

# An Interview with Joel Salatin

By Dr. Joseph Mercola

**DM:** Dr. Joseph Mercola

**JS:** Joel Salatin

Introduction:

**DM:** Hi, this is Dr. Mercola. Today I'm here with Joel Salatin on his farm in Virginia. He's really one of the pioneers in sustainable agriculture. And really, you know, as a physician, it's really painfully obvious to me, and I'm sure most of you viewing this, that what we eat has a large control over what our ultimate health is.

Clearly, we need to get back to the source of our food and this constant reliance. Ninety percent of food that Americans eat is processed foods. We really want to get back to our roots and understand how the food is going, and who is producing our food.

Joel has done a tremendous job of really pioneering processes that really allow farmers to grow food in an efficient manner. But then the challenge is that many of these farmers aren't really very good marketers. Interestingly, there's been a movement – thanks to the Internet, software developments, and electronic researches – that allowed this transition. I'm wondering, Joel, if you can update us on some of the changes in the issue that you've seen recently, which really suggests that things can change pretty rapidly for the better.

**JS:** Sure. Yeah, I love it when we take technology development for globalism, and it becomes the way in for localization. The Internet is one of those things – you know, dot com, the whole E-commerce thing. One of the things that's been happening – and I love farmers' markets, but farmer's markets have built-in problems – there's a lot of politics. They're confined to their space, for both vendors and parking. Many farmers' markets are not accepting new vendors.

**DM:** And they have limited hours.

**JS:** They have limited hours. The farmer has to come with stuff, and then go home and put stuff away, you know, all of these elements.

What's developed in the last couple of years literally is (I'm going to call it) a minor grassroots explosion in essentially virtual electronic farmers' markets, where a software is being developed to be able to present an electronic shopping cart (some sort of an electronic supermarket experience, if you will) to a customer online, working with a cadre of farmers behind the scenes that are also profiled, you know. Do you want more information on this farm? Boom! You can take a virtual tour of the farm. You can sit there, do a two-minute tour around the farm, and you can see things.

But using this amazing electronic informational interface without bricks, border, and cashiers will actually create economies of scale and efficiencies to be able to aggregate on a local scale, to

get economies of scale and efficiencies that the industry currently enjoys, but on a localized or micro scale.

We're collaborating with one group right now that's working with about a hundred farms within 100 or 150 miles. They do a weekly shopping cart using moonlighting Papa John's Pizza delivery drivers. Everybody orders once a week. Then they come around to the different farms, pick up everything, spend all night aggregating it into the customized boxes, you know, for Jim Smith, Jane Doe, blah, blah, blah. Then they put them (about 20 boxes) in the cars and dispense them at five o'clock in the morning.

By eight o'clock, they're all done. The people put it in their fridge before they go to work. It's extremely efficient. What they say is that they can way undersell places like Whole Foods and have it fresher – way fresher.

**DM:** And higher-quality.

**JS:** Higher-quality and cheaper, because they don't have to inventory, and they get rid of the bricks and mortar and all of the...

**DM:** It's a huge cost.

**JS:** It's a huge cost – all those shelf-stocking and all that.

**DM:** The rent, heater, and the air-conditioning.

**JS:** Yeah, exactly. We're working with another fellow that is using the Internet website to create a schedule for office workers in the metropolitan sector. Take an old school bus, you rip out everything, and put in essentially an old general store motif – you know, burlap, crew boards, and stuff. He's got his bins, freezer, potbelly stove, a couple of rocking chairs, and he prints it. He prints what he has.

He's essentially a goffer. He goffers this stuff from about 30 or 40 farms, puts it in the bus, and takes them to the office, the big office complexes in the urban centers. People come out on their work breaks and shop. And it's efficient for them, because now they don't even have to make that left hand turn into the supermarket on their way home. That's efficient.

Another one that we're just working with here in Staunton, called Staunton Fresh, is an entrepreneurial activity. Literally, one guy said, "I want to become a local food aggregator. I want to be that."

