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IMPACT JOURNAL

A LOOK AT THE KEY INITIATIVES, RANCHERS,
PARTNERS, AND ANIMALS DRIVING THE EPIC
FOOD REVOLUTION.

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CREDITS



Words by **DAVID LEFFLER**

As the youngest of four boys raised in Austin, Texas, David has long been accustomed to noisy, crowded rooms where calm is seldom found. Growing up in this environment was a little hectic, but it taught him to keep his head up and his ears open — because there's always knowledge to be gained from the people around you.

He's learned to channel this valuable lesson through his life passion, writing. When his head isn't buried in a notebook or stuck in the clouds, you can find David camping, hiking, swimming, or hanging out with his family.

Cover & interior design by **ANDREA ROMERO**

A native of San Salvador, El Salvador, Andrea subscribes to Teddy Roosevelt's motto: "Speak softly, and carry a big stick." Never the first to speak but always quick to act, she's an accomplished designer and photographer who embraces every challenge that comes her way. Since starting at EPIC as a college graphic design intern, she has received her degree and become the company's in-house graphic designer. When she's not creating new designs or snapping photos, she's helping keep Austin weird or hiking with her Boston Terrier, Lucy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our list of acknowledgments could go on forever, but we'll do our best to be brief. First and foremost, we'd like to thank Allan Savory and The Savory Institute for their guidance on so many of these topics. Meeting Allan altered our worldview and enlightened us in ways we'd never imagined. So much gratitude is owed to every supplier, actor, and personality featured in this journal, all of whom lent us their time and trusted us with their words and stories. We hope we did right by them. We'd be remiss if we didn't give our amazing employees and consumers a shoutout as well — without them, none of this would be possible. They're the champions who are fueling this food revolution and pushing us to greater heights than ever before. And finally, we'd like to thank you, the reader: for you are the most important cog in this entire movement. Now equipped with the knowledge, stories, and passion to create true change, we need you to help us continue our work and fight harder than ever to positively impact our food systems. Together, we can build a stronger, healthier foundation for the present and far into the future.

IMAGE CREDITS

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Section 1

PEOPLE & PROFILES

Within every grassroots movement, there are people who stand out and stand up for what they believe is right. Behind each of them is a story, an internal mission that pushes them to do more for their families, communities, and far beyond. While we can't possibly commend every person who deserves recognition, we selected these individuals for their especially outstanding resiliency, diligence, and passion.

A LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDERS

Our planet is the most precious thing we have. Massive trees, lush pastures, majestic animals, healthy and vibrant ecosystems, and the nourishing food they yield — those are the things that have always inspired us. As athletes and fierce competitors, we always strove to fuse our bodies and minds with nature to gain a greater appreciation for its beauty and power. This not only reminded us of the incredible bounties this world holds for us: it fueled us to victories we never could have foreseen. We learned to care for the earth and respect our place as humans in it.

We're no longer high level athletes, but our dedication to connecting with nature and the animals we live alongside has grown even stronger over the years. This eventually led us to make the grandest but most important decisions of our lives: to switch from being raw food vegans to fulfilling our ancestral, carnivorous legacy. This shift brought with it the realization that our global food system — and the processes and people driving it — were rapidly stripping our planet of its natural resources and depriving animals of healthy, humane lives. So we made it our mission to ditch the status quo and create food that's better for lands, consumers, and the precious animals that have sustained humanity since the dawn of time. Our journey since then hasn't always been smooth, but it's been the most impactful, life-altering experience imaginable for us. It's also given us a glimpse of so much more to come.

That's where our first-ever Impact Journal comes in. We've long sought for a way to truly capture the people, partners, missions, and causes that are fueling the food revolution that's shifting the way we produce food — and care for our planet — in astonishing ways. With this journal, we've finally found the platform to do so. Within these pages, you'll find stories of personal triumph, awe-striking dedication to creating a better world, and people whose odysseys seem too grand to be true. You will also learn about massive ecological threats to the earth and how, despite the assertions of many in the mainstream, we can combat them through animal impact and by adopting a more holistic view of our place in the world.

This publication is about sharing, amplifying, and accelerating the movement for a better food system and a better world. We hope its stories give you a greater appreciation for the food on your table and inspire you to fight for honesty, transparency, and altruism in agriculture. While this is the greatest step we've taken yet in our adventure, we know there will be so many to follow. Our 2017 Impact Journal isn't just about highlighting key victories and honoring those who have dedicated their lives to these causes — it's here to lay the foundation for far greater accomplishments, by inspiring the next generation of land stewards to leave the planet better than they found it.

Thank you for your time, support, and compassion. We hope reading these stories will light a fire for change within you and bring you closer with your food, your farmers, and your lands.

Sincerely,

Katie and Taylor
LAND STEWARDS // CO-FOUNDERS





THE STORY OF MEAT

WHAT IF CHANGING WHAT YOU EAT AND WEAR COULD IMPACT THE STORY OF THE SOIL, WATER, AND AIR?

Around the globe, there is a burgeoning resistance comprised of farmers and ranchers who are regenerating their soils, watersheds, wildlife habitats, and communities by practicing Holistic Management. This movement is global, it's culturally diverse, and most importantly, it's transforming the world. This is the story of meat.

Our journey began long, long ago, when animals roamed the earth in herds and packs as far as the eye could see. These massive groups moved gracefully across grasslands, careful not to catch the eye of waiting predators. This way of life was

borderless and balanced, and it sustained for thousands of years. It was a simpler, purer time, when the planet worked in natural harmony.

Since then — especially over the past century — human impact has drained our lands of their resources and stripped their soils of life. Fueled by large-scale industrialized agriculture and managed with mechanized tools, modern food production processes have brought swift destruction to our most prized and crucial possessions. The animals who once acted as stewards to our pastures suddenly became the scapegoats for our ballooning waistlines and shrinking

savannahs. Monoculture ruled supreme. In the blink of an eye, our planet lost the balance that once defined it.

We wanted to change that. Inspired by the teachings of Allan Savory and the belief that healthy soils make healthy animals and healthy animals make healthy consumers, we made it our mission to restore order in ecosystems and diets through the food we produce. We knew it wouldn't be easy (and it hasn't) but we've never doubted our cause. Now, we're more confident than ever that consumers want to know where their food comes from and how that impacts the health of our planet.

In reality, people want to connect with their ranchers and their animals and the soils that are vital to feeding us all: they want to be a part of something that's changing the world for good.

The food revolution is picking up steam. As we've united a coalition of dreamers and fighters, our spirit has only strengthened in the face of opposition. We believe in a world where animals are no longer vilified as the culprits behind man-made crises like climate change and soil degradation, no matter how crazy we sound. Because the more people hear our message of honoring the animals we consume, unleashing their abilities to fertilize and revitalize soils, and voting with their dollars, the more they'll see the truth. Once you do, it's as clear as day.



So here we stand. Drawing on the collective knowledge of renegade ranchers, rebel scientists, and cutting-edge product manufacturers, we're bringing a counterintuitive approach to solving the issues of climate change, desertification, biodiversity loss, and degradation of land. Buoyed by empirical data and living examples from around the world, we're out to show the world that cattle and other ruminants can help heal our planet.

So open your eyes and ready your mind: this is the story of meat. ❖



WELCOME TO ROAM RANCH

EPIC'S FIELD EXPERIMENT

Since Taylor Collins and Katie Forrest founded EPIC, they've fought to connect conscious consumers with responsible ranchers. Their intent has always been simple: to unite people from both ends of the spectrum around practices that heal our land, revive rural economies, and honor the animals we consume. They're damn proud of the work we've done on this front, but they'd always dreamt about us owning our own space — a special spot reserved solely for EPIC ideals,

practices, and values. They kept this goal in the back of their minds, never losing sight of its significance. And after years of waiting and months of planning and finger-crossing, those dreams finally became a reality when we bought ROAM Ranch.

This place is perfect for us. Located on the outskirts of Fredericksburg, Texas in the heart of the majestic Texas Hill Country, ROAM sits on 450 acres of farmable river bottomland. Like much

of our world, this once-fertile region was industrially farmed for the past 100 years. This left it dangerously degraded from a combination of mineral extraction, overgrazing, the introduction of monoculture, and biodiversity loss. Consequently, it was hardly capable of being a safe wildlife habitat or a productive farm, ranch, or recreational area. Land in this condition is often deemed unsalvageable and left to wither away — but we're proving otherwise.

That's because ROAM is our company's regenerative test laboratory. Rather than purchasing a plot of pristine ranchland, Katie and Taylor chose to seize the opportunity to further develop our understanding of the regenerative agriculture principles our company was founded on. Specifically, we're fully reviving this property from a degenerated state by healing its soil to produce nourishing foods and provide optimal living environments for animals — a full 180 from how we found it.

We're using a two-pronged process: introducing livestock and fostering crucial wildlife relationships. By doing so, we're regenerating damaged lands

and creating a net positive impact that exceeds our local community. Without a doubt, though, our main driving point is to prove that properly managed animal impact has the ability to sequester carbon from the earth's atmosphere and store it where it belongs — the soil. Through this, we're going to inspire a new generation of farmers and ranchers to join us in our efforts to heal our scarred lands while reversing desertification and climate change. The food revolution needs a home base, after all.

ROAM has its fair share of entertainment value and on-site activities — like hunting, wildlife viewing, yurt camping, and more! —

but its primary purposes are regenerative, biodynamic, and holistic. In addition to serving as a functional ranch and recreational land, ROAM also acts as an educational facility. Already, we are monitoring its environment and taking soil samples to assess its overall health. Through empirical data collection, we'll have the ability to assess pivotal changes in the soil's carbon levels, organic matter, biodiversity, water retention, crop yields, and more. These are key indicators of the regeneration process and will provide us real-time tracking of our improvements to the land. It's all part of our larger plan.



Taylor Collins and Katie Forrest work with Savory Institute representatives to assess ROAM's land health and map out its resources.



Taylor Collins studies ROAM's rapidly-improving pastures, which will soon be home to a herd of bison.

The ranch isn't exactly paradise — not yet, at least. For years, its pastures were exhausted of all nutrients and healthy traits by significant and prolonged use of fertilizers and herbicides. But by giving it time to rest and carefully reintroducing animals back onto the property, we're revitalizing ROAM's once-vibrant ecosystem with native plants and grasses, bison, axis deer, pigs, rabbits, turkeys, chickens, ducks, goats, and honeybees. Unlike monoculture farms, this emulates our world's natural biodiversity and provides some much-needed balance to surrounding environments. And here's the key: we're using the planned grazing principles advocated for by The Savory Institute to pasture-raise and rotate our animals. With the power of holistic land management, our land will become three times as productive as conventional farms in the area.

Led by Katie and Taylor, we are creating a legacy our employees, partners, and customers can be proud of. This beautiful piece of Hill Country heaven is demonstrating the power of regenerative livestock and our ability to go beyond 'sustainable' to achieve 'regenerative.' Slowly but surely, this educational, recreational, and communal space is proving agriculture can save the planet! ❖



Katie Forrest (R), plants one of countless measurement markers spread throughout the ranch.

SUPPLIER STORIES

“It is the man on the ground with his rifle who ultimately wins the war.”

BRUCE H. NORTON

We firmly believe that the men and women on the front lines of our food systems are the most crucial cogs in the entire process. With that, we are proud to introduce our suppliers: the heroes on the ground who are fueling the food revolution with aching muscles and the sweat from their brows. Without their dedication to higher production standards, better animal treatment, and creating quality nourishment for our bodies, we'd all be lost.

WHITE OAK PASTURES

BLUFFTON, GA



Will Harris with his two daughters, Jenni and Jodi

THE MIRACLE IN BLUFFTON

How Agriculture Transformed This Tiny Georgia Town From Dying To Thriving

If you're looking for Will Harris, head to the old Bluffton courthouse. You'll find him there, cowboy hat in hand and his dog, Judge, by his side, working feverishly to keep White Oak Pastures churning away as it has since 1866. But

he's not just trying to sustain his family's legacy — he's fighting to secure its future.

Will's battle isn't unique. Unfortunately, it's one that almost every part of rural America is facing, especially in the South.

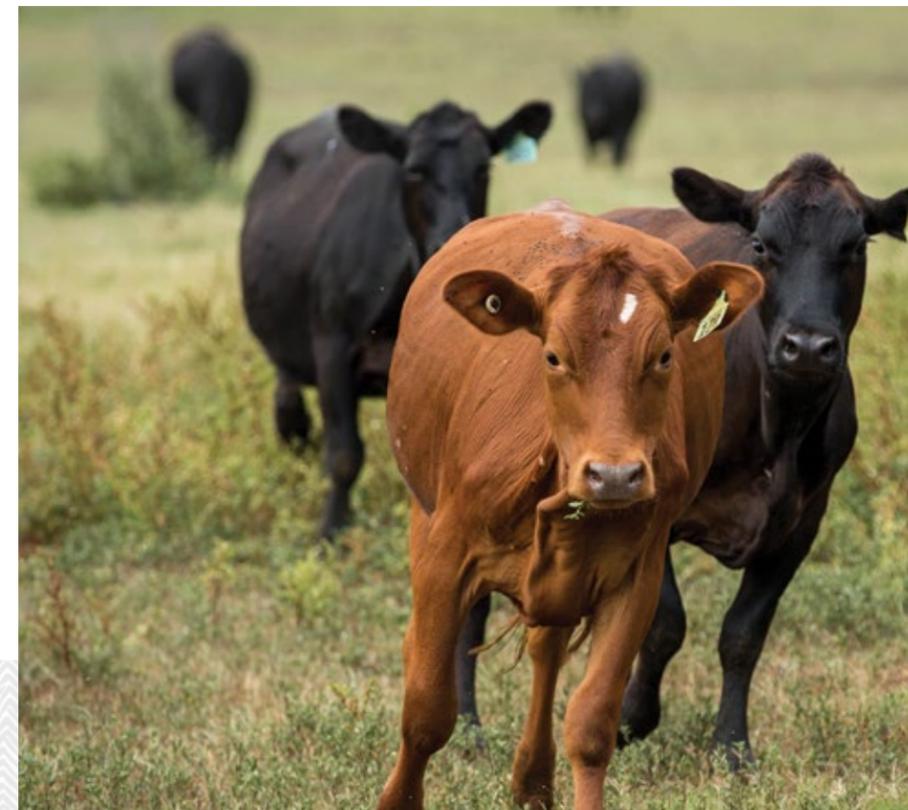
As agriculture has morphed from a key part of every province's local economy to mechanized, industrialized conglomerations ruled by ruthless efficiency, towns like Bluffton have been stripped of economic opportunity. With no means of employment available, locals are forced to move elsewhere in search of better lives, leaving behind barren wastelands of past glories.

Bluffton was never a huge place. Founded in 1814 by settlers moving westward, it's not accessible through any large navigable waterway and sits in the shadow of the Appalachian Mountains. As a result, Will said that its population probably peaked at around 400 people in 1910. But with fertile soils and reliable conditions, it's always been a damn good place to farm. "It's a geological anomaly, really," he said in his thick Georgia drawl. "Thanks to an unbelievable combination

of geology and meteorology, it's an extremely productive place for farming and agriculture. That's why archaeological findings suggests it was once home to one of the largest cities north of Mexico between 300-600 AD."

That natural abundance drew Will's great-grandfather to the area in the mid-1800's and has kept his family there since. But when modernized farming arose after World War II, traditional practices were swept away — and with them, economic and ecological balance. Regional agriculture and ranching were replaced by row crops, machines, and monoculture. The new order didn't care about uniting local economies or drawing workers: it was focused only on mass yield by whatever means necessary. Like so many others at the time, the Harris family adjusted to these standards to survive.

By the mid-90's, Big Ag was in full swing in Bluffton. The town was barely holding on. According to Will, things were so bad then that the post office was the only place around where you could buy something. The population had dwindled to the point where basic services like gas stations, restaurants, or grocery stores simply weren't needed. White Oak was in business but centered solely on raising livestock; the farm was overrun by pesticides, chemicals, and natural imbalance. Will knew he had to make a change. "Since I was a little boy, all I'd ever wanted to do was run [White Oak]. But as the years passed, I liked our operation less and less," he explained. "I felt like my childhood dream was slowly dying with every round of pesticides and hormones we introduced to the land and cattle."





A White Oak worker preps a sun-dried rawhide for production in their on-site workshop.

So Will decided to buck the system. There weren't many available resources on alternative agriculture practices at the time, but Will had one reliable outlet: history. Looking to his great-grandfather's tactics, which integrated multiple species of animals and crops to create a thriving ecosystem, he turned his one-sided operation on its head. He cut the chemicals out and introduced chickens, goats, pigs, and other animals back onto the farm. It was all part of the strategy behind holistic land management, which seeks to create ecological harmony to strengthen lands, improve their yield, and maximize animal quality.

