



Getting Kids To Work

Joel Salatin – PolyfaceFarms.com

Marjory: Hello, and welcome back. This is Marjory Wildcraft, your host and guide through the Home Grown Food Summit. This next segment, it is truly my privilege and honor to be able to do an interview with Joel Salatin. Joel is a hero of mine. Even though he's a farmer, he has a lot of experience to bring for those of us that are just involved with backyard food production.

Joel is so well known among alternative agriculture. He's written several books. I believe it's about 7 of them to date. This will give you a sense of Joel's character. Just listen to some of these titles here. I got them down out of my library. "The Sheer Ecstasy of Being a Lunatic Farmer." And here's another one, "You Can Farm: The Entrepreneur's Guide to Start and Succeed in a Farming Enterprise." "Pastured Poultry Profits: Net \$25,000 in 6 Months on 20 Acres." And now these next 2 titles, you really get a sense of who Joel is. One is, "All I Want To Do Is Illegal." And then the other one is, "Folks, This Ain't Normal."

The interview we're doing today, we're going to be focusing on how to work with kids so that kids will want to work with you. A lot of this information comes out of Joel's book called "Fields of Farmers: Interning, Mentoring, Partnering, and Germinating." Working with young people, Joel definitely walks his talk. A little known thing about Joel is that on his farm in the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia he has 4 generations of family living together, working together, playing together, and mostly all getting along together. So there isn't anybody I could think of who is more qualified to talk to you about how to work with kids so kids will work with you.

All right, Joel, well, thank you so much. I really appreciate you being on the call. We really have a situation where the average age of our farmers are in their 60s. We've got at least 1 or 2 generations of people that haven't got the common sense that comes from working with the earth and growing your own food. A lot of our families are getting broken in some ways.

I remember a long time ago when I first saw the first Polyface Farms video, and there was your son Daniel working with the rabbits. My first thought was, what a wonderful place for him to be, because, you know, young teenage men were really focused on procreation, and he just really was enjoying himself showing us how to breed rabbits. What a delightful young man to be working in the family business.

Joel: Sure.

Marjory: So I've really looked forward to having this talk about, what are some simple things that we can do to work with kids, and have kids want to work with us, and get excited about this?

Joel: Well, I think 1 of the first things is just to realize that we need to have an integrated approach to our lives. We live in a highly compartmentalized, institutionalized, structured, fragmented, disconnected, segregated kind of experience. We've passed child labor laws so that kids can't do the kind of things they used to do, from picking apples, to working for people, to stocking shelves. We've created this segregated idea. You can play until you're 18, and then suddenly you're supposed to be an adult. What that does is it creates boomerang kids. They just keep coming back, because they never really got assimilated into adult culture

Marjory: I always remind my kids every summer is that the reason you used to get the summers off as a kid is because you were to go out and weed and harvest and tend, and you were supposed to be working.

Joel: That's right. That's right.

Marjory: It's not 3 months to just lay around and forget things, right?

Joel: That's right, yeah, to just sit around like some sort of a pet dog. So the idea of actually being involved with adults in the adult world ... And of course, our whole stratifying work experience, where you go to the office every day to work, has aided, has encouraged the stratification of not only the work place but the whole family deal. So we're big believers in integrating the children. We think the children are a lot smarter, and they actually really want to grow up and be like us, if we provide them self-actualization opportunities to actually participate in our lives.

From day 1, from diaper days, our kids, when I went out and dug a post hole, Daniel was there in his diapers. He might be playing with his pocket trucks in the pile of dirt, but he was there. At 5 or 6 when he could handle a shovel, he could push the dirt in. You don't say, "This is an adult world." No, it's 1 world. You focus on integrating them in the kitchen, in the garden. That's why having things to do around the home, the domesticity of having a kind of a home-centric living style, is important to this. We live in a time ...

Marjory: So the back yard garden and tending the chickens, and just the simple chores.

Joel: Yeah. We live in a time when the home has kind of just become a pit stop where we change clothes and refuel to go outside, to go elsewhere for the important things in life. Actually having a home-centered lifestyle, where outside is an expression of the values and the beliefs that we've inculcated in the home, that's a whole different ball game. We're believers in that whole integration.

