



“ Chicken Sales Mini Business ”

**TGN on the Road with Marjory Wildcraft
and John Livingston**

FULL TRANSCRIPT

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Marjory: Hello and welcome to the Home-grown Food Summit. This is Marjory Wildcraft, your host. This summit is brought to you by The Grow Network which is the premier community of people who are growing our own food and making our own medicine. I have always been aware of the possibility of just a small side income business of flipping chickens, so raising chick to laying age and then selling the laying hens, and, in this presentation below, you'll see why that actually does make a lot of sense. Actually, this was a business I ... This was a business that I actually thought of doing, but in all my spare time, right? I found a really, really neat guy who is doing it, and I went ahead and got the awesome Grow Network video producer Anthony and I to go do a piece on this little side stream of income.

Our farmer here is John Livingston, and his day job is accounting. Let's be all clear that he does have a day job that supports his chicken habit, but he has created an awesome little side business selling laying hens to his local communities. In many areas, there is a niche for small producers to raise chicks to laying age. John, in his area, is known as "the chicken guy," and he shares all the details like the dollars. He's an accountant so you're going to get the dollars and the cents and the nuts and bolts and the joys of successfully operating this little side business of flipping chickens.

I do want to make a note. At the end of the presentation, there were two things that I found very, very interesting and inspiring. One is that he's right near the city of Austin. The city actually encourages backyard chickens. You want to watch the end of that to see why. Also, how a chicken is like a tattoo. So watch this interview that I did with John and maybe you'll be inspired to start a business flipping chickens.

Marjory: Hey, this is Marjory Wildcraft, and on this edition of TGN On The Road, we're going to show you how to flip chickens for fun and profit.

All right, I'm here with John Livingston in Central Texas, and John, can you tell folks a little bit about you? What you do for a living and ... Other than flipping chickens, of course?

John: Right. Well, my day job is an accountant. I work in the commercial real estate industry. A few years ago they said, "You know we could use your space to create a conference room." And I said, "Where will I work?" They said, "Well, we thought you would like to work from home."

Marjory: You would like to go home, right? Yeah.

John: I said, "That's great." I started looking for a little farm.

Marjory: What a great way to get ... But, you're still doing that work now, right?

John: I do that work.

Marjory: But you got a remote job, that's pretty cool

John: I have a remote job. I go into the office maybe twice a week. That also gives me not only the opportunity to get my laundry done but also do some farming and things like flipping chickens.

Marjory: Flipping chickens. How long have you been here on this land? We're in Central Texas in an area called the Sand Hills. Beautiful, beautiful region. How long have you been here?

John: Three years. Just over three years now.

Marjory: Not too long. You've really developed a little business.

John: Not too long. Yeah.

Marjory: Was there some precipitating event that you said, "Wow, I want to start raising these chickens and growing more of my own food." Or was it just a dream you'd always had or did you grow up knowing how to do this?

John: I was a beekeeper. I had a hive at my house in the city, an urban hive. I also had a handful of hives at an organic feed mill and chicken farm in Elgin. The guy who ran that, Jeremiah, said, "Well, I would like to have some bees." I was like, "Great." I was out there on like a Wednesday afternoon working on beehives and he said, "John, come in and have some tea." I went in and he sat me down at his big kitchen table and he said, "You need to be working outside." He said, "You shouldn't be doing accounting work downtown. You should be working outside." Not only did that inspire me but seeing him and his operation made it obtainable.

Marjory: Oh, so, you saw somebody else living this lifestyle and said, "Wow, I think I could do that."

John: I could do that.

Marjory: Yeah. Cool.

John: It's not impossible. It's not that far out.

Marjory: Kind of like this video we're making now for other folks, showing them they could do this. Right?

John: Exactly. I hope that it leads to that. That kind of led me to come out here and try some agricultural things, chickens. It all starts with chickens and then some goats.

Marjory: Chickens are the gateway.

John: They really are.

Marjory: The gateway. What do we call that, it's not that the gateway drug. It's the gateway agricultural product.