Will's move was revolutionary. It directly rejected the chemical-ridden, commoditized industry that agriculture had become and sought a more intimate

appreciation of natural resources. It vowed to leave the world better than it found it. And it worked. In the 22 years since White Oak made the shift to holistic, they've become one of America's leading producers of grass-fed beef, pastured-raised pork, and free-range chicken. This explosion of business and productivity has earned them nationwide acclaim and made them the industry leader in educating consumers and producers alike. But perhaps most importantly: it's brought jobs back to Bluffton.

Over the last ten years, White Oak's staff has grown from four employees to 140, exceeding the town's population just a few decades ago. This influx of people increased the need for public services, businesses, and housing, so Will bought

up a bunch of old, dilapidated buildings and opened a general store, restaurant, and employee housing. He even bought the old courthouse, which functions as his office. "You can tell by my pup's name who's really in charge," he joked.

Bluffton's economy hasn't been this strong in a century. Fueled by White Oak's commitment to providing fair wages — their average worker makes twice the county average — and operational growth, the town is doing the impossible: reviving its economy by going back to its roots. "This place has never had a factory or mill, and it's not making a comeback through tourism or gentrification," Will said. "Agriculture's the girl that brought us to the party and saved this town."

Will doesn't fancy himself a miracle worker or Bluffton an isolated case. He believes other towns could make the same adjustment if their landholders commit to a holistic approach. "We never set out to revive this town. We can't take credit for it or pretend this was part of some grand vision — it was just a byproduct of the plan," he admitted. "What we've done here is certainly replicable. There's no hidden formula or secret sauce: we simply changed the way we farmed and embraced a larger view of how we impact our resources and communities."

Regardless of Will's intentions, he's stoked the flames of the food revolution far beyond Bluffton. White Oak Pastures has proven better land management creates a harmonious system that produces higher quality animals and generates products that consumers want to purchase. But, despite their growing notoriety and burgeoning local economy, Will acknowledges there will still be plenty to be done long after he's gone. "We're still figuring things out. If you're going to make a truly meaningful impact, you've got to think generationally."

Luckily, Will knows the Harrises aren't leaving Bluffton anytime soon. His daughters Jenni and Jodi each gave birth to their first children earlier this year: Jack and Hattie. ❖



NORTHSTAR BISON

RICE LAKE, WI



(L-R) Marielle, Lee, Mary, and Sean Graese

Sitting On 1,200 acres of Prairie Land Where Bison Have Roamed For Centuries, This Family-Run Ranch Embodies The American Spirit That Inspired ‘Home On The Range’

“Good for land, good for the animals, and good for people.” This simple motto has long been the backbone of Northstar Bison and the Graese family behind it. Since 1994, when Lee and Mary Graese purchased their first two young bison from Bluemound State Park in Minnesota, this adage has guided their every move. Twenty-three years later, with the help of their

children Sean and Marielle, Northstar is the top producer of grass-fed bison in the entire country.

Their story isn’t one that can be summed up in revenue figures or company size. That was never the Graeses’s goal. Instead, they sought to create something that was true to their character: an operation that reflected

the rich history of America’s grasslands and the iconic bison who have long roamed them. “I love history and all the Old West. I read everything I could about the explorers and early settlers,” Lee explained. “And, of course, bison were a big part of every one of those stories. They’re such an icon in our history, and rightfully so.”

This historical context can be found in every nook and cranny of their business. Lee recognized Northstar’s animals would be happier and healthier if they adhered to their natural diets, so he harkened back to a time where massive herds of bison grazed on tall, lush American grasslands. Utilizing these age-old practices helped Northstar avoid dangerous and harmful feedlot-style tactics and led them to build out a revolutionary 100% grass-fed model for their bison. The process wasn’t easy — there’s a reason why less than a fifth of all bison in America are grass-fed — but it’s been well worth their efforts. They now serve as an educational hub devoted to influencing and converting regional bison ranches into grass-fed businesses. “Grass-fed bison has more nutrients per ounce than any other red meat on the planet,” Sean Graese said. “But more than that, allowing an animal to live on the land as

it was intended — that’s an incredible thing to be a part of.”

Northstar has been vital in the ongoing grass-fed revolution, but it’s playing an even larger role in the animal welfare realm. Thanks to their operation’s vertical integration (they have their own abattoir and processing plant), they have complete control over how their animals are treated in every phase of their lives. This has allowed them to implement a number of progressive practices, like ‘field harvests,’ which ensure every one of their bison ends their lives as comfortably and with as much dignity as possible. Regardless of the task, their ultimate priority is the health and happiness of their animals and consumers.

Thanks to the Graeses’ dedication to honesty and integrity, Northstar is the ideal supplier and partner. They treat

every animal with respect and admiration. They believe in a model of morals and honor, the exact opposite of the mechanical, heartless feedlots and slaughterhouses that plague the meat industry. And they realize minimizing waste and creating a foundation of compassion is the only way to preserve humanity’s longstanding relationship with the animals we’ve lived alongside for millennia. “Animals were put here for a purpose: to sustain life,” Lee reflected. “Not only for the predators they may feed on the prairie, but also for the humans that were here. We’re just continuing that process.” ❧

For more on the Northstar field harvest, what it entails, and why it sets the standard for food sourcing and animal welfare practices, visit page 102.



DIESTEL TURKEY

SONORA, CA



Tim and Joan Diestel (center), along with their kids (L-R) Garrett, Jason, Heidi, and son-in-law, Jared

THE DIESTEL DYNASTY

Drawing On Four Generations Of Experience, This Family Is Taking The Turkey World By Storm

Well over a century ago, the Bottini family immigrated from Western Europe to Sonora, California. A gold rush town nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Nevadas near Yosemite National Park, it offered a diverse climate and wide-open space. Demand

for food was high, so Ernest Bottini purchased 400 acres and started a turkey ranch. If only he could see what his founding enterprise has since become: Diestel Turkey Ranch, the leader in humane and high-quality poultry production.

While its roots run deep into California's Wild West days, Diestel Turkey Ranch was officially founded by Jack Diestel in 1949. Raised in Sonora working turkeys alongside his great-uncle, Ernest, Jack frequently drove out to San Francisco with his uncle and a flatbed full of birds to sell on the city's piers. These childhood trips inspired him to start Diestel, which he later passed onto his son, Tim. Growing up, Tim recognized the impact his family was making by providing first-rate birds to market goers, but he saw an opportunity to share their passion in more prominent ways. That's where his wife, Joan, whom he met while both attended The University of California, Davis, came in. "She was studying nutrition and was on her way to becoming a Registered Dietitian," Heidi, their youngest child and only daughter, explained. "She wanted to make high-quality food more accessible to people — and going straight to the source was the best way to do that."

It was a match made in heaven. After a brief stint in Alaska, Tim and Joan returned to Sonora in 1980 and bought Diestel from his father with plans to make a splash in the poultry world. The natural food space was far less fruitful at the time (healthy supermarkets like Whole Foods weren't nearly as widespread nationally), so they reached for the best tool they had: the phonebook. "They just started calling butcher shops and getting the word out on their birds," Heidi said. "That's really how it all began."

Diestel epitomized a small family operation during Heidi's upbringing. Her parents performed every task from breeding to feeding to processing, all the way up to distribution. Their kids — Jason, Garrett, and Heidi (in descending order of age) — were also involved in the day-to-day operations, thereby instilling in them the same rural mindset that had molded their father at an early age. "We got a real

appreciation for the world of ag and raising animals with day-in and day-out care," Heidi reflected. "There's just something really rewarding about raising an animal from birth to full maturity in a healthy, humane manner."

Heidi's devotion is emblematic of the entire family's perspective. This stems directly from Tim and Joan, who have always given their kids the chance to shape the business while pushing them to pursue anything they felt drawn to. Their golden rule was this: you can only be involved in the business if you really love it — and if you don't, then go find something you do love. This pressure-free approach gave the Diestel kids the agency to explore their own interests and personal identities, allowing each to carve out their own niche in the family and on the ranch. It also taught them to dream big and to never settle.





Over time, all three kids decided they wanted to be a part of the family business. Jason, the eldest, was the first to return to the ranch. Consumed with a passion for raising turkeys in innovative, environmentally-conscious, and sustainable ways, Heidi said he represents an amazing mix of new ideas and a traditional, fundamental appreciation of farming. “Jason is super close with our grandpa and has a clear understanding of animals and the earth. He can almost feel the changing of seasons before they come,” Heidi described. “It sounds a little romanticized, but it’s the truth. He’s the consummate farmer.”

Jason’s strengths paired with Garrett’s (who’s a whiz with numbers and has spearheaded Diestel’s move into online sales) and Heidi’s (who works closely

with buyers and customers to keep a pulse on the market and opportunities for growth) have given the ranch newfound flexibility and potential. This has allowed the company to diversify its turkeys across a variety of products and cater to a growing number of consumer niches. They now offer everything from deli meats and ground meat to burgers and sausage — a far cry from their early days of only selling whole birds around the holidays. Diestel’s growth speaks just as much to the maturation of the natural foods market as it does to their ability to penetrate it. “We’ve been pushing for a greater connection between consumers and their food since day one,” Heidi said, “so we’re excited to see people are coming around to this notion. It’s pushing us to find new ways to blend efficiency with our old-fashioned values.”

New processes have allowed Diestel to employ several different operational and production styles when raising their turkeys. Their most prominent and recognized program is their pasture-raised model, which has a GAP (Global Animal Partnership) Step 5 rating and houses 100% pasture-raised turkeys. This program takes place in the middle of giant, oak tree-lined pastures that harness a multispecies grazing plan to maximize land quality. Alongside these turkeys, you’ll find goats, sheep, chickens, and even a rescued llama named Rosco. Heidi admitted that pasture-raising birds has its risks — they’ve run into issues with predators like owls and coyotes — which is why their Anatolian Shepherd, Thomas, is roams the property to protect the flocks. Rosco does his part, too. “It’s about as wild as it gets,” Heidi laughed.

Diestel also has GAP 1-2-and-3-rated ranches that have more barn-centric environments with access to the outdoors. With 6-10 inches of fresh pine wood shavings as groundcover, these setups are littered with enrichments like tree branches, alfalfa bales, and misters to keep the turkeys cool during the summer. The one thing that can’t be found on their ranches: chemicals. Heidi said they take measures like spraying probiotic solutions from their fans to ensure the birds stay clean but aren’t riddled with antibiotics. This variety of GAP-rated ranches has allowed Diestel to increase its consistency and supply while preserving its core values of quality, balanced, and natural animal diets, and raising turkeys that are as happy as they are healthy. But perhaps the most prevalent characteristic around the ranches is an appreciation for the animals. “Going back to our roots, we’ve always sought to honor the animals by optimizing that turkey meat and ensuring nothing goes to waste,” Heidi said. “Remember, we’ve been doing this for almost 70 years. It’s not something that happened abruptly by any stretch of the imagination.”

In many ways, that attitude — one of patience, longevity, and pride — has come to define Diestel. They’re no longer a tiny operation, but Heidi and her family still make up its braintrust and backbone. In fact, her husband, Jared, is now the company president. This has given the ranch the perfect mix of vitality and wisdom, which touches everything from their dedication to animal welfare to their sustainable practices. There’s no better example of this than their on-site commercial composting

program, which converts huge amounts of organic waste like feathers, manure, pinewood into nutrient-dense soil fertilizer. “We’re seeking better ways to create food that’s high-quality, efficient, and creates a solution to the degradation of America’s soils,” Heidi said. “We’re sustainable from the soil-up.”

With Tim and Joan moving to a more advisory role, Diestel is primed for a changing of the guard. But while this could cause internal conflict for many family-run businesses, it’s actually brought Heidi, her brothers, and her parents closer than ever. Whenever they’re not working together, they accompany each other on hikes, share

meals, and even go on family vacations. “The business never gets turned off, but we always make concerted efforts to try to talk about something else,” Heidi laughed.

Despite their vast experience, the Diestels are still learning. Agriculture and consumer demands always change, which is why collaboration, innovation, and staying humble has been ingrained in their family DNA. “We’re still finding ways to become more efficient and impactful while staying true to the quality that’s fed our family for nearly seven decades,” Heidi said. “There will always be ups and downs, but I think it’s a fight worth fighting — after all, it’s your food.” ❧



FRED'S ALASKA SEAFOOD

KENAI, AK



FAMILY, FISH, AND FREEDOM

Steve Sturman Founded Fred's Alaska Seafood As An Ode To His Father and The Gritty, Liberating Life Of A Fisherman

For as long as he can remember, Steve Sturman's days have started and ended on the water. Born and raised 60 miles south of Anchorage, Alaska on the Kenai Peninsula, he's always felt an intrinsic connection with the frigid seas that line his homeland and the teeming

marine life within them. This link — which also he saw in his father, a commercial fisherman and his biggest idol — was his trail map to deliverance. No longer a boy, Steve steers the skiff and has taken up the family fishing mantle in ways he'd never imagined.

Steve's father, Fred, moved out to Alaska in 1964 in search of work. A native of Guymon, Oklahoma with deep roots in the oil and gas business, he'd recently been laid off and needed to support his wife and two children, Carl and Cathy. He settled in quickly and, six

months later, sent for his family. Fred wasn't exactly a man bred for marine life, but by 1971, after cutting his teeth as a deckhand and longline halibut fisherman, he made the leap to commercial fishing. A year later, Steve was born.

When he was a child, Steve followed his father everywhere — especially when it was time to go fishing. The perfect blend of sturdy and stubborn, he was always eager to learn and determined to prove himself a capable helper. His father, an old-school, blue collar man who'd braved Alaska in its infancy and practically taught himself to fish, would let him tag along but didn't grant him any exceptions. The kid had to pull his weight like everybody else. "He wasn't going to coddle me or put me under his wing," Steve laughed. "He would take me begrudgingly, because he knew that my mom would skin him if anything happened to me."

Fred was all about tough love because he wanted more for his son. Due to the fishing industry's unpredictability, he pushed Steve to get an education while growing as a fisherman. Salmon season only spans from Memorial Day to Labor Day, making it a tough gig to rely on annually. So Steve shipped off to Nampa, Idaho to get his degree in elementary education from Northwest Nazarene University. It seemed like a foolproof plan. "It was so simple: you teach up until the first couple weeks of May and then you're off for the summer to fish," Steve said.



But a semester of student teaching 5th graders was all it took for Steve to know he wasn't cut out for the classroom. There was just too much structure. He felt like a caged animal. He picked up a few seasonal jobs over the years, working as a bag handler for Alaska Airlines and a UPS driver when he wasn't fishing during salmon season. He loved it. But when his wife, Tesa, gave birth to their son, Colby, he knew things had to change.

So in 2005, Steve went all in and founded his own fishing company. He named it Fred's Alaska Seafood in tribute to his father, who had suffered a heart attack a few years before and could no longer endure the rigors of a 12-hour day of fishing. He was eager to implement quality fish treatment practices in an effort to market his salmon to American markets — an atypical approach considering the

majority of fish in the region went abroad. "I'd see all these fish go overseas. We'd always joke they were getting a one-way ticket to Tokyo," Steve explained. "I knew there was a domestic market in the United States for wild-caught salmon and I was gonna do my darndest to pursue it."

That's exactly what he did. Bent on reaching U.S. buyers, Steve flew his family to Dallas, Texas for a winter to try his hand with consumers in America's heartland. People laughed at him — "Everyone thought people only ate cattle and catfish down there," he said — but he didn't care: he was going to prove Americans living far from his icy waters wanted to eat fresh, top-notch salmon. He was right: people went wild. They'd never had anything like it. Fred's slowly grew in popularity, working its way into the Dallas farmers market and getting a few newspaper

features. But Steve's biggest breakthrough came through brick-and-mortar organic co-ops, where masses of consumers loved knowing the personal connection he had with his fish. "More and more, people want to know the origin of their food," he said. "They want to know the story and they want to know who's behind it. Nobody can sell your passion like you can."

Dallas was a key turning point. Since then, Fred's has exploded into American markets, especially in the southeast. This has allowed Steve to expand their operations and invest money in things like better shipping capabilities and a massive walk-in freezer — to Tesa's relief, since the fish had previously been kept in huge chests in their garage, exposing their cars to Alaska's sub-zero winters. But Steve isn't looking to take Fred's global or losing sight of the little things.



Steve showing his eldest sons, Colby and Brett (left) the ropes on the water



He prides himself on the quality of care they provide their fish, including icing them immediately upon capture and keeping them cold all the way up to the processor. "It's the little things that preserve and enhance the taste of the fish and let the consumer know there's true care taken," he explained.