He's taking about 10 or 15 percent markup, whereas the average supermarket takes about 35 or 40 percent markup. He's taking about 10 percent markup, running it as a sole business, a little sole proprietorship. Essentially, he bought the software from some company in Oregon or something, and has about a dozen, 15, or maybe as many as 20 local farmers signed up with a wide array of items.

People will buy once a week. Then he'll come out with his truck, pick everything up, and meet everybody at a location once a week. They get their stuff. They shop once a week for what's available locally, but they get to do it on their time. They don't have to get up on a Saturday morning and go to farmer's market.

**DM:** Sure.

**JS:** The farmer doesn't have to get up and go to town.

**DM:** It's delivered to their home.

**JS:** Yeah.

**DM:** I mean how much easier does it get than that?

**JS:** Or in this case, they're going to go to a pickup spot.

**DM:** Sure. Okay, or at the convenience of their office.

**JS:** Convenience, near where they are.

**DM:** Right. It's simpler than going to the store.

**JS:** Exactly. All these systems are trying to use this amazing, cheap, information-friendly interface and take the big overhead components out. I just think it's very exciting.

**DM:** It is very exciting. There will be an article with this interview. We hope to have some resources that people can contact, so they can find this software.

**JS:** Sure.

**DM:** You don't have to be a farmer, you know. There are a lot of people out of work who are really skilled.

**JS:** Yes.

**DM:** They could take on this venture with very low capital investment and create a phenomenally beneficial service for so many people.

**JS:** Yeah.

**DM:** There's an opportunity for tens of thousands of people to do this. But one of the points that I'd like to emphasize, too, is that after having you graciously give and provide us with a tour of the process of your farm, where you're raising pasture-raised poultry and beef, it is very, very clear that this is a possibility. Most people watching this don't even realize that it's possible. Part of the problem is that there's an enormous number of farmers who would do this.

**JS:** Right.

**DM:** But there's just not a demand for that. I can't strongly encourage you enough to recognize this possibility and to go out. Take some time, effort, and energy. Don't watch a movie here or there.

**JS:** *[Laughs]*

**DM:** Skip that. Invest that time in finding a farmer, convincing them to employ the resources that you've developed over the last 40 years to provide this type of product. Because a lot of

people, and I think justifiably so, vegetarians, are really annoyed and disturbed with the factory farm process.

**JS:** Oh, yeah.

**DM:** I think they should be.

**JS:** Yes.

**DM:** But we've done a tour of your farm. This is nothing like it. This is a completely different universe.

What resources would you recommend for the average person watching this to recommend to their local farmer if they wanted to engage and really learn more about this? What resources would you suggest or how do they contact you? What's the process they should begin with to be able to get up to speed on this?

**JS:** Well, I think every community right now has what I call "farm treasures" around it.

**DM:** Uh-huh.

**JS:** Many of them are very small. But as a non-farmer, as an eater, as a consumer, you need to get into that network. Every state has a sustainable agriculture organization or biological farming organization that is the nucleus of those farmers in that state. There are more and more "Eat local," "Buy local" directories now available. Look at those farms that have been in there. I couldn't agree more. Ultimately, wouldn't it be nice if you or I could click our fingers and say, "You know what? Nobody has to do anything to really change the food system." But that's not true.

**DM:** Uh-huh.

**JS:** The food system that we have right now is the summation of decades of billions and billions of individually made decisions: to buy a Snickers bar and not this, buy a flat screen TV instead of this, or buy potato chips instead of potatoes and lard and make them yourself. What we have is a physical manifestation of all these billions and billions of decisions. Where we will be in 20 years will also be a physical manifestation of where we are. Each one of us needs to understand the power of one, the power of that single decision, day by day.

[-----10:00-----]

When it comes up to the fall and you're looking at those Caribbean cruises, say, "Wait a minute. We're going to go in two weeks, not this week, because this is the week the frost is going to happen. I'm going to go and find at a farmer's market, CSA, or another local farmer, find out where I can get three, slightly blemished bushels of tomatoes at the end of the season. We're going to spend the week making tomato salsa, canning tomato juice, and making tomato leather. *[Laughs]* We're going to do that. And that's what we're going to eat this winter."