Marjory: That fits right in with our whole message here of homegrown food, because growing your own food ... Lots of folks that I've spoken to, their fondest memories is of spending time with their grandparents in the garden, or tending the chickens, or working in some ways. You had a really big insight about independent businesses, and having the kids, really helping them to become focused, come into some independence and maturity through their own little businesses. Often that was complementary to what was going on in the farm.

Joel: Well, sure. It can be things beyond farming. I mean, I can speak to my life growing up. I got my first Lang chickens when I was 10 years old, started my egg business. I started at 10, and then I had to sell those eggs, find customers. I had a bicycle. I'd peddle them to the neighbors, you know. I only had 18 hens, but they laid a dozen eggs a day, so we ate 2 as a family. I had 5 to sell. That's a nice sized little business for a 10 year old. Fifteen, twenty bucks a week, that's a lot of money for a 10 year old.

Marjory: That's some nice pocket change.

Joel: It is, and the beauty of that, it's not an allowance. It's self-earned. Then when our kids came along, Daniel started his rabbits when he was 8. Rachel started baking things for sale when she was about 7 or 8. Before then she did those little, what you call, those little looms, pot holder looms, and string them on this little plastic frame. She sold those for two bucks. I think the little elastic loops cost about 25 cents a pot holder. She sold them for two bucks. Then she started making pound cakes and things.

you know what it does to the self-worth of a child when at 8 or 9 years old a sophisticated lady walks up to them and says, "Oh, are you the one that made that pound cake for my garden club ladies last week? It was so wonderful, and delightful, and blah, blah, blah." I mean compare that to just being the highest points getter on Angry Birds. There's absolutely no comparison.

Marjory: When you've really made a difference in somebody who comes up to you, and it's a real person. You are recommending when they start these business, though, you really keep it hands off and let the kids run them themselves. That's 1 key point.

Joel: When I promote child businesses, I mean child businesses. I mean, yes, they have their, learn their accounting. They have to learn how to lose money, how to make money. It's not all about money, but that business is their business. You can be a benevolent banker and a wonderful coach and all that. But ultimately, if they've got, for example, a plant or an animal, for example, that they're dealing with, it's not up to you to remind them to go take care of them. If the rabbit does because it didn't get fed, I mean it's a sad day, but that's an important lesson.

This is for all the marbles. This isn't a fantasy, an Atari game that if you make a mistake in 5 seconds the machine gives you a new icon and you go on with yourself like you did before. This is the real deal.

In our grandchildren now, Daniel is ... I've got to tell you this story because it's so cute. We've got 2 boys and a girl, so Travis was 9 when he started raising his ducks. He's raising ducks for eggs, duck eggs. That's his enterprise. Andrew was 7 when he started with his lambs, so he started doing lambs and he's in his second year now. He had 2 last year when he was 7. Now he's 8 and he's got 6, so he had 300% growth in 1 year. That's pretty good.

So then we've got this granddaughter who's 2 years behind the boys. She just turned 6. So last year, the boys had their ducks and their lambs. They had their business. Well, she was 5. She was watching these brothers do their thing. Completely unbeknownst to any of us, she got it in her head, I'm not going to get bested by these boys. I'm going to join this entrepreneurial deal, too. All of a sudden one day, here she comes into the sales ... We have a sales building here at the farm. We're open in the morning Monday through Friday. She walks in with a handful of flowers that she's picked out along the field edge. We have a customer in there, a nice young 30-year-old gentleman's in there buying something. She walks up to him and she says, "I'm selling these flowers for a dollar, and I'm sure your wife would really love these. But if you don't have a wife, I'm sure you know somebody that would love ..." She got this whole schpiel, you know.

Marjory: I've got to confess. There was a little girl that came up to me a little while ago, and she was selling rocks, and I gave her a dollar. I actually gave her 3 dollars for 3 rocks. You can't turn that down, right?

Joel: No. That's right. You talk about life lessons. That is so, that is just ... It doesn't get more soul level, and more personal distinctiveness level than that. I just think that instead of looking at that as, oh, here's we've got some sort of little capitalist greedy person coming on. Rather, what you're having is the honor and privilege to participate in the growing up, the development of responsibility, of initiative, of all those kinds of things. My goodness. That's so much more powerful than plugged in and jiving around to just an i-whatever. I don't even know what these things are called.

