



MOTHER EARTH NEWS
ONLINE *Summit*
Practical Skills for Modern Homesteading

“Pastured Poultry Tips”

Joel Salatin

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ONLINE Summit
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Hosted By



Marjory Wildcraft

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Marjory: Hello and welcome to the Mother Earth News Online Homesteading Summit, this is Marjory Wildcraft, your host for this amazing event. I am just so delighted, like a total hero of mine is on the phone with me right now, that's Joel Salatin, I'm going to read you a little bit- If you don't know Joel, my God you've got to know this man. Here's how he describes himself, as a Christian libertarian environmentalist capitalist lunatic farmer. One of the great things I love about Joel is he can take like eighteen years and can catenate them all together and somehow it all totally makes sense. It's just astonishing how he'll lay it out. Actually, he is probably the most famous farmer in the world and he has done more to move forward the movement of small family farms than pretty much anybody else on the planet. He is the author of at least ten books that I know of now and most of them dealing with how to become successfully a small family farm and do it with a tremendous amount of care towards the Earth and people with nutrition and fertility and soil and just basically doing it the right way.

In this call with Joel what we're going to talk about, we're going to loosely follow his book Pastured Poultry Profits and let me give you the subheading which is Net Twenty Five Thousand Dollars In Six Months On Twenty Acres. That's the kind of guy Joel is. Actually, our discussion today is mostly going to focus on not necessarily making growing poultry for profit but really just how does a small family do it together. My family and I raise about a hundred birds a year and then we process some with the kids and everything and grow our own meat and Joel is going to be speaking on that with that topic today. Joel, let me welcome you to the call!

Joel: Thank you, it's my delight and honor to be with you. That's great.

Marjory: It really is, we're seeing the movement is becoming very tangible. The pendulum has completely gone towards centralized food and now it's really going back the other way. You were definitely a leader in this movement and as I said before just really a hero of mine so I'm just thrilled to be able to be on the call with you!

Joel: We'll cover some ground.

Marjory: Let's do that. Why don't we just jump in the beginning, in the beginning getting started and again we're taking the view point, I think that the quantity of say a hundred birds is about right for a family of four. I start out, I go to the post office, I pick up a box of a hundred of them, I know that a hundred of them are not going to make it through this process.

Joel: Usually the hatchery will stick in an extra three or four but no, you're right. There's about a five percent attrition rate so you're going to lose around ten or so in the brooding until they get done.



Marjory: Actually I tend to lose more, we usually are pretty happy if we only lose about thirty percent so we end up with about seventy birds, which is great, and then we have at least one bird a week for the family and then we have a bunch to give away or trade. That ends up being a good number. We're not quite as strict as somebody who is focusing on this as an income might be so our systems are a little bit laissez-faire you might say.

Joel: Yeah, but the advantage of a homestead, I'll just call this a homestead scale, is that you can give more individual attention. Let's talk about some of the little things that you can do, I want you to see that number more up there around doing eighty five to ninety from a hundred birds.

Marjory: Okay, I'm good for that.

Joel: Let's think about how we could do that. One thing, obviously, is to get them quickly from the hatchery and not have them an extra day in the post office. Try different hatcheries, you would be amazed that sometimes the hatchery farther away can get you chicks quicker than the one nearby simply because of the way postal routes and airplanes go. In fact, post offices are quite ... Inconsistent at the way they handle birds. Fortunately, we're big enough that we get them straight from the hatchery, they deliver them straight to us. I think the last batch we got the straw the broke the camel's back for us was one summer we had a thousand chicks that came to Richmond which is the big distribution postal service and somebody stuck them in a tractor trailer on a hundred degree day in the parking lot, closed the truck up and went to lunch and then got back in the truck and every chick was dead. They froze to death. That was kind of our final straw but all I'm saying is the care and attention that different post offices give is real, real inconsistent. Some post offices-

Marjory: I do get this, yeah. I have noticed over the years that sometimes the hatchery will say they're mailing it today and I'll get the chicks the next day and then sometimes I notice I get them two or even three days later so I guess you're right about that.

Joel: That difference between one and three days is unspeakably huge.

Marjory: It's actually astonishing to me that they can mail a chick in the first place, right? They send it to you in a box and you've got baby chicks in there.

