

Spring Chicks, The Natural Way



Chicks A Few Days Old







Chicks are 3-4 weeks old

This marks the start of our sixth flock to date and the fifth spring that we enter raising chooks as chicks. What's different about this year however is that for the first time we hatched our own. The natural way. We must tell you that it has been extremely exciting and rewarding to watch the transformative process. From the time our broody Australorp plucked out all of the feathers from under her belly to the dawn we found the first chick chirping in the nesting box along her side.

In the past we have always purchased our chickens from other breeders. Throughout the process we have experienced both joy and pain. We have learned to become very resilient flock shepherds through the multitude of casualties we've experienced and for a number of reasons which we suspect. Chook owners know more over time, but even after we have

conducted a necropsy, sometimes you just never know why your little feather friend died. Then we remember natural selection and survival of the fittest doesn't always make sense. Nature has a way of showing you tiny details and intricacies of life that may have gone unnoticed before, when everything appeared to be perfect. It is under the ruffled feathers that you find many questions left unanswered. And yet somehow you have the urge to try again.

So, this season it is extremely rewarding for us to watch mama hen take ownership of 11 brown, white, and blue eggs in her nest. We watched as a few more eggs were laid each day in the same space by the Leghorns, Barnevelders, and Ameraucanas. Only 7 hatched and we buried the others in the garden. Each one of them is unique in their own way by the day of the week they were born which earned them names of which to keep.

The first egg that hatched was blue and an Ameraucana. It had been at least twenty-one days when we noticed a fracture in the shell. Over a period of more than six hours she pecked her way out of her shell. Chicks can live for four days after they've hatched on the nutrients supplied from the inside of their shell. Remarkable the way that nature works eh?

One by one they hatched and we brought them into their temporary brooder. The goal was to

reintroduce mama hen to her chicks after they'd all hatched, but she was so stressed out from the extensive incubation period that when she left the nesting box we could tell she was relieved. So we let her find her zen again to sow and scratch in peace.

The youngest chick is nearly two weeks behind the oldest and Thursday, the only Australorp that hatched was born January 7th. She took a couple of days to get out of the eggshell. She was exhausted and we were not sure that she'd pull through but shorty is hanging with the best of them today. Sunday, Ameraucana the first was born January 27th, then Wednesday Ameraucana the 2nd (30th), Sunday the first Leghorn (3rd), and two Leghorns hatched on Monday (Jan 4th). One Barnevelder hatched on Tuesday (5th). By now a few of them are about a month old.

For more information on raising your own flock we highly recommend:

Harvey Ussery *The Small-Scale Poultry Flock*

Gail Damerow Storey's *Guide to Raising Chickens*, and *The Chicken Health Handbook*

Benefits of Using the Polyface Farm Model in

Central Texas

Organic Red Hard Wheat growing in our largest garden bed and planted as the first crop to build the soil! We purchased this seed from **Thayer Feed and Seed LLC** at the Mother Earth News Fair in Kansas 2014.

There are many benefits to the Polyface Farm model. Joel Salatin isn't caught up in labels but believes in the essence of husbandry practices and stewardship (Salatin, A New Old-Fashioned Food System 2015). His model aides the local community with access to affordable food and he shares his knowledge with those willing to learn how to incorporate biodiversity while turning a profit. Central Texas is a difficult region to be a "grass farmer." Land varies depending on the ecoregion and is a mix of rocky cavernous ridges, limestone, savannah, piney woods, and blackland prairies (Library of the University of Texas n.d.). Drought and a hot climate bring about other challenges that Salatin doesn't necessarily face in Virginia.

Salatin claims that his beef is "**salad bar beef**" because of the variety of leafy greens that are found in his fields (Salatin 2014). So every day he provides a different polyculture, diversified, paddock for nutrition which consists of dandelions, Kentucky blue grass, onion, narrow leaf plantain, wide leaf plantain, orchard grass, fescue, red clover, white clover, and buttercup (Salatin 2014). Although our region has the capacity to produce a variety of forage crops, different seasons really dictate what is grown but rebuilding the soil is a necessity.