Staying small was always part of Steve's plan. By keeping a lean crew comprised of 7-8 members — including his sister, Cathy — and a couple skiffs, he's able to enhance their practices while maintaining a hands-on role in the water every day. Considering they can

bring in up to 40,000 pounds of salmon on a good day and typically work from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM in-season, that's nothing to sneeze at. Steve's not complaining about the rigorous work: he's doing what he loves. "I always thought it would just be cool to start a company, fish, and support my family while reflecting well on Alaska and my industry," he reflected. "I'm living the dream."

It's always been about fishing and family for Steve. He's not certain which of his three sons — Colby (11), Brett (9), and Gage (7) — are most likely to

carry on the Sturman fishing legacy, but he's not losing sleep over it. He just wants them to pursue their passions as feverishly as he did. As for his dad, the namesake of Fred's Alaska? "He's more inclined to just stay on the beach and tell me what I'm doing wrong," Steve joked. "He's there to listen, offer guidance, and share stories with me, but Mom would kill me if I took him out and anything happened to him."

A few decades and many fish later, the boot's on the other foot. ❧

GRAND VIEW BISON

CADOTT, WI



HOME ON THE RANGE

Alongside Nearly 700 Bison, Kris and Roxy Brown Are Building a Brighter Future For Their Daughters

Every morning at dawn, Kris Brown steps out of his Cadott, Wisconsin home to check on his bison. His wife, Roxy, will join him when she's not working part-time at the Mayo Clinic's ER in nearby Eau Claire. But the most

excited member of the Brown family every morning? Their ten-year-old daughter, Aryanah. "She'll get up at six o'clock and help work the animals all day if she can — 12 hour days, sometimes," Roxy marveled. "She sets

her clothes out every night and is ready to go as soon as she wakes up. She loves it."

Such is life at Grand View Bison Ranch, where Kris, Roxy, and their three daughters reside. Aryanah's their eldest and the most knowledgeable ranch hand of the trio, but the younger two — Jersey (7) and Vayda (3) — are quick to point out when the bison have moved paddocks, overgrazed in certain sections, or even if their stool consistency indicates the animals ate immature grass. It's just part of their day-to-day life, their father said. "This is our lives 24/7. They see their mom and I working together pretty much non-stop on everything from maintaining paddocks and fixing fences to feeding and moving the bison."

Roxy and Kris are both from the nearby Eau Claire area and, although their parents didn't own livestock, each grew up helping out on dairy

farms for friends and extended family. This instilled in them the wonder of animals, a love of the outdoors, and the appeal of life out in the country. They hit it off when they met on Halloween in 2006, which Kris joked was the result of his flashy costume (he was dressed as Harry from *Dumb & Dumber*, sporting a baby blue tuxedo and matching cane). By 2007, they were married and had Aryanah and Jersey over the next few years. Neither had great ranching aspirations at the time, as Roxy was a hair stylist and Kris worked for his father's construction company. But as their family grew, so did their desire to move away from town.

That's when the opportunity of a lifetime — a serendipitous one, at that — arose. It was 2010, and Kris had been searching for rural properties

off-and-on for over two years. A friend suggested he check out a chunk of land nearby with beautiful rolling hills and a gorgeous view for miles. It sounded too good to be true. But when he met the farmers who owned the place, he was flabbergasted: it belonged to Jerry and Betty Dzienkowski, the parents of Roxy's mother's boyfriend during her childhood. She was in disbelief when she found out. "I spent almost 10 summers there as a kid, running around and getting my hands dirty," she said. "I practically grew up there, and all of a sudden I had the chance to raise my kids on it."



With bison and hills aplenty, there's no shortage of scenic views around these parts.



(L-R): Kris and Roxy with Vayda, Jerry and Betty Dzienkowski, Aryanah and Jersey

It was too good a chance to pass up. They purchased 70 acres from the Dzienkowskis and started the country life they'd dreamt of for so long. Kris began kicking around the idea of raising cattle, but this initial move was about giving their kids better access to the bounties of nature. "It's a parent's dream to see your kids running around, making their own adventures, laughing, and enjoying freedom in the fresh air," he said.

Kris got more serious about ranching, so he reached out to a longtime friend in the industry. When he asked his friend which type of beef cattle would be the best investment, he received a stunning recommendation: bison. It didn't compute. Bison weren't true, reliable livestock, he thought; they

were akin to an exotic animal, which he wanted no part of after years of breeding giant lizards and big pythons for a business he'd started called Vital Exotics. But as he and Roxy researched bison ranching, they became increasingly excited about the idea. So they drove up to Northstar Bison — an established operation an hour north of them — to see what handling these animals was like. It was a life-changing experience. "Getting to work those animals was exciting because it showed me how manageable and gentle they can be," Roxy explained. "We realized it was a challenge we could take on together."

And that's exactly what they did. Shortly afterwards — it was 2014 by then — Kris and Roxy purchased 35

bison and started Grand View Bison Ranch. They also bought a larger parcel of land from the Dzienkowskis (who were looking to retire from commercial farming) and immediately took to the lifestyle and camaraderie the ranch provided them. Before long, Roxy and Kris were tag-teaming every task from moving herds to feeding hay during the winter to taking water measurements and beyond. Teamwork was a key part of their everyday approach to success, both on the farm and in their relationship. "Whether it's working the animals, taking data, running in the shoot, Roxy can do it all," Kris smiled. "She's not afraid to jump in a corral and stand on a hay bail and push some animals around."

All that cooperation has paid off in a hurry. In less than three years, Kris and Roxy have propelled themselves from small-time bison ranchers to industry up-and-comers with nearly 700 bison. As their property and herd size have grown, so has their capacity to make meaningful impacts as holistic management land stewards. This has helped their land, which was commercially farmed for row crops for over six decades, rapidly improve. "The grass has become so lush and resilient," Roxy marveled. "An entire paddock will be trampled after the bison graze on it, but it'll look dense and green again just a couple days later." Kris added: "The erosion rates from rainfall have dropped immensely after just two years of animal impact. Our soil soaks up rainwater like a sponge."

The vibrant pastures that holistic management has produced boost the demeanor of the bison, too. "They start acting like a bunch of kids whenever you let them onto a new paddock with waist-high grass," Kris said. "It's obvious the animals are much

healthier and happier, which will translate into a far better product for the customer."

The past several years have provided many lessons on growth and collaboration for the Brown family. Perhaps the greatest experience has been witnessing their animals' symbiotic relationship with the land create a cycle of growth for the surrounding ecosystem. All of this has made a telling impression on their daughters, who are no strangers to riding ATV's and herding 1,000-pound animals. "I can't help but grin when I see my girls surveying animals and helping out," Kris said. "Then Roxy will return from moving animals or chopping brush with a machete and I'll just think to myself, 'Yep, that's my wife.'"

There's still plenty of work to be done, but Kris and Roxy see it as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. After all, their land has improved by leaps and bounds in just a few years: imagine what they can do with a growing army of land-regenerating

bison and a burgeoning library of first-hand rancher knowledge. The next step is helping the girls continue their development. Considering they're usually out in the fields the moment they hop off the school bus, that should certainly be doable. But choosing an heir to the Grand View throne? That's a different story. "The girls all say they're going to take over the ranch, so that should be interesting," Roxy laughed. "It's definitely in their future."

Regardless of where Grand View Bison goes from here, Roxy and Kris just want to keep the spark and natural wonder alive for their family. Their commitment to their work and their daughters' growth carries them through even the most trying times. "We take pride in handling even the worst situations because this is our business and our land and we want the best for our family, our land, and our animals," Kris said. "We never waste a day or an opportunity to take in the beauty of these animals and their relationship with our world." ❧





DOCTORS & SCIENTISTS

“Agriculture is not crop production as popular belief holds - it's the production of food and fiber from the world's land and waters. Without agriculture it is not possible to have a city, stock market, banks, university, church or army. Agriculture is the foundation of civilization and any stable economy.”

ALLAN SAVORY

Scientific data and long-term trends are key to the overarching success of revamping our food systems and properly assessing their impact on our planet. While much of the mainstream scientific community has some catching up to do, there are several key actors who are speaking up for regenerative agriculture, responsible meat production, the ecological positives of animal impact, and much more. Hear their fascinating stories on the following pages.





THE RD IN REBELLION

DIANA RODGERS IS PUTTING MAINSTREAM NUTRITION OUT TO PASTURE

Diana Rodgers is a lot of things: licensed Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, Nutritional Therapy Practitioner, author of three books, a podcast guru, a farming enthusiast, and a mother of two. She's one of those people who makes juggling an endless list of tasks seem almost too easy. But nothing she's gained in life came easy

— she got where she is today by overcoming decades-long struggles with diet and health. Now, she's fighting back against establishment dietetics and mainstream medicine.

As a child, Diana struggled with undiagnosed celiac disease. Her condition exposed her to frequent spat

of poor blood sugar regulation and low energy levels, forcing her to cope with seemingly perpetual sickness. But as her frustration mounted, so grew her desire to find a solution. By the time she was finally diagnosed at the age of 26, nutrition had become a full-fledged obsession of hers.

Diana is unlike other nutrition fanatics you'll meet. While her interest stemmed from her gut issues (a characteristic of many modern diet aficionados) her passion arose from her time out on the farm. Her first exposure to agriculture and food production came during a summer job in high school at an organic farm in Sagaponack, New York. She was hooked immediately. "I always loved being outside and covered in dirt. It was natural for me," she said in an interview on *The Meatcast*, an EPIC podcast production.

Diana's joint passions of working in the field and eating well stuck with her for years before she brought them together. She and her husband, Andrew, dabbled in the tech field after graduating from college, but it wasn't for them — so they ditched their jobs and went back to where they wanted to be most: the farm. While Andrew worked towards his Master's in Soil Science at UMass, Amherst, Diana spent several years at Whole Foods Market working exclusively with gluten-free products. It seemed like a dream gig for someone with celiac. But the more she ate gluten-free packaged goods, the more she experienced throbbing headaches and hunger-induced mood swings.



"Is monocropping, plant-based agriculture really going to solve our soil health crisis or our weight and dietary issues? Or do we actually need to look at more meat?"



Eventually, she was diagnosed with gestational diabetes while pregnant with her first child, Anson. She knew there had to be a better way to eat and live.

As Diana helped Andrew — by then the manager at Green Meadows Farm in the North Shore of Boston — in the kitchen and farmstand, she became increasingly interested in acquiring a formal nutrition education. Among other things, it would help her better understand her body's needs and assist health-conscious consumers. So she took the leap. She performed well in class, receiving her Nutritional Therapy certification before moving on to

pursue her Registered Dietitian (RD) degree. But despite making straight A's, she had trouble fitting in with the ideology of her professors and peers. Like most of the medical and mainstream nutrition community, they lambasted meat consumption. As someone who'd spent years on farms and around responsibly-raised animals, it was nails on a chalkboard for Diana. "Most of my professors were vegetarians and would say meat was flat-out evil," she recalled. "I tried to stay quiet, but that would only last about three weeks into each semester before I would just lose it. I'd email them studies making the case for meat all the time."

By the time she completed her coursework and required internships, Diana was certain of two things: mainstream nutrition was outdated (if not flat-out wrong) and she was going to set things straight. Since then, she has written several books to help people understand how real, whole food is produced and how to apply that knowledge in their day-to-day lives. Beyond improving their own health, these lessons help consumers gain a greater appreciation for the labors required to produce honest, healthy, and sustainable foods. "To quote Wendell Berry, 'to be interested in food and not food production is clearly absurd,'" she said. "My goal is to help

people gain a much better understanding of what sustainable agriculture looks like in order to be informed consumers. It's the only way."

Education is at the core of everything for Diana. So when she and Andrew moved to Carlisle, Massachusetts in 2012 to run Clark Farm, they made sure it was an easy place to access first-hand agriculture experience. In addition to making the farm an organic CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) operation — which gives consumers an up-close look at production, along with a weekly share of the goods produced there — they offer on-site education programs, work with an international exchange organization, run an internship program, and host university students from colleges in nearby Boston. Diana believes these efforts give Clark an open, welcoming atmosphere that breaks down the social barriers that typically divide people. "Our lives are so curated and so vertical now. Most people only associate with others who share their political preferences, religious views, etc.," she said. "Farms can really help build community because we have all kinds of people working, talking, and engaging with each other and their world."

Perhaps the largest lesson Clark's visitors walk away with relates to animal treatment and meat production. Harkening back to her days in class, Diana has made it a point to expose the farm's visitors and her readers to how animals can positively impact our bodies and planet. She knows she's in the minority among nutritionists on this, but that only gives her greater motivation to succeed. As her reach

continues to grow over multiple mediums and their farm flourishes, she's confident consumers are becoming progressively more informed, intentional about questioning dietetic norms, and independent in their decision-making. She's never felt more galvanized. That's why her next project will be her grandest yet, diving deep into the health and environmental reasons why we need to have more meat in our diets, not less. "Is monocropping, plant-based agriculture really going to solve our soil health

crisis or our weight and dietary issues? Or do we actually need to look at more meat? It's the question I've been asking professors, other nutritionists, and consumers for years."

It's about damn time they heard the truth, Diana. ❖



Diana and Will after another productive day in the fields

REGENERATIVE U

HOW MICHIGAN STATE BECAME GROUND ZERO FOR THE FOOD REVOLUTION

In 2005, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita rocked the southeastern United States. The storms blew apart communities across thousands of miles, leaving millions without access to food, water, and other critical resources. Seemingly overnight, the region — especially Louisiana — was stripped of any semblance of modern society. Jason Rowntree, then an assistant professor in the School of Animal Sciences at Louisiana State University, was shocked by the food insecurity that hit the region once the flood waters subsided.

“I was south of New Orleans, a place where they grew rice, citrus, beef cattle, and had vibrant fishing and shipping industries, and there was practically nothing to eat,” Rowntree explained, recalling his experience as a food security first responder. “Everything being grown there was meant to contribute to larger processed food operations, so there was very little local infrastructure. We were in the land of agriculture and there was nothing to eat.”

Jason watched as the area’s access to food transformed from first-world to third-world conditions. The system’s fragility and dependence on outside resources was unbelievable. There was simply no regional resiliency or food



Jason Rowntree is bringing regenerative agriculture to the world of academia.

independence. The conventional agriculture practices Jason grew up with in East Texas, studied in school, and taught, failed when they were needed most. He had to take action.

So Jason did what he does best: research. He began scouring for information outside of the academic realm, determined to find a way to create a more resilient, localized agriculture model. That’s when he discovered Allan Savory and holistic management, which emphasizes responsible land stewardship by

helping ranchers better fit their agricultural practices to their available natural resources. As a man raised in the world of uniform, one-size-fits-all production practices, it was like nothing Jason had ever seen. He devoured every piece of Savory Institute material he could find. “The more I read, the more I knew holistic management was the recipe for moving forward,” Jason reflected. “Since then, I’ve made it my life’s work. I know we can improve societal health and quality of life through agriculture and land management.”



“... We can improve societal health and quality of life through agriculture and land management.”

Around that time, Jason returned to Michigan State — where he’d earned his PhD several years before — as an Associate Professor in the Animal Sciences department. This position gave him a platform to secure university resources to explore holistic management, but he had to be careful: many of his peers and stakeholders had invested time and money into the model he was denouncing. Nonetheless, Jason was eventually given the opportunity to convert the school’s research center into a regenerative ag laboratory. It was his chance to make some serious waves. “We took a normal commercial farm and flipped it on its head overnight,” he explained. “We started doing a lot more intensive soil monitoring and seeing important, quantifiable changes in land and animal health. It seemed natural, but it was the first time a large public university was operating under a holistic context.”

Getting the university to give holistic management a shot was only the beginning, though. Jason continued pushing things further until Michigan State officially became a Savory Institute Hub in 2015. Through this, he and his partners successfully brought revolutionary land management ideas into the rigid world of academia — an unthinkable achievement just a few years before. Thanks to the program’s newfound and unique academic-NGO relationship, their facility suddenly had a unique vantage point and access to resources other hubs didn’t.

“Becoming a hub gave us the chance to make the science behind the movement more sound and allowed us to get holistic management into our classrooms and research centers,” he said. “Now more than ever, our close ties are helping us aggregate data and quantify land impact in ways we can communicate to stakeholders and consumers that can also pass scientific rigor.”

That’s only half the answer to Jason’s food security quest. Luckily, creating regional outlets for food producers is one of the key components of holistic management. So as he continued to run soil tests and measure animal impact on land, Jason helped launch grass-fed markets in the Upper Great Lakes area. He wasted little time, spearheading a multi-pronged effort to connect distributors with local

demand. Right away, he realized how fractured the system was, even in his own backyard. There were suppliers grass-finishing 500-1,000 heads of steer a few miles from MSU campus, and none of that meat was being routed through campus. “We’re serving beef in our cafeterias and restaurants, we’ve got thousands of people tailgating at football games, and none of that is coming from our local community?” he marveled in disbelief. “With the way things were set up, it was easier to get those cattle to Omaha or Houston than five minutes up the road.”

