

Have we forgotten the wisdom of the ancients? Do we even care? Apparently not: my recent attempt to sell a concept for a videogame based on the Battle of Gaugamela elicited only a generic rejection letter from Brainsplatter Entertainment Systems' back office. And to my follow-up query, offering to equip the Pan-Hellenic phalanxes with harquebuses, nunchucks, and Uzi-mounted Quidditch brooms, the tenured radicals at Brainsplatter did not respond at all.

No American wishes to contemplate the idea of war. But when we as a nation are obliged by fate to do battle in Kyrgyzstan, Acapulco, Carthage, and Nantucket, surely our youth will need an X-box game of the highest scholarly standards. By thwarting such an endeavor, the post-structuralists and feminists at Brainsplatter Entertainment Systems have played their own ignoble part in the intellectual degradation of America's youth.

Failing to locate the classics department in Mbandaka, I regale a group of young men lounging on the riverside with an impromptu lecture on the elephant cavalry tactics of Hannibal. The group's bluff commander gives me a hearty slap on the face with a rifle butt and asks if I know how to carry water. The next thing I know, we are all marching toward Katanga to do battle with the Mai-Mai militias. No Namibian mercenary wishes to contemplate the idea of war, but the struggle to vanquish the Mai-Mai is of vital strategic interest to the United States, if not the entire Free World.

Will freedom blink? ■

—as told to Chase Madar

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Cultivating Freedom

Joel Salatin practices ethical animal husbandry—no thanks to the feds.

By Lewis McCrary

JOEL SALATIN calls Abraham Lincoln our “worst president,” not because he destroyed states’ rights or Southern identity, but because he created the United States Department of Agriculture. “There is not another agency that has been so successful at annihilating its own constituency,” he says.

Since his star turn in Michael Pollan’s bestselling *Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Salatin has become a celebrity of the local-food movement. Pollan’s book recounts a week spent at Polyface Farm, Salatin’s 500-acre plot outside Staunton, Virginia.

Despite his friendship with the Berkeley-based Pollan and identification with a movement primarily birthed of the Left, however, Salatin is unabashed about his conservative perspective. He calls himself a “Christian-libertarian-environmentalist-capitalist lunatic.”

At Polyface Farm, the owner jokes, the primary crop is grass. In gently rolling fields, set against a postcard backdrop of the Blue Ridge mountains, Salatin raises grass-fed “salad bar beef,” pastured poultry and eggs, and free-foraging pigs. The last were featured in a “Nightline” report about Salatin’s most famous customer, the fast-food chain Chipotle, which buys most of its pork from organic farms.

Salatin has become accustomed to media coverage. An offer to star in a TV series sits open on his desk, and last summer Polyface was a central tableau of the documentary “Food, Inc.,” which cast a critical eye over the industrial

food system. The film’s message was opaque, giving equal time to large-scale USDA-certified organic producers, mothers calling for more federal oversight, and anti-regulation, small-scale farmers represented by Salatin. While undoubtedly the most entertaining of the bunch, he is aware that he couldn’t win over all viewers, many of whom probably came away with the message that government intervention is the solution. “Our biggest fear is that ‘Food, Inc.’ will move heavy-handed food-safety regulations forward,” he admits.

Salatin is no stranger to skirmishes with state and federal regulators. In his self-published book *Everything I Want to Do Is Illegal*, he recounts, in epic fashion, battles over his on-site processing of poultry. Polyface chickens, which draw rave reviews and customers from hundreds of miles away, are washed and prepared for sale in an open-air environment that regulators found to be unsanitary. After a protracted fight with the bureaucracy and some assistance from local politicians, Salatin was able to retain his farm’s exemption from the regulations, which he insists are only appropriate for multinational corporations.

Because he refuses to abide by USDA rules for federal “organic” certification—Salatin calls it the “O-word”—Polyface relies on word-of-mouth and an open-door policy to encourage transparency, confident that this will draw customers genuinely concerned about the origin of their food and the method

by which it comes to their tables. Polyface, unlike Big Agribusiness, sees showing people around the farm as part of its mission. At a recent open house, Salatin reports that 1,600 people showed up from over two dozen states.

