

## Review: Sheer Ecstasy of Being a Lunatic Farmer

by Tim Boyd – November 9, 2010

Environmentalism is important and also controversial. We have choices. We can look for enlightenment on the subject from someone who pontificates from their power-massage recliner in their climate-controlled McMansion in the suburbs or we can look to someone whose livelihood depends on a correct understanding of the environment.

*The Sheer Ecstasy of being a Lunatic Farmer* is a book written by just such a man. Joel Salatin is the author. He also owns Polyface Farm which has operated for about 50 years under the principles explained by his book. I think that is about long enough to get an idea whether he is going in the right direction or not.

This book is loaded with ideas you don't hear everyday. Bigger is not always better. Artificial insemination may not be a good idea for keeping your herd genetically robust. Is there really a food shortage? He makes an excellent argument for why we should want smart, well-paid farmers. Do we really want something as important as our food to be produced by people who are as poor as dirt and half as smart? What does it say about our culture when we pay millions to rock stars and expect the farmer to take a vow of poverty? We might want to rethink those twisted and unhealthy values. There are too many interesting and great ideas to even list in a review. You'll just have to buy the book.

One radical idea is that farming does not have to be a blight on the land. Farming, done right, can heal the land, build soil and improve the environment. Mr. Salatin explains in some detail how to build soil much faster than one inch every 1000 years or whatever the "experts" are saying these days. A very important piece to this puzzle is the humble cow. Contrary to popular belief, cows are not an ecological disaster. Properly managed cows on grass will sequester more carbon in the soil than any other known technique. While this is a good thing, he does not say or imply that CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere should be our most feared enemy. I'm glad he doesn't. Without carbon dioxide, life as we know it would cease. So when environmentalists or government agencies reclassify an essential component of our atmosphere as a contaminant, how am I supposed to hang on to any respect for such an agency?

Salatin talks about environmentalist-sponsored government wetland regulations which essentially require freezing the area being regulated into a steady state where nothing is ever allowed to change. Unfortunately we live in a world where change is the norm, so stopping the change requires a lot of work on the part of humans – which means we need to burn a lot of that evil fossil fuel. While those kinds of people chase their tails, the lunatic farmer works with nature rather than trying to lock it in a cage.

There are many examples of pop environmentalism. Ironically, you will read none of this nonsense in the book by the lunatic farmer. One of the great things about being a lunatic farmer is you don't need to let political correctness censor your thinking. We can listen to someone with a long track record of success or listen to the eco-freakos. We have choices.

This book is only funny if you have a sense of humor. For those who know Joel Salatin, you will be happy to see familiar examples. At Polyface, the chickens still express their chicken-ness, and you can see the cow-ness of the cow, the pig-ness of the pig, and the Salatin-ness of the Salatin. You will also see phrases like the "Greco-Roman western linear reductionist systematized fragmented disconnected parts-oriented individualized culture ..." As fun as that is to read, it is even more fun to hear him say it in person.



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Joel Salatin gives away huge secrets to big success. Isn't he worried about helping the competition? Well, there are a few reasons why the answer is no. He knows you can never get ahead by being a copycat. Another key point in the book – people who don't ever let their minds out of their little Greco-Roman western linear reductionist systematized fragmented disconnected parts-oriented individualized box will think he is howling at the moon.

Mr. Salatin also knows that he can't save the world by himself. He makes a very powerful case for why we need as many smart farmers as we can get. The idea that farming is for idiots is deadly for any culture. Industrial farming is failing in multiple ways as I write this. Food production is not scalable. Big factory food is destroying valuable resources and making people sick. That obviously can't go on much longer. Producers know that and they also know that if people in general ever taste a real chicken like you find at Polyface, the game will be over even sooner. If there aren't more Polyfaces, everybody is going to get very hungry. If you want to be a smart farmer, reading this book would be a smart start.

Does his crazy environmentalism work? If you visit Polyface (and I have several times) you will see happy, contented animals. The people that live and work there are also look happy. There are no nasty odors even from the pigs. The grass really is greener on the Polyface side of the fence.

And then ... taste the food. Oh, yes. It's working. The thumb is way UP for this book.

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### **HYPERLINKS for PDF version:**

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