A few years and many meetings later, Jason had turned things around. These days, Michigan State gets 80% of its beef from local suppliers — an incredible feat considering the school is home to over 50,000 students. It’s an example he often cites to show that,

despite common misconceptions, local economies can quickly be altered to best fit their communities’ needs. And since it lends itself to operations focused less on maximizing output and global logistics and more on meeting nearby needs, this localized approach creates mutually beneficial relationships for producers, consumers, the land, and the animals. The best part is, this model can be used by any community, regardless of where it’s located. “Every context is different when it comes to a local food system,” he explains. “That’s why it’s crucial to understand the different factors in various geographical regions. We’re just designing a system to help local producers and consumers form a strong, sustainable relationship with their natural resources.”

The impact of this system is threefold. In addition to fueling local economies — Jason estimates that every dollar spent on beef cattle in a localized model has a \$3.00 multiplier effect — and giving them stronger food security, holistic land management can also sequester carbon from the earth’s atmosphere by healing damaged lands. It’s simple: with stronger, taller vegetation in place, greater amounts of carbon can be put back into the soil. Jason’s especially passionate about this component, which is why Michigan State’s holistic program has made it a priority and taken precise soil health and carbon measurements

since day one. There’s still plenty of work to be done, he says, but they’re on the fast track to publishing quantitative evidence that animal impact can offset CO2 emissions entirely. But to truly exploit this potential, these breakthroughs can’t remain in the doldrums of academia. The information has to go public.

That’s where the Land-To-Market program comes in. Working closely with EPIC and The Savory Institute, Michigan State is helping develop a system that would allow holistically-raised meat products to bare a regenerative label. This wouldn’t just

give responsible companies and producers the recognition they deserve — it would allow consumers to put their money behind food products they know are having a positive impact on the land. It’s the perfect marriage of academic research and consumer-driven markets. “If we’re going to feed the world long-term, we have to be in sync with the natural processes that have preserved earth for millennia,” Jason said. “Our best solution relies on developing methods that produce high amounts of nutrient-dense, high-quality food in localized, sustainable manners. The Land-To-Market program will do exactly that.”

While the progress Michigan State has made in less than a decade is remarkable, it’s helped uncover more questions than answers. With yearly fluctuations in key climate factors like rainfall and temperature, researchers are focused on creating a process, not finding a clear-cut answer. This long-term approach won’t just aid their efforts to establish important trends in their neck of the woods: it’ll help create a system that will ensure holistic management practices and conscious consumerism can thrive around the world.

Admittedly, Jason’s come a long way since he watched communities crumble in Louisiana. He’s not naive enough to believe he’s found the cure to world food scarcity, but he knows his team and partners are making progress that will combat the helplessness he saw back then. With every measurement taken and dollar spent, the argument for regenerative ag is getting stronger by the day. ❖



Jason and his research team are always in the field taking measurements and getting their hands dirty.



THE SAVORY INSTITUTE

ONE ORGANIZATION'S FIGHT TO SAVE THE WORLD'S GRASSLANDS
THROUGH HOLISTIC MANAGEMENT

It all started with a cup of tea. Decades ago, Allan Savory received a knock at the door of his Zimbabwe home. It was an old ranching couple — a strange set of visitors for an accomplished wildlife biologist and ecologist who had long believed animals were a grave threat the environment. Wary of their pursuits, he politely invited them in to talk. As they spoke, the ranchers explained how, no matter what they tried, their land continued to slowly wither away. They were beside themselves. Allan was shocked. “For the first time, it just hit me deeply that ranchers love the land as much as I do,” Allan said in a 2016 video titled *The Story of Meat*. “That eventually led me to understanding that we scientists, for centuries, have had the bull by the udder: we’ve had it wrong.”

Allan walked away from that conversation a changed man. His world had been turned on its head — so much that he committed himself to finding a path forward to heal our planet through animal impact. That’s where the theory of holistic management, a combination of his previous scientific workings and his newfound faith in ranchers and livestock, began. By strict definition, it means “the process of decision-making and planning that gives people the insights and management tools to understand nature: resulting in better, more informed decisions that balance key social, environmental, and financial considerations.” But in laymen’s terms, it is the framework for an animal-centric system that helps people around the world holistically harvest food while

restoring the earth’s rapidly-degrading grasslands. It’s the perfect marriage of ecology and agriculture.

As the years passed, desertification continued to creep into areas once occupied by thick, grassy vegetation. By the early 2000’s, 70% of grasslands were reportedly degraded. Allan watched as these ecosystems, which cover roughly a third of the earth’s land surface and are vital to sequestering carbon from the atmosphere, rapidly fell into decay. He had to do more. So in 2009, he founded The Savory Institute alongside his wife, Jody Butterfield, and a small group of holistic managers. Their goal was simple: provide the means and information to help land stewards worldwide practice holistic management.



At the crux of their mission was the concept of holistic planned grazing, which bunches herds of livestock together by mimicking the predator/prey dynamic. By keeping animals close together and moving them around frequently (as herds have done in nature for millennia) this practice helps harness the healing powers of ruminants to regenerate grasslands and improve soil health. “The cattle are the tool producing wildlife habitats, making rainfall more effective,” Allan said, overlooking a herd grazing. “By letting the animals

feed and produce meat from the grass, we actually are simultaneously using the animals to prepare the soil for grass to grow.”

Holistic management is a simple and versatile strategy that can be practiced anywhere. Rather than parachuting in and telling farmers and ranchers how to raise their animals, Allan believes the best way to truly spread the word is through education. That’s where the Savory Network comes in — an elastic network of hubs across the globe that advocate

for, implement, and facilitate regenerative agriculture and responsible land management in their own ecological contexts. This impact of this network is twofold: it helps rural communities achieve economic independence while healing their lands and providing the Savory Institute with important data on their soil health, microbiology, and more. With over 30 hubs worldwide, including in Patagonia, Sweden, South Africa, Turkey, and the United States, the network’s reach and depth is growing greater by the day.

Allan and his peers have banded together to save the planet through education and compassion. Now, they’ve got strength in numbers to fuel their mission. With their hubs exponentially gaining more prestige, influence, and research capabilities, The Savory Institute is compiling their measurements and data to make a compelling, metric-driven case for regenerative agriculture. There’s never been a better chance to refute the destructive monoculture and mechanization that modern ag has

brought to global food systems and sensitive ecosystems. But they’re not stopping there. In fact, the food revolution is only beginning.

If everything goes according to plan, the Savory Network will encompass over 100 hubs and one billion hectares by 2025. That’s a wildly ambitious goal, but ambition is what has gotten Allan and his crew of renegade ranchers this far. And with a burgeoning arsenal of irrefutable evidence of the economic and

ecological vitality they’ve brought to numerous agrarian communities, they’re better equipped to restore our grasslands and heal our world than ever before. “Ultimately, the only wealth that can sustain any community, economy or nation is derived from the photosynthetic process — green plants growing on regenerating soil,” Allan said. “And if you had to bring it all down to one thing, it would just be that land management needs to become more holistic.” ❧



“Ultimately, the only wealth that can sustain any community, economy or nation is derived from the photosynthetic process — green plants growing on regenerating soil.”



Allan sharing his passion for holistic management in the fields of Zimbabwe

REGENERATIVE RUMINANTS

NATURE'S LAND STEWARDS



As wild as it sounds, there are animals who were specifically put on the earth to maintain the bonds between water and soil, sunlight and vegetation, and the natural balance between humanity and its surrounding resources.

Ruminants — including cows, goats, sheep, deer, and bison — are among the most crucial creatures in the animal kingdom. As our global land stewards, they share a profoundly deep connection with grasslands, soils, waterways, and the atmosphere. Thanks to regenerative agriculture, they're being unleashed back onto the lands they've roamed for thousands of years.

By definition, a ruminant is an animal that acquires nutrients from plants by fermenting them in specialized compartments of their stomachs prior to digestion. In other words, they are biologically adapted to convert the byproduct of photosynthesis into food. Their stomach has several — four, to be exact — chambers that allow them to maximize their nutritional intake when eating vegetation like grass or hay.



The key here is what happens afterwards. Thanks to special microbial actions in their digestive tracts, these animals produce incredibly potent fertilizer through manure. This gives them a unique, symbiotic relationship with the lands they graze: they can help regrow the grasses they eat to ensure the entire system continues running smoothly. In fact, they can actually repair damaged lands and create a net positive return on the ecological system.

Unfortunately, ruminants' abilities to act as land stewards have been largely

interrupted by modern society and mechanized food production. Rather than grazing freely on grasslands as nature intended, many of them have been placed in gruesome feedlots. This has a multi-pronged impact on both the health of the animals and the land. For one, they (typically cows) are unable to graze or move around and usually are not grass-fed. This prevents the animals from consuming their natural diet, aerating soils with their hooves, or stimulating plant growth and improving land health. By depriving these ruminants of opportunities to fertilize pastures and

regulate ecosystems, we're hurting the animals, the planet, and ourselves.

We can do better. Ruminants have the ability to regenerate our lands, heal our soils, and combat climate change. So let's celebrate these incredible animals and help them work their magic. It's what they were put on this earth to do. ❖



Ruminants have the ability to regenerate our lands, heal our soils, and combat climate change.



Section 2

PASSIONS & TARGETS

As a food company, we touch on so many points in society — from our ability to influence public health to our animals' welfare to our impact on the earth and the well-being of our suppliers. That's why we believe in passion before profit. We're proving that, with the right motivation and the proper targets, companies can be for-profit and for-purpose.



LAND TO MARKET

THE LAND TO MARKET PROGRAM: WHERE CONSUMERISM, ACTIVISM, AND EMPOWERMENT CONVERGE

With every passing day, consumers are becoming more cognizant of the impact of their purchases and the companies they're supporting. This movement has given rise to a variety of packaging labels (think *Fair Trade Certified*, *USDA Organic*, *Non-GMO Certified*, etc.) meant to communicate how their suppliers and companies went above and beyond to create better, more responsible products. And while each of these seals stand for significant causes, their programs are all practice-based, not outcome-based. The truth is, there's never been a verification label that empowers people to make informed food and clothing purchases while healing the

environment — until now. Introducing the Land to Market label: the future of food and fiber consumption.

For nearly a decade, The Savory Institute has been spreading the word about Holistic Management to ranchers and farmers around the world. They've been wildly successful in their mission, compiling a global arsenal of meat, dairy, wool and leather producers dedicated to regenerative agriculture and responsible land stewardship. Thanks to their labors, the opportunities for true change in worldwide agriculture have never been greater. But there's always been a missing link that has

hindered these suppliers from sharing their stories with consumers: no direct messaging to consumers. Savory recognized this and deployed their network to forge a full-fledged connection with consumers. The end result is the Land to Market program, which will connect conscientious brands with verified regenerative supply for their consumer products. This will enable consumers to easily identify food and fashion items created through practices that enhance water, soil, and climate health.

The significance of this program's establishment cannot be overstated.

By designing an easy, simple way to indicate which products derive from regenerative agriculture, The Savory Institute is giving people the power to vote with their dollars to support producers are actively working to combat humanity's greatest ecological challenges. Along with Savory, the organizations behind L2M include Ovis 21, Michigan State University, EPIC Provisions, The Nature Conservancy, Texas A&M University, and White Oak Pastures. Collectively, this braintrust spans across thousands of miles, multiple industries, and years of experience. Our differences may be vast, but our belief in this movement is unmatched.

The Land to Market label isn't based in hopes or wishes, though — it's entrenched in digestible data and real science. Thanks to every participating organization's dedication to tracking soil health, water retention, carbon content, and other vital metrics,

Savory plans to provide impact reports and measure ecological improvements connected to the products purchased by consumers. Imagine: people will be able to certifiably know how their purchases are improving the planet's health. This makes for good marketing since consumers and producers are far more likely to commit themselves when they're able to see the fruits of their labor (or dollars).

But little of this matters if nobody can afford to make or buy these products. All too often, cause-based goods are more expensive than their competitors, making them less appealing and accessible for the average customer. The same issues affect producers, too, since many market certifications are expensive and cumbersome to receive. That's why Land to Market's braintrust has worked hard to ensure this process is lean, cost-efficient, and economical across every industry it touches.

Unlike many other packaging labels, consumers will associate Land to Market with its mission — ecological impact — not higher costs.

This is truly the beginning of something special. By giving transparency and access to information back to consumers, we're giving people the ability to make informed decisions about their world. Land to Market couldn't have come sooner, either: with sensitive ecosystems suffering worldwide and communities more susceptible to droughts, floods, and famine, the time to act is now. As daunting as these challenges sound, we have the power to create real change in our world and regenerate our planet's soil and carbon-sequestering grasslands. We just have to make it easier for people to support the cause.

Land to Market will make every trip to the grocery an opportunity to heal our land and environment.



Land to Market will make every trip to the grocery an opportunity to heal our land and environment. This is about more than just market trends, quarterly sales, or a seasonal harvest: it's about creating a better future for our children and grandchildren through our daily purchases. And when it's all said and done, the companies making responsible and forward-thinking choices won't be the exception — they'll be the rule. ❖

For more information please visit savory.global/landtomarket



The Land To Market label will funnel consumer dollars directly to operations that are farming regeneratively and have the data to prove they're making an impact.



HAPPIER ANIMALS, HEALTHIER CONSUMERS, AND PROUD PRODUCERS

IMPROVING SUPPLY CHAINS IS THE BLUEPRINT FOR BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

We're all familiar with the hot-button health terms that appear in every natural foods store, wellness blog, and workout warrior's Instagram feed. From non-GMO to grass-fed to organic and beyond, people are becoming increasingly more aware of what they're putting in their bodies and how to best amplify the influence of the companies they support. Think about it, you'd never see someone wearing a t-shirt of their favorite food brand 10 years ago. But something that's often overlooked by consumers (and how could it not be?) is how quality, transparent supply chains between top-tier producers and companies are

built and sustained. Hint: it's not instantaneous.

Let's start with an example. When EPIC was first founded, we thought it would be (somewhat) easy to locate grass-fed bison suppliers. The only trick would be convincing them to work with us, right? It didn't take long to realize that wasn't how things worked. Unfortunately, hardly any ranchers were raising grass-fed bison then. In fact, only 3% of bison were 100% grass-fed at that point. This wasn't due to suppliers' love of grain-feeding their animals or lack of demand, of course: it stemmed from a

market trend that emerged in the 1980's and 90's, when the bison industry was still in its infancy. While trying to compete with beef products for shelf space — premium beef was still being marketed as grain-fed for flavor and consistency — bison suppliers were under the impression consumers weren't interested in grass-fed. This mindset was still wildly prevalent up until a few short years ago, illustrating the gap that often exists between ranchers and consumers. But all of that changed when we stepped in and became the first brand to educate suppliers about the growing desire for grass-fed bison.



Every EPIC cow and lamb is now 100% grass-fed. We're working feverishly to say the same about our bison.

Once we pledged our commitment to their grass-fed animals and they saw our demand from consumers skyrocket, it was game on. We've been converting more and more ranchers to this model ever since.

This speaks to a larger problem at hand in the food industry. Producers frequently aren't in touch with the latest consumer trends, hindering them from making the proper adjustments to their operations. The consequences of these misunderstandings are magnified when live animals are involved, since making changes to large-scale practices related to diet, grazing, exposure to

chemicals, and harvesting can take years. When you multiply these factors across many different supplier operations, it's easy to see why supply chains cannot be overhauled overnight. As a result, companies who want to truly change things must deploy a measured but relentless dedication to improvement and have faith in their ranchers. It's a hell of a lot harder to buck the system than to go along with the status quo.

Nonetheless, settling for dangerous and harmful practices is unacceptable. Improving animal treatment, ensuring greenhouse gases don't flood our atmosphere, and creating clean

products are smart business decisions and crucial to the future of our global health. The era of waste and land destruction has come and gone, and the time for action has arrived. That's why we're committing our company and network of suppliers to leading the charge for transparency, consumer education, and animal welfare. And after years of work, we're finally seeing the fruits of our labor in our sourcing quality — both in today's products and, more importantly, down the pipeline. We're building a system from the ground up that will better serve and connect people for decades to come.

None of this would be possible without partners who are willing to take risks. Thanks to operations like White Oak Pastures, The Savory Institute, Northstar Bison, and many others leading the charge for holistic management and grass-fed, we've never felt more optimistic about smashing the toxic food system we all inherited. Now we're going for gold: 100% grass-fed ruminants across the board, non-GMO certified and pasture-raised poultry, and an outlet for every part of the animals we source. These

are lofty goals, but we can't afford to hold back.