Marjory: But actually interacting with people and looking them in the eye and speaking to somebody who's a couple years old.

Joel: Vicariously living through somebody else's creativity, as opposed to living in the moment in your own creativity. That is unleashing the human spirit like few things are able to.

Marjory: And you know, the entrepreneurial spirit, and the ability to do business and to handle money, is really a fundamental life skill. It really is. Children need to learn that. We all need to learn that. If our big banks had learned that we would be in a very different place.

Joel: One of my favorite stories, when Daniel our son was about, oh, I don't know, he was about 11 or 12, and he would go down and buy, he had his rabbits. It was a pretty significant business. He still has the rabbits. He was down buying rabbit feed. At that point, he was already up to enough that he would get a thousand pounds at a time. He'd get twenty 50-lb. bags of unmedicated rabbit pellets at a time. So he's down there. He's barely tall enough to look over the counter at the feed store. He counts his money out and he said, "I need a half a ton." Of course, the counter guy, he's got this bemused look on his face. He said, "Why don't you get 2,000, get a whole ton?" Daniel wrinkles up his nose a little bit. He looks back at his money. He says, "I don't have enough money for a ton. The counter guy looked across then at me with this real serious look, and he said, "Man, there's a lot of adults in here that don't know that lesson."

Marjory: That's beautiful.

Joel: Isn't that the truth? Isn't that the truth?

Marjory: Joel, how do you feel about paying kids and chores? What would be your advice on how to handle that?

Joel: That's such a good one. I put a big difference, kind of between chores and personally initiated work. I'm not a believer in allowances. I never have been. Nobody should just get paid because they get out of bed and show up for breakfast in the morning. The allowance thing creates an entitlement mentality. There are things that you should do, simply by being in the household of humanity. I mean, somebody's got to take out the trash. Somebody's got to make the bed. Somebody's got to wash the clothes. Somebody's got to wash the dishes. These are all things that we do in the household just to survive. These aren't businesses. These aren't enterprises. These are just things you do because you're in the human family.

I think that it's really important. In fact, we're dealing with it right now with apprentices and interns and subcontractors and things. I think that our culture has done us a disservice, where we segregate work and personal. We go somewhere to work. We get paid there. If we're not there, then our time is our own and we can do it for recreation or entertainment or whatever we want to do. But it's freewheeling time.

So what happens is, a lot of these young people kind of grow up, we work with them here on the farm, and it's hard for them in their minds to separate, okay, we're pruning these trees today, I know. We're not getting paid for pruning these trees. But by pruning these trees today, the trees are going to be healthier down the road, and 25 years from now they're going to make veneer lumber instead of firewood, and they're going to be worth \$1,000 a tree instead of \$50 a tree. That's why we prune them today, because 50 years from now that's going to make the difference. So yeah, I know, the pruning them today, there's nobody writing us a paycheck to prune them today, but we do that as an investment in the future.

I think that our whole cultural vocational setup has kind of militated against the things that we do because we're human, the things we do for the human family.

Now bringing that to the home, I make a big distinction between the jobs that have to be done to make the home run efficiently, sweep the floor, wash the clothes, wash the dishes, those kinds of things, as opposed to things that the kids might do on their own initiative. If a child comes and says, "I'd like to grow tomatoes for our table." Pay the child for those tomatoes. That's not now a chore. That's personal initiative.

If you propose, you could throw out there, sit down and brainstorm. What are things that would actually make us more self-reliant, or have benefits to our household? Maybe it's 5 chickens in the backyard that would lay our eggs and eat the table scraps. Maybe it's some garden, some produce. Maybe it's a beehive. Maybe it's spinning, some mittens or clothes, or whatever. But there are all these things that can be done to enhance the economy, the home economy.

Marjory: What are things that we're spending money for to somebody outside the family that we would rather just go ahead and pay our children to do and provide for us?

Joel: Yes, exactly, exactly. You would be amazed at how many things can be incentivized this way to reward the initiative, to reward initiative of the kids. I'm a big believer for those kinds of things. Yes, they should be paid. They should be paid well. That money, even if it crowds you as a parent to pay, it crowds you financially, that money will come back. You'll get the more return on that investment than you can on any investment in the world, trust me. Because you're building into your kids a personal worth. Yes, I want to take initiative, but you know what? I'm not going to be a doormat. I'm not going to just let people run over me. But I also want to be a contributor. You strike that balance there.