Joel: The reason that this is both humane, it's not an inhumane thing even though some of the PETA people think it is, one of the reasons this happens is that unlike a mammal which nurses, a chick comes out of an egg. Think about this, this will be fascinating for you, a hen, let's say we're kind of in a natural setting, a hen begins laying eggs that she's going to hatch. This could be any wild bird or whatever, but they don't just lay one, they lay several. Well, they don't lay those



eggs one day after another, they might lay five a week. The point is by the time what's called the clutch, the clutch of eggs is done and the hen says, "All right, now I'm going to start setting," it might be seven to ten or twelve days before she's actually has the clutch ready and begins to lay. That means that the first egg laid is ten or twelve days old and older than the other one.

What happens is, before the bird starts sitting on the eggs, they don't develop very much because they're not warm and they're not in the perfect incubation stage because the hen's not sitting yet. The first egg laid develops very, very slowly but it still develops. When she finally says, "Okay, I got my clutch together, now I'm going to start laying," you've got eggs that are up to literally three days of development difference, okay? It might be twelve days old but developmentally it's three days in advance of the last egg laid the day she says, "Okay, not I got my clutch I'm going to start sitting on these eggs."

We fast forward twenty one days, now the first egg hatches. Well, if she gets off the nest and tends to that one and says, "Okay, let's go out and find some grub," the other eggs die because the hen just left. She can't leave them to go find food or anything until the last egg hatches. That's why in birds a bird can three days without food and water from hatching because the first one hatched needs to be self sufficient until the last one hatched gets done. Then the hen says, "The clutch is done, they're all hatched, now let's go find some food for everybody." She takes the little chicks and they go out and they find seeds and bugs and worms and whatever and begins feeding them. That's the reason why a chick, unlike a calf or a rabbit or anything like that, unlike a mammal, can go three days without food and water and be okay.

Marjory: Those chicks are basically built in with a couple of days of nurturing so they don't need the attention. Let's talk a little bit about once you've got the chicks in and the brooding, I remember reading in your book and you were talking about you've found in experience that the brooding requirements are not the same as what are in all the tables that are promulgated by the different extension agencies, that they can actually tolerate higher and lower temperatures than what they're recommending.

Joel: That's right. They certainly can tolerate temperatures that are different. The thing you have to remember is they need to be able to get warm, you don't have to have identical warmth in the entire box or the entire spot where they are. That's why in a homestead situation, if you're using a little light bulb or something like that, what you want to see is you don't want to see the birds huddled up underneath it. You want to see where the heat is it's most intensive, you don't want a chick to be there. If chicks are under the most intensive part of the heat that means it's not warm enough.

Marjory: Right.



Joel: What you want is a doughnut. You want a doughnut. The doughnut is showing that it's plenty hot right in the center and they're finding their place to be warm enough. They're perfectly happy to go out into even seventy degree, sixty degree places as those chicks for fifteen, twenty minutes while they eat and drink and then come back and get under the heat. If they're all spread out into the edges of the box or the place where you have them, if they're out in the edges then you know the heat is way too much, you need to turn it back. What they can't handle is drafts. If there's a breeze going through, they don't like the breeze, they don't want a draft, and they certainly don't want to be wet.

The bedding, don't use newspaper or something like that because then what they're going to do is they're going to slip and slide on it and they're going to pull tendons and have all sorts of dysplasia problems. Use something they can get footing on, my preference is wood shavings. It's real fluffy. Some people like sand but use something that's friable, that has little particles they can get traction on, move around, and preferably that's absorptive so when they poop it will absorb that and adhere to it and not just roll around and get on their down and their feet.

Marjory: That bedding for me is actually part of the reason I want to do this whole process, I usually love to use some pine shavings or something like that and I just throw on more layers of it as I mess it up and I've just almost got an instant compost pile, that stuff is fantastic.

Joel: Yes, that's right.

Marjory: I also like to use a stock tank, we'll just get I guess, what is it, a hundred gallon stock tank and put them in that, it has like a two or three foot height on it. It cuts down on the drafts and that works out really well. Could you talk a little bit about different breeds that you would recommend? I know in your book you're talking about the Cornish Rock cross and it has astonished me how fast, really, you are done with those birds in eight weeks. Then the heirloom varieties are definitely hardier and I seem to have a better survival rate with them although they really do take twelve weeks to get to a decent weight. Would you want to just mention a little bit about your experience with different breeds?