Change is incremental. Like any grassroots movement, it takes an army of united people to stoke the flames of the food revolution. We — consumers, producers, and companies — need to lean on one another. If companies increase their transparency with consumers, they will gain a stronger appreciation for the gradual progress being made to improve sourcing quality and volume. Congruently, the

more committed companies are to supporting producers who go above and beyond, the greater the supply of quality food will be.

Let's continue to ride this wave and consolidate our power for the better. As we gather momentum, our march towards widespread improved food production practices will eventually shift into an all-out sprint to the finish line. ✦



The supply of pasture-raised chickens and other high-quality animals is slowly growing thanks to consumer demand and producer commitment.





REDEFINING MEAT CONSUMPTION

THE BIRTH OF THE CONSCIOUS CARNIVORE

Meat is bad for your health. Meat is too water-intensive. Meat production is inhumane and unsustainable.

We've heard these generalizations (and others like them) all too many times. Over the past several years, the 'expert' opinions, studies, and outcry condemning the consumption of meat have piled up. They're partially right. Industrialized, mechanized meat production is inhumane, wasteful, and diminishes our natural resources. It's not just harmful to our societies and our animals: it's dangerous for our

planet. But not all meat is created equal — and we're proving that with every product we sell.

Since 2013, we've immersed ourselves in an agricultural movement that's showing meat production can be attractive and moral. It's known as the food revolution. This grassroots effort is based on two principles: responsibly raising animals and holistically managing land. The key here is acknowledging that every component of the food production process — from the animals to the pastures to the

ranchers — is a living, breathing thing, rather than part of an assembly line. It's a simple but crucial distinction that has gotten lost in the mix over the past several decades. In taking an intentional, compassionate approach to making food we're proud to share with others, we're incrementally proving there's two sides to every story. Meat can be good. Meat can be humane, sustainable, and even regenerative. And it can be the food of the future.

It all begins with the consumer, which is why we've made it a point to reinsert our fans into the food production process. We're proving people want to connect with their food and the people who produce it. So when we began creating quality products from humanely-raised animals that are healthier, better for us, and better for the earth, we made sure our consumers could discern honest meat from the rest. Thus, the term 'conscious carnivore' was born.

As our business has grown, our message and consumers' voices have amplified. With every dollar they spend on our products, they're casting a vote for responsible practices that take a long-term, holistic approach to food and how it impacts the world around us. And as this movement has gained traction, it's become easier and easier for us to prove why being an ethical, transparent business directly correlates to being a successful business. We're showing that, when given a choice, a rapidly-increasing percentage of the population is choosing to support businesses like EPIC. People want to be a part of something bigger than themselves.



We're not naive, though. Brands that go above and beyond are still a rarity and control a small part of the overall market. This is especially true in the meat industry. Our sourcing and practices aren't perfect either, but we don't let perfect stand in the way of progress: we're focused on pushing the needle and compounding incremental improvements with ceaseless passion. Despite our industry's current standing, we couldn't be more excited, encouraged, and motivated by what we've seen so far. In just a few short years, we went from a side hustle for two kids in their mid-20's to a nationally-acclaimed company in the natural foods space — and we're just getting started. As we continue to grow in reach, volume, and variety, we're going to exponentially increase our influence and ability to connect people with their food on a deeper plane.

The fact is, taking the easy way out isn't an option — not when it comes to our food, our animals, and the world we inhabit. Our consumers are standing proof that responsibly-sourced meat and regenerative agriculture are not only attainable: they're the only way we can defeat climate change, the feedlots fueling it, and the dangerous practices that have overrun our industry. Together, we're proving that voting with your dollars truly can change the world. ↩



REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

OUR BEST CHANCE TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE AND SECURE OUR PLANET'S FUTURE



For thousands of years, monstrous herds of animals roamed the earth. These beasts covered vast swaths of land in search of food, water, and safety from predators. Their presence was integral, both as a food source for hunters and as ecological regulators. This was especially true for ruminant like goats, cattle, buffalo, sheep, and deer, whose stomachs have the ability

to ferment plants through special microbial actions. The result: a highly potent manure that's incredibly valuable as a fertilizer. When paired with the natural soil aeration provided by their hoofs, these animals could stimulate the biological elements of healthy grass and soil in ways no man-made tool ever has.

These factors created a symbiotic, cyclical relationship between the planet and its inhabitants. The grass fed the animals, the animals fertilized the soils, and the grass grew back taller and stronger while the animals were away. Unfortunately, as humanity proliferated, it slowly chiseled away at the size and frequency of these herds. We hindered their roaming capabilities by putting up fences or killing off their predators, limiting their ability to impact lands like they once could. Simultaneously, we began employing harsh farming methods and tools like tilling, synthetic fertilizers, and

pesticides that stripped soils of vital nutrients and left them little time to recover between harvests. Suddenly, our natural land stewards were no longer able to do their job. The system was shattered.

This sequence began years ago, but we're feeling its strongest tremors today. As grasslands and soils have withered away without animal impact to heal them, they've become increasingly infertile and unable to absorb carbon from the atmosphere — a tragic development with the threat of climate change on the rise. It's

become clear we have to find a way to decelerate its effects. That's where regenerative agriculture comes in. By simulating the natural movement of animal herds through planned rotational grazing patterns and unleashing the power of ruminants to promote naturally thriving ecosystems, regenerative agriculture can heal previously damaged lands. Even more importantly, it can reverse previous destruction to our atmosphere. That's because healthy grasses from holistically managed lands remove carbon dioxide from our air and put it back where it belongs: the soil.



Ruminants like goats are the key players in regenerative agriculture.

This isn't just an idea — it's a proven strategy. Over the past four decades, Allan Savory and The Savory Institute have lead the charge for changing our global food production model and embracing a holistic approach to agriculture. Through taking soil samples, monitoring carbon content, and executing countless grassland reclamation projects, they've proven regenerative agriculture works. They've shown it can bring degenerated land back from the dead, it can use carbon from the atmosphere as fuel for vegetation, and it can make up for the damage we've caused to our world¹. Now is the time to unleash it.

There's no time to waste. With our animals and the planet disconnected, our grasslands — which cover between 20-40% of the earth's land surface — have deteriorated. Desertification has slowly swept across the globe, incrementally destroying the precious few areas of productive land we have left for food production. Even worse, our soils' ability to absorb carbon for plant growth has vastly decreased, leaving us helpless against the dangerously high levels of greenhouse gases that modern life and agricultural practices have created. With rising tides and global temperatures, we're (literally) in hot water.

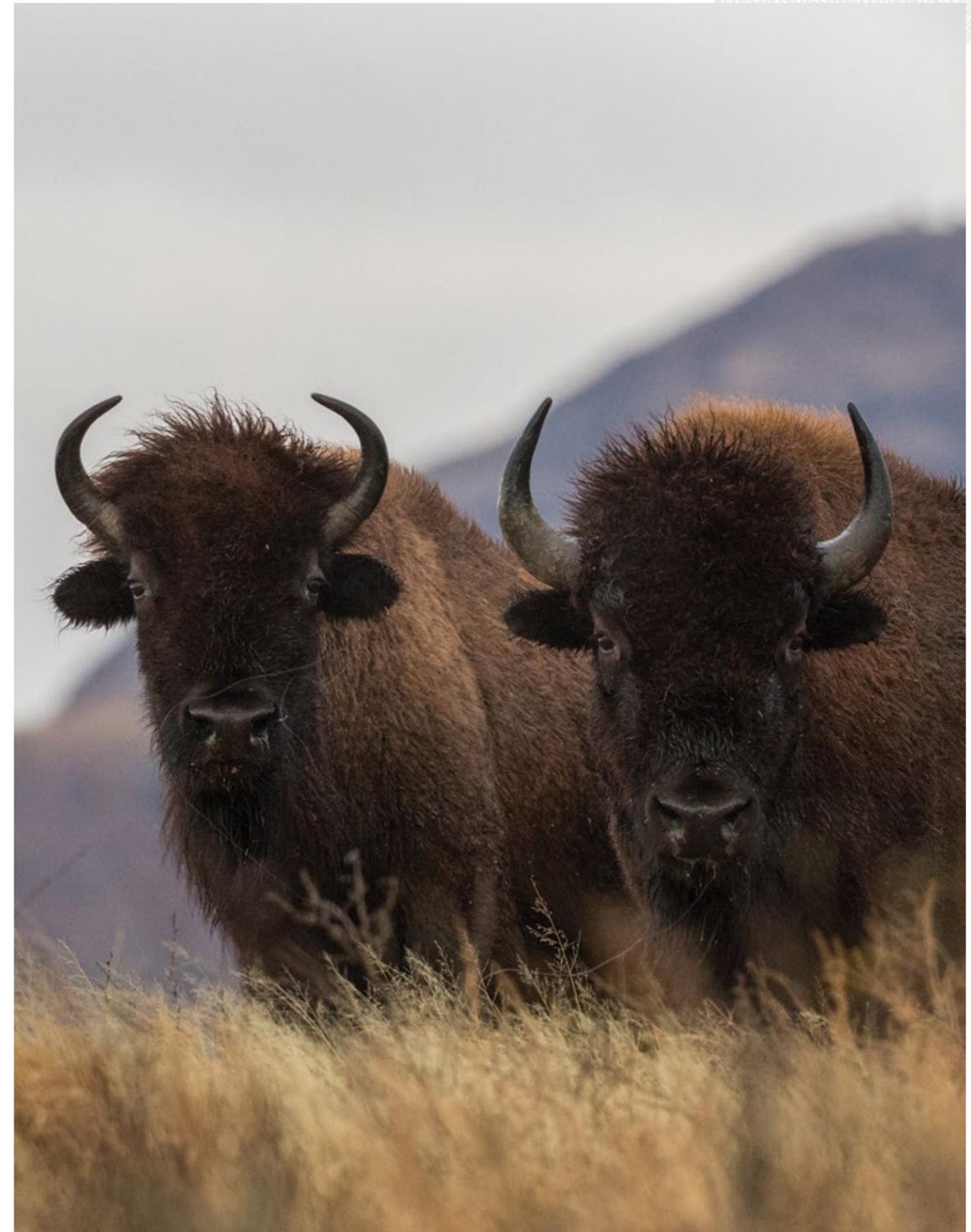
That's why we can't sit still anymore. The time has come to stand up to the Big Ag enterprises that kill ecosystems with mass production, monoculture, feedlots, tilling, and dangerous chemicals. Instead, we have to embrace regenerative agriculture, return our ruminants to the pastures, and allow them to do what they do best: heal our lands. It's the best thing for our animals, our planet, and our future.

We know this is a big ask, but we've had one of the key ingredients to defeating climate change under our feet this whole time. Don't you think it's about time we use it? ♡



The bison's ability to fertilize and revive grasslands make it a key actor in regenerative ag.

¹ Teague, W.R., et al. "The role of ruminants in reducing agriculture's carbon footprint in North America." Journal of Soil and Water Conservation, vol. 71, no. 2, Mar. 2016, pp. 156–163., www.jswnonline.org/content/71/2/156.refs.



DEGENERATIVE, REGENERATIVE, & SUSTAINABLE

A CLEAR LOOK AT THE THREE TYPES OF FOOD SYSTEMS
IMPACTING OUR PLANET



In recent years, people have become increasingly proactive in understanding how their actions — from the clothes they wear and the food they eat to the way they get to work every day — affect the world around them. This stems from a deepening recognition that our planet is equipped with finite resources. The results of this awakening have only begun to scratch the surface of the sweeping changes yet to come, but it's

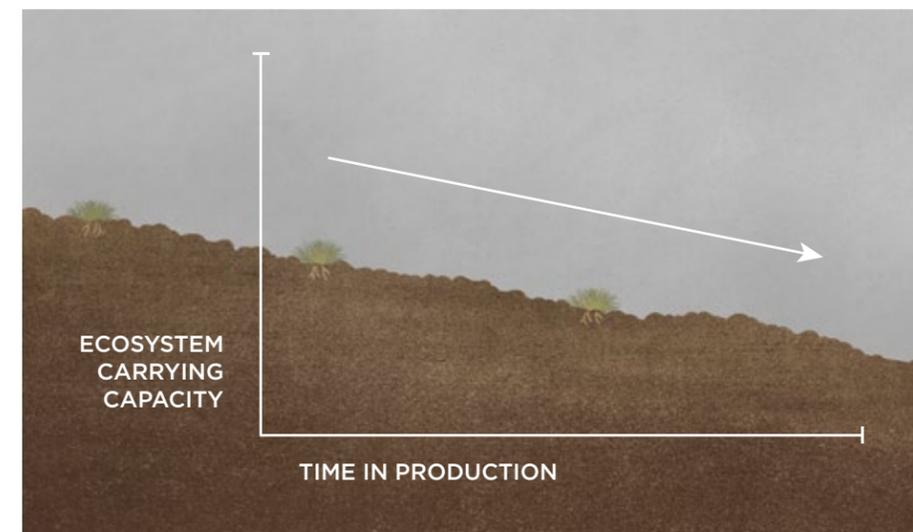
clear that we as a species need to take far better care of the earth.

But before we can expect others to grasp the importance of regenerative agriculture for addressing worldwide issues like famine, topsoil loss, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, and climate change, it's crucial to first understand how it stacks up against degenerative and sustainable models.

The Degenerative Model

Degenerative agriculture does exactly as its name indicates: it deteriorates the planet, strips it of natural resources, and altogether operates under a parasitic relationship with the world. The majority of humanity in today's world uses this model out of tradition, convenience, affordability, and, in some cases, ignorance. At the center of degenerative ag is the view that we as humans can take what we want from the earth without second-guessing the long-term implications of our actions — essentially, that the resources around us are limitless and there for the taking. This way of thinking manifests itself in many forms, but is most common in modern food systems.

Picture a vast field of plowed farmland. Row upon row of tilled soil sits perfectly aligned and symmetrical, a testament to human innovation and



power over nature. Despite the neatness and short-term productivity of this model, it's akin to repeatedly gauging our planet's most precious resource: its soil. Because the most modern form of degenerative agriculture — huge plots of monoculture crops, as previously described — seeks to impose itself on ecosystems rather than working with them, it weakens the ability of soil to

absorb rainfall, maintain healthy biodiversity, and replenish itself for future prosperity. Degenerative models are also gravely endangering our grasslands, our water systems, our ecosystems, our climate, and the chances of survival for future generations. This extractive system cannot continue to exist if we hope to address the mounting list of ecological concerns we as a species are facing.



The Sustainable Model

Our friends at Kiss The Ground argue the movements toward sustainability and conservation were born out of reaction to our planet's degeneration. We completely agree. As mentioned in this segment's opening paragraph, people are waking up to the idea that our current relationship with the world isn't healthy and, furthermore, is unsustainable.

That's why this model seeks to do less harm by putting an end to degenerative practices and conserving the resources we've got left.

There's nothing fundamentally wrong with sustainability. It recognizes a need to shift away from harmful, wasteful food production systems and the havoc they've already wreaked on

the world. It argues for more responsible interactions with our natural resources and taking on a more mindful approach to how we feed, clothe, and move ourselves. But it falls short. Sustainability would be the perfect approach to take in a world whose resources were still at full capacity — but considering how much damage we've already caused the earth

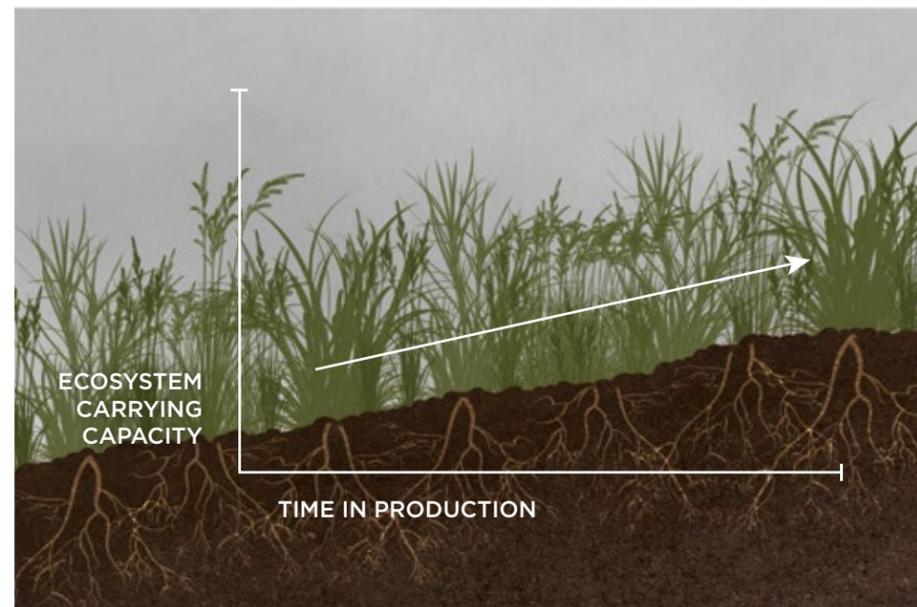
and impacted its potency, does it really make sense to simply try to save what we've got left?

