



Notes From The Field My visit to Polyface Farm

By Ted Wycall

This particular Friday morning began earlier than most. I needed to get enough work done so that I could leave the farm for 2 days and not have to play catch up when I returned. A friend and I would be leaving at 2 pm sharp for an agricultural sabbatical to the hills of Southwestern Virginia. Destination: Joel Salatin's Polyface Farm. With bags packed, the farm squared away for the weekend, we departed almost on time.

That evening we stayed with a friend at his mountainside cabin outside of Lexington Virginia, about a half hour drive from Polyface. As we talked over dinner and beers, we were not surprised to learn that the locals in that area were well acquainted with Salatin, his famous farming practices, and the superb quality of his products. Famous is right, some of you may have read Michael Pollan's Omnivore's Dilemma, in which Pollan features Polyface farm. That would make one pretty famous in the world of farming. Now we just had to see it for ourselves.

The Polyface "field day" began at 5:30am. As we pulled through the farm gates, the first thing we saw was a large herd of cows grazing in one of the most dense, lush pastures I have ever seen. The backdrop was huge meadows rising into wooded mountain sides. In the foreground were a freshly painted white farmhouse, a large cattle barn, and many outbuildings. Harmony, prosperity, and tradition were all immediately apparent. A prettier picture couldn't be painted.

We were directed to our parking space by the Polyface farm staff, all of whom were clean cut cowboy types wearing the traditional "cowboy cut" wrangler jeans, with hats and boots to match. For the next two hours little hybrid cars, huge diesel pickups, and everything in between streamed in through the gates. There would be about a thousand people arriving here today. The license plates were from all over the country, Maine, Oregon, Arizona, Texas, Maryland, Washington, Florida, Iowa, Alabama, and on and on. The people were as diverse as the license plates. There were hippies, cowboys, farmers, Amish, Mennonite, Luddite, urbanites, lefties, righties, boxers, briefs, vegetarians, bikers. Regardless of our backgrounds, political orientations, nationalities, whatever... we had all come from distant lands searching for enlightenment. We all wanted to know, how does one operate a farm that raises livestock humanely, sustainably, and profitably? Good question, now let's take the tour...

The first stop was pastured broilers. There were thousands of chickens on this farm, but there were no chicken houses. WHAT!?! You mean chickens don't have to live in chicken houses? You mean its better that they don't? I am obviously a long way from home. The next stop was the laying hen/beef cattle pasture. That's right,

the hens and cattle share the pasture. Think back to all the nature shows that you have seen on TV. There are always birds comingling with the large herds of herbivores, whether it is Bison, Wildebeest, Caribou, Water Buffalo, whatever. The idea to combine the chickens and the cows is to create a symbiosis, where by letting a chicken express its chickiness, and a cow express its cowness, the two mutually benefit from each other's presence. Salatin is big on this point, that by letting each kind of animal do what it wants to do, in the environment that it is physiologically best suited for, all of creation will benefit. Our final stop was the pig operation. Salatin has 7, 1/4 acre pens that a herd of pigs are rotated through as they mature from piglet to full grown pig. Just before the pig is fully mature, they are rotated to a 4 acre paddock in an oak forest. Here they root for acorns, one of a pigs favorite foods.

There are two trademarks of this sort of livestock operation. The first is that it is pasture based. Not only does the pasture serve as a major/primary food source, it also absorbs and feeds on livestock waste, which eliminates any potential pollution. The second trademark is frequent rotation of the animals. Rotation serves two very important purposes at the same time. First is getting the animals onto new pasture so they can feed on extremely high quality fresh forage. Second is getting the animals away from their excrement, which if allowed to accumulate, causes all kinds of health and environmental problems. Antibiotics and nutrient pollution are unheard of in this kind of farming but are a mainstay conventional confinement models.

Provident and Greenbranch farms are working hard to incorporate livestock husbandry with our vegetable farming. Some of you may have already tried one of Jay's pastured broilers, which are especially tender and delicious. Here at Greenbranch, we are hoping to provide next year's CSA with pastured beef and eggs in the autumn of 2009. Thus far, we are on track, hopefully the progress will continue. Onward.

In This Week's Share

Corn, Tomatoes
Beans, Potatoes
Cucumbers, Eggplant
Scallions, Watermelon
Peppers*

* Maybe, maybe not!

Recipe of the week

Roasted Tomato Basil Pesto

This variation on pesto is so delightful it's amazing that it's not more common. The roasted tomato flavor is superbly highlighted by the sweet aromatic basil—but a very ripe regular tomato will work well too. Don't limit this pesto to just pasta; try it on pizzas and roasted potatoes, in an omelette, or over grilled vegetables. You can make an equally delicious variation by using cilantro instead of basil. by Shareholder(adapted from the Seed Savers Calendar, 1998).

Recipe courtesy of <http://www.AngelicOrganics.com/recipeservice>

2 pre-roasted tomatoes or 1 large fresh tomato
2–3 cloves garlic, peeled, halved
3 tablespoons pine nuts
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1 cup fresh whole basil leaves
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
2 tablespoons butter, softened
salt
freshly ground black pepper

1. Combine the tomatoes, garlic, pine nuts, and oil in a blender and process until just combined. Add a handful of basil and process again briefly; continue adding the basil in small amounts until all is combined.

2. Stir in the Parmesan cheese and butter and season with salt and pepper to taste.

Serves 2

Note: Do you have a favorite recipe using ingredients commonly found in our shares? If you do, send it to me at sheltonlankford@mac.com and I will print it in the newsletter so that other members can enjoy it as well.

Mater Mania Sunday August 17! Come on down to Bivalve for the fourth annual ...

'Mater Mania, on Sunday August 17, 2008 from 3-6 p.m. at Cedar Hill Marina and Park. The suggested entry donation of \$5 per adult, and all proceeds, will benefit the Medora Harvest Fund. Event will be held rain or shine. Features include tomato tasting, a fresh-made salsa bar, and a Tomato Sandwich Extravaganza, featuring sliced farm-fresh tomatoes. Live acoustic and folk music will be provided by four local musicians/bands: Pugsly, Phil Knight, Folk Heroes, and Blue Light Special. There will be a silent auction, plus a baked goods sale as well as children's nature crafts, provided by the Ward Museum. Come and bring your friends!

The 'Mater Mania Silent Auction needs donations!

In the past we've auctioned everything from pottery to CDs to canoe trips to tennis lessons. If you think you have something that would work for our auction, please consider donating it. For all donations please contact coordinator Marjorie Hill at chacohill@comcast.net or 410-219-5961. Thank you.