He wants to create an “NRA for local

Agriculture-school faculty who visit Polyface tell Salatin that they are “glad to prove the veracity of [his] model,” but immediately ask him, “How much money can you give us to do the research?” For Salatin, this is evidence that, in the end, the bottom line drives the research

tional and libertarian conservatives. Surveying his customer parking lot, Salatin says, “It’s absolutely typical to have three Obama bumper stickers alongside three that say, ‘Abortion stops a beating heart.’” He is encouraged by the movement’s broad appeal, but laments that he cannot convince more of his fellow churchgoers not to “stop for happy meals on the way home from the pro-life rally.”

He is often surprised at his reception when he speaks at places like UC Berkeley, where he was prepared for hisses, but received a standing ovation. He was impressed by student-maintained vegetable gardens adjacent to the dormitories.

In his own days at Bob Jones University, where Salatin was an undergraduate in the late 1970s, students would have considered gardening menial. The natural-food movement was seen as so central to the countercultural Left by Bob Jones’s evangelical leaders that students were told to avoid “the food cult.”

Salatin, who grew up going to natural-food stores, found this hostility from the Right troubling. Today, he is delighted that so many conservatives have joined what he calls the “heritage food movement.” (He chuckles, admitting that this is a subtle “slam” at the Heritage Foundation and other conservative think tanks that he claims are in bed with agribusiness.) As for Bob Jones, it has evidently changed its outlook. The university recently honored Salatin as “alumnus of the year.”

For all his dialogue with the Left and criticism of the institutional Right, Salatin is enthusiastic about Republican Ron Paul, though he wanted the Texas congressman to run as an independent in 2008. Salatin rejects most right-wing talk-show hosts. He accuses Rush Limbaugh, in particular, of being dismissive of the local food-movement. But Salatin has kind words for Glenn Beck, whom he

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food” and has helped start a small-farm legal defense fund with a hotline that farmers can call for advice when hostile regulators come knocking. Consumers should understand that “if the government has a right to get between your lips and your stomach,” he says, all the other freedoms, especially “to shoot, pray, and preach,” are diminished. He endorses private, voluntary certification organizations modeled on *Consumer Reports* and says he would be happy to submit to and pay for a third-party referee with standards appropriate to small-scale farming.

The government’s monopoly on meat regulation began in 1906, when in response to public panic resulting from the publication of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, Teddy Roosevelt signed legislation mandating federal meat inspections. Today, Salatin claims that agricultural regulation favors multinational corporations such as ConAgra and Monsanto because the science that supports the USDA regulatory framework is paid for by these corporations, which give large grants to leading agricultural academics. “The research coming out of the land-grant universities is a mouthpiece for the corporations,” says Salatin, who argues that conventional models don’t account for energy consumption: “We can produce more per acre on a fifth of the fuel as the industrial food system.”

agenda. “I don’t have money. Monsanto has money,” he says. He is convinced that industrial agriculture pays for science that is biased toward “bigger, faster, better, cheaper” and ignores unintended costs, particularly damage to the land and human health.

Salatin points out that when science goes wrong, the consequences are sweeping. Always with us is the “propensity for human evil. ... The question is not whether we can eliminate it, but whether we centralize it or decentralize it. ... If I run a dirty ship here, I’m only affecting a few customers. What happens when the USDA determines that feeding dead cows to cows is the new science-based technique? Mad Cow.”

Much as he resists the federal regulatory apparatus, Salatin is skeptical of unqualified celebration of the market, insisting that the status quo, especially when it comes to agriculture, “is not a spontaneous order.” He notes, “The butcher, baker, and candlestick maker have been around a lot longer than supermarkets and Wal-Mart.” Regulation that favors industrial farming has warped our sense of what Salatin describes as “appropriate scale.”

