

Accountant Quits Day Job and Starts a Chicken Farm

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✓ Fact Checked

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Joel Salatin has pioneered processes that allow small farmers to grow food in an efficient, sustainable manner
- › Paul Grieve, a former accountant, cofounded Primal Pastures, which raises free-range chickens based on Salatin's regenerative farming processes
- › Factory farmed chicken has been identified as the food responsible for the greatest number of foodborne illnesses, thanks to the presence of pathogenic bacteria (many of which are resistant to antibiotics)
- › Raising your own or buying free-range chicken from a local farmer can help you avoid the dangers associated with contaminated factory farmed meats
- › Backyard chickens are growing in popularity again, and many U.S. cities are adjusting zoning ordinances to allow for this pastime. BackyardChickens.com has a section devoted to laws and ordinances on raising chickens across the U.S.

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Have you ever wanted to quit your day job and start a chicken farm? If this thought has ever crossed your mind, but you believe this is about as far-fetched a dream as becoming an astronaut at retirement age, think again.

The video above tells the story of Paul Grieve, who quit his accountant job to cofound Primal Pastures. As noted on its website, Primal Pastures is the outgrowth of:¹

1. A belief that we are experiencing a major food crisis
2. A sound idea of how to fix it
3. A vision of raising the best meat in the world produced in Southern California

Starting From Scratch

Grieve's journey from cubicle to farm really began when, at the age of 22, his health started failing. After doing some research, he and his family started following a Paleo diet, which led to significant improvements. Grieve's energy level soared and his arthritis disappeared. His father-in-law and brother both lost significant amounts of weight.

This ultimately led them to learn more about food in general – how it's produced and altered through various processes. Discouraged by the fact they could not find the kind of food they really wanted in their local grocery stores, the family decided to raise their own [free-range chickens](#).

None of them knew anything about raising chickens when they first launched Primal Pastures. Armed with nothing except Joel Salatin's book, "Pastured Poultry Profit\$,"² they set out to raise a flock of 50 chickens. "We really just wanted to produce good food for our family," Grieve says. "That's how this whole thing started."

Fifty chickens turned into 100, then 200, then 400. Today, five years later, the Temecula, California, farm produces "healthy and happy" pastured poultry, pork turkey, and duck, and grass fed beef and lamb. You can learn more about their farm operation on [PrimalPastures.com](#).³

As you might expect, the venture has seen its fair share of drama. About nine months into it, they lost so many chickens to predators they nearly went out of business. At that point, they added dogs to protect the animals, and have not lost any of their livestock to predators since. They now have 14 dogs guarding the 140-acre farm.

Two Models of Food Production

- **CAFO Versus Free-Range Egg Production**



Conventional egg-production agriculture (also known as confined animal feeding operation or CAFO) raises hens indoors and in cages. This has raised concerns about animal welfare, environmental damage and nutritional impacts.

Egg-laying hens confined to cages do not have space to move or stretch, and they show more fearful behavior and become prone to skeletal problems. Large numbers of animals confined in small spaces also pollute the air, water and soil with the vast amounts of manure they produce.

- **Definition of True Free-Range Eggs**



Free-range, egg-producing hens must be given access to the outdoors, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture regulations. However, many large commercial egg producers get away with giving their hens access to a tiny, covered outdoor area while still giving the hens conventional feed. The feed is a crucial component, as the main ingredients of commercially raised hens' diets are genetically engineered (GE) soy and corn. Commercial eggs, even if they state "free-range" on their label, will typically fall into this category.

True free-range eggs are from hens that range freely outdoors on a pasture where they can forage for their natural diet, which includes seeds, green plants, insects and worms. Typically, you will find these eggs at a local farm or farmers market.

- Nutritional Facts**



In addition to being better from an environmental perspective, free-range eggs are also nutritionally superior, as demonstrated in Mother Earth News' 2007 egg testing project. Compared to official U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutrient data for commercial eggs, eggs from hens raised on pasture may contain:

| | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1/3 less cholesterol | 2/3 more vitamin A | 3 times more vitamin E |
| 1/4 less saturated fat | 2 times more omega-3 | 7 times more beta |

- **Eggs: An Ideal Source of Protein**



Free range eggs are truly an ideal food; it's not only one of best proteins you can get, it's also one of the least expensive. And nearly everyone can tolerate eating them regularly. They're at their very best if eaten raw. But in order to safely eat them raw, they **MUST** be organic and free range. CAFO produced eggs are typically not safe to eat raw due to the unsanitary conditions the hens are kept in and far higher likelihood that the hens are infected with pathogenic organisms.