John: Yes. The gateway product for small producers.

Marjory: How did you get into flipping chickens specifically? By the way, flipping chickens is not like the spatula in the frying pan.

John: Nor gymnastics of any kind.

Marjory: Nor gymnastics. Right. Oh, my gosh. I'm having a visual on that. Okay.

John: Flipping chickens is buying chickens that have been hatched somewhere else. Day old chickens, usually mail ordered, although there are some great farms where I've gotten chickens.

Marjory: A little older.

John: That are people who sell day old chicks and they're not that hard to find. You buy these birds, you raise them to laying age and then you sell them, hopefully for a profit.

Marjory: If I can summarize this a little bit, if you want a laying flock in your backyard, usually you only want four, five, or six, eight birds. Right? Buying them from a hatchery, they only want to send you a minimum of 25, if not 50 or 100.

John: Exactly.

Marjory: Then you'd have to raise up all those birds, which takes five or six months before they get to laying age. Then you've got way too many extra birds. Actually, there is this really nice little niche business for small producers to go ahead and pick up those 50 birds, raise them up and then sell them off into the local community and that's what you're talking about.

John: Exactly, because your average backyard chicken keeper doesn't have this much space, nor do they necessarily have the time to raise chicken. Maybe, like me when I first started, you just need a starter flock. You need a half a dozen birds just to get

started and have some eggs. That's just it, the hatcheries, it's usually to avoid extra charges, and sometimes they won't even ship them unless you can order a couple dozen birds. Especially in the winter time because it keeps them warm in there in the mail system.

Marjory: Let's talk a little bit about your operation. Let's start all the way from you get your little chicks and how you raise them up and then all the way to the sales and marketing part, which is important right.

John: Yes.

Marjory: You get your little babies in. I've done this many times. You get a flat from the post office. They come in a box. They ship it, and is that the way you typically get them?

John: Most of the time, although like I've said, I have found a few people, especially local breeders, harder to find breeds that ... It's good to also, if you're going to breed chickens yourself eventually, start varying your genetics. You don't want to get-

Marjory: At this point in time you're not breeding them but is that something you aspire to?

John: We hope to next year start hatching some chickens. I have a couple breeds that I've been working on building my genetics and getting chickens from different hatcheries so that they're not all related.

Marjory: I know that's a big thing with Joe Salatin and a lot of the chicken community, is like breeding varieties of chickens that are real specific. They lay real well, they have a good demeanor, they're kind of smart, but not too smart.

John: Certain color eggs.

Marjory: Yeah. Yeah. So, those chicks come in and then here I guess this is your brooder area. This is a little area that you've got them in that they come in to first.

John: We do. We have what used to be a tack room.

Marjory: For horses.

John: And a stable where they would keep equipment. It was not very difficult to put in some hardware cloth walls and create a couple of spaces so that you can have different age groups of chickens. They start in a smaller area with a brooder. I like the brooders that are little rectangular boxes that are kind of close to the ground. We jokingly call them the wire mommy.

Marjory: The big wire hen.

John: The alternative would be like a heat lamp, which is a little more dangerous and uses a lot of electricity.

Marjory: Basically, we need to keep these chicks at about 90, 95 degrees for the first couple of weeks. They need to be warm. You've got this little set up here for them for that. About how long do they stay in this little area here?

John: You know until they're six to 10 weeks old. Depending on how many birds and how much room they're taking up. If they're not taking up a lot of room they might stay a little longer. But if they're just too many birds and they need more space and it becomes a health issue, then I open them up.

Marjory: Let's talk about the space here. This looks like it's a four by eight space or so.

John: That's exactly right.

Marjory: About what it is?

John: Yeah.

Marjory: How many chicks have you found is a real comfortable amount to put in here?

John: I can get about four dozen in there comfortably. But they will move out pretty quickly into the bigger space.

Marjory: Okay, close to 50 of them. You get them up to where they're a little bit of a good size before you move them into the next. And feed? You're just buying a local good organic feed or non-GMO, non-soy?