He wants a big-tent local-food movement. While two decades ago, most customers at his farm store were “liberal, hippie, tree-hugger types,” he now estimates that an even number are tradi-

praises as both “agendaless” and “truth-seeking.” He points to Beck’s criticism of the USDA and attention to how so-called food-safety regulations threaten small farmers.

He sees himself not as an ideologue, but as a modern farmer reined in by a few first principles. Some charge that small-scale farming is nothing but nostalgia, but Salatin is no Luddite. He uses e-mail and maintains an extensive website and blog. He’s enthusiastic about some new farming equipment but believes agricultural technology must be guided by a moral sense that accounts for both the dignity of the animal and the human consumer. He is persuaded by the arguments of Matthew Scully, a prominent GOP speechwriter who brought animal welfare to the attention of many on the Right, and suggests that Scully’s *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy* be “required reading in all Christian colleges.”

Salatin’s public lectures are peppered with his own references to metaphysics: he’s not afraid to argue that industrial farming has forgotten the “pigness of the pig.” And he doesn’t shy away from connecting American agriculture to our interventionist foreign policy, stating in “Food, Inc.” that “a society that just views a pig as a pile of protoplasmic inanimate structure ... to be manipulated ... is just as likely to view other cultures with the same type of disdain and disrespect and controlling-type mentality.” Moreover, agribusiness, like so many sectors of the economy, is dependent on the foreign oil that keeps America entangled in the Middle East: “We’re fighting a war on the other side of the side of the world to maintain cheap oil so we can maintain an energy-intensive industrial food system,” he says.

Having long referred to his activism as a “ministry,” Salatin also trains new missionaries. With seven summer

interns and three year-long apprentices, this small tract in Virginia is a sort of seminary, with trainees living and taking meals together. Salatin admits that he preaches to his on-sight followers, occasionally reading passages from his favorite books over dinner. Most of these young people have no farming background and have never lived in rural areas. They come to him, Salatin is convinced, because they are looking for a “noble vocation”—to “do something sacred with their lives, hang the money.”

The ministry is a family enterprise. Salatin’s 28-year-old son Daniel is now the third generation to farm this patch of the Blue Ridge. The traditional conservative emphases on the importance of place and family clearly resonate with Salatin. He suggests that most solutions start at home. Instead of calling your congressman for more regulation, as a postscript to “Food, Inc.”

THE FARM’S WEBSITE SAYS, “**WE DO NOT SHIP ANYTHING ANYWHERE. WE ENCOURAGE FOLKS TO FIND THEIR LOCAL PRODUCERS AND PATRONIZE THEM.**”

instructs, he recommends “cook[ing] your own meal from your home-grown garden.”

Salatin’s own home-based business has been wildly successful. Polyface products are so highly regarded that he no longer needs to sell at farmers’ markets. Instead, most of his consumer sales come from visitors—many admit to driving hundreds of miles to buy from Polyface—and cooperative buying clubs in the Washington, D.C. and Richmond, Virginia metro areas.

Unlike other online purveyors of grass-fed beef and poultry, most of whom ship nationwide, it’s difficult to taste Salatin’s products unless you live within a day’s drive of Polyface. The

farm’s website says, “We do not ship anything anywhere. We encourage folks to find their local producers and patronize them.” In the preface to Salatin’s book *Holy Cows and Hog Heaven*, Pollan explains that he first thought there might be something more to this farmer when Salatin refused to FedEx his products to Pollan’s home in California.

Salatin is convinced that this air of authenticity gives him broad appeal. He is not an armchair intellectual who pontificates from a plush think-tank office. He spoke with *TAC* at a picnic table on the lawn of the farmhouse, clad in his trademark suspenders and straw hat, dirt under his fingernails from working the fields. Most of his writing is relegated to the winter, when Polyface shuts to visitors and Salatin retreats to his Macintosh to compose his manifestos. He says that at least one of his half-dozen self-published

monographs has sold in the tens of thousands, and he plans to write another this winter, with the provisional title *The Sheer Ecstasy of Being a Lunatic Farmer*.