We always said we wanted our kids to grow up with a sense of money, that we would invest in them and build a relational aspect with them that was so strong that when we got old and couldn't take care of ourselves, that they would feel obligated to take care of us.

Marjory: That was the original purpose of children.

Joel: Yeah, before the government stepped in and did everything. I think that that really yields great dividends that we can't imagine.

Marjory: You had some advice and recommendations on how to pay them, versus by the hour or by the task, or management by objectives is the corporate wording for that. But you had some really good insights on how to pay them.

Joel: So many times, we pay ... Again, our culture, paying by the hour. I don't like hourly wages. It always sets up tension. The boss never thinks he gets his money's worth, and the employee always thinks they're working their tail off and not getting recognition. So there's a problem with hourly wages. So I'm a big believer in commissions, bonuses, salaries.

Here's the deal. Instead of being time oriented, make the compensation task oriented. To me, this is one of the most, this right here is worth the whole interview. How many people have kids that dawdle, dawdling kids. I tell them to get ready for bed and they dawdle. I tell them to wash the dishes and they dawdle. Weed the green beans, and they complain and dawdle.

There's a couple things you can do to get your kids to love to work with you. One is to clearly identify a task, and then make the compensation, whether it's monetary, or reading a story, or a crème brulee dessert, or whatever.

Marjory: Special treat?

Joel: A special treat. Whatever the compensation is, tie it to task completion. So rather than saying, "Go pull weeds in the beans for an hour," instead go out with a piece of pink survey ribbon and ribbon a starting plant, ribbon an ending plant, and say, "When you're done, then your task is done and you get whatever this reward is, this thing that we've agreed on." That way, the child is incentivized to stay with it to the task. They're not just putting in time. If they weed 3 plants and it takes them an hour, okay, they've completed their objective. Rather, you teach completion-oriented objectives that way. So they're working toward that pink ribbon out there at the end, and if it takes them 5 minutes, great. They're done. If it takes them 2 hours because they're fooling around and chasing butterflies, whatever, well, it takes 2 hours. But that incentivizes completion. Practicing piano, how many kids take piano lessons. The parents, "Go up and practice piano

for a half an hour." Don't tell them practice the piano for half an hour. Say, "Look, you've got this song here. When you get that to a certain proficiency," and you can agree with whatever that benchmark is, "then you can stop." Then the child, if they really work hard at it and just really focus and get after it, and they can get it done in 15 minutes, then they're done. If they want to sit and dawdle and pick their nose, and whatever, then maybe it takes an hour. But all these things, washing dishes, all these chore kind of things, all these things need to be task oriented, rather than time oriented, because time orienting, just putting in time, simply teaches dawdling.

The other thing that I would say on this. So task oriented as opposed to time oriented. The second thing is to turn into a game. Kids love relays. They love competition. They love, we all love to win, right? So if you're out with your 6-year-old, okay, and you're going to pick beans. Now, I don't know why I'm stuck on beans, but beans are ... Well, I'm just stuck on beans today. So you've got these 2 rows of beans, or 2 beds of beans you've got to pick, right? You section off an appropriate, age-appropriate amount of the beans for the child to pick, and the correct amount for an adult to pick. Don't make them the same. Make them different so they're age appropriate. Then you maybe blow a whistle or whatever, make a funny dance or do a handspring or whatever. You start and race. Who can get done first? Let the child win sometimes. Don't beat them down. But also, don't just let them win all the time, either. It's a little bit of give and take. Because they can understand when the game's being thrown, okay? So you work together. You turn what would normally be a bit of a drudgery chore maybe, and you turned it into a game that way.

The finally thing that I would say is simply that kids are attracted to what their parents are attracted to. If you're complaining about, "Oh, I've got to go out and weed this. I've got to go out and do this. Rah, rah, rah, rah. Churn the butter. Wash the dishes." Whatever. And you go through the day with your lower lip sticking out enough to trip on, you're kids are going to develop a glum spirit as well toward that. They catch. When we don't teach them, they catch what we throw them. If we're throwing them depression and frustration and glumness, that's what they're going to catch. But if we're throwing them enthusiasm, and "Oh, look. Man, these are the best beans in the world. Wow, can we make these dishes sparkle today." We can make what would normally be a bit of a headache into the most exciting thing they can possibly. And they get vicariously excited about seeing mom and dad excited about things. They catch that enthusiasm as well.

