

# 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)."

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## 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!

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## Support these Organic Farms to Help Transform Our Foodshed

My bioregion has a lot of growth opportunities and has made great strides within our local foodshed. The biggest sustainable access that anyone can have in relation to their local foodshed is to grow their own produce, like the veggies we grew (shown above) from our organic garden! The **Sustainable Food Center** has been a key player in transforming our community. They have advocated change, helped impoverished communities have access to healthier food choices, provided resources and education, and launched necessary services. They are available at some of the Austin farmers markets in some impoverished areas and have potential growth opportunities to branch out to other neighborhoods. The **Capital Area Food Bank** recovers a lot of food from many restaurants and farms and distributes it to poor communities throughout this region (Texas 2014).

There are several organic farms in Austin, some of

which have been around for quite some time. **Tecolote** is an organic family farm a few miles from my home in Manor, which has been the longest CSA distributor in Texas (Kramer 2014). Their engagement in the food movement is through their contributions in living sustainably, local restaurant/co-op distribution, farmers markets in different counties, the slow food movement, and biointensive/sustainable/civic agriculture. These are some of the things I learned from this incredible farm by volunteering and working for them. As a CSA shareholder or farmers market shopper you will be pleased to have access to specialty smoked peppers from David's famous outdoor wood smoker and other unique heirloom varieties that are boom-tastic! Chat about your next dish at the market with Katie!

**Green Gate** is an organic family farm about ten miles from my house that focuses on civic/sustainable agriculture, CSA distributions, some restaurant wholesale, meat/honey/dairy shares on-site from other farms, host to a bee colony from an offsite beekeeper to share the pollination benefits, promote community development and education through their New Farm Institute (Flynn 2014). I've had the wonderful opportunity to work and volunteer for Green Gate! Learning from Farmer Chip and Farmer Erin is a unique and magical experience. Something that you don't want to miss! **Help support them in building their NFI infrastructure and site. Donate!**

These two farms are very similar, especially since they are strong family farms, yet their focus is somewhat different. While Tecolote focuses on their direct market reach through face to face networking, Green Gate focuses on educating the community on food ethics.

Not to sound exhaustive, I'm trying to simplify. They both represent farm gate to food plate, instill historical character at their farms and equally share traction in their fields. Green Gate has integrated permaculture design at their farm sites and they are open to the public to learn, offer children's farm camp programs, and alternative educational curriculum opportunities to local schools. They are the only organic farm in Austin that focuses on this. Green Gate provides additional SNAP benefits from the government by doubling the voucher from \$10 to \$20 per day for produce when used on the farm (Banks, 2011).

There is a crucial demand in any city or town for people and children to have access to learning about where their food comes from. That ignites interest which can lead to change. Not all organizations who are involved in the foodshed allow others to learn from them through first hand experience. Although you can volunteer at several of the organic farms within this bioregion, that doesn't mean that people are begging to do so, especially if they don't care about the food movement or know why it's important.

**Urban Roots** in Austin is another organic farm with a civic/sustainable agricultural drive that teaches struggling teens a better way of living. This includes preparing food, field work, advocating change, and they team up with other local businesses to fundraise and raise community awareness for their mission. They stand out as leaders in their field in this arena and use their community engagements at the market, SXSW and other festival exposure, farm dinners, CSA, and fundraising events to propel their grassroots movement. Urban Roots attacks food security issues by providing produce to poor communities. Support their social

movement, community impact, and farm! They are the funnest farm to volunteer for! Volunteer!

Although not all of the local organic farms have a mindset to transform lives through educational opportunities teaching volunteers or community members, they do in their face to face interaction at farmers markets, website exposure, grassroots involvement and CSA distribution. The need for expanding **SNAP benefit** access at all the farms and providing mobile access to local, fresh foods in different impoverished neighborhoods is imperative to closing the gap between different populations who may be missing out on the local food system, necessary sustainable food transitions and food security.

For more information about volunteering at a local Austin or Manor farm please review my **Green Thumb-Texas Directory page**. Or talk to your local farmer at your nearest food hub! Building new relationships through Community Supported Agriculture is a great place to start! Find a local CSA farmshare near you!

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