Just to begin understanding that our ecological umbilical and ultimately our own personal well-being are going to only be as good as the participatory responsibility that we bring to the table.

**DM:** That's great. That's what we can do as a consumer. But if a consumer wants to find a potentially interested farmer like yourself (or I mean as advanced as yourself)...

**JS:** Right.

**DM:** What type of resources would the farmer do?

**JS:** Oh, the farmer.

**DM:** To get up to speed on what you're doing.

**JS:** Oh, my goodness. Well, I've written numerous books.

**DM:** Any that you would recommend more than others?

**JS:** I think the first one would be *The Sheer Ecstasy of Being a Lunatic Farmer*.

**DM:** Okay.

**JS:** To me, that really describes the paradigm, the heart and soul. And it's a fun book. But beyond that, certainly in the pasture-based livestock, the *Stockman Grass Farmer* magazine is the world leader, published out of Jackson, Mississippi. It is the world leader in the whole pasture-based how-to. It's pasture-based by farmers for farmers.

Another one would certainly be *Acres U.S.A.* magazine, which is broader. It brings the grains in. But *Acres U.S.A.* would be a good one.

Beyond that certainly to link up with the local Weston A. Price chapter, get the *Mercola* newsletter. Get linked up with what I call the "tribe": the tribe that's thinking differently.

**DM:** Uh-huh.

**JS:** What you'll find is that there is a tremendous amount of resource and help. Our website, PolyFaceFarms.com, lists the chicken waterers, aluminum fencing, energizers, full flow valves, shade cloth, and all these things that you've seen here on the store that we use.

**DM:** They're not very costly, but still you have to find them somewhere.

**JS:** You have to find them. They're all listed in our Resource section. Here's what we use - even a good post hole digger. Don't get your post hole digger from Lowe's. I mean I have nothing against Lowe's.

**DM:** [Laughs]

**JS:** We go to Lowe's plenty to get screws and things like that. But if you want really good, multi-generational heavy tools, go to A.M. Leonard or some good company like that that makes 10-pound post hole diggers.

There are resources out there on our website and others. We link to other websites where people can find not only the information but the infrastructure – the actual physical hardware – to make this work. Then beyond that, you just have to start, and that’s the hardest part.

**DM:** Yeah.

**JS:** We have this saying that “If it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing right.”

**DM:** Uh-huh.

**JS:** Well, that’s wrong. If it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing poorly first. Because nobody does it right the first time. I mean, can you imagine at a family function, little Janey, the latest family addition, crawling around on the floor.

**DM:** *[Laughs]*

**JS:** Everybody’s sitting there at Thanksgiving dinner or whatever, suddenly Janey climbs up the chair leg and she gets up. She kind of hangs on, she toddles around, and everybody says, “Oh look! Little Janey’s starting to walk.” You get all excited. And of course, Janey then, you know, she grins, loses her focus, and plop! She falls down on the ground on her diaper. Well, does everybody gather around her saying, “Janey, if you can’t walk any better than that, just quit!”?

**DM:** *[Laughs]*

**JS:** No! They’ll say, “Oh, look, she’s trying to walk. Try again, blah, blah, blah.” But as adults, for some reason, we have this “If it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing right.” I have women coming up to me, saying (no sexist here), “I’m afraid to can. A can might blow up. What if it blows up?” “I’m afraid to cook anything, because, you know, what if it doesn’t taste good?” And I’ll say, “Look, if it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing poorly first.”

**DM:** Yeah.

**JS:** A farmer, you’re not going to make the paddock size correct, and everything’s not going to be healthy the first time, but you’ll learn by doing. You become skillful by jumping in and starting. So, if it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing poorly first.

**DM:** Yeah. Thomas Watson Sr., the guy who developed IBM, was really popular in that saying.

**JS:** Yes.

**DM:** Fail and fail often and frequently; just learn from your mistakes.

**JS:** Right.

**DM:** But you know, as adults, we’ve developed this fear of failure. It’s sort of intrinsic to us, but it’s really highly counterproductive.