- **The Best Way to Eat Your Eggs**



The way you cook your eggs can destroy the nutrients. The closer to its raw state the egg is, the better, so ideally, you'll want to eat them raw or soft boiled. The egg white is typically what causes most of the objections to the texture of raw egg, so feel free to throw away the egg white, or simply blend the whole raw egg into a smoothie. Personally, I eat just the raw egg yolk — four every morning, purchased from a local farmer.

Personally, I remove the whites because it's just too much protein for my challenged kidneys which were damaged years ago from improperly removed amalgam fillings. If you have normal kidney function that eating the whole egg raw is fine. Consuming raw egg whites tends to only be a problem if you avoid the yolks which have biotin that the avidin in raw egg whites removes.

- **The Worst Way to Eat Your Eggs**



Scrambling your eggs is one of the worst ways to eat eggs as it oxidizes the cholesterol in the yolk. If you have high cholesterol this may be problematic, as the oxidized cholesterol may cause damage in your body. Best to avoid scrambled eggs like the plague, probably better for most to fast than to eat them.

- **No, Eggs Won't Harm Your Heart**



Many mistakenly believe eggs are bad for your heart due to their cholesterol content. This is a serious misconception, as your body actually needs cholesterol, and artificially driving your cholesterol levels down is likely doing far more harm than good. Every cell in your body needs cholesterol. It helps to produce cell membranes, hormones, vitamin D and bile acids that help you to digest fat. Cholesterol also helps in the formation of memories and is vital for your neurological function. In other words, dietary cholesterol is your friend, not your enemy.

- **Where to Find Free-Range Eggs**



Your best source for fresh eggs is a local farmer that allows his hens to forage freely outdoors. You can tell the eggs are free range by the color of the egg yolk. Foraged hens produce eggs with bright orange yolks. Dull, pale yellow yolks are a sure sign you're getting eggs from caged hens that are not allowed to forage for their natural diet.

As hinted at by Grieve, there are basically two vastly different models of food production today. The first, and most prevalent, is the large-scale agricultural model that takes a very mechanistic view toward life, whereas the other – the local, sustainable farm model – has a biological and holistic view.

The latter has the advantage of working with nature rather than against it, and by doing so, you don't need things like antibiotics to keep the flock healthy, or grain with feed additives to keep them nourished. All of those things actually end up doing far more harm than good, as it impacts the quality of the meat.

The widely adopted, factory farm, "bigger is better" food system has reached a point where the fundamental weaknesses of it are becoming readily apparent, and foodborne disease and loss of nutrient content are just two of the most obvious side effects.

It's a proven fact that factory farmed and processed foods are far more likely to cause illness than unadulterated, organically grown foods. This connection should be obvious, but many are still under the mistaken belief that a factory operation equates to better hygiene and quality control, when the exact opposite is actually true.

A pig rolling in mud on a small farm is far "cleaner" in terms of pathogenic bacteria than a factory-raised pig stuck in a tiny crate, covered in feces, being fed an unnatural diet of genetically modified grains and veterinary drugs.

The Case for Local, Free-Range Chicken

The same goes for chickens, and considering the fact factory farmed chicken has been identified as the food responsible for the greatest number of foodborne illnesses,⁴ thanks to the presence of pathogenic bacteria (many of which are resistant to

antibiotics), either raising your own or buying free-range chicken from a local farmer is your safest bet.

Consumer Reports' testing in 2007 found more than 80% of whole chicken broilers harbored salmonella and/or campylobacter,⁵ two of the leading causes of foodborne illness. Five years later, in 2013, they found potentially harmful bacteria on 97% of the chicken breasts tested,⁶ and half of them had at least one type of bacterium that was resistant to three or more antibiotics.

The same state of affairs is reported in other countries. In New Zealand, Michael Baker, a public health researcher and professor at University of Otago, is urging the implementation of a "tobacco-style" warning label on all raw chicken items, informing shoppers about the health risks involved.⁷

"It's the most hazardous thing you can take into your kitchen," he says. Testing has even revealed factory farmed chicken meat may also contain drugs that are banned for use in food animals.⁸

Starting a Backyard Flock

In the video above, Salatin shows how he raises free-range chickens at Polyface Farm. Salatin's setup is the model upon which Primal Pastures is based. While Primal Pastures is primarily focused on meat production, backyard chickens are a great source of fresh eggs.

While chickens can continue to lay eggs for their entire lives provided they're well cared for, the rate at which they do so will slow down considerably after they reach the age of 5. You can help to spread out your chickens' production by adding in younger chicks to your flock after a year or two.

Keep in mind your hens will not be egg-producing "machines" year-round. Chickens need at least 14 hours of daylight to produce eggs. This means they're going to produce fewer eggs, and maybe none at all, during darker, colder, winter months.

Naturally, you can raise chickens for both eggs and meat, although the latter will also require you to learn about humane slaughter methods.