Native grass seed by **Native American Seed** company would be introduced to the grazing system because it's what

the buffalo used to forage, is extremely hardy, requires minimal watering and does well in Central Texas. We have access to organic feed from a local mill just a few miles away so it is ethically important we purchase soybean free, Non GMO feed from **Coyote Creek** as the most sustainable option. However gleaning food from other farmers and businesses is another great sustainable feed source that works well in a zero waste system.

A mixed farming system is sustainable as long as the number of animals and crops produced stays in balance with nature and production demands. A grazing pasture management system must be in place on any farm with livestock. Efficiently maintaining a sustainable pasture requires incorporating the forage-producing capacity and stocking rate to achieve the target level of animal performance over time without causing deterioration of the pasture's ecosystem (David L. Greene 2002, 1).

Salatin grows on a large scale farming system and a smaller scale farm could; be more attainable; require less labor input; be more manageable; be financially feasible and sustainable. I also believe that food crops should be integrated in order to be more self sufficient. Salatin raises beef, chicken broiler meat, chicken eggs, rabbits, and pigs on between 100-500 acres (Pollan, Joel Salatin's Polyface Farm 2006). By reducing farm scale to accommodate smaller percentages of livestock while encouraging heritage breed diversification is imperative to the preservation of endangered species. In my experience, raising heritage breed chickens in Central Texas creates more resilient food systems. Reducing farm size would allow the farmer to have a better quality of life. (Pollan, Joel

Salatin's Polyface Farm 2006). There is a demand for access to healthy and affordable food in Central Texas as well as markets to sell value added products through CSA, farmers markets, and restaurants (Austin Energy Depletion Risks Task Force, Roger Duncan 2009).

Austin needs to minimize food security issues in order to be more sustainable but Austin only represents a fraction of Central Texas. Having access to a farm store and being able to visit the farm to understand where your food comes from plays a crucial role in establishing a better food system. Building a farm brand using a sustainable whole farm model will encourage community members to become a part of the food movement. Educational opportunities aid in the development of future farmers which is essential to making our bioregion more sustainable.

"When we say we are grass farmers, what we're saying is we are honoring and producing the most historically normal, carbon cycle, nutritive cycle, energy cycle that is solar driven in real time and actually builds soil like nature has done forever (Salatin, Episode 516 – Polyface Farm 2014)."

Bibliography

Austin Energy Depletion Risks Task Force, Roger Duncan. *The City of Austin*. Austin Energy Depletion Risks Task Force Report, Austin: Austin Energy, 2009.

David L. Greene, Stanley W. Fultz. "Understanding Pasture Stocking rate and Carrying Capacity." *Fact Sheet 788*. College Park: Maryland Cooperative Extension University of Maryland, 2002.

Library of the University of Texas. *Figure 1. Balcones Escarpment Area, Central Texas*. Austin.

Pollan, Michael. "Behind the Organic-Industrial Complex." *The*

New York Times Archives. May 13, 2001.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/13/magazine/13ORGANIC.html?page=wanted=all> (accessed October 19, 2014).

–. “Joel Salatin’s Polyface Farm.” *Strategies for Sustainable Agriculture: Rotational Grazing*. Compiled by Rooy Media LLC. November 29, 2006.

Salatin, Joel. *Episode 516 – Polyface Farm* Growing a Greener World TV, (October 23, 2014).

–. “A New Old-Fashioned Food System.” *Mother Earth News*, January 2015: 67-69.

Spring Ahead Locavores!

Spring ahead and become a locavore (Strolling of the Heifers, Inc. 2014)! But apparently Texas is last on the locavore index according to this Vermont organization



on.