John: I do. That's definitely one way to get your margin up a little bit, is to buy in bulk. Because I have a flock. Because I have the little ones, it's very easy for me to get to the thousand pound threshold that gets me the best discount at the feed mill.

Marjory: When you go buy a thousand pounds from the feed mill they're like, "Okay. We're saving off-"

John: They come in 330 pound barrels.

Marjory: Oh, wow.

John: I try to make sure that I have enough to get me through so that everybody runs out at the same time and I can go get another thousand pounds of feed.

Marjory: Go get another load. Now do you find it really important to the end user who you're selling to get a higher markup if you say, "Hey, these guys all had good feed."? Are you finding that the buyers care whether the chicks had organic feed or not?

John: Some do and some don't.

Marjory: Okay.

John: A lot of backyard chicken keepers do.

Marjory: We've got these baby chicks. You're feeding them some pretty good feed. You're buying it in thousand pound, half ton bulk to

reduce costs a little bit. They're in this little area for a while until they become adolescents or teenagers, then you move them over to the next area that you've got there for them.

John: Then they have another area, which has an automatic door that also gives them space to the outside. At that point, I try to give them, you know, almost a foot of space per bird.

Marjory: You've got these 50 birds in here. They've got this inside area with their roosts, and they've got the door to the outside. Then this outside pen is completely enclosed, even from the top. What are the main predators that you have to worry about here?

John: Well, my biggest predator and originally the door just opened to the outside and all these chickens, in the morning they would just spill out into the yard behind my stable.

Marjory: You didn't have the whole fencing in place yet?

John: No. I would start losing a bird a day when the hawks would come through on their migration.

Marjory: The red-tailed hawks. Yeah.

John: They love chickens.

Marjory: Everybody loves chicken. Isn't that amazing. Yeah.

John: I put a big 10 by 10 dog run up against the stable and it has a sun cloth on top. That stops the birds.

Marjory: That stops the birds.

John: I don't really have a lot of other predators back there because I have three miniature donkeys.

Marjory: I was going to say.

John: Their guard donkeys.

Marjory: Guard donkeys. You were saying that the guard donkeys are actually a tax write off?

John: Yeah, it's kind of a running joke around here but my tax accountant made me convince him that the donkeys were a tax write off. That I could write off their feed and veterinary. But the truth is, in that yard I have never lost a chicken to a fox or a raccoon or coyote even because those donkeys, they stay around that stable because that's where they eat and none of the other critters come anywhere near them.

Marjory: Now that's a ... A lot of people do use donkeys, especially they're known for being able to keep coyotes off. That's a totally viable method. I like to use dogs but that totally works. We've got the chickens and they're half grown. You've got them in that yard for awhile.

John: Right. And they usually finish there. When I start seeing eggs, that's when I start to make the decision, is this chicken for sale or is it going to become part of my own flock. The whole reason that I got into it was to refresh my flock. Also, to experiment with breeds. Also, how crowded is the space?

Marjory: It starts as they get bigger. Yeah.

John: Once they get to 12 weeks old, they're pretty good sized birds. Some chickens are grown at that point.

Marjory: Most chickens are harvest able for meat at that age. Although you're raising these guys for egg layers. What age are most breeds going to be ready to start laying eggs? That's going to be about four or five months?

John: Yeah. A lot of it depends on the breed. Sometimes a specific bird, but I found that usually around 25 weeks most of them will start laying.

Marjory: Okay. 25 weeks is months-

John: Six months.

Marjory: Six months, okay. Great. Now you've got the birds, just because you create something, how do you market and sell these guys?

John: Word of mouth.

Marjory: Word of mouth.

John: Is the best. Most of my birds go to clients, believe it or not, I have chicken clients. I have people that call me, sometimes now even people request things specific breeds. Like, "Will you raise some Polish Crested?" I say, "Sure." Because, yeah.

Marjory: I really want these.

John: They can't find them anywhere.

Marjory: How did it start though? I mean now I get it, word of mouth and you've got a list, a client list but how did it get started?