Though not without a sense of humor, Joel Salatin is on a deeply serious mission. The unholy alliance of Big Agribusiness and Big Government, which is “so prejudicial against grass-roots innovation,” is no less than “evil.” So as long as people are listening, this lunatic farmer will keep shouting. Watch out, USDA. ■

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No Easy Money

The case for raising interest rates

By Charles Hugh Smith

HERE'S THE RECIPE for endless prosperity, central planning version: start with a little inflation to plump up asset values, encourage spending and make debt easier to pay off in the future, then add in declining interest rates to encourage expansion and reward buyers of bonds. (As interest rates drop, the value of the bond rises.) Lastly, run some big government deficits to stimulate spending and toss in expanding money supply so there will always be plenty of dollars to borrow and spend.

Our central planners—the Federal Reserve and the U.S. Treasury—have furiously combined these ingredients, and the world watches anxiously to see if the results will be

- A return to cheap-money prosperity;
- A Japan-style no-growth deflation;
- Argentine-style debt repudiation and currency devaluation.

Despite the assurances of Bernanke and associates, the recipe can turn out badly: you can drop interest rates to nearly zero and still get deflation and no growth in the real economy. Alternatively, reckless expansion of cheap money and government deficits undermine the nation's currency and creditworthiness, triggering debt repudiation and ruinous devaluation.

Some are saying that the U.S. is following the path to doom even as the Fed insists that Japan-style deflation and the devaluation of the dollar are impossible. (What else can central planners say? The five-year plan to eternal prosperity is failing? That would be a quick ticket

to Siberia—by which I mean the Commerce Department.)

Forecasting the direction of all these moving parts is like predicting the outcome of a 3-D chess match with multiple players randomly moving pieces. So let's focus on interest rates, the only force over which the market really has any sway.

If central planners only create money and give it away, the results are predictable: an oversupply of "free money" leads to inflation. Instead, they manage the business cycle by manipulating the supply of and demand for money. If the Goldilocks Economy is getting a tad overheated, the Fed withdraws money and raises short-term interest rates. Businesses and consumers borrow and spend less, and Goldilocks breathes a sigh of relief. If the economy catches a chill, then the Fed "injects liquidity" and lowers interest rates, encouraging more borrowing and spending.

This seems to work pretty well, until it doesn't. Japan has been borrowing a truly insane 40 percent of its government spending for years and has kept its interest rates so near zero that the prospect of a mighty one-quarter percent increase causes panic. So who's going to bury money in a bond paying a dime of interest a decade? Well, government, of course, because it can create the money to buy its own bonds. And other investors will, too, if they fear all other investing options will only drop in value. That's a sad statement about the prospects for real estate and new enterprises in Japan.

But super-low interest rates and mas-

sive government borrowing require something special: a huge pool of surplus capital that can be sunk in no-return government bonds. How dumb does money have to be to do that year after year?

The explanation of Japan's weird stability in going nowhere is partly cultural, which is why drawing parallels between the U.S. and Japan is perilous. In Japan, Big Business, banks, insurance companies, and the government aren't just in bed with each other: they tuck each other in and put mints on each others' pillows. Thus super-low interest rates and liquidity are only available on an institutional level. The average small business in Japan can't borrow unlimited sums at near-zero interest, but global institutional buyers borrowed trillions of yen at low interest and invested the money elsewhere at higher returns: the infamous "yen carry trade."

The other cultural factor at work is Japan's prodigious savings rate, which for many years hovered above 20 percent—though it is now dropping as times get tough—compared to a zero or even negative rate in the United States. With opportunities to invest overseas restricted, Japanese savers had limited options: take a gamble on deflating real estate and stocks or buy government bonds. Given that unappealing menu, they chose the bonds.

While Japanese-style government-Wall Street collusion is clearly growing in the U.S., we don't have the key ingredients of Japan's balancing act. There is no giant pool of domestic savings, and battered American investors still have