Backyard chickens are growing in popularity again, and many U.S. cities are adjusting zoning ordinances to allow for this pastime. Requirements vary widely depending on your locale, with many limiting the number of chickens you can raise or requiring quarterly inspections (at a cost) and permits.

Many cities limit the number of permits that can be issued each year, while some cities even require approval from your neighbors. BackyardChickens.com⁹ has a section devoted to laws and ordinances on raising chickens across the U.S. It's a good place to start.

You'll also need to decide whether you want to raise chickens from the chick stage or get them when they've already reached the "teenaged" stage (known as pullets). The younger chicks will be more labor intensive, yet some say they also become tamer when raised in your flock from that young age (and many enjoy the chick stage).

Five Questions to Ask Yourself Before Raising Chickens

If you're thinking of raising chickens, you'll likely find inspiration from Salatin's Primal Pastures' operations. However, before you move forward, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1. Can I dedicate some time each day?** — You can expect to devote about 10 minutes a day, an hour per month and a few hours twice a year to the care and maintenance of your brood.
- 2. Do I have enough space?** — They will need about 10 square feet per bird to roam, preferably more. The more foraging they can do, the healthier and happier they'll be and the better their eggs will be.
- 3. What are the chicken regulations in my town?** — You will want to research this before jumping in because some places have zoning restrictions and even noise

regulations (which especially applies if you have a rooster).

4. **Are my neighbors on board with the idea?** – It's a good idea to see if they have any concerns early on. When they learn they might be the recipients of occasional farm-fresh eggs, they might be more agreeable.
5. **Can I afford a flock?** – There are plenty of benefits to growing your own eggs, but saving money isn't one of them. There are upfront costs to getting a coop set up, plus ongoing expenses for supplies.

For Optimal Health, Buy Real Food

For would-be farmers who want to learn more, I suggest reading some of the books Salatin has written, such as "Pastured Poultry Profit\$," and "The Sheer Ecstasy of Being a Lunatic Farmer."

His website, PolyFaceFarms.com,¹⁰ also offers a wealth of information and resources for farmers and consumers alike, including an online store that offers the actual physical hardware to make everything from fences to chicken feeders.

If raising chickens isn't your thing, consider seeking out a local source of pasture-raised chicken and fresh eggs, as well as other organic, grass fed and locally produced foods. If you live in the U.S., the following organizations can steer you in the right direction:

Demeter USA – Demeter-USA.org provides a directory of certified Biodynamic farms and brands. This directory can also be found on BiodynamicFood.org.

American Grassfed Association – The goal of the American Grassfed Association is to promote the grass fed industry through government relations, research, concept marketing and public education.

Their website also allows you to search for AGA approved producers certified according to strict standards that include being raised on a diet of 100% forage,

raised on pasture and never confined to a feedlot, never treated with antibiotics or hormones and born and raised on American family farms.

[EatWild.com](#) – EatWild.com provides lists of farmers known to produce raw dairy products as well as grass fed beef and other farm-fresh produce (although not all are certified organic). Here you can also find information about local farmers markets, as well as local stores and restaurants that sell grass fed products.

[Weston A. Price Foundation](#) – Weston A. Price has local chapters in most states, and many of them are connected with buying clubs in which you can easily purchase organic foods, including grass fed raw dairy products like milk and butter.

[Grassfed Exchange](#) – The Grassfed Exchange has a listing of producers selling organic and grass fed meats across the U.S.

[Local Harvest](#) – This website will help you find farmers markets, family farms and other sources of sustainably grown food in your area where you can buy produce, grass fed meats and many other goodies.

[Farmers Markets](#) – A national listing of farmers markets.

[Eat Well Guide: Wholesome Food from Healthy Animals](#) – The Eat Well Guide is a free online directory of sustainably raised meat, poultry, dairy and eggs from farms, stores, restaurants, inns, hotels and online outlets in the United States and Canada.

[Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture \(CISA\)](#) – CISA is dedicated to sustaining agriculture and promoting the products of small farms.

[The Cornucopia Institute](#) – The Cornucopia Institute maintains web-based tools rating all certified organic brands of eggs, dairy products and other commodities, based on their ethical sourcing and authentic farming practices separating CAFO "organic" production from authentic organic practices.

RealMilk.com – If you're still unsure of where to find raw milk, check out Raw-Milk-Facts.com and RealMilk.com. They can tell you what the status is for legality in your state, and provide a listing of raw dairy farms in your area. The Farm to Consumer Legal Defense Fund¹¹ also provides a state-by-state review of raw milk laws.¹² California residents can also find raw milk retailers using the store locator available at www.OrganicPastures.com.

Sources and References

- ^{1, 3} Primal Pastures
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