Marjory: I've experienced that, especially with the very younger children, harvest is the best time to bring kids in to work in the garden, like harvesting the beans, or digging the potatoes. Of all the different things that need to get done, that one

usually is the most delightful and fun, and it's easy to get kids to help you out with that, if you're looking for a place to start. How do you handle it ...

Joel: I think we as adults tend to enjoy that best, too. I mean, that's payday, right?

Marjory: It is payday. Yes.

Joel: It's a lot easier for us to get excited about picking beans than it is about planting beans or weeding beans or watering.

Marjory: Or weeding beans, yeah. Very much so, yeah. You're right. It's the enthusiasm that we have that's that catching. How do you handle, or what advice would you have for ... My son I'm thinking of in particular. I'd say, "If you weed this row of beans then you'll get paid this much, or you'll get this reward." Then I find out, well, he pulled out some of it. How do you handle some of the corrections that are going to be inevitable? Do you have any advice on that?

Joel: All of this, I mean, there's a whole lot to say about this. But all of this has to be done with a great deal of personal time. I'm assuming that when we start talking about getting to where you pay we're not talking about a toddler. All these build on themselves. So when I say integrate kids with work, I mean, when the child is in diapers and you're carrying them around in this little basket, they go out with you to do the garden work. Or they're up with you on the counter, the dishes. If the kids are growing up, if they're integrated with your life, and you're involving them with your life, i.e., not plopping them down in front of the TV to watch ... This is the difference. This is the difference. If you take that 3-year-old, "Here, go sit and watch ..." What is the new Disney? Frozen? "Go sit and watch Frozen, because I'm going to go run the washing machine." Do you know what you've just taught. You've just denied that child the chance to catch the most foundational charity and responsibility and dependability and punctuality and faithfulness and perseverance. All the character traits that we want to inculcate in our kids, we deny them the opportunity to be that. Yeah, I know, they can barely walk. That's okay. They can go with me, and, "Can you hand me that pair of underwear, that pair of socks?" Yes. Yes. A toddler can do that. That's how, when they get to be 7 or 8, suddenly you can say, "Hey, go take sister's clothes. Put them in the wash." And boy, they've wash. They've got their stool there. They can punch that thing on. Because they've been there. All of this assumes and extremely early integration stage so that there is no reason why a 6 or 7-year-old can't distinguish a weed from a cucumber or a green bean, or whatever. Why? Because they've been out there hearing and seeing and being involved with it. There's always going to be, sure, there's going to be mistakes. So you need to be quite gentle on those mistakes, as long as they're totally accidental. If there's a tantrum and something's being hurt just because I'm in a bad mood, then that's a different story, and there's got to be consequences for that. But all

of this is assuming a very ... I mean, gathering eggs. A 5-year-old, 6-year-old can gather eggs quite, quite well. But it starts when we're holding them, when they can't even reach up in there and we hold them and hold them over there. Say, "Here." And they pick it up, and you pick up 1 egg. Yes. It takes time. I know that. It takes time. But that's the investment that we make, because if we don't invest it ... What is it? There's a saying that like 80% of a person's complete character and temperament development is done by 3 years old. That's not very old.

Marjory: Oh my gosh, yeah. I'd always heard 6, by 6. You know, the Jesuits used to say, "Give them to me until they're 6, and then you can have them," is the classic saying there.

Joel: That's a pretty common one, too. But the fact is that if you're waiting to try to remediate your TV-addicted, iPod-addicted, entitlement-addicted, celebrity-addicted 15-year-old, and suddenly you think you're going to get them to get all jazzed up about weeding green beans, it's going to take a whole n

'nuther ...

Marjory: That's a whole different workshop right there.

Joel: You'd have to leave them, come and leave them for a while.

Marjory: I've got to tell you, for when you do get kids raised up like this. I was reading recently that the most productive time on an organic farm is when the kids are teenagers. They have so much energy. If there's any way that you can really funnel that, and having done this by working with them from an early age on, it's astonishing what they can do.