**JS:** Yeah. Oh, it is. Edison, when they did, I think it was the light bulb, the whatever. The 70-second experiment when it failed, his staff was scared to tell him that this didn’t work. They finally came and told him, he said, “Oh, wonderful! That brings us one step closer to the solution there!”

**DM:** *[Laughs]* We know one that doesn't work.

**JS:** Yeah, what a great attitude. What a great spirit. We need to take that in our own lives as farmers, as eaters, as all of these, you know. None of us has all the answers today. But we're all in this quest. We're all learning. We're bumbling, stumbling, and you know. But when you're out there trying... If you seek, you will find.

**DM:** Yes. There's been a transition from these small farms to big, large corporate factory farming.

**JS:** Sure.

**DM:** And you're really fighting that trend with some of the techniques that you've developed.

**JS:** Right.

**DM:** I'm wondering if you can comment on the whole process and what you see as an industry leader.

**JS:** Well, what I see is a growing conflict between the two models. I think the one model is predicated on essentially a mechanistic view toward life, and the other one is a biological view towards life. In our culture, we've only... Because we, as a culture, we view life as fundamentally mechanical, we're asking "How do we grow the pig faster, fatter, bigger cheaper?" And that's all that matters.

I would say, our side asks, "How do we make the pig happier, more piggy, and more expressive of its pigness?" That recognizes the fundamental honor and sacredness of that life form or that being, if you will. That's the fundamental difference.

The amalgamation of farms has followed a mechanistic view where machinery does run more efficiently when it runs 24/7. A bigger earthmover is more efficient than a smaller earthmover, because the bucket's bigger and still only takes one operator to move more cubic yards and material. A mechanistic view does move a culture toward size, scale, and toward an inability to account for some of these unseen things.

What's happening now is E.coli, salmonella, mad cow disease, C. diff, and MRSA. I call that the biological P and L statement *[Laughs]* that is starting to come to the fore and create awareness that "Oh, maybe just growing it faster, fatter, bigger, cheaper isn't all there is." Maybe there is more. Maybe it does matter if the earthworms are healthy. Maybe you can't just replace earthworms with tin, tin, tin of fossil fuel fertilizers.

**DM:** Yeah. Many people viewing this, too, they don't realize what's behind this push toward a mechanistic model. It's not this farming industry per se, but it's really the chemical industry.

**JS:** Well, it's the chemical industry, but I think beyond that it's a paradigm.

**DM:** Uh-huh.

**JS:** It's a cultural worldview where we have segregated our own personal responsibility even for our own health and foisted off on the "expert" over there, you know. He's going to fix me.

We've segregated our responsibility for the food that we eat to Procter & Gamble and Tyson. And we've said, "I'm going to put my faith in them. And by proxy, they will make the decisions for me."

We've essentially moved our culture from where we had a visceral participation in air, soil, food, and water (a hundred years ago) to where now the average American is far more informed and passionately interested in the latest belly button piercing and Hollywood celebrity culture than what's going to become flesh of their flesh and bone of their bones at six o'clock.

[----- 20:00 -----]

I think that farmers have essentially done what consumers asked, which was, "I want to be liberated from the kitchen. Give me TV dinners. Give me Velveeta cheese, you know, squirtable stuff. Give me breakfast cereals, Cheerios, Pop-Tarts, and Cocoa Puffs." And guess what? Farmers have moved in as people have come out of the kitchen, and have essentially subcontracted that to long large food processors. That has separated people from taste, texture, and the old, historical nuances of food, and created then a commodification of agriculture to where..

For example, Dolly Madison's cookbook or Martha Washington's cookbook. You look in there, they had Day 8, boysenberries, juneberries, and currants. I mean, just look at the berries. Why, there were 20 to 30 berries that they had. Today, we have strawberries, blueberries – that's about it.

**DM:** Blackberries.

**JS:** Blackberries. Yeah, but we just don't have (in a supermarket) that kind of variety that we did. What's happened is that farms... When you have a mechanical view for life and segregate it, what it does is it puts the pressure on farms to get bigger and bigger and bigger, because of the economies of scale of a mechanical anything.