In the ideal world of sustainability, the best outcome possible would be leaving the planet exactly as we found it. To us, that falls short of the overarching mission: leaving this place better than we found it.

The Regenerative Model

Over the past several years, the belief in developing a food system that renews, regenerates, and restores our planet has wildly proliferated. Fueled by a growing number of renegade scientists, the concept of regenerative agriculture has become the rallying cry for a movement that recognizes how we can work with the earth — rather than against it — to address the greatest threats to its vitality. In other words, it seeks to do the exact opposite of what the degenerative model does, and goes beyond sustainable. It aims to heal the wounds we've inflicted on our planet and provide some much-needed ecological rehabilitation.

This may seem idealistic, but there's already a blueprint for how we can live regeneratively. The key here is working with the world's natural processes to revitalize its soils, its biodiversity, its ability to absorb



water, its ecosystems, and therefore its ability to foster life. Encouraging healthier, stronger soils is the faster way to kick start our planet's intertwined ecological system and set course for a path of regeneration and improvement. Animal impact (especially with nature's land

stewards, ruminants) lies at the heart of this. Taking a regenerative approach is about radically shifting the way we view our relationship with our planet. We're *part* of the world, not masters of it.



We're *part* of the world,
not masters of it.

When compared side-by-side, it's obvious which model is the most promising. The harmful, degenerative relationship humanity has imposed on the earth has gone on for too long. Now is the time for us to act and change our ways. Making the shift to regenerative will surely require time, adjusting, and some sacrifices, but it's the best chance we've got to hit the restart button. Only once we've acknowledged the need to encourage the earth's natural systems rather than impede them will we truly have set the table for a better world moving forward.

A golden opportunity has presented itself. Let's make the most of it. ✨



Special thanks to Kiss The Ground for assisting us with this article and for being a key leader in the regenerative revolution.

MULTI-SPECIES OPERATIONS

WHY COLLABORATION IS CRUCIAL IN NATURE & AGRICULTURE



A chicken catches a ride on a goat at White Oak Pastures.

Isolation does not breed success on the farm — no matter what modern, mechanized agriculture models say. Since humanity transitioned from hunter-gatherer civilizations to early agrarian communities, people have always operated multi-species and multi-crop operations. Only in the last century have many farms converted to the single-crop, monoculture approach that rebuffs our world's natural synchrony and destroys ecosystems. But just as their ancestors did for thousands of years before them, greater amounts of farmers and ranchers are realizing that integrating multiple species into their operations is the most efficient, productive, and healthy form of land stewardship.

A multitude of animals belong on a farm because each serves a specific role in large-scale land health. For instance, cows, goats, sheep, pigs, chickens, and turkeys should all be there. You can even mix in some bison if you don't have sheep (since they can spread harmful diseases to one another). Cows and bison are the key ruminant actors, responsible for aerating topsoil with their hooves while infusing their specialized, potent fertilizer into the land. Without them, grasslands couldn't grow as robustly and regenerative agriculture wouldn't exist. Goats and sheep, while also ruminants, are like nature's weed-eaters: they gobble up every weed or piece of brush they come across. They're vital to sustaining healthy pastures and reclaiming areas that have been overtaken by woody and invasive vegetation. Next up, the chickens and turkeys. No matter what the industrialized operations that push for 'vegetarian-fed' chickens say, these poultry pickers play a crucial role in the fields by eating insects and scavenging through the droppings of the other animals. This doesn't just give them a hearty diet — it helps

debug pastures and orchards and spreads manure around while killing off dangerous parasites. Finally, there's the pigs. Though they're not the cleanest bunch, they can also play a critical role in farm health by rooting (digging up roots with their snouts), which tills soils and helps clear land. Collectively, these animals form a pasture maintenance crew that no machine or chemical can match.

This isn't a heartfelt story of natural collaboration: it's about efficiency. Animals such as horses, goats, sheep, and cattle all graze on different parts of pasture and vegetation, so none of them are as effective land stewards when raised in isolation. For instance, horses are selective eaters and tend to overgraze their favorite spots rather than spreading out their feeding areas. This can leave acres of underutilized and even untouched forage that farmers are forced to kill off with herbicides that degrade land and soils over time. Because goats and sheep instinctively target weeds and invasive brush species that encroach on pastures, they're the perfect way to address underutilized forage or revive

... Every animal on multi-species operations serves a purpose in ensuring their lands are healthy, strong, and resilient. Similarly to humans, these animals are stronger together and were meant to share their pastures, not exist in isolation.

eroding pastureland. Of course, these animals couldn't improve land health without the powerful droppings of cows and bison, and they would be subjected to greater risk of disease if chickens weren't there to kill off the parasites. This efficiency isn't accidental — it's a byproduct of the fact that these animals have always existed together in nature.

Multi-species operations are more productive, too. Every animal's role in the pasture creates a compounding effect on its peers' capabilities. As was previously discussed, chickens consume a more balanced diet while making the cows' fertilizer more effective, goats and sheep boost pasture health while consuming brushy vegetation, and so on. These symbiotic relationships allow producers to focus less of their time and resources on destructive and expensive shortcuts (like chemical sprays, antibiotics, and lab-made feeds) and more on planned rotational grazing and holistic management. When it comes to life on the pasture, a natural remedy is always the best prescription.

Joint animal impact creates healthier pastures, soils, and ecosystems. As their relationships can attest to, every animal on multi-species operations serves a purpose in ensuring their lands are healthy, strong, and resilient. Similarly to humans, these animals are stronger together and were meant to share their pastures, not exist in isolation. Bringing cows, goats, sheep, chickens, pigs, and bison — if sheep aren't present — together is a recipe for greater land health and a brighter future for future generations. It also ensures our food comes from farms and ranches that operate holistically and look out for animal welfare, unlike the mechanical feedlot model that has overtaken big ag and is stripping our planet of vital resources. It's pretty

straightforward: why separate our animals if keeping them together is more efficient, more humane, and better for our bodies and planet?

Of course, multi-species operations are not flawless. They require a greater deal of energy and attention to detail, and can pose logistical problems when it comes to things like fencing — different types of fencing is more effective with some animals than others, for instance — water consumption, and rotational grazing. They also can be more difficult to market and, when implemented and managed poorly, can be vulnerable to inter-species diseases (like those transmitted between bison and sheep). But when you consider the

vast number of advantages that integrating animals brings to pasture health and business capability, it's clear these issues are dwarfed by their large-scale benefits.

The concept of multi-species farms sounds complex at first glance, but it couldn't be simpler. Think about the children's song "Old MacDonald Had a Farm." The farmer in it has cows, pigs, ducks, chickens, lambs, and goats. Considering a toddler can grasp the concept of bringing animals together, the rest of us need to get with the program.

Oh, and Old MacDonald: it's about time you get yourself a bison. ❖



Pigs and chickens are happy to do the dirty work necessary to keep pastures healthy





FROM CITY SLICKER TO BISON RANCHER

SARAH GLEASON HARNESSED HER INEXTINGUISHABLE PASSION TO CORRAL HER DREAM — BUT SHE'S JUST GETTING STARTED

Nothing about Sarah Gleason's appearance or background screams 'rancher' to the casual onlooker. To start, she's a woman — a young one, at that. It doesn't take an industry expert to recognize how male-dominated the ranching world is. It's not exactly in her genes, either. "I'd have to go back generations to find the last producer or farmer in my family. I don't even know who that would be, to be honest," she admits.

None of that matters, though. When you start looking in the right places — like her ambition, drive, and 'who gives a shit what you think' attitude — it's clear Sarah was meant to run bison. And if you need more proof than that, just check the tags on her herd: they read "Gleason Bison." But to appreciate Sarah's rare standing in the world of bison producers, you need to rewind back a few years, when her dream of ranching was still a revelry.

Sarah was born in Fort Myers, Florida in the mid-1980's and moved to Denver, Colorado at age two. The daughter of a healthcare professional with an eye for the outdoors, she was always in the garden planting vegetables and flowers as a child. She loved riding horses — so much that she often pretended she was on one when she wasn't out at the stables. From an early age, it was obvious she wasn't meant for white-collar work.

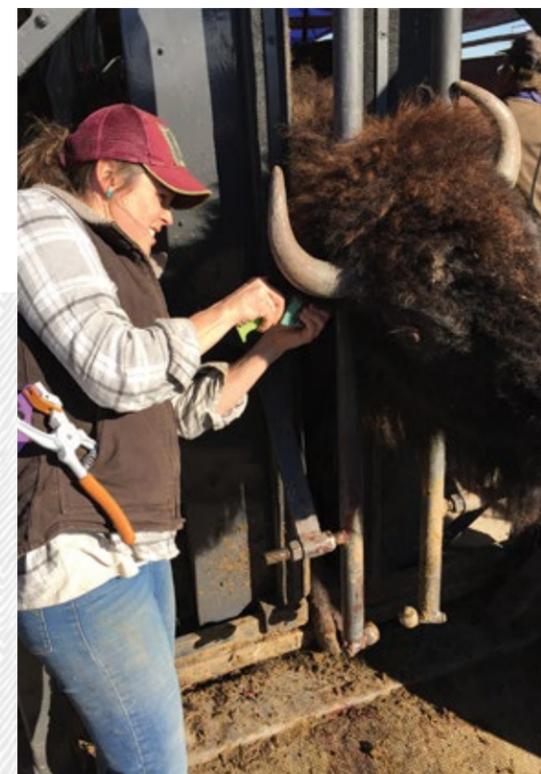
She was also one hell of an athlete. By age 12, Sarah was training at the Olympic Training Center with the Colorado Springs Swim Team. A few years later, she swam at Texas Christian University and got her degree in political science. After graduating, she spent the summer river guiding in Buena Vista, Colorado and the winter in Keystone,

Colorado. During this time, she met her future husband, Mike. They loved it out there, but Sarah felt like something was missing. "Those of us who are very goal-oriented, especially lifelong athletes like myself, need to have a mission," she explained. "I was searching for a higher calling."

So she hopped in the car with Mike and a handful of possessions — including their dog and cat — to head to Washington, D.C. to put her degree to work. It was the first of many leaps of faith she'd take in her pursuit of purpose. But after working for a congressman from 2008-2010 and then leapfrogging to the Marine Fish Conservation Network to help with fishing industry and conservation policy, Sarah's flame was extinguished. She needed to get outside and venture off the beaten path. "I

realized working in an office all day, every day was not the thing for me," she said. "I had to find a way to be outside."

Desperate for a change of pace, Sarah and Mike moved to Durango, Colorado, a small city nestled in the southwest corner of the state. She immediately fell in love with its natural beauty and escapability. Invigorated by her newfound access to nature, Sarah realized her officeless dream job laid in the pasture, assumedly with horses — until Mike gave her an even wilder idea: bison. "I thought it was a ridiculous idea at first," Sarah admitted. "How was I, a 26-year-old girl with no livestock or agricultural background, supposed to raise these enormous, ferocious beasts? It seemed insane."



Mimi (R) and Sarah (L) after working their first roundup together in 2015

But the more Sarah thought about it, the more the idea stuck. She ran with it, joining the National Bison Association (NBA) and inhaling their Bison 101 handbook. Things got more serious when she started contacting producers from the NBA registry to ask if she could check out their operations. She wasn't afraid to ask questions or get dirty — she made it her business to know every bison owner in Colorado. "I'm sure it seemed absurd to people when I told them I was going to become a bison rancher," Sarah said. "But to be frank, I didn't care. I knew that's what I was going to do."

The same ruthless competitive spirit that had propelled Sarah to athletic prestige was fueling her bison chase. Things really took a turn once Mike got into medical school and they moved up to Denver in 2012. By then Sarah was working in the marketing department at Whole Foods, but she was infatuated with the world of bison. She had visited several ranches and had participated in multiple roundups at that point, but she realized she'd have to hurdle a couple massive obstacles to complete her mission. "It dawned on me that if you don't have livestock or land and aren't independently wealthy, it's incredibly challenging to get into the bison industry," she said.

Sarah had none of those things, but she didn't take it as a hint to quit. Instead, she pushed back even harder. And finally, after years of researching, learning, hoping, and networking, her saving grace came in the form of a South Dakota ranching powerhouse named Mimi Hillenbrand. It was the summer of 2015 — only a few months after Sarah had started as the Director of Marketing



at The Savory Institute — and Mimi, the owner of 777 Bison Ranch and a holistic management guru, was visiting their offices. Sarah had read all about Hillenbrand and knew that if anyone could help her break into the bison game, it was Mimi. So she went for it. "I basically pulled her aside and expressed my desire to be a bison producer and asked if she'd consider running animals for me," she explained. "I had to give it a shot."

There's typically not much incentive for ranchers to run other people's herds on their land. With resources always at a premium, they usually need to conserve them for their own animals and operations. But after thinking it over a bit, Mimi invited Sarah up to work the fall roundup with the 777 crew. A month and a half later, she invited Sarah up again — this time for the Custer State Park and 777 auctions. That's when things got real. Alongside her trusted

ranch manager and bison guru, Moritz Espy, Mimi informed Sarah that she wanted to help her get into the industry and would be happy to run animals for her. Furthermore, Mimi wanted to become her mentor. "Sarah's enthusiasm was a little overwhelming at first, but how can one resist a person with that much passion for something?" Mimi reflected. "Agriculture needs new, young, driven, passionate people and they need help getting their feet in the door. I look forward to the day Sarah has her own ranch." Sarah added: "I'd been clawing to get into the bison world for six years without knowing how things would ever work out. And suddenly, it hit me: it finally happened. I'll never forget that moment."

Things progressed quickly from there. After mulling things over, Sarah decided her best bet was to commit to a plan where she'd own a sizable herd after four years. And in October of 2015 — a



little over a year after the two met — she purchased 15 pregnant bison, putting her on track to own 30-40 by 2020. Gleason Bison, LLC was officially in business. Becoming a legitimate bison producer changed everything for Sarah. She finally has skin in the game — and she's not going to stand idly while her herd grows at 777. She and Mimi have continued to grow as friends and ranching companions, galvanizing her to spread the word on holistic management and grass-feeding bison. "Truly changing this industry will require a balancing act between consumer demand, producer adaptation, and patience," she said. "But we can do it. I'm going to fight to restore our soils and grasslands and make grass-fed bison the norm."

There's still plenty more milestones left for Sarah and Gleason Bison. Atop her to-do list: finding a ranch for her incoming herd, which will be paid off in just a few years. From there, she'll be entirely responsible for her animals for the first time — a challenge that she relishes. Looking back, this experience has taught Sarah as much about people as it has about animals. She hopes to help others someday the way Mimi and the 777 Bison Ranch crew helped her. "For anyone else out there who has big dreams, in agriculture or elsewhere, just go for it," she said. "Relentlessly and unapologetically chase your goals."

And as for the ranchers who laughed in her face or wrote her off for daring to become a female bison rancher: "They can come out to my roundup and work my animals." ❧



Section 3

VICTORIES

It's important to relish your hard-earned victories and ride their momentum onto greater heights. There's still plenty of work to be done in the grand scheme of things, but we're damn proud of these achievements and what they mean for larger social health.



AMERICAN BISON

WHY OUR NATIONAL MAMMAL STILL NEEDS OUR HELP

Last May, former President Barack Obama signed the American Bison Legacy Act into law, designating the bison as the National Mammal of the United States. Finally, their place in our country's cultural, economic, and ecological heritage was recognized. Unfortunately, the act didn't include environmental protections to get bison back on the grasslands they once roamed or establish standards for their treatment. That's a problem — one that we're avidly working to help address. Because if we truly want to honor the bison's legacy in American history and preserve its future, we need to support regenerative ranchers

and conscious companies and actively work to improve the bison's quality of life. Without further action, this title means little for the fate of these brilliant beasts.

Experts estimate that up to 60 million American bison roamed North America's vast grasslands when European settlers first arrived. Traveling in massive herds, they were a critical life-giving source to indigenous people across millions of hectares. Simultaneously, they played an essential role in shaping the ecology of the Great Plains and the earth's atmosphere as a whole. By grazing heavily on native

grasses, aerating the soil with their hooves, and fertilizing topsoil with their manure, they helped vegetation and other animal populations flourish while keeping carbon-sequestering grasslands strong. But as colonization swept across North America, their herds were slowly curtailed and pushed further and further west until things reached a breaking point in the mid-19th century. In a combination of American expansionism and a desire to eliminate the animals Native Americans relied on most, U.S. leaders openly endorsed the mass-slaughtering of millions of bison.

