Welcome to the small farms podcast, a production of the small farms program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. This is Episode Seven, where I interviewed Daniel Salatin of Polyface Farm in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, and keynote speaker at the upcoming Iowa small farms conference. I'm Christa Hartsook, small farms program coordinator, and we hope you enjoy the show. Daniel, first off, welcome to the show. Can you tell us a little bit more about Polyface Farm?

Yes, thank you for having me. Pleasure to be here. Sure. Well, Polyface Farm is a multi generational pasture based regenerative agriculture farm in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. And our goal is to.. just to create and to duplicate and spread throughout the world, if you will, regenerative farming practices and farming infrastructure. So whether that's r&d and development things and getting them out there, that's what we do. And we're focused on livestock and poultry. And that's what we're our main focus is do very, very little to zero produce, and all of it is on beef, pork, poultry, rabbit. My son has a few lambs. So we're mostly meat oriented.

Fabulous. What do you think makes Polyface Farm unique in its connections, and its marketing to its different customers?

For us, the biggest thing that happens is, you know, every time there's a food scare our phone rings.
rings. We're seeing more and more of those, and people are becoming much more concerned about their food and the sources that it comes from. Whether it's coming from, you know, overseas, outside of the US, or whether it's coming from a packing plant that they've never heard of before, those things are beginning to cause concerns into the buying public. As people want to be more in control of their food and where it comes from, we offer them that outlet and say, you can come to our farm, you can look, you can see, you can smell, you can touch both the animals and the product before you buy it know exactly who's raising it, who's been involved with it, the processes of how that has happened, and take it home and enjoy it with your family, knowing where it's coming from. So our goal, what makes us unique is a 24/7 open door policy to all customers and visitors of any kind of any time. So people can come literally from California be quote on quote, driving by our dirt road, and, and stop in and take a look. And that's a huge thing that connects Polyface with our customers. At the same time, we're producing food, that is, you know, life giving and health giving to our folks with that connection with the person who grows it. And so they're able to make that connection have that comfort when they sit down. As they become more and more concerned of the food production and where it comes from in our country.

Christa Hartsook 03:11
That sounds great. You know, you and your dad, Joel Salatin, have really taken a lot of your educational outreach, kind of on the road offering workshops or being the featured speakers at different conferences. Now why do you really think that that outreach, and that education is important?

Daniel Salatin 03:29
We feel that our agricultural production and our food in general has become devoid of life and of health giving properties. And, you know, that's not to insult or impugn any farmer or any production, any person who's involved in production. But that is the road that we have taken. And that's where a lot of our research and promotion has taken us in this country over the last 50 to 75 years. And to the point where we have to supplement it consistently with it.. here's the thing, if you look at food costs in the 1920s, versus medical costs, and you add those two numbers together, food cost was very high. Medical costs is very low. And you look at that today. It's quite the opposite. But the percentage of the annual income that's spent on those two items is almost identical. And so our concern is look as we begin producing a food system that is completely void of health, and and vitamins and minerals and all this stuff, we have to go otherwise and create it and make it we're just in a use it up society, we want to I think that's why it's resonated in the fact that we use very, very low inputs. One of the big concerns I think we'll talk about in one of the future questions, but how does a farmer get started? I know that's a big question. You know, how do we get young farmers involved in in farming, and one of the reasons it's difficult is because it comes with a generational, sometimes multigenerational, debt load to get into farming, whether it be purchasing the property, or going into a debt for a, you know, a large scale animal operation system. And so another reason that our message has really struck a chord with folks is because it starts small, yes, we can get large, yes, we can see the world. But it starts at an an embryonic level, that can be joined by a myriad of different people who can get involved at a young age or at an old age, at a level that's accessible to them that doesn't create age long, or multi generational debt load. And so I think we do that we want to educate people, we don't want to see our desert get any bigger, we don't want to see our our kids get less healthy. You know, these are things that are
real issues in our society and in our culture, and we feel that our following nature’s template approach to producing food is what is the future to really sustain our culture, in our communities in our country, in the farming society.