Joel: Yes. Think about the bar mitzvah. That's a Jewish tradition, obviously. But that's 12 years old. At 12 a person should be developmentally ready to assume some reins of decision making. Buffalo Bill Cody was a Pony Express rider when he was, what was he, like 13?

Marjory: Oh, geez.

Joel: Can you imagine a 13-year-old kid outrunning Indians through the wild west on a horse carrying US mail. I mean, give me When you look back, though, at what young people have done. I even hate to use the word teenager. That's a complete American fabrication. It's almost like we've given ... It's almost like assuming or giving license, giving credence to this, between childhood and adulthood this spinning your wheels kind of existence. I enjoy calling them young people. Anyway.

Marjory: That's a good distinction. I appreciate that. I'll switch my language. There's a lot of potency in the words you use. Absolutely.

Joel: It is. And the thing is, we've found that people jump to your expectations. If you don't have any expectations, which is I think where we've come to in our culture, we really have so low expectation. Just go learn your multiplication tables, and go to school. We really, as a culture, we expect them to be stupid and foolish and whatever, instead of having actual expectations where they actually start to grow up. Our son Daniel, even when he was ... We homeschooled, by the way. I'll be transparent with folks. We think that's a model that enabled and integrated, all the things we've been talking about we think are easier. But they're not impossible when you're in school. But you just don't have as many hours in the day. You've got to be a little more diligent about planning for it. I didn't homeschool for me, but for Daniel, when he was, I don't know, 14 or so, we had friends that did construction, built houses and things, and so ... I mean, it was probably as illegal as sin. He didn't get paid this much. But went with these friends building houses. Well, guess what? When he got married at whatever he was, 21 or something, he built his own house. I couldn't have any more done than the man in the moon. I couldn't do it today. But it's those early life experiences. When you're a young adult, before you have adult responsibilities is the ideal time to be doing things like growing food, constructing things, mechanic work, whatever, spinning, weaving, ceramics, pottery. I mean, think of all the craft and artisanal things, plumbing, electrician, all these life skills, so that you actually have that as you head into adulthood. What a great gift, than just getting A's in school. I'm not trying to downplay A's in school. But if things go south and things get tough, I want to be with somebody who knows how to set a deadfall and trap a rabbit, tan its hide, and make cordage out of its sinew, than a person that knows how to do calculus, in the final end of things. I'm not trying to denigrate calculus. I'm just suggesting that we shouldn't see them ...

Marjory: Practical skills.

Joel: We shouldn't see one as useful and one as wasteful.

Marjory: I agree. I also just wanted to hearken back to a title of one of your other books. "Everything I Wanted to do is Illegal." It's true.

Joel: That is for sure.

Marjory: One of the other things I was struck about in the original Polyface Farms video is you were talking about structures, and actually how you built your farm was designed with the kids in mind, in that you realize that you're inventing things and changing things, and part of the delight for you in becoming a farmer and growing up was trying some of the stuff your dad had and modifying it, and

recognizing that there needs to be space for your kids to do it. So you didn't make permanent structures, and you actually ... Could you talk a little bit more about actually how the farm is designed to incorporate already thinking of the kids.

Joel: We use primarily portable infrastructure, or very cheap, homemade, functional infrastructure, as opposed to edifices that will stand the test of time, and be here for a thousand years. Actually, I think the native Americans had it about right by building homes that would compost in about 10 or 15 years. That's about the cycle of a family. You get married and need a little house. You have kids and need a bigger house. Kids move out, now you want a little house. Those are about 10 to 15 year increments. So about a shelter structure that composts in about 15 years I think is probably a pretty good idea. When you develop ... On the farm here, when we develop infrastructure, we're thinking low capital intensive structures as opposed to permanent structures that are going to lock in the next generation to the same use. We're always thinking about buildings, for example, that are multiple use, rather than single use. Maybe we're running beef cows through them now. Well, maybe our kids are going to want to run goats through them, or whatever. If you make capital intensive single use infrastructure, it locks in the next generation to the same model, paradigm, whatever, business that you've been in, and it makes them feel trapped. And of course, what do people do when they feel trapped? They want to run away. You mentioned at the very top of the program, it's a big problem. Why is the average farmer 60 years old? When the young people don't want to get in, the old people can't get out. Leaving some flexibility there is really important. This goes 1 step further, when we talk about giving your kids space. You asked about correction there earlier. I've written numerous times about what I call letting your kids bend over some nails. As adults we're looking at the cost of nails and all this, and cost of lumber. How do you get a 16-year-old who loves to don a, what do you call them, a construction belt. You know, the one with all the pouches in it, you've got hammers and stuff in. And work next to you on a project. Well, how you get there is at 5 years old, when they're uncoordinated and they're little kids, taking a board. Yes, I know. That board, okay, so it cost five bucks. Big deal. And letting them just pound nails and bend over nails. Throw the board away for crying out loud. But that little youngster right there, bent over nails, is developing those motor skills that are going to show themselves when they're 15, 16. It's okay. It's okay to bend over some nails. It's okay to waste a board. It's okay to waste some nails. Because that's your investment in tomorrow's relationship. Many of us, I didn't, but many people I've talked to, grew up in homes where as a child all you can remember was, no matter what, it was never good enough. If you built something, it wasn't quite good enough. If you washed the dishes, they weren't quite clean enough. If you dusted the furniture, Mom didn't say, "Oh, great job." The first thing she said was, "Oh, you missed a speck