As we know, artisanal anything must be small-scale. The difference between a pot made on a potter's wheel as an individual craft, as an extension of a person's soul if you will, compared to a pot made in a mass-produced factory. The difference is that this one has character, integrity, and often has nuances that this one over here won't have.

And certainly the same thing is true in food. Ultimately, we, as individuals, need to appreciate that we have created the food system that we have. I don't like this "It's because of them. It's because of that. It's because of this." Ultimately, we have the food system that we have, because that's what we want.

**DM:** Well, it's really the most empowering, too, because someone else is responsible for it. There's very little that you can do.

**JS:** Exactly.

**DM:** But if we take responsibility, we take control of them, there's quite a bit that we can do.

**JS:** You said it. You know, if every American tomorrow decided to not eat at a fast food place, it would collapse the whole thing.



**DM:** Overnight.

**JS:** Overnight. That doesn't take an Act of Congress. It doesn't take a grant. It doesn't take a regulation.

**DM:** Or an election.

**JS:** Or an election, yeah, exactly. That's why our slogan is, "We're healing the land one bite at a time." We want people to understand that when you eat, that is a decision that affects the landscape our children will inherit. You can make that decision independent of politics and everything else. You could make that decision three times a day. And there are thousands of farmers like us (many of them smaller than us) around the farm, around the world, around the country that are waiting to serve that clientele.

**DM:** Yeah. But only if there's enlightened people who understand this.

**JS:** Yes, enlightened people. That's right. *[Laughs]*

**DM:** It's a very powerful message.

**JS:** That's right.

**DM:** That we have that ability to do this. We need to be empowered to recognize that, to take steps, and to know that it doesn't matter if you fail initially. That ultimately, as long you're persistent, you're going to have a fair measure of success.

**JS:** That's right.

**DM:** Again, we can't encourage you strongly enough to go out there, take the steps, and really do what it takes to take control of the food that you're eating, because the resources are out there. They exist. It's not some nebulous cloud that the other person in some far estate, some far larger urban area, or rural area is going to make. You can do it yourself. It's going to take a little effort and time, but it's beyond worth it.

**JS:** Uh-huh, it sure is. Yeah, it sure is beyond worth it. You know, in the last 35 years, we've exchanged nine percent of our per capita expenditure on healthcare and 18 percent on food to today and 35 years, nine percent on food and 18 percent on healthcare....

**DM:** *[Laughs]*

**JS:** To me, could those possibly related? We talk about quality of life and self-empowerment. To put a little attention on the food might help a lot of other things fall into place.

**DM:** Yeah, I think the numbers are such as like the average person is spending less than 10 percent of their income on food.

**JS:** Yes. That's correct.

**DM:** In many places in the world and certainly in the past, it was 25, 30, to 35 percent. The factory farming method has been enormously successful in providing a product that's

inexpensive and tastes good. But really, the artifact of that as you've mentioned is the health statistics. We're spending a lot more for health.

**JS:** Well, the externalized costs...

**DM:** Yes.

**JS:** Which include, you know, soil loss...

**DM:** Oh that's...

**JS:** The environmental degradation.

**DM:** Right.

**JS:** Health costs, animal welfare issues, nutrient deficiency – these are all externalized costs. Nature bats last. Our ecological womb has its own P and L statement.

**DM:** Yeah.

**JS:** And we have better looked at that P and L statement and say, "Let's live differently, eat differently, buy differently, and participate differently, so that we get on the positive side of that ecological womb's P and L statement.

**DM:** Because no one's charging us for those externalized costs. Those are sort of debits we're delaying for ourselves or for our grandchildren.

**JS:** Yes, exactly.

**DM:** Well, I can't thank you enough for being a leader in the industry and really so inspiring and providing us with the message of empowerment and encouragement that we can do it. Really, thank you for all that you're doing. I look forward to the amazing impact of your effort.

**JS:** Absolutely, thank you for coming. Thank you.

**DM:** All right.

*[END]*