Joel: Yes, well, we've used many, many different breeds over the years. Our primary one is still the Cornish Cross. They're not nearly as fragile, whatever, fickle, stupid, whatever adjectives you want to use as I think a lot of people say. They certainly go after bugs and they're more agile than you would think. They are, we call them race car, Nascar, high-octane double breasted birds. They do grow incredible. They have extremely high nutrition requirements because they grow so fast. You can't just feed them apple peelings and a couple worms and expect them to do well. They need a really complete ration that's easy to access, easy to digest, and that sort of thing.



- Marjory: They do eat. I just couldn't believe, any time of the day or even if you went in the middle of the night to check on them and they saw light, they would just start going to the feeder. They ate just like constantly.
- Joel: They do. To go from hatched to four and a half pound carcass in eight weeks is amazing on fourteen pounds of feed. We've also used the Freedom Rangers which are the take-off of the French Label Rouge broiler. It also has a pretty wide breast. It'll need to grow an extra two weeks, they grow a little bit slower, they are hardier and if that's what you'd like to do, that's fine. They're more expensive but because they grow a little bit slower, they're a little bit hardier. If you want to go to say Cockerels from Barred Rocks and Road Island Reds and New Hampshire Reds and things like that, those of course are the hardiest birds. You can hardly kill them with a stick, you'll just see them go after it but they grow pretty slow and you're not going to get a decent size until they're about sixteen weeks.
- Marjory: It's true, we raised up a batch of Barred Rocks and it was sort of a desperate year when there weren't any meat chickens available at the nurseries and everybody had a rush on them so I said, "We'll all try one of those dual-purpose breeds." I loved Barred Rocks, they had such a good nature, but I tell you what, if they saw a grass hopper fifty yards away they were going after that and they really didn't care about the grain. Which is a good thing if you're trying to raise chickens without spending a lot of money on them but if you're just trying to fatten them up and try and keep them corralled in one area it ended up not being so good.
- Joel: Yeah. You're being very charitable to not get bogged down here in all the nuances, the whole heirloom thing can kind of become a cult if you're not careful. I don't want to go down that road right now, we're just trying to do some good how-to tips on growing these things.
- Marjory: Just point out the differences, just really highlight the differences.
- Joel: The main thing you have to realize with the more dual-purpose what are called heavy-breed dual-purpose birds is they will take twice as long to grow and even when they're- That does two things. Obviously you have a lot more chores, feeding and watering for a lot more days. The upside is that they're hardier. They are hardier. They will get out, they will scavenge more stuff, they're not as prone to die or heart attacks or leg dysplasia or anything like that. The other thing though is that they do not have a double breast, because they're so active, they're primarily dark meat, very little white meat. The breast is what's called a raiser breast. Your breast to other meats ratio is extremely small and because there's sixteen weeks you can't just fry them. You're going to have to slow cook them or braise, you're going to have to do something that's a lot slower or it's going to be tough.



Marjory: Yeah, I noted that in your book. You talked about the slow-cook method and that's the way we grow them and actually when I have people over for dinner, we let them know in advance that what we call them, yard chickens, are very different from grocery store chickens. It's going to be a little bit more like steak.

Joel: Yeah. Actually, the taste is more rich and the meat is actually more moist. You have to realize that exercised meat is moist and un-exercised meat is tender. You don't get tender and moist from the same thing. The way you tenderize, because tender and moist are on opposite ends of the meat spectrum, the way you tenderize moist is long, slow cooking.

Marjory: There is some great recipes, I actually prefer that. I put the bird in the morning with the potatoes and the onions and it's cooking all day and you know at the end of the day when I'm tired, I don't have to cook. It's all done for me. I think it's an awesome process.

Joel: That's right. Crock pot, slow cooker, that is the kitchen's delight. I can't believe how many couples we know that don't even have a crock pot or slow cooker. For us, what can be faster for the meal than just throw everything in in the morning, walk off and leave it, let it just sit there and kind of bloop, bloop, bloop, bloop all day. The beautiful thing is if you come back at five o'clock it's ready, if you want to eat supper at six it's ready, if you want to eat it at eight it's ready and it doesn't get dried out, it doesn't get overcooked, it's just a wonderful, wonderful ...

Marjory: You're totally right on with that, especially with teenagers in the house and people coming and going, our dinner schedules vary so it's great.

Joel: That's right.

Marjory: Let's talk a little bit about feed. I know some people get really, really hung up in pasture, people get really hung up on like, "It's got to be organic feed!" I've heard you make some comments about, "You know, maybe you ought to focus more on developing the pasture rather than the feed." I love that perspective and I wonder if you'd talk about that for a little bit?