John: It starts with Craigslist is a great place. That is a lot of work though. You're going to get a lot of emails. People are going to say, "Hey, I'm looking for Wyandotte. I'm looking for Brahmas. I'm looking for Marans. Do you have any of these birds?" From Craigslist, I do some monthly farmer's markets, producer's markets. Some of them won't let you bring live birds, some of them will. If I can't bring live birds, I bring lots of pictures and organic feed in 20 pound bags, kind of lure people to my booth and give them something that they can buy.

Marjory: Are you getting known as the chicken man?

John: I don't know, yeah in some places I think it have gotten known as the chicken guy.

Marjory: Chicken man john.

John: Will the chicken guy be there?

Marjory: The chicken guy, I like that better. Yeah.

John: You know, I don't sell very many birds at those markets, but-

Marjory: It's mostly making the connection.

John: It's the connections. Everybody takes a card and some of those people do call you back.

Marjory: Do you collect their names and addresses and stay in touch with them at all? Or is that not a step that you have made yet?

John: I don't do that as much as I should. I think that's a great idea.

Marjory: A good suggestion.

John: Especially for the people who don't call you. It could be as simple as asking somebody and making a note. "Oh, you're going to build a coop? When do you think you'll have that coop ready? I'll give you a call."

Marjory: You went to a Montessori school. You sell chickens to Montessori.

John: I often sell to Montessori schools. I went to a Montessori school and we had chickens, so for me it's kind of fun to see it turn full circle.

Marjory: You know, my kids went to a Montessori. It was so great. They had the chickens there and it was part of the whole educational process. That's a good market then is schools.

John: It is. In addition to backyard chicken keepers, Montessori schools, I have a ranch that's a foster home to a bunch of homes.

Marjory: As another way, yeah.

John: They actually found me on Craigslist.

Marjory: Let's get into some numbers.

John: Okay.

Marjory: Baby chicks cost \$1.00, \$1.50 or \$2.00 depending on the breed?

John: Well, I usually raise heritage breeds and they usually start at three to four dollars.

Marjory: Oh. The prices of chickens have gone up since I've been thinking about-

John: It also depends on the hatcheries. There are some hatcheries where I do think I get a little bit better deal.

Marjory: A better deal.

John: Or a better bird, at least a better value.

Marjory: You've got that much into them and then you're going to have feed. I guess the ... What is the biggest expense? I would assume it's feed.

John: Feed is the biggest expense.

Marjory: Right.

John: If you don't count time.

Marjory: Right. We don't count time.

John: No.

Marjory: Let's just not do that.

John: I know. That aside, there are ways that you can kind of account for time and make a little bit of difference. One of them is volunteers and interns if you have space.

Marjory: The WWOOFing program.

John: The WWOOFing program.

Marjory: There's lot of ways to find folks that want to help out.

John: That does cut down on the labor a little bit. Feed is probably the largest at just over 50 cents a pound, it cost five, maybe a few more dollars a bird.

Marjory: How much are you going to be spending ... \$5 a bird you were saying, so maybe \$6 a bird is the fee that you're putting in. The bird itself was three or four dollars, so sounds like we're up to about \$10 now.

John: Yeah, also when you sell them. If you can get somebody who doesn't necessarily need a bird that's already laying.

Marjory: That like in a month or two will be laying, then you can save on that fee.

John: Exactly.

Marjory: Yeah. A month of feed is-

John: Exactly.

Marjory: -a dollar or so, right?

John: Yeah.

Marjory: Yeah. We call it chicken feed but when you're in the chicken business, it's actually a big deal.

John: Yeah.

Marjory: Right?

John: It is a big deal.

Marjory: You may have a total of \$10 into these birds, not really counting your infrastructure costs but just the direct expenses I would say. How much can you sell a laying hen for? Now, bare in mind that we're outside of Austin, so that's the market that you're selling them to.

