

Joel Salatin – Point of View

'Sound Science' Is Killing Us



by Joel Salatin

At a recent House committee hearing in Richmond, Virginia, the state Commissioner of Agriculture, Carlton Courter — seated next to me at the polished oval table that only government buildings contain — proclaimed that “raw milk is just as dangerous as moonshine.”

That statement, of course, was based on “sound science.” Seated behind him were credentialed experts, the representatives of sound science. From industry personnel to Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services bureaucrats to Federal Food and Drug Administration academically credentialed professionals,

all trumpeted forth sound science as the Holy Grail. With one voice, all of these cultural elites extolled the virtues of rBGH, irradiation, genetic engineering, and pasteurization as representing sound science.

Those of us at the committee hearing who would dare to ask for consumer choice were called “borderline criminal” in our intent, because sound science has proven that consumers are incapable of informed, responsible, rational decision-making. These experts have done their consumer surveys, and they know sound science proves that food choice is tantamount to Russian roulette on a plate.

Only government food is safe food. Sound science dictates what is safe. No other standard will do. Only T-bone steaks wrapped in million-dollar, agriculturally prohibited, quintuple-permitted, government-sanctioned processing facilities are fit for human consumption. I can't

buy a pound cake from a neighbor who whipped it up and baked it in the family kitchen. That's not safe. Sound science has thus decreed.

But Coca-Cola is safe. McDonald's Happy Meals are safe. So is irradiated food. Genetic engineering is the darling of sound science. And until just a couple of months ago, sound science decreed that feeding brains and spinal cords to herbivores was state-of-the-art technology. Now the denizens of the ivory towers are