Although it's slightly outdated too, but Vermont is a tiny state and Texas is enormous so the fact that it's last on this chart is depressingly not surprising. At any rate size doesn't matter. Even though it clearly does to Vermont and y'all know the Texan saying, "everything's bigger in Texas!" But Texans probably aren't as concerned with the title of locavore as they are about doing what they've done for centuries, by living off the land. Keep it simple, support the community by buying from farmers you know or create your own food supply. You will find simpletons and sustainable homesteaders throughout this vastly and drastically different state with a variety of growing conditions in different ecoregions. I would say the Austin food system is doing well and on its way to getting better.

Do what you can to support your local community. Find out who the farmers are that live closest to you and find out if you can volunteer for them or join their CSA (community supported agriculture). CSA is when you sign up and pay dues to a farm of choice and they guarantee you a share of goods for a certain number of weeks out of their harvesting season. This is one of the best ways that you can support your local food system and help to create more food secure neighborhoods. By paying upfront for a share of the upcoming harvest, you help support the farmer before they plant the seeds that grow into the foods that feed us! Now you know what it means to join a CSA, muy importante!

If you aren't ready to make that kind of commitment just yet but are interested in gardening and having access to fresh produce, go to a farmers market and ask

some of the local vendors what they like to grow! There are generally very good ideas that evolve and transform at farmers market booths and you can also learn exciting new ways to cook unique produce and other goodies too! It's what I love most about going to the farmers market or selling at one myself. It's amazing the things you learn while talking to the community!

You can also go to a local nursery, preferably not a big box chain store, and ask them for help on what plants would be best for your area! If you want to start growing your own food, just know that you are amazing and you can do it! Don't quit after your first try and don't tell yourself that you have a black thumb because a plant died. There are a lot of things to contend with which is why it helps to go the experts at the garden center and I've found that'll help you get started on the right path if you don't have any other options. Many of nurseries have free classes about gardening, especially in the spring! Another reason to buy and learn locally!

Agriculture extension services are one of the best free gardening, farming resources out there. Take advantage of them, every state has extension offices that offer a variety of courses. Texas has some outstanding courses for new farmers and ranchers. I attended the [Texas Agrability Workshop](#) in January in Georgetown, Texas. It was fantastic!

Catching up with you, as usual my nose is in my studies and my blogging falls by the wayside! We have also been working on a bunch of outdoor projects this winter and we can't wait to post pictures. We will be updating all of the Late Bloom Homestead photos since we have made drastic changes in the past year. You'll be shocked as

to the progress. We also have had our 2nd flock of heritage breed chicks for almost 2 weeks! Please join our [Late Bloom America Facebook](#) to see pictures and any videos that we've posted. I posted one today to show you the chicken brooder with the rainwater drip nozzle system that Davin built.

I'm studying Sustainable Food Systems now at Green Mountain College, for my Master of Science Degree. I'm almost in my 3rd week of Sustainable Agriculture Theory and Practice. The program is very intensive and unparalleled to any program of it's kind in the US. You may see some of my postings as a spin off of my discussions at school since I spend quite a bit of time preparing mini papers for grades, aka "discussions" are mandatory usually 6 times a week. So you can see how bad my website is slacking in this arena!

Ole man Winter, I was happy to see snow, play in it, go cross country skiing, and learn about the food systems in Vermont a few weeks ago. I also attended the NOFA conference in Burlington. Some of the workshops that I went to included a commercial mushroom farming presentation, the benefits of growing elderberries by four different farmers, secrets for growing popcorn, ginger, and sweet potatoes. Some others too. I personally found the Mother Earth News Fair ten times more educational at a fraction of the price. But the NOFA conference food was spectacular all presented from the local foodies throughout the region. They had an ice cream social Sunday evening from a local creamery and I was able to get fresh coffee and]cream ice cream, man it was good, can you believe it in -15 weather! Ha!

Works Cited

Strolling of the Heifers, Inc. "Strolling of the

Heifers 2014 Locavore Index highlights benefits of food from local farms." *Strolling of the Heifers*. April 7, 2014.

<http://www.strollingoftheheifers.com/locavoreindex/> (accessed March 9, 2015).