At the height of their killing, four million died between 1872-1874. By the late 1880's, there were less than 100 free-ranging bison left in the United States.

The impact of this was two-fold. In a matter of years, the bison population losses grew from a slow burn into a wildfire that nearly consumed their existence. It didn't take long for the U.S. to pay the price for replacing bison — the animal most responsible for shaping its grasslands — with improperly managed cattle and rows of degenerative monoculture cropland. Without the bison there to nurture their native plants and ecosystems and their topsoil exposed from constant tilling for row crops, the Great Plains rapidly deteriorated. Sixty years later, the region's loose topsoil and fledgling fields gave way to the dust bowl's formation, nearly breaking the back of middle America.

Thankfully, things have improved since then. With the country's bison population withering away, American animal conservation groups recognized it as an endangered species in need of saving. As a result, small pockets of land — many privately owned — were carved out for conservancy efforts over the past century. One of the least expected voices to rally behind bison: ranchers and meat producers. Believe it or not, converted cattlemen have been instrumental in growing the bison population from around 30,000 a few decades ago to roughly 400,000 as of 2016. As bison products have skyrocketed in popularity, so has the number of buffalo. The mainstream discourse has yet to shift beyond their population size, though. Consequently, industry negligence and federal regulations subsidize and

encourage harmful practices like grain-feeding animals, tilling soil, spraying pesticides and using chemical fertilizers. Our national mammal deserves better, and it's up to us to demand it.

There are encouraging legal precedents here. When the bald eagle was listed as an endangered species in 1966, only 417 nesting pairs were left in America. But thanks to laws like the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the birds now have over 10,000 breeding pairs, have protected habitats, and are no longer facing extinction. Similarly, the Northern Rocky Mountain wolf (which was listed as endangered in 1973) was revived by legislation that got them back in native ecosystems, like Yellowstone National Park. The point is this: the American government has a part to play here — just maybe not a key one.

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The fact is, consumers and companies have to be the key catalysts for change here. The movement for grass-fed bison meat and the proper management of animals has grown tremendously, indicating that more people are voting with their dollars to support ranchers who are helping animals eat and live as they were biologically intended. But there's still plenty of room to grow, which is why the National Bison Association (NBA) launched its "Bison 1 Million" campaign with a single goal: grow North America's bison population to one million strong by 2027. It's a huge leap — that's over double the amount that currently live on the continent — but it's certainly attainable considering the NBA's wide network of ranchers and affiliates. With the animals' ranching, production, and consumption on the rise, there's plenty of reason to be optimistic about Bison 1 Million's prospects.

We've got a decision to make. If we truly want to honor the bison's legacy, a title won't suffice. Rather, we as producers and consumers must make an effort to improve their quality of life by supporting ranchers who are doing things right and aiding the NBA in its mission to raise bison awareness. This means continuing to grow the food revolution against typical industrial food practices, while demanding our lawmakers pass legislation that protects vital habitats and allows the animals to graze on public land. Hand in hand, our grassroots efforts — bolstered by stronger political measures — can ensure America's National Mammal gets the opportunity to inhabit and restore the grasslands it has called home for thousands of years. ❖



ONE MAN'S MEAT IS ANOTHER MAN'S POISON

EARLIER THIS YEAR, THE TEXAS GOVERNMENT TRIED TO WAGE CHEMICAL WARFARE IN ITS 'FERAL HOG APOCALYPSE.' WITH OUR STATE WILDLIFE AND SAFETY ON THE LINE, WE STEPPED UP.

Feral hogs are dangerous, destructive, and disliked in our neck of the woods. Rightfully so, too — any rancher can tell you horror stories about the damage their passels can cause to crops in a matter of minutes. They're a terror and threat to our state if left undisturbed.

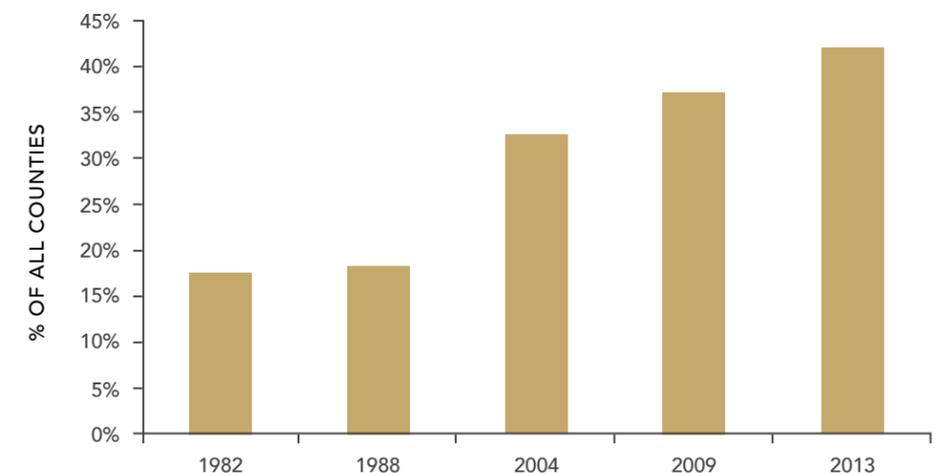
Naturally then, their reputation made them the target of frequent attacks by Texas' Agricultural Commissioner, Sid

Miller. In fact, he's made a name for himself and his dislike of the invasive swine, championing multiple laws aimed at decimating their populations. His proudest accomplishment is likely the passage of the 'Pork Chopper' Bill of 2011, which allows hunters to gun the hogs down in mass from helicopters. But last February, he took things to a dangerous new level by proposing we ditch the guns and break out the poison.

Miller and the Texas Department of Agriculture's proposal was simple: poison the pigs and be done with it. Their poison of choice — one that Miller himself approved — was warfarin, an anticoagulant that slowly kills animals through excruciating internal bleeding that leaves their intestines mangled and blue. Just the thought of it is enough to send shivers down your spine. It was the most savage attempt yet by a government official to provide a quick-fix for a problem we created. After all, these pigs are running wild because humans decimated the populations of their natural predators, even killing off several species entirely.

Our opposition to this tactic wasn't just for humane reasons. Commissioner Miller's strategy was dangerous, ill-conceived, and had the potential to wreak havoc on our state's ecosystems. He didn't propose any safeguards or protections against the

spread of this poison into water channels or through other animals: the plan was to simply mix the warfarin into large bins with hog feed and leave them out as traps. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see how the poison could be eaten by other animals or spread from infected pig carcasses to our state water systems and supermarkets. Nothing in nature exists in isolation.



The percentage of counties in the United States with feral swine present from 1982 to 2013 (USDA 2015)

We knew there were better ways to address this issue. Rather than viewing these hogs as a pest in need of exterminating at any environmental or moral cost, we recognized it was wiser to see them as a source of food and economic growth. Citing our usage of the pigs in our wild boar bars — which are sourced from 100% wild Texas pigs and provide a constructive solution to these difficult circumstances — we argued the best path forward was to create supply chains that would control the hogs' populations. This

would allow us to mitigate their impact, chip away at the unfathomably large number of feral hogs statewide, and ensure thousands of pounds of nourishing meat wasn't put to waste. It's a win-win-win.

We didn't pound our chests on social media or gripe about this crisis internally, though — we took action. Upon hearing about Commissioner Miller's plan, our co-founder, Taylor Collins, published an op-ed in Texas' largest newspaper, The Dallas Morning

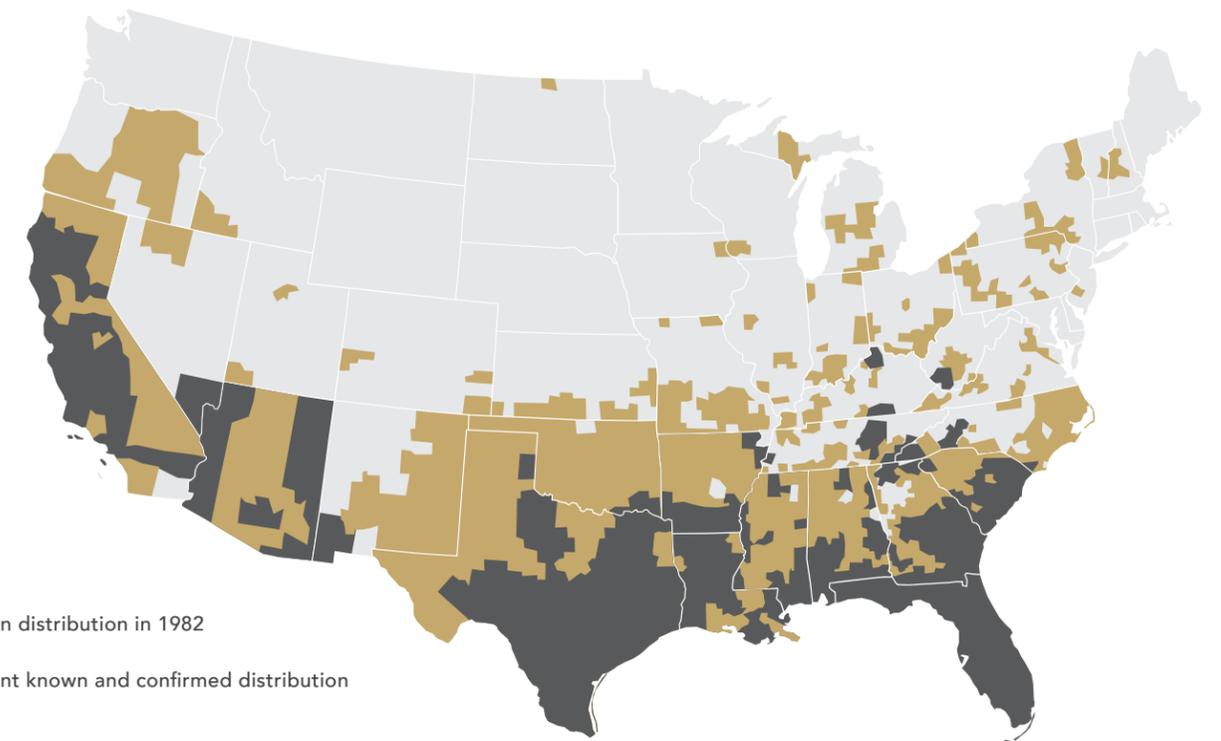
News, expressing our vehemence to seeing our state's ecosystem deteriorate into a battleground for gruesome, experimental chemical warfare. From there, we brought thousands of people together and rallied them around the need for responsibility, not short-sightedness. And it worked. Soon after demanding accountability from our state representatives, the proposal was rescinded and the poison company hightailed it out of Texas. It was an incredible outcome, to say the least.

This was a major win for the conservation and wildlife protection communities. Had this plan gone through, Texas' feral hogs wouldn't have just been at risk: our entire state would have been compromised. But thanks to the tireless work by so many of our peers in the hunting, agricultural, and wildlife industries — along with thousands of spirited consumers and citizens — it didn't. We staked our claim as the true defenders of Texas. The good guys won, and it felt damn good.

Nonetheless, there's still plenty of work to be done and we have to remain diligent. Our wildlife, animals, and ecosystems will only remain safe if we're loud, proud, and willing to fight. So let's keep this up and spread the word — we can't afford to be ignored. ⚡



Nothing in nature exists in isolation.



Known and confirmed feral swine range in (2012) compared with historic 1982 range. [Miller and Sweeney 2013, National Feral Swine Mapping System (<http://swine.vet.uga.edu/nfsms/>)]



THE WHOLE ANIMAL PROJECT

OUR REVOLUTIONARY EFFORT TO ELIMINATE FOOD WASTE

Every year, over a billion tons of food is wasted in the United States — and that's just the debris we know of. One of the greatest contributors to food waste that people rarely talk about is the food production process itself. Unfortunately, the meat industry is a major culprit of this for one particular reason: people often only purchase the 'premium' cuts of meat. This puts many producers in the awful position of raising animals that will be harvested for only specific parts of their meat rather than their entire bodies. When we found this out, we were appalled. It's a complete

disservice to the proud animals who give their lives for human consumption and a black mark on our industry. So we decided to do something about it.

That's where our Whole Animal Project comes in. Inspired by our company values to 'honor nature' and 'do more with less,' we set out to create products that truly value the animals we harvest. Compiling waste and throwing away food just isn't in our DNA — and it certainly wasn't during the previous millennia our ancestors walked the earth.

It's a simple premise: we use more parts of the animals we source to create more delicious products while simultaneously minimizing waste. But getting our Whole Animal Project off the ground was easier said than done. Because the vast majority of suppliers don't prioritize minimizing waste, we had to seek out the ones who shared our values, dedication, and vision. We also had to fine-tune our processes and ensure we had the ability to use parts like bones, fats, organ meat, and skin. Luckily, we had no shortage of motivation to reach our goal. We knew it was the right thing to do.

The Whole Animal Project made its debut in January of 2016. Nearly two years later, it's safe to say we knocked it out of the park. Our stacked product lineup now boasts a plethora of nutrient-rich, nourishing foods that utilize more of the animals than any other consumer packaged goods company. For instance, we use over 80% of the cattle and bison we source and are actively working to further build on innovative items like our collagen-dense bone broth, wholesome and traditional cooking oils, and delicious pork skins. Through this journey, we've proven that creating waste-minimizing products is an extraordinary marriage of business, ethics, and morals.

Inspired by our company values to 'honor nature' and 'do more with less,' we set out to create products that truly value the animals we harvest.

The world's never going to be a perfect place. We can't change everyone's habits or force other businesses to become more value-oriented. But, we can show them the best reasons and ways to do the right thing. With that in mind, we're going to continue providing suppliers an outlet for their animals that doesn't generate waste while proving that mission-driven companies with morals and consciences exist. Our Whole Animal Project isn't about us, our products, or our legacy, though — it's about connecting people with their food and uniting them behind a common goal of better appreciating the precious resources our planet holds for us. Once we've done that, the possibilities will be endless. ✨





THE HONESTY PLEDGE

OUR COMMITMENT TO HONESTY, EDUCATION, AND TRANSPARENCY

For far too long, the meat industry has been known for shady practices and hoodwinking consumers. There's merit behind this reputation: feedlots, growth hormones, and chemicals are integral parts of producing the vast majority of commercially produced meats. There's no pride in that process — which is why there is such a broad disconnect between producers and consumers.

But that's the old guard. Alongside our all-star suppliers, who go above and beyond to treat their animals humanely and honorably, we're pushing the boundaries of food transparency and fighting for heightened consumer education. Our latest sourcing breakthrough will shape the greater food industry for years to come. Ladies and gentleman: the EPIC Honesty Pledge.

The pledge is all about ease of information. Understanding the dynamics of food sourcing can be complicated — oftentimes, deliberately. But we're bucking that trend. We're choosing to be simple, upfront, and honest about where we get the animals to create our products, how they're treated, and what they consume. Perhaps most importantly, though, we're admitting where we have room to improve. In creating this living monument for genuine and fair treatment of consumers, we have laid the foundation to continue injecting hope and truth into a realm of business known all too often for murky, inaccessible, and misleading information. It's never a good sign if a company has something to hide.

We created our Honesty Pledge for a couple different reasons. The first one is obvious: we're damn proud of the people we source our animals from.

Our partners are some of the most hard-working, ethical people we've ever met and they're not afraid to get on board with daring initiatives like our waste-minimizing Whole Animal Project and regenerative agriculture mission. But the second reason might be more important. We want to shine a light on our supply chain and help consumers understand how we're pushing the massive meat industry to improve its standards. Do we still need to improve our sourcing for certain categories? Absolutely. But are we confident our gold standard supply chains are growing by the day and pushing other producers to do better? You bet your ass. In the end, we'll only achieve our goals if consumers are given the information and the opportunity to support the companies that do things right. When that happens, our competitors will be pushed to step their game up, which will improve the quality of life for all animals, producers, and consumers.

This wasn't an easy feat. We tasked our Director of Operations, Kirk Blanchard, with tracking down every single EPIC sourcing statistic he could find. Luckily, Kirk's an overachiever. The end result of his tireless search is our public sourcing library, which proudly details up-to-date facts about the animals in our products on our website. Not every aspect of our supply chain is flawless, but the numbers are real and they're improving with every step we take.

