Community, Nation, and Global Impact Of Raising Farm Animals
By: Mason Cain

Supplementing our goats diet with grass.

Introduction

This article is geared more towards people who do not own livestock, and don't understand the process of large scale agricultural production, its benefits, and downfalls. These factory farms feed millions, even billions, and we are utterly reliant on them. Is this a good thing? I would argue not, and my proof is quite simple. Take COVID for example, as soon as the few big meat processing plants we have in the US shut down , meat prices skyrocketed. But why? Because a country of over 300 million was reliant on *30 large plants that harvest more than 85% of our fed beef.**
If employees get COVID in ten of those factory's, at the very least 1／3 of those factory's production is cut down severely. Almost 1／3 of the U.S's beef production potentially put on hold. The slaughterhouses MAY the most vulnerable part of the production system, but take the big farms raising your lettuce. If you read where most of the lettuce comes from in the grocery stores, it is California. What if a drought hits California? What if the truck drivers driving the lettuce to your local grocery store go on strike? Well what little lettuce the grocery store can get will cost an arm and a leg.

What's The Solution?

More small farms and market gardens. A higher quantity of smaller farms. A higher quantity of small, diverse farms. If your town had two small beef farms, and the tri-county area had a few approved processing plants, then the economy of your town would not struggle as much if one beef producer loses his cows, or if a processing plant is temporarily shut down. Why? because you have other options. Now it wouldn't be good for your town, but "the damage is contained". By this I mean not the whole nation is affected. This same example applies to the lettuce farms. If one farmer loses his lettuce crop, but a few miles down the road another farmer is growing lettuce,well then your community won't be as affected. This ideology does not just apply to farms, if you grow your own lettuce then whether a farmer can or cannot produce does not matter as much. With those introductory examples out of the way, I would like to dive deeper into the increased food security, decreased food waste, lower carbon footprint, and increased

food quality we as a nation, and world, would experience if more people raised livestock.

Food Security

I already talked (wrote) about increased food security in the introduction, but there is an important aspect of this often overlooked. How animals can affect the garden.** (This is the diversity part!) If you didn't already know, animal manure is one of the best things for a garden. The only thing better is living plants, even then that is arguable. Eliot Coleman talks about the role of livestock in his book *The New Organic Grower,* and noted 75% of the nutrients in chicken feed ends up in their manure. That's a lot of nutrients for the garden, and whether you take the poop and compost it, or graze your chickens on grass to then turn into a garden, you will notice the benefits. I did. If you decide to pasture raise poultry, up to 40 percent of their nutritional needs can be found in the pasture, according to Coleman. I would argue this number could be higher, especially if you follow the methods of *The Executive In Overalls* (YouTube), or Amy Fewell (author of *The Homesteaders Natural Chicken Keeping Handbook)* who trained their chicken's to eat bugs and grass first (chickens are carnivorous by nature and love hunting for bugs). Even if you don't pasture raise your chickens, they will love your food scraps. So not only will you have better security against rising food prices, but you also will be more resistant to rising grain prices. Which even if you don't raise animals, will affect you when you go to buy eggs.

How does this tie into food security? Well, big farms have a harder time raising their animals like this, meaning they are more reliant on grain prices. Most big crop farmers also rely on chemical fertilizers, putting the price of our food at the will(at least partially) of fertilizer producers. (Grain is fed to most cattle nowadays.) However, small farmers who raise both animals and plants can create a self-sufficient farm ecosystem, where the animals feed the plants and plant waste and pastures feed the animals. Even if not totally self-sufficient, these farms (and homesteads!) have the potential to be a lot

more self-sufficient. **The less reliant our farms are on variables they cannot control, the less variable our food prices will be.** By having more small farms, or more people growing their own food, we can contain the impact of crop failures and animal/ processing staff sickness to smaller populations.

Decreased Food Waste… Even Better Food Security

I kind of already mentioned this, but as small producers, even home producers, our animals can rely more on our, and even our communities, food waste. A farmer who raises 300 pigs leftover casserole won't make a dent in the pigs diet, but if you raise one or two pigs that is a different story. Big crop farms no doubt have a harder time getting rid of crop waste.Most are mono-crop, animal-less farms. We hear about it all the time, and although progress is being made in reducing this waste, a small farm is a better solution. If you keep your farm small and integrate animals into it, then a bushel of rotten tomatoes will be plenty for a flock of fifty chickens to snack on. Instead of leaving the farm to be turned into some product (absolute best case scenario, but unlikely), these tomatoes are fed to the chickens, who in turn feed a small community (fifty laying hens laying 40 eggs a day can easily feed 4-5 families), and fertilize the garden with their manure.**The key point to take away from this article is that we need more small, diverse farms**.