Joel: Sure. The single biggest weakness of any homestead flock is that it doesn't get enough green material. The reason the green material is so important is because chlorophyll is nature's number one detoxicant, it's always the key for developing your essential, the ratios of your omega three, omega six, your essential fatty acids, your saturated, unsaturated, all that kind of stuff. The green material which from the pasture is the most critical thing. As far as the feed is concerned, I like to get feed from local sources, from neighbors if possible. Obviously GMO free if you can get it. Don't get hung up if you can't get GMO free and you can't get it from your neighbor because your neighbor thinks you're a wacko for doing what you want to do. It's okay, don't not raise chickens



because it isn't a hundred percent true blue cultish altruistic. Go ahead with it. Put your attention instead on making sure those birds ingest a lot of green material because the green material will cover up and compensate for a multitude of impurities and imperfections as you go forward.

Marjory: Yeah, I loved your emphasis on develop your pastures. If you're going to have a budget, spend money on improving your pastures to feed the chickens rather than spending a bunch of money on an expensive chicken feed if that's the choice you're up against. For me personally, I grow the chickens every year and that's, other than the bedding we were talking about when in brooder, but a big part of it for me is the fertility that they bring as we move them around. I specifically have areas they have completely been regenerated just because of the presence of the birds there every year. That for me is the bonus of it because we're using that feed to not only turn it into protein but I'm also turning it into fertility.

Joel: Yes and that of course honors the historic reason for animals. One of the critical functions that animals play in the environment is moving fertility around, otherwise if you didn't have animals, all fertility would eventually gravitate to the values and the streams and the creeks and the hill tops and hill sides would be barren. It's the animals that both, herbivores and birds and things, that eat in the fertile valleys and along the stream banks and then carry that up on the high ground. That's one of the most functional niches that animals perform in nature. All you're doing is mimicking that historic role and letting the animal enjoy that historic role as opposed to in a factory farm situation where there's such a concentration that you can't drive far enough away to get it economically applied in an ecologically responsible manner. It becomes instead of being a blessing on the land, it becomes a liability on the land because there's too much in one spot.

Marjory: Joel, what age and how will we know when to take the chicks out from the brooder and actually start putting them out on the pasture? Would you want to speak about that for a bit?

Joel: Yeah, well, of course in my book I have kind of a chart or a graph there of what temperature they can take but I've had birds that are just twenty days old handle twenty degrees which is pretty cold, twenty degrees fahrenheit.

Marjory: That's pretty cold. I don't know if I can handle it.

Joel: The way they handle it of course is to snuggle together. They're again, there is a sweet spot where if you have two hundred chicks for example and it hits say twenty five degrees, there's going to be four or five suffocated birds in the middle where that two hundred birds rolled up trying to get warmer and they push together and they get harder and harder and the ones right in the middle get covered up and suffocate. If you keep the batches, so a batch of birds that is



only maybe seventy five can handle that fine because there's not enough mass to crush the ones in the middle. Just the point that I'm making though is these birds are much hardier than the industry graphs will say.

We have found that even in the first week you can take that, I think they're supposed to be ninety degrees, you can drop that down to eighty easily by the end of the first week and by the end of the second week be down into the fifties. That ability to handle the cold, you harden them off, just like we harden off transplants in a greenhouse to get them acclimated and ready to go outside by dropping the temperature routinely. Same thing happens with the chicks. If you keep that temperature ninety straight through until the day you go out and suddenly it dips to forty then you're going to have a bunch of pneumonia. If you gradually drop that temperature in the brooder so that you acclimate them and harden them off, they'll get used to snuggling together, their instincts will kick in and they'll get that together so it's not such a big shock when they go outside.

Marjory: Can we shift now to talk about slaughter and I hate that, that actually sounds really hard, but butchering, the processing day, our birds are now eight weeks old and actually for the Cornish Rock crosses if you don't process them pretty soon they aren't going to be able to walk so you want to process them. We've mostly been doing it by hand but I've heard you talk about the new, I guess the Featherman or some of the new smaller homestead scale processors that it's actually economical to get one of those for just this homestead scale of chicken production now. I just would love to hear your thoughts on that.

Joel: You don't have to hand pluck very many chickens before you look for an alternative.

Marjory: Exactly.