John: There are a lot of backyard chicken keepers looking on Craigslist for Wyandottes and Cochins and Marans and Orpingtons, Americanas. People love the blue laying eggs. An Americanan, 20 to 25 dollars, a Maran, which you know like a black copper Maran that lays a beautiful dark chocolate colored egg, maybe \$30.

Marjory: Right.

John: But that chick is going to cost you more.

Marjory: Right. It's not a huge profit center, but it's a lot of fun and you are making some money on it. You're connected with a whole bunch of the community and you're providing a really valuable service to the community plus you're continually regenerating your flock.

John: Exactly.

Marjory: It sounds like a lot of fun.

John: Yeah. You know and paying for my own flocks expenses.

Marjory: Let's talk a little bit about breeds. Have you found you know what, you're watching the market, you're watching the Craigslist, you're listening to your customer base, how do you decide what breed to use?

John: Yes.

Marjory: You mentioned earlier that some people say, "Hey, can you custom grow me a flock of Wyandottes?" Or whatever, silkies. In general, how do you make that choice?

John: Well, I have a few favorites and I start there. Sometimes it's convincing the customer that-

Marjory: Oh, these are your personal favorites, you said, "I love these. I'm going to grow these and I'm going to sell them to somebody." Right?

John: Exactly.

Marjory: Okay, I got it.

John: And I'm going to convince you that this is the chicken you want.

Marjory: This is the breed you want. Yeah. Yeah.

John: There's a little bit of that. I do kind of keep an eye on Craigslist, what are people looking for? I do raise specific breeds for some people. I think almost any heritage breed is going to be a good bet. Again, colored eggs, people, especially backyard chicken keepers.

Marjory: Have you ever done packages, like I'll sell you these six birds and you're going to get blue, brown, white and pink eggs or whatever and the rainbow flock. Have you done any marketing spin like that?

John: I haven't. I have done packages where people can buy a 20 pound bag of organic feed and a chicken. Maybe a \$5 discount if they buy both at the same time.

Marjory: Do you have any rough idea of how much this is netting you in a year? Or do you not want to think about that?

John: I can tell you that you know, the gross number, the net number is hard to calculate because again, a lot of the money's going back into my own flock.

Marjory: Right.

John: The goal would be for the whole chicken operation itself to at least break even. Gross wise it's really easy to make a few thousand dollars a year selling, flipping chickens.

Marjory: Flipping chickens. Now one of the things that's immeasurable in this is like John just does doing this and you can see that he loves it. He's having a ball with it. That's one of the intangibles that you get out of it is the satisfaction and being outside, beautiful. I heard that one of the requirements from the IRS on whether you're a hobby farmer or whether you're a real farmer, or whatever they think of. They have like these nine questions.

John: You know, I have this very careful tax accountant and we have a little farm business set up to separate the farm from our personal. Of course, he says, "You've got to be careful because you don't want to be downgraded to a hobby farm. You want to be a real farm." He has these nine questions, these parameters, that apparently the IRS uses to decide whether or not you're a hobby farm. One of them is, "Do you derive any enjoyment from your farm activities?"

Marjory: Doesn't that say a lot about how the IRS thinks that we should be working.

John: I guess if you don't like it, you're a real farm.

Marjory: Whenever the accountant comes by you're like, "Ah, these chickens."

John: I try to look really worn out and miserable whenever I talk to my accountant.

Marjory: Do you have any advice for somebody who doesn't have a laying flock yet and they're wanting to get one. What size would you recommend? What advice do you recommend for folks wanting to get a laying flock?

John: For like a backyard flock?

Marjory: Yeah. Yeah, just a small.

John: Start with a coop.

Marjory: Make sure you've got the housing in place. Good point. Yeah. Yeah.

John: Get a book about chicken health.

Marjory: Any one you'd recommend?

John: I think it's called The Chicken Health Handbook.

Marjory: That's a pretty good name.

John: It's got a really good index. It's all about the index.

Marjory: Ah, the index, absolutely. Right.

John: You look for eye, mouth, wings, feet and go from there.

Marjory: You know I don't have that, but I'm going to add that one to my library. It's a good one?