Christa Hartsook 06:25
Why that sounds great. And I really appreciate, you know, an easy entry point for people to become involved in that. So that sounds great. Daniel, I'm not gonna lie. It's a little chilly in Iowa today.

Daniel Salatin 06:37
Yes!

Christa Hartsook 06:39
But why are you excited to come to this conference?

Daniel Salatin 06:41
Well, I'm excited to come to Iowa, because it has been incredible. I mean, it is, you know, one of the first states you think of when you think of, you know, massive agriculture and just agriculture in general, when you think of of our nation's food production, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, those are the huge states that you think of those middle the states, so the soil and the production, that Iowa boasts, is second to none, literally in our country. And to see what it couldn't do with a more, let's just say nature balanced or ecosystem friendly, environmentally friendly farming system is just astronomical, and to see what it can do in Iowa would just be super exciting. I'm also excited because I do have a passion for getting young farmers involved in farming. And I know that when you see the heartland states, you know, closing and consolidating schools and things because there's no one in our rural areas anymore, that's a concern to me. And so if anything that I can offer through some of our systems that we've created to create income streams and revenue generating streams for young farmers to stay on farms, and put people back out on the land, that excites me!

Christa Hartsook 08:05
Boy, that sounds great! Firstly, what can we expect to hear from you, you know, in your keynote address, what are you going to cover?

Daniel Salatin 08:14
Well, for me, you are going to see a through a myriad of pictures and my talk about how we don't have to cut down more trees, buy more equipment, or get into more debt to add income streams to farms. So many times we think of farming is just what that one square foot of land
will produce, whether it be corn, or soybeans, or cattle, or pigs. But there's so many other things that that land can do. And so looking at nature as a template, you will. through my session, you will see how young people are getting involved in agriculture, how new farmers are getting involved in agriculture, through a layering concept, and that is we call it stacking of the farm. And so you have the land being used for multiple things. And it's much more an integrated farming system, as opposed to a you know, if we look at nature, there's not a monoculture or a single thing, you know, one type of tree or one type of plant one type of animal, it's always a multi species. And so you'll see how we've used an integrated system of different animals and different plants to create a literally a cornucopia, if you will of production off of one square foot or one acre. And by doing that, we create the opportunities that get more people involved in agriculture and farming. And so that's what I focus on. That's what we do here. At the same time, you know, producing food that heals the land and heals our culture.

Christa Hartsook 09:54
That sounds great, Daniel, and I know that you're scheduled for another kind of more of a breakout session after that keynote address, what are you going to cover in that type of a session?

Daniel Salatin 10:04
Yes, well, in that one, we're going to drill down into some of the more specifics and the nitty gritty. I know it's not going to be a lot of time, but I think we're going to try to cover, you know, a little bit more of the pasture poultry operation and how you can raise some poultry there on your property and get that rolling. And some other the specifics that folks have do a lot of q&a as well, based on my keynote session, you know, let's drill down and some things that are important to this community, realize I'll be dropping out, dropping into Iowa from the other side of the country, and we'll want to address how our ideas can fit with this community and this specific area of the country. But I think specifically, we're going to be focused on the pasture poultry, and and the layering specifics and how that actually works, just because we won't be able to get to all of it in the first session.

Christa Hartsook 10:58
You bet. Daniel, we're gonna have registration information up on our site. I'm assuming you do as well. On Polyface Farms.

Daniel Salatin 11:05
Yes, you can go to our polyfacefarms.com. And go to the Schedule tab and you'll scroll down to where you see Daniel Salatin. And the conferences listed there with the link directly to the sign up location there with the Iowa agriculture.

Christa Hartsook 11:23
Fabulous. Thank you so much, Daniel.
Fabulous. Thank you so much, Daniel.

Daniel Salatin 11:26
I'm looking forward to being there!

Christa Hartsook 11:27
Well, great. As I said, we'll have this podcast up on our website along with registration information, and that is www.extension.iastate.edu/smallfarms. We'll have full registration information. We look forward to seeing everybody and especially Daniel Salatin at our February conference. Thanks so much for listening!