right there." This gets ... I've done this little talk at conferences, and seen 50-year-old people with big tears start to roll down their cheeks when ... They are 50, 60 years old, and they still are afraid to do something innovative, because in the back of their head there's some matriarch or patriarch standing there saying it's not good enough, or there's something wrong with it. I'll tell you, this is a critical element. If we're going to give our kids wings to fly, we have to let them tumble out of the nest a few times. We have to let them bruise themselves a couple of times, and it's got to be okay. We've got to let them not be successful. Let them fail. But praise them in the failure. It's okay. Affirm them. Praise, praise, praise, I say. It's so easy to find fault. We're hardwired to find fault. We love to find fault. That's why we call them stoplights and no go lights, right? We remember what stops us, not what makes us go. We talk about what stops us, not what makes us go. It's easy to complain. It's hard to praise. I think we as parents, as part of this whole learning process, as we bring our kiddos along in our life, we have to really concentrate. I mean, it's almost against human nature. But concentrate on finding those things to praise. It doesn't mean that we don't correct. It doesn't mean that we don't discipline. Doesn't mean anything's okay. But what it does mean is that we praise every opportunity we have, because that's what as Steven Covey, in "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" says, that's what puts the emotional equity in the gas tank for the occasional withdrawal. We're human. As parents, we make mistakes, too. We make wrong accusations from time to time. We jump to conclusions. We're judgemental. We're prejudicial. Whatever. We're going to make an emotional withdrawal from that emotional gas tank once in a while, and we have to have put in enough equity in that tank over time so that we can make an occasional withdrawal and it's not going to completely drain the tank and stop the relationship.

Marjory: That's really beautifully said. I have to say, you've got 4 generations living on your farm. What a wonderful example. I guess maybe 1 thing we should wrap this up is, what do you see as the single biggest reason for the failure of the family farm? Why would you say that's not more of a common experience?

Joel: I think the biggest failure of the family farm is innovation on the part of the farmer. What's happened is that the economy has changed over time. When mom and dad bought this farm in 1961, the production ratio was a dollar and the ... What am I trying to get to? I'm trying to make this extremely simple. The land price of \$90 an acre. The production value was \$30 a hundredweight on calves. That's a 3:1 land to production ratio. Today, that ratio is not 3:1. It's 50:1. In the last 50 years, we have seen this land to production ratio completely change. During that time we have seen a lot of things that used to be done on farms, small scale manufacturing, canning, craft type things, value adding type things from a direct marketing standpoint, we've seen those gradually go away until

today the average, the farmer only gets 9 cents of the retail dollar. When you go buy food at the supermarket, the farmer's only getting 9 cents of that dollar.

Marjory: Ouch.