Joel: Look, if you're going to do two or three or four, sure, hand plucking is fine but as soon as you're going to go over maybe twenty then you're going to want something with rubber fingers that's going to speed that process up for you. Of course, the cheapest ones are these little tabletop ones, I think there might even be ones that you actually hook up with a drill, like a cordless drill and it spins.

Marjory: Yeah, there's a guy out of Missouri that developed one like that.

Joel: Yeah, there are numerous folks that have put these together. The way it works is that the rubber fingers actually hit the feather follicles on the edge and ... We're already talking about processing so we can't get much grosser, it's kind of like popping out a zit, okay? You hit the edge of that pimple and it squirts out, that's what the rubber fingers are doing. You could do it with your fingers but because the rubber fingers are spinning and touching a lot of little pieces of the bird's skin quickly, they're able to find the perfect spot and pop those feathers



out way, way quicker than you can just around with your fingers. That's the way it works. The key to making it work is the scald. No matter how you're wanting to pick, the scald is the secret to everything.

Marjory: Oh, good, tell us some of the details about scalding then.

Joel: Well, the scald is ... We practice about a hundred and forty five degrees for about a minute twenty seconds. There are any number of things, you can do a hot scald and go up to one fifty five or so, for a slower period you can do what's called a slack scald and do it much longer at a lower temperature. We find that the higher, and the industry pretty much utilizes the higher temperature, the faster you go, the quicker the bird can deteriorate in a showcase. The industry is trying to sell fresh birds and keep shelf life up and color up, they're wanting to scald a little bit lower temperature so they don't take the bloom off of the skin. Not quite as important in a home situation. We use about one forty-five which is kind of a happy medium there.

The key is to make sure that those feathers are moving back and forth, you don't just take them and drop them in a pot and walk away from them. You stir them, you pick them up, because you want those feathers, again, those feather follicles, the follicle is actually a little ridge on the skin and the feather goes down in this little volcano, if you will. You want that feather to be moving back and forth so that the water can penetrate down the edges of that little volcano to get down into the bottom of that feather follicle. That's why we put some soap in the water, just some good biodegradable soap in the water that breaks the water's surface tension and increases it's penetration into that feather follicle.

Marjory: That's a good tip, yeah.

Joel: If you're scalding by hand, use some rubber gloves and shove those birds down in there, swish them around, pick them up, let them drain a little bit, shove them down a little bit and once you do some you'll get a sense of it. Then go with the picker. We feel like at somewhere around twenty birds is when you're going to want to look at something mechanical and these mechanical things are very, very cheap now, you can get set up for I think a hundred dollars or less. If you're doing a hundred birds, that hundred dollars you'll feel like-

Marjory: It's worth it. It for sure is. Our family's been doing this for a couple of years and we'll do it over a couple of weekends. Each time the family will do twenty to thirty birds on a Saturday morning. My husband is going, "Yeah we have to hit another Mother Earth News Fair and look at some of the other things like some of those pluckers and go check that out." The kids too.

Joel: The moms are all interested in the community building and aren't we having a wonderful time here together and dad's saying, "I want to get through this fast."



You know?

- Marjory: By the end of it we're all wanting to get through it fast, we're done with that. Again, from a utility perspective, yeah.
- Joel: The next step up is we feel like it hits somewhere in the one to two hundred bird range. Once you pass two hundred birds, now you're wanting to go to a what's called a batch system or a completely automatic system where you're not holding onto the bird anymore. You're putting the bird into what looks like a glorified washing machine, top loading washing machine but the rubber fingers are in that drum and it's spinning around. The bird essentially does a strip tease in that spinning tub. There's the do-it-yourselfer, the Wizbang Plucker. It's been out for quite awhile and a lot of people have made their own Wizbang Plucker. Eli Rife has them, the Featherman which probably has the best at the cheapest price partly because their lowest priced model uses a neoprene barrel bottom as opposed to stainless steel. That drops the cost way down.
- Marjory: Sure.
- Joel: The little Featherman Junior, I don't know what they cost, a thousand dollars or nine hundred or something like that, that is all you need for all up to a couple thousand birds. It's not very expensive and once you have one, our experience has been that anyone that has one on a community has a new profit center that you can rent out or you can be the coolest member of the local self reliant tribe by having one of those things. Everybody is going to want to borrow it, use it, whatever.
- Marjory: There you go. We are always also into community building and that's an excellent thing because we're also always looking into small, diverse income streams. Let's shift over now to talk about problems. Everybody's talking about predators and then seasonality is another good one to talk about. Let me let you rip some on problems and people, the first thing to know is there are going to be problems.
- Joel: That's for sure. There's no gain without pain, you know? There are certainly problems. Probably the single biggest first problem is comfort in the brooder and we've talked about some of those things from bedding and heat and that sort of thing. You're mommy hen, when you get these chicks you're mommy hen so you have to watch them up and be prepared to observe and make sure that they're comfortable and there's no draft or anything and no cat that's going to go in and eat them all or whatever.
- Marjory: Yeah.
- Joel: The single biggest predator that we've had over the many decades we've been doing this are rats in the brooder. Be aware that if you have a rat issue, a big