Lower Carbon footprint

I probably don't need to mention this, however if the food we eat is more local than our carbon footprint is less. Delivery trucks won't need to drive thousands of miles to keep our country fed. Even if it is indoor urban farms, or greenhouses feeding the local community.These have the potential to be less carbon neutral then field crops, but can give year round tomatoes to the local community.. In turn, drastically cutting down trucking emissions. **Locally grown/raised food is not trucked hundreds, even thousands of miles**

Better Quality, and More Nutrient dense food

Another very interesting topic Eliot Coleman mentions, actually writes a lot about, in his book *The New Organic Grower* is that food grown in better quality soil is more nutritional. The idea itself is quite simple. By creating a biological active soil that makes available trace nutrients chemical fertilizers cannot, the plants absorb those trace nutrients and we then eat those extra trace nutrients. In a nutshell. A study done by *Singing Frog Farms*, along with a geologist and botanist team from the University Of Washington,(plus other people and farms to act as controls) showed that *Singing Frog Farms* produce, grown in biologically active soil (they tested that too! I will put a link to the article) was between 100-400% more nutrient dense. (They tested different crops.) Biologically active soil is created with manure, compost, and other methods easily achieved by a small farmer/gardener who owns animals. Biological growth requires its own article, or books. I recommend some at the end of this article!

So if better soil means better plants and produce, and as small producers we can rely more on plants and produce from our farm for animal feed, meaning the animals on our farm eat these plants and produce,does that make the meat/eggs more healthy? This concept makes sense, and some studies have been done regarding it. The results

seem promising. With that said, I recommend you do your own reading before drawing a steadfast opinion on this topic.

Then Why Are There Not More Small farms?

There really is no right answer to this question. Maybe it is the fact that, most of the time, grocery store food is cheap compared to local food. Or perhaps, not enough people own any land at all. Maybe not enough people are attracted to the farming lifestyle, or willing to butcher their own meat. Maybe there are too many government regulations. No doubt, a big contributor to this issue is the fact that many communities don't allow livestock. We need to change the way we view livestock, and know if raised correctly most do not smell any worse than a dog. It is when we start overcrowding, and neglecting our animals do they start to stink.

No matter what community you live in, you can almost definitely have a container garden. Most fruits and vegetables can be grown in containers, and vertical growing towers offer even more growing space per square foot.

As with most solutions, relying more on a lot of little farms(gardens) as compared to many big farms is easier said than done. However it is possible. Before the tractor trailer, even train, communities had to feed each other. **The shift towards more small farms is already starting.** If this small shift will turn into an avalanche of small farms, I do not know.

I Don't Even Own An Acre!

Even if you only have 1/4 of an acre, you can do alot with that. That is more than enough space for a small flock of chickens, and a small kitchen garden. Honestly maybe closer to a medium sized garden. It depends how you plan and arrange your mini-farm, but this is more than enough space if used correctly. Even small balconies are a better start than nothing (obviously chickens cannot be kept here, but pots of plants can!)

Is Hunting A Viable Solution?

When I think about many of the issues with today's food system, bad conditions for animals, being shipped across the country, etc a solution that comes to mind is hunting. Even compared to small-scale meat farming, hunting is no doubt better. The animals are quite literally raised as nature intended, and earth did fine for billions of years without humans. Well the animals are almost raised as nature intended, by this I mean many species (such as deer) lack predators. This is because humans took out their natural predators, and so we now need to act as the predators to keep the ecosystem healthy. Take deer for example, where I live in NJ wolves used to be deers biggest predator. Until settlers chased them off. Now deer are a pest to farms, and yards (atleast in South NJ). Along with that, too many deer mean overgrazing in the woods. The solution? For once, Humans.We need to "act as the wolves", and hunt the deer. This example does not just pertain to deer or my area.

Besides those benefits, hunting is way cheaper than buying meat. **If done responsibly, it is almost more reliable than meat prices. Responsibly being the keyword.** I say almost, because it is not guaranteed you shoot one. But neither is it guaranteed a storm won't destroy a huge farm.

Over hunting has proved to be detrimental in the past, and easily could again if we are not careful.

Closing Word

I hope at the very least this article helps you rethink our fragile food system, and may encourage you to do something about it. Below I recommended some books that helped me draw the conclusion I did on our food system, and biological growing.

Recommended reading

- *The New Organic Grower* By:Eliot Coleman. Coleman examples biological, small scale methods of growing in a common sense fashion I enjoy. This book no doubt inspired many of today's market gardeners.
- *The Market Gardener* By: Jean-Martin Fortier. This is the book that sent me down the rabbit hole of soil health, and is very helpful for the aspiring small scale grower.
- *The Homesteaders Natural Chicken Keeping Handbook* By: Amy Fewell. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book, and it contains many interesting tips and tricks, plus entertaining stories and the history of chicken keeping.
- Nutrient Density — Singing Frogs Farm I mentioned contents from this article, and highly recommend you read it.
  *https://www.provisioneronline.com/articles/111359-beef-plant-of-the-future
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  For more information on using chickens in the garden here is another article I wrote,Using Chickens To Regenerate, Add On To, And Keep Soil Healthy | BackYard Chickens - Learn How to Raise Chickens

About The Author

Mason Cain is a 15 year old wannabe market gardener. He currently raises and sells plants, produce, and flock of chickens from which he sells the eggs.