recent book by Salatin is unlike his first goofier ones in that it is not as preachy, cheesy and/or blistering. Salatin's writing has become more eloquent over the years, since his original typewriter days, and his thoughts are more imaginatively conveyed, with sharp humor and passion. Occasionally he sounds off his rocker, but only in an intensely inspiring manner; most of the time he seems more clear-headed and intelligent than just about anyone, especially when describing the harsh realities faced for the modern farmer; as well as the varying degrees of elitism and conservatism that are amplified in the farming community from both liberal and conservative sides of the symbiotic spectrum. He is very experienced and knowledgeable in the world of sustainable farming, and when he talks about farming specifically I feel like there is no one more invested in and aware, with vast insight, of the changing climate and ecosystem, and the varying needs and concerns of healthy farmers, healthy animals and happy/healthy foodies alike. I will keep this copy well preserved on my bookshelf and continue to return to it as a good base from which to understand some of the details behind food policy, corporate and exploitative agri-business/industrial farming vs. small, local, urban and rural green farms.

Ami says

Joel Salatin is always a little bit extreme for my taste. However, his enthusiasm and passion more than make up for his ranting. And, I must add, his ranting can be highly convincing at times.

Jim Kahn says

I have great respect for Joel Salatin the farmer and businessman, but this will certainly be the last of his books that I read. If you have already read one or more of his other books, there is no reason to read this one; it is a simple re-hashing of the same themes and principles.

Further, I am officially tired of Joel Salatin the Condescending Christian Fundamentalist. For a book which from its title indicates it should be about farming, Salatin cannot help but weave in his extreme religious and political ideology. In one particularly baffling section, Salatin somehow attempts to weave together environmental conservation activities with abortion and pornography. Huh?

There are certainly some interesting parts to this book if you can get around the ultra conservative rambling - for example, his take on adding ponds to his property, and he is certainly correct in bashing the industrial food system from CAFO's to government subsidies. But from a quality standpoint, he absolutely is incapable of staying on topic and presenting coherent arguments.

If you have learned about Salatin and Polyface Farm from the Omnivore's Dilemma, Food Inc., and/or any of his magazine articles, you probably have a pretty positive impression of him and a good understanding of his farming principles. Stop right there. There is no need to read his books as they will only degrade your opinion of him. I wish I had.

Ariel says

Mr. Salatin expounds on the kind of attitudes and actions they take at his farm, Polyface, that are completely foreign to conventional farming (and foreign to liberal thinking as well, in some cases). It helped me see more clearly why it's good to do things like work with the seasons, stay relatively small, use less machinery, and build fences that aren't straight (because fences should go with the lay of the land, which typically means in curves, not grid-like lines). And I already knew that farming can be a fun, rewarding, lifestyle... but this book reinforced that and helped me see how to make it so in my own future. Also, who doesn't enjoy a blunt, funny, and rather contrary book once in a while?