foul rat can come in and take fifty chicks in a night without batting an eye. They won't eat them all but they will carry them to their rat hole, if they go down a rat hole, that's what they do and they just pack them in there and many of them aren't even dead yet they just eventually suffocate. Make sure your domestic stuff, your cat, your dog, a lot of people their biggest predator is their own dog goes and kills stuff. That's one reason why we use the totally enclosed field shelter is for that very reason.

These birds are, once you get them out of the brooder then you go to the field, they're, I just saw that [inaudible 39:48] if I did a big report on White Oak Pastures' farm and they said you're losing a thousand dollars a day in eagles taking chickens. Well, they're using a more open day range kind of system and that's very, very vulnerable. I like our protected system not only for weather but also for predation, that being totally enclosed, top and bottom and sides, it's a great deal of protection from opossums and skunks and hawks and eagles and all these other things that are going bump in the night out there. It's extremely cheap, it's a lot cheaper than a stationary coop because you're building something very, very light weight that's portable as opposed to something that's strong enough to be stationary and take the vicissitudes of nature for many eons to come. Predation is a big deal.

Weather of course is the next big one. If they're going to be out on pasture, weather is your single biggest variable which brings me to seasonality. There are times to raise these and times not to raise them. Here, in Virginia, we don't raise these birds outside. Our last batch is in the field now, we'll dress the last bird by the end of October and we won't have a bird in the pasture again until the first of April.

Marjory: Oh, boy, is that one of the biggest mistakes we made is we got these Cornish Rock crosses which are these birds that really, they grow so fast and they get so big and fat and we started them in basically middle of June-July in Texas and at first it was great because brooding them was so easy, didn't need to protect them from the cold or anything right. Then I started having problems with heat stroke and then it was like I couldn't keep these birds cool enough. This was the dumbest thing, this was totally the wrong time to do these birds because really I couldn't keep them in that kind of housing you're talking about because we couldn't keep them cool enough so we had to move them to an area with misters and under trees. It was a disaster. I totally have learned the seasonality lesson, you absolutely are right on that. I figured here in Texas the best time is going to be-

Joel: If you're down in Southern Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, those areas, absolutely you want to probably take your summer off and raise them through the winter. You'd have the advantage of being able to take your two hottest summer months off and raise them ten months of the year. There are things you can do to keep them cooler, you mentioned misters. In the summer we knock a back



panel off of our field shelters and open it up so it's essentially a breeze way. We get through, we get hot in the summer, we get days up into the upper nineties or even a hundred, a hundred once in awhile, it doesn't really hurt the little birds. Little birds can take a lot of heat. It's the big birds. They turn into sumo wrestlers, those are the ones that can't take the heat.

Be aware and by the same token if you're in the north if you're up in Wisconsin then you're going to want to be more like us, you're going to be a kind of a six month on, six month off program. I do know people in the north who have covered their field shelters in plastic with clothes pins temporarily to make kind of clothes as a season extender, like a cold frame or whatever. That works if you're trying to push it in the beginning or late in the season. Just remember that as you begin to close it up you're going to reduce ventilation and you're going to have more respiratory problems because the place is going to turn into a terrarium and turtles might like terrariums but chickens don't like terrariums. They need airflow, they need a lot of movement. That's a balancing act that you have to watch.

We did that one year and decided against it because we had respiratory problems because we were having to close up the shelters so tight that in order to keep them warm we even had, generally in the spring, we were even having snows out there while we were trying to do this and it was just too tight and we lost some to pneumonia because there wasn't enough airflow. The chickens generate a lot of heat, actually. They're growing, there's a lot of metabolism going on, just like a compost pile there's a lot of digestion going on, a lot of heat is being generated. The chickens actually do generate a fair amount of heat.