John: Yeah. It's where I go when people call me and say, "What's wrong with my chicken?"

Marjory: Right. "Hang on a second."

John: Get a coop, get your supplies and look at Craigslist. Research your breeds. One of the things I did wrong is I started looking for, there almost all dual purposed birds.

Marjory: In a way, yeah.

John: Rarely do you eat a hen.

Marjory: Right.

John: In the city you can't have roosters anyway. I wouldn't worry about that. I would worry about how many eggs a year, what size eggs, what color eggs and look for those sorts of traits. You're not going to eat your hens.

Marjory: Yeah. We're here in Central Texas and so all of this information is going to be regional. What works in Maine is not going to work in Texas. We're going to have different birds.

John: That's true.

Marjory: What do you recommend for this region for those that are right here?

John: You know, I've had a lot of success with Americanas. One of my personal favorites, if you get what's called a straight run from the hatchery, which is a number of the birds will be male, and a number will be female.

Marjory: And female.

John: They don't sex them. They don't separate the roosters from the hens. You might go for something that the roosters would be bigger, like a Brahma. Brahmas one of my favorite breeds, big, big roosters and nice hearty hens that lay lots of brown eggs.

Marjory: Do you have any idea how many eggs in a year a Brahma hen is going to lay in this region? Do you have any?

John: Easily over 200, 250. The heat really suppresses everybody.

Marjory: Let's say somebody has some experience already, I would recommend that before you get into flipping chickens, that you have some experience raising them as a backyard farm.

John: Yeah, I would say, get some grown chickens. Find somebody on Craigslist. Go to the farm where they're selling the chickens and look for health. One thing that I'm very careful about is I

never mix my personal flock with chickens that I might sell. If they move from the nursery to my flock here, they're not for sale.

Marjory: They're here. And you keep them separated for hygiene and health and possible contamination.

John: Yeah. Some people will be really funny about bio security, which it's understandable. But you want to get an idea of the farm and whether their birds look healthy. Ask questions. What are you feeding them? Have you had any problems? And that kind of stuff. Some people don't even know that they have fowl pox or whatever and you can very easily find yourself in a situation where you get a sick chicken.

Marjory: Let's say somebody's had a backyard flock for a while, they're feeling pretty confident that they know, they got the coop and they've kind of got the situation set up. What would you recommend if they were going to go ahead and take the leap into becoming a chicken flipper?

John: Becoming a chicken flipper? I would say look on Craigslist, look and see what other people are selling.

Marjory: Are there other chicken flippers out there?

John: And there are. There are other chicken flippers out there. Call them. Ask questions, maybe go buy a bird from another chicken flipper.

Marjory: See their operation. How they're brooding. How they're raising up the teenagers. How they're marketing.

John: Yeah. Check and find out if you need any kind of licensing.

Marjory: That's a good point. I'm one of those that usually doesn't pay attention to those things. So, yes, that's a good one.

John: Beg for forgiveness, not for permission.

Marjory: Right.

John: In Texas, you need a poultry seller's certificate from the Animal Health Commission.

Marjory: Right. That's if you're going to transport them off farm to a market.

John: if you want to sell an animal off of your farm, anyone can come by and buy a chicken if I don't have a license, but if I'm going to sell it off of the farm at a flea market or a farmer's market or a chicken event, you know like the coop shows.

Marjory: The chicken round-up.

John: Yeah, Austin has a wonderful tour.

Marjory: We've been on that tour. They have a tour of all these chicken coops. It's really-

John: The Funky Chicken Coop Tour.

Marjory: The Funky Chicken Coop Tour. You could sometimes take chickens and sell them on the tour?

John: Oh, yeah. There's somebody in Corpus that organizes a tour like that. He's contacted me and said, "Hey, can you bring some chickens down?" I'm like, "It's a little far, we'll check the date."

Marjory: Right. Or if the surf is up, right?

John: Right.

Marjory: Surfers up in Corpus. That's ridiculous. You've got a license and that really is a pretty simple thing. Isn't it just paperwork?