Joel: As recently as 60 years ago, that was 35 cents. So what this represents is not only has the production and the land price ratio completely changed, but the amount, the percentage that the farm gets from the production, that percentage as a portion of retail has gradually diminished. What this means is that in the raise of food prices and everything else, the farm income has simply dropped, dropped, dropped, dropped. So the farmers that are seeing their kids follow them on the farm have figured out a way to stay in business, or value add. Here on our farm, what we've done is we have stacked and value add. We process our own chickens. We process our own rabbits. We direct market everything we do. So we wear all those notorious middleman hats so that we become all those middle people that supposedly take all the profits. If that's where it is, I want to be one. Let me sign up. But so many farms have not done that. So they're being squeezed out of a salaried position. Goodness, most farmers work in town to support their farm addiction. They don't even make their living from the farm. They have a town job and then they come and farm on the weekends. If there isn't 1 salary, there certainly isn't going to be 1 for the next generation. That's why I'm such a big proponent of creating stackable fiefdoms so that we're going to multi-speciation, multi-enterprise systems. But actually there's not a single farm in the world, including ours, that is fully utilizing all of it's resource base, in a positive way. Not that we're raping it. Not that it's going down. We're actually utilizing it, and the resource base is actually going up. We're building soil. We're hydrating the landscape. We're making more transpired fresh air, sequestering carbon, those kinds of things. It doesn't have to go backwards, but it has to go forwards. That is not going to happen with industrial based, single species, factory farmed, genetically modified organism commodity programs. It's not. That is going to continue to diminish the farm opportunity for families. But when you diversify, you value add, you build your own complex relational synergies on a piece of land and access your community at the retail level, suddenly a lot of income can be generated on a very, very small farm.

Marjory: And a big part of that diversification is incorporating the kids into the process to make some of those different businesses and to create some of that income, or to bring some of the diversity in there to operate some of those procedures.

Joel: Yes.

Marjory: The small family farm is definitely in a reinvention process, isn't it?

Joel: Yeah. And you know, there's so many pressures now on these farm kids. I'll take some heat for this, but I will tell ... Nobody can do it all. You know, the old idea of supermom. It doesn't exist. You can't do it all. So I'm a big believer ... Look, I love the farm. If you love the farm, then enjoy the farm. Let that be your recreation, your entertainment, your vocation, your integrated lifestyle. Don't think the kids are going to miss out if they're not in ballet, little league, soccer, and every other little thing that you can imagine. They will be just as valuable as human beings and adults knowing how to plant tomatoes and make tomato sauce and salsa, and set a deadfall for a rabbit in the wild. They will be just as productive and wonderful adults, than if you're beating up the road every day running to the soccer league every day, and stressing yourself, because now there's no time to do the farm work that needs to be done. "Oh, we've got to go to the soccer game!" You can't do it all. It's okay. It's okay to not do it all. I give you permission to not do it all. It's fine. Your kids will be just fine. Abraham Lincoln read by candlelight, was self-taught, didn't even go to school, and there he was. The world is full of people who simply got affirmation and were encouraged to reach their whatever, their potential. That's what incentivizes kids. That's what turns them into really great adults. Responsibility, and an appreciation of the awesomeness and the mystery of life, and being surrounded with this contagious enthusiasm and zest for living. Trust me. That's as wonderful to discover with a nest of wild duck eggs by the pond edge as it is the soccer tournament. It's just as exciting. So it's okay to concentrate on an element of life that I think is grossly under-appreciated in our culture, and to reestablish the agrarian, the Jeffersonian intellectual agrarian. That's just fine.

Marjory: Joel. Thank you. Thank you so much for spending time with us this evening, or this afternoon. It really is a delight. Every time I hear you speak I get new things out of it. Where can people go to learn more about Polyface Farms and maybe some of the books that you have? They're really delightful to read.

Joel: Sure. That's very kind. We have a website, polyfacefarms.com. If you just Google in p-o-l-y-f, it'll pretty much come up Polyface. We have a great website, lots of resources, links to YouTube. We have a whole, we sell our books. I've written 9 books. The one that we've pulled a lot of this is called "Family Friendly Farming." There's 1 whole section in there with the 10 commandments for getting your kids to love the farm. It's really 10 commandments for getting your kids to just love being with you, and to have kids that are enjoyable to be around when they're 16.

Marjory: There you go. We need that, too.

Joel: But my context is farming, so I deal with the farming. But certainly, if you're not, you can certainly pull a lot out of it.

Marjory: They're general principles.

Joel: General principles. But yeah, the books are there. A lot of information there, a lot of links. So that's the place to go and find out more.

Marjory: Well, thanks again, Joel. We really appreciate it.

Joel: Thank you for having me. I've been delighted. Thank you.