We aren't perfect, but our objective here is perpetual progress. Building extensive supply chains and forging relationships with responsible ranchers takes time — and we're ecstatic about where we are and where we're headed. That's why we're going to continue pushing ourselves, our consumers, and our industry to demand better. Because in the end, transparency and honesty aren't just company ideals: they're necessities for a healthy society. ✦



THE MIGHTY POLLINATOR

BEES HOLD THE KEY TO THE FUTURE HEALTH OF OUR FOOD SYSTEMS, SOCIETIES, AND PLANET



Outdoor escape is the most liberating and cleansing way to let loose. It's a reminder there is more to life than screens, air conditioning, and the seemingly endless pull of the internet — a reminder that nature, our lands, and the vibrant organisms around us are what truly matter. It's a chance to

strengthen our bond with the world that has been home to (and fed) our ancestors since the dawn of time. But to secure a healthy, promising future for ourselves and those who come after us, we need to ensure the prosperity of one tiny insect: the bee.

As the chief pollinators of the planet, bees are responsible for fertilizing a jaw-dropping percentage of flowers and crops. Without them, the majority of flowering plant species (including almost every vegetable we eat) could not reproduce and would die off. That includes alfalfa and clover, which are essential food for livestock, like cattle.

To better understand these powerful and vital creatures — especially honeybees — we turned to Tara Chapman of Two Hives Honey. Tara is an absolute pro when it comes to pollinator proliferation and integration into our modern world, and is a key resource for everything from the process of pollination to hive structures to the thousands of different bee species that inhabit our world. Perhaps the most fascinating

thing about these insects is how sophisticated and unique they are. “Every hive has a personality. Some build beautiful, straight comb, while others build in crazy shapes and sizes,” Tara said. “Some take their dead and essentially toss them out, but I’ve seen times where they’ve been carried away and lined up with their heads all facing the same direction — almost like a honeybee burial ceremony.”

This is all part of their larger social structure, which harnesses collective power for the greater good of the hive. The concept sounds strange at first, but it allows honeybee hives, whose populations can run anywhere from 45,000-75,000, to run with ruthless precision. Everyone has a specialized role. Male bees (drones), for instance,

have one job: reproduce. “They have a singular function, so they’re basically disposable,” Tara joked. “They fly around the hive all day looking for a queen to mate with. As crazy as it sounds, their intestines are literally pulled out of their bodies once they’re finished having sex.”

It does sound crazy, but the point of Tara’s example is that individuality doesn’t exist in the hive. Everyone is a cog in a larger machine — and for it to run harmoniously, every bee must do its job. Scientists refer to bees’ collective social structure as a superorganism: a beautiful, unified unit with a common goal. That’s why individual bees are willing to sting threats to their hives even though doing so kills them. There isn’t a nobler example of sacrifice in the world.



A former CIA agent, Tara Chapman of Two Hives Honey rarely dons her beekeeper suit when handling hives.

Most people assume the queen is the most powerful bee in the hive, but that's not exactly true. She's definitely important — without a queen, a hive goes into a frenzy and can collapse almost immediately — but worker bees are the real champions. “Every bee you've seen out and about is a worker bee,” Tara explained. “They're the ones who are responsible for gathering nectar from plants to create honey within the hive. In the process of going plant to plant, they pollinate our world for us. Without them, nobody would eat in their hives.”

We'd have a hard time eating without them, too. Name a food and, chances are, honeybees have played a role in helping it arrive at your dinner table. From cucumbers to apples to cocoa and coffee, bees are heavily involved in the fertilization processes that help plants create seeds for future generations. They're also integral to the success of the ranching and dairy industries, ensuring many of the cover crops ruminants eat can flourish every year. And yet, North America's bee populations have plummeted over the past several decades due to large-scale destruction, deadly pesticides, and commercial agriculture. Suddenly, our once-overlooked food guardians are facing massive population declines and, for many species, extinction.



So much of this stems from Big Ag. As vast fields of monoculture — growing a single commercial crop in mass, like almonds and walnuts — have replaced traditional farms, they've demanded an increasingly larger presence of honeybees to pollinate them. To fill this need, these operations import commercial 'migratory' hives by the truckload (picture this: an 18-wheeler full of millions of bees) during the growing season. This has proven to be a particularly profitable method, but it has come with dire consequences: it's killing off the bees. “Just like humans, dietary diversity is crucial for bees. When they're forced to pollinate giant fields of the same crop, they're not getting a balanced diet,” Tara said. “Massive monoculture farms, especially those using neonicotinoids, have created a vicious cycle that nobody's benefiting from.”

Neonicotinoids are a class of especially deadly insecticides. A key ingredient on many monoculture farms, they indiscriminately target the central nervous system of insects and result in paralysis or death — and Big Ag will continue exposing millions of imported bees to them as long as it can turn a profit. But with the help of beekeepers like Tara, and pollinator-conscious companies across the country, we're fighting back. EPIC is heavily invested in ensuring these creatures play a key role in the food revolution, and we're actively educating our consumers to increase their bee knowledge and awareness. Additionally, we are dedicated to supporting bee-friendly producers and campaigns. Furthermore, we have installed several hives at ROAM Ranch

to accelerate the growth of its biodiversity, help lay a strong foundation for critical plant species and broader land regeneration, and help proliferate sensitive terrestrial ecosystems. All of these factors are essential to our planet's health and exemplary of the impact bees have on our world. When it's all set and done, we'll have over three million honeybees helping ROAM flourish. “For a ranch, if you have your cattle on pasture eating alfalfa and clover, you're going to need bees out there,” Tara said matter-of-factly. “The biggest animals often rely on the smallest ones.”

The right decision typically isn't the easiest one. It costs more to do things in ways that positively impact our soil and our animals. But it's worth it, both in ecological impact and product quality. As a result, we're working to ensure these striped, six-legged workaholics are more valued, cherished, and recognized than ever before. We need you, the reader, to do the same. So whether it's putting up a hive in your backyard or supporting your local farmers and ranchers who are pollinator-friendly and avoid pesticides, go the extra mile. Our world, its bees, and future generations will thank you. ✨



Beekeepers often mark their queens with bright colors to help identify them within a hive.



Section 4

CONVERSATIONS & TRANSPARENCY

“Feed Others As You Wish To Be Fed”

The meat industry is known for its shady practices and consumer ignorance, but that’s changing. These days, people are demanding more transparency, information, and education from the companies they support — and we’re happy to give it to them. Forging a stronger connection with our food makes for a more informed consumer base and a more promising future for all.



THE FIELD HARVEST

NORTHSTAR BISON'S ASTONISHING EFFORT TO
PROVIDE THEIR ANIMALS A PEACEFUL EXIT

Advocating for the truth and speaking out is especially important when the conversations are difficult and things aren't pretty. That's why we make it a point to know how the animals we eat — and the products we produce — are harvested. Although it can be difficult to witness, seeing an animal being slaughtered for human consumption grants us a deeper and more profound respect for its life. This practice reminds us to be grateful for the meat we consume and the importance of minimizing waste. It also speaks to the need for transparency and being honest with consumers.

Everything begins with a human connection. Northstar Bison is a family-owned ranch that specializes in producing 100% grass-fed bison with first-rate animal welfare practices. These folks are elite bison ranchers, and the guardians watching over the 1,000 living animals we purchased this past March for future production. They're also America's largest producer of grass-fed bison. But far beyond their sheer ranching prowess, Northstar sets the industry standard for respect, honor, and compassion towards animals. There's no better example of this than their field harvest.

To realize how special a field harvest is, you need to understand how most meat is processed. Typically, animals are loaded into large trucks and driven to a processing plant. Depending on the distance from the ranch to the processor, this commute may take over 5 hours. Ranchers try to make this a comfortable ride, but being in a trailer is innately stressful for animals. Like humans, when livestock experience stress, their bodies respond with increased adrenaline and the release of cortisol hormones. If improperly managed, this can result in a buildup of hormones in the animals and, later, in your meat — degrading flavor and altering the nutritional composition. It's a disturbing reminder that the animal's final moments were filled with terror and fear, said Lee Graese, Northstar's patriarch. "You can raise an animal perfectly for three and a half years and ruin that all in the last three hours. An animal's death isn't just a

hurdle to clear or simple task to complete."

It gets worse. Once the animals arrive at their (typically large) processing plant, they are placed into crowded pens. This further increases stress. From there, they are moved into shoots and enter the processing plant in a single-file line. Their final moments will be spent inside a sterile room often known as the "kill floor." There are

different methods of harvesting animals, but the most common tactic used on the kill floor involves some type of "gun" that delivers a precise blow to the front of the animal's skull and knocks it unconscious. While these systems can be humane, their primary objective is to maximize productivity. Most small processing plants are mindful of animal well-being, but large industrial slaughterhouses are nothing short of nightmarish.

"Knowingly taking a rifle out into a field to harvest animals that you care so much about — and having the weight of their life in your hands — puts a lot of pressure under every squeeze of that trigger. It has to be that way: because if it's not stressful, then you don't care enough."

Northstar's model is radically different. Rather than focusing on efficiency, they strive to minimize stress and ensure their animals' end of life transition goes as smoothly as possible. They believe every animal deserves to die with dignity — which is why their method of field harvesting does not entail any lengthy truck rides or ghastly assembly lines.

It all starts with tools. Because Northstar is a vertically integrated ranch, they are responsible for every aspect of the harvesting process. This has allowed them to coordinate a short commute from their pastures to their in-house abattoir, which is far less taxing on the animals. Furthermore, their bison aren't marched to their deaths at a processing plant. Instead, they graze in large pastures alongside the rest of their herd for weeks. This

gives them sufficient time to metabolize any residual stress hormones their body may have built up from moving pastures.

When it's time to harvest the bison, Lee drives out to the pastures with his rifle and strategically selects which animal to harvest. Maintaining his distance, he is careful to avoid animal distress or drawn attention to himself. Once he has made his selection, he delivers an unexpected and effectively lethal blow to the animal's brain stem at the base of its skull. Accuracy and patience — skills Lee has mastered over the past 20 years — are key here. The hit instantly renders the animal unconscious. From there, Sean (Lee's son), oversees a whole animal butchery of the bison, making sure to salvage as much of the animal as possible.

This unique form of harvesting animals isn't easy to pull off. It takes time, dedication, and humility. On a good day, Northstar can harvest and process around 20 animals — a far cry from the 100 animals *per hour* that the industrialized systems harvest. That alone speaks to their commitment to animal care over efficiency, and it's why the field harvest method is the most natural end-of-life scenario we've seen. It truly sets the industry standard for thoughtful animal harvesting and reflects why we support ranchers doing the right thing. That's why we intend to accelerate our growth with Northstar Bison until they are managing over 1,000,000 acres for bison grazing by the year 2020. The more humanely-treated animals out there, the better.



Lee Graese carefully takes aim, knowing his animals will spend their final moments in the pasture with their herd.



It's never easy to witness an animal lose its life, but we find incredible comfort knowing the bison at Northstar live their final moments surrounded by their familial herd on the pastures they call home. In a beautiful gesture, every animal harvested dies with a mouthful of grass. Sean, put it best: "Knowingly taking a rifle out into a field to harvest animals that you care so much about — and having the weight of their life in your hands — puts a lot of pressure under every squeeze of that trigger. It has to be that way: because if it's not stressful, then you don't care enough. It's up to you to give them a peaceful exit." ❖



Sean Graese, Northstar's resident butcher, methodically dissects their bison with the utmost care and precision.



OUR WILDLIFE AND “THE WALL”

THE MOST VULNERABLE ECOSYSTEMS WILL PAY THE
BIGGEST PRICE FOR A TEXAS-MEXICO BORDER WALL

From the moment he stepped into the Oval Office, there were been rumblings about President Donald Trump’s proposed construction of a wall along the Texas-Mexico border. Who would pay for it has been an especially contentious point. But those rumblings erupted into an outright explosion after news broke that the administration had begun preparations to begin construction in South Texas. More specifically, on the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge.

The story first broke when Marianna Treviño Wright, the executive director of the National Butterfly Center — a 100-acre center that is part of the Rio Grande Valley wildlife corridor — found workers taking soil samples and marking spots for clearing land. Wright soon realized the men had been contracted by, of all entities, the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP). She was stunned. Sadly, her discovery only served as foreshadowing for more to come.

Shortly afterwards, reports confirmed that the larger area being targeted for the wall’s scheduled construction was the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge— as early as January of 2018, according to projections at the time of this journal’s publication. A federally owned sanctuary along the border, Santa Ana spans over 2,000 acres and is often referred to as the “crown jewel of the national wildlife refuge system.” It’s

also one of the top birding destinations, thanks to the over 400 species of birds and 450 species of plants who have called it home since 1943. And just like that, it all could be wiped away.

Let’s get specific. CBP claimed they are still in the planning phase, but reports citing federal officials have said otherwise. If they’re right, then the construction of an 18-foot tall, three-mile-long levee wall could be the next step. In that scenario, a road would be built south of the wall, and land on either side of the wall will be cleared for surveillance, towers, and cameras — effectively gutting the Santa Ana Refuge. The ramifications of this move would be felt immediately. In carving up, clearing out, and splintering this refuge for the wall, irreplaceable ecosystems will be destroyed. Thousands of land-based migratory animals will be stranded and unable to

pass through to sought-after lands; their territory will be cut in two. Vital, native plant species will be reduced to rubble.

The reason the feds may build on wildlife refuges first is because they own the land. Estimates say that over 90% of the over 1,200 miles of Texas borderlands are privately owned, meaning the government will need landowner approval to touch them. So even if CPB and federal officials follow through with this Santa Ana plan, it will only be a drop in the bucket. When you take this into consideration, it’s clear how senseless — and borderline insane — it is to take such a drastic step right out of the gate. This matter has become more about scoring cheap political points with constituents than looking out for America’s safety. But we’re not giving in without a fight.





Mountain lions are among the thousands of land-based species that will be impacted by a Texas-Mexico border wall

At the time of this journal's printing, plans for 'the wall' had momentarily stalled. But sadly, we doubt we've seen the last of these types of proposals. This predicament is emblematic of a larger threat this administration poses to wildlife welfare. That's why, now more than ever, we all need to step back from the tired, partisan arguments and unite around what really matters here: the precious natural beauty and resources

our country has long protected. Regardless of which party you vote for, we can all agree that vital ecosystems home to hundreds of sensitive plant and animal species shouldn't be the first to see fences go up.

So don't sit idly. Whether it's through calling your legislators, staying vocal, or simply following the news and staying informed, now is the time to

take action. Complacency is simply not an option with so much at stake. And the next time you hear anyone say Mexico or anyone else will pay for 'the wall', think again — our wildlife and homeland will. ❖



The Rio Grande River snakes through the Santa Elena Canyon, dividing Mexico and the United States

PARTING MESSAGE

RUN INTO THE STORM

Hurricanes. Tsunamis. Flash floods. Storms have caused some of the most unbelievable and unforgettable destruction our world has ever seen. They're wild but beautiful, and bring every animal to their knees — all except buffalos. Because in one of the most inspiring acts of nature, those majestic creatures don't run away when a storm is on the horizon: they run into it.



At EPIC, we seek to emulate this act of crazed bravery every single day. We don't shy away from challenges or fear. We don't stand idly and let the world come to us. We take what's ours. We face our greatest obstacles head-on. We choose to embrace change, rather than run from it. That's why, in the spirit of being one with the buffalo, we ask you to join us in our rebuttal of modern agriculture's wasteful ways and to charge forward in the name of true progress. We ask you to run into the storm.

We didn't come up with this concept to drive higher sales numbers or sell merchandise. We're dreaming bigger than that. EPIC was built to become a force of change in a food industry that sorely needs improving. That's why we're not content with the status quo and are going beyond the sustainable and organic models. Instead, we're going all-in on regenerative, nose-to-tail products that can heal the land and improve the lives of the animals we live alongside. This requires flexibility, selflessness and perseverance, but that's to be expected if you're bucking the system. That's what running into the storm is all about.

If we're going to shock the world and alter the food landscape for good, we're going to need help. Because while it's our responsibility to inspire, the true power lies in the hands of consumers and champions for change, like you. It's only with your support and willingness to vote with your dollars that we can truly impact our world's surroundings, improve its health, and change communities for the better. This may sound daunting to some, but we couldn't be more confident. Together, we can smash every obstacle we encounter as a wolfpack united by honesty and compassion.

We've got too much at stake to be scared. We're building a grassroots revolution that pushes back against conventional food standards and demands better from the companies that feed us. And while we're sure to face our fair share of tests and roadblocks, we're not afraid of a fight. To make the largest impact and change the world, you have to be strong. You have to be ferocious. You have to be fearless. So as we barrel towards looming threats on the horizon, we won't cower or despair — we're going to charge even faster, push even harder, and rally our herd towards bigger and better things with every step.

So join us as we lower our heads, sharpen our horns, and run into the storm. Get ready, world: here we come. 🐾