John: It's paperwork. They do send somebody out to test your flock. They're actually great people. I haven't had any trouble-

Marjory: With the state.

John: -with the state. They're very friendly. I lost my license card at some point and I just called them up and they mailed me another one. Or emailed me another one. It's not expensive if you have a flock of less than a hundred birds, I think it's 50 or 75 dollars.

Marjory: I've always been a big fan of having multiple income streams, and obviously, flipping chickens is not, you're not getting rich off of that. Sounds like you're mostly making just a little bit, if breaking even.

John: Right.

Marjory: You're collecting a bunch of your own eggs.

John: Oh, yeah.

Marjory: You're getting that out of it. Plus you got a network.

John: We do sell eggs.

Marjory: Yeah.

John: Yeah.

Marjory: So there's the other products out of it too then. Would you recommend this to people to do as just an extra income stream and would you-?

John: I would. It's not incredibly difficult. It can be a lot of fun.

Marjory: Although we're not confessing that to the IRS.

John: Right.

Marjory: Except when it's working but the rest of the time, it's a lot of fun.

John: It is a lot of fun. You meet some real interesting people who are real excited about chickens. Who just built their first chicken coop and they're just glowing when they come out here. I get a lot of first egg emails.

Marjory: Tell me what a first egg email is like.

John: It's somebody like, it's usually starts with a thank you. You know, they've invested all this effort.

Marjory: And they're getting eggs.

John: And now they're actually getting eggs and making omelets. They're generally good stories.

Marjory: Nice. What would you say to inspire somebody if they were interested in doing this? I mean it really didn't take you that long to get up and running like, just really a year or two?

John: It took about a year. It happened very organically, very naturally. I was replenishing my own flock, trying out new breeds and then you start ordering more chickens.

Marjory: More and then selling some.

John: Pretty soon a natural schedule developed and the next thing I knew it was a year round activity of selling chickens and it's, like I said, not that difficult. It's fun. You make a little bit of extra money. It's another stream of revenue for the farm. It's also, one thing I really like about it is, these animals are usually going to very good homes.

Marjory: Nice.

John: I thought for a little while that I wanted to sell meat goats and then I had baby goats. I'm not going to sell meat goats. These chickens are going somewhere where they're going to have happy, productive lives.

Marjory: People really value them because of producing eggs.

John: Yeah.

Marjory: We're outside of Austin and the city of Austin is kind of progressive but they actually have given you a bit of a boost in your business, right?

John: A little boost definitely. The city has a program now where if you take a chicken class and buy a coop, they will give you a little rebate.

Marjory: What is the city's motivation for that? Why does the city want you to have a chicken coop and chickens?

John: They're trying to get waste out of the landfill.

Marjory: Oh.

John: The compost, I mean we do it here all the time. In fact this morning the chickens got everything that was leftover from last night's salad.

Marjory: Right. All the scraps. They clean that up right away. The city of Austin actually has a program where they're encouraging people to get laying flocks of chicken, and building coops, because they want people to feed the scraps of their food to their chickens so that it reduces the load onto the waste disposal system for the whole city?

John: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Marjory: That is pretty smart.

John: Yeah, it's pretty cool isn't it?

Marjory: Yeah. There's an inspiration for you. If you live near a city, use Austin as a model and go to your city planner's and say, "Hey, we need to get this implemented." That's pretty innovative.

John: We can get this stuff out of the landfill and into our yards and create some good natural fertilizer.

Marjory: As well as some really delicious calories and nutrition for human bodies to be healthier. The way your business is structured, this is kind of cool because laying hens don't lay forever, right?

John: No.

Marjory: I tend to keep mine way too long. They hardly are producing anything but I've fallen in love with them. In general, people do switch out their flock, what, every couple of years?

John: A hen will lay well for a couple of years and then she will slow down. She won't just stop though.

Marjory: Right, it's a thing where it trails off.

John: At that age, you're probably not going to want to eat that chicken.

Marjory: No, you usually have such an attachment to them. Although, you know what? Those older hens, apparently the giblets from them are the most delicious, but we won't go there. Shh.

John: Shh.

Marjory: Yeah. But really, you have a natural thing, so you sold somebody a flock a few years ago, and they come back and they're like, "Wow, I had such a great experience with John." Are you getting people who are like-?

John: A lot of people also, they start with a handful of birds. Six months later, they decide to add a few more birds. Like tattoos maybe.

Marjory: Tattoos, okay.

John: You just keep getting more.

Marjory: How is a chicken like a tattoo?

John: You keep getting more of them. You can't stop.

Marjory: You keep getting more.

John: Also, sometimes predation.

Marjory: Right, you lose some. Yeah, for sure.

John: Believe it or not, there's a thing called sudden chicken death.

Marjory: Sudden chicken death.

John: Yeah.

Marjory: SCD. I haven't heard of that one.

John: A chicken will just die and it's probably heart failure or something like that.

Marjory: Yeah. Things happen.

John: People generally have to replace their birds before two years are up. We've talked a little bit about red-tailed hawks. If your birds get to go outside, there's a good chance.

Marjory: You've got a lot of people that, for whatever reason, they had a really good experience and they need more chickens and they come back. I guess at this point now that you've been at it for a few years, you're much less dependent on Craigslist and mostly on your own set of referrals, is that?

John: Generally. Unless I have a big surplus. I generally don't go to Craigslist. It's generally referrals. Sometimes Facebook, High Rock Ranch has a Facebook page. Funky Chicken Coop Tour, even just going, you take your cards with you.

Marjory: Hand them out.

John: In the course of discussion. Coworkers.

Marjory: There you go.

John: You hear somebody.

Marjory: At the daytime job that's really sustaining you.

John: Yeah. Yeah.

Marjory: But it does get easier. The marketing gets a lot easier as you go on.

John: It does. Yeah. And becomes somewhat natural. You meet an organizer of a farmer's market and you're like, "You know, I sell chickens at farmer's markets."

Marjory: There you go, boy. Bingo. Plus you can do your shopping right there. Well, John thank you so much. You're so awesome.

John: You bet. You bet.

Marjory: You're just typical of all of the folks that are involved with The Grow Network, doing little, small, innovative things that make a big difference for all of us to be able to live sustainably. In order to reach you, folks can either reach you inside at The Grow Network lab site where we've got you.... a number or your Facebook page is on High Rock Ranch?

John: High Rock Ranch in Red Rock, Texas.

Marjory: You're open to having people contact you if they either want a chicken and they're in this area or if they would just like some help maybe or some guidance in starting their own chicken flipping business, you'd be willing to help out?

John: Absolutely. I love to answer people's questions. They can contact me if they want chickens or if they just want to say, "How do I do this? How do I start?"

Marjory:

Yeah, yeah. This is Marjory Wildcraft and I'll see you on another episode of TGN On The Road.

Well this has been a presentation of what we call On The Road, TGN On The Road, where Anthony and I go out and we find really interesting things and video them. If you really want to support this, if you enjoyed this, like seeing it, click on the button to the right and pick up the full summit package. I'll be looking at the number of sales that we get from this, and that will give me a real good indication of if we should continue doing these TGN On The Road video series. I got to tell you. I have just a ton of fun with them and they're really a ball to do, but they are an expense. So we really do need to figure out a monetary model to support it.

So if you really like this, you like the quality -- it's definitely a lot higher level of quality of video production and much more intensity of information -- click on the button to the right, pick up the summit package. I will definitely be watching that and know also if you want to enter comments down below, but that will give us an indication if we should continue to do more of these TGN On The Road episodes. So we definitely really appreciate your support, and when you pick up the summit package, that helps a lot. As you can tell, The Grow Network does not have any outside funding. We don't have any outside advertising. We're not getting any grants. We're just a group of people that are dedicated to making this thing happen, and when you purchase a summit package, it really helps a lot.

Well this is Marjory Wildcraft, and you're participating in the Home-grown Food Summit.