Marjory: Joel to jump back to the predators question real quick, could you talk a little bit about electric fencing and how effective and how you use that in your system?

Joel: Sure. We use the electric poultry netting from Premier.

Marjory: Yeah, I love that company.

Joel: Yeah, they're just wonderful. They really experiment, too. They're constantly trying to refine and do a little better. We used that and so some people actually use it as a double protection around their field shelters so we've seen people use that as a double layer of protection. We use it for our layers so we have layers and turkeys in a free range kind of situation where you have a central shelter and then you surround it with this netting.

The key to that is getting it up nice and tight and making sure you have enough spark on it and this is one disagreement I have with Premier, they say that you need I think it's a point five joule energizer. We say you need at least a one point two five joule energizer in order to get enough juice through that because those little filaments, those little metal filaments running on the polyethylene,



they're not the best conductor in the world because they're just so tiny, so small, like a tiny pipe, trying to put water through a tiny pipe. You need some umph behind the spark to push it through that very small-

Marjory: I will echo your words in that when we first started we just picked up an energizer from the local-

Joel: Oh, you're making my head explode!

Marjory: The local big box store and we got those and it just didn't work at all. We have a sandy soil which is difficult to deal with in the first place but I found you really need to invest the money in a good energizer.

Joel: If you're going to have animals and you're going to invest in anything, a good energizer so that the good companies are Speedrite, Gallagher, PEL, Twin Mountain, Kencove, those are the good ones. Your local farm store, that little one that it says, "It will go through weeds and brush at ten miles," no, they're not, those are not the ones you want, you want the good ones. For your sandy soil, once you get it, then your next big trial is getting a good enough conduction on your ground rod. That's another huge problem especially in light soil or dry areas.

Marjory: We ran into some predator problems at the end there because we were doing this again in the summer which is the wrong time to do it and the ground was so dry that we had a hard time having the electric fence have the charge it needed.

Joel: What you do is you have a five gallon bucket and you put a little pinhole in it, really small, the size of the lead in a lead pencil, a small pinhole. You're going to have water at the chickens anyway, right? You fill this five gallon bucket and you sit your little pinhole next to your ground rod and you just let it drip and you don't want-

Marjory: To keep the conductivity.

Joel: Yeah, you don't want it to run out fast because if it runs out fast it won't penetrate in the ground but if it just drips and over twenty four hours drips out, now you're going to make this huge wet area that's a whole cubic yard and now you really got conductivity on your ground rod, now you're going to really get some good voltage on your system.

Marjory: Yeah. Well Joel I so appreciate the conversation and I hope as people have been listening to this they hear your stories also of failures and setbacks. I know when I've done a lot of speaking people are often relieved to hear that I continually screw things up. Don't be afraid to make mistakes as long as you're learning from them it's all a good thing, right?



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Joel: That's right.

Marjory: At the end of the day we still ended up with a lot of really delicious chicken even though it wasn't a hundred percent. Yeah, but thank you so much for being on the call, I really appreciate it. To pick up any of the books you've done and you've got so many books on so many wonderful topics related to small farming and I love your practical like, "If you want to make money this is what you need to do small farming," and they should go to Polyfacefarms.com, is that the correct website?

Joel: Yes, Polyfacefarms.com, it's all one word, P-O-L-Y-F-A-C-E, polyface, you just type that in and it'll pop right up and do come to a Mother Earth News Fair-

Marjory: You're almost at all of them, right? I keep seeing you all the time there.

Joel: I am at all of them and man I love those guys. They're our tribe and you will leave with so many ideas, there's so many workshops, so much good infrastructure and tools and equipment and everything.

Marjory: It's so fun, yeah. They really are. You're right, they are the tribe. Everybody there is just down home doing good things and great ideas and great fun, it really is just a blast. They're really expanding them, I think they're going to have like a dozen of them in 2017, it's going to be so much fun, they're really taking off. Anyway, I really want to thank you again and really appreciate everything that you're doing and yeah, I'm going to catch you at the next Mother Earth News Fair. We'll catch you then.

Joel: Thank you, always a pleasure to visit with you, thank you.

Marjory: All right, Joel, I'll have them cut that off there at the end. Let me say again, thank you so much, I mean really you have done so much to help this whole movement of integrity living and good food get out there and inspire so many people to actually take the step and make a living doing this so I really want to say thank you and how much I appreciate that and it's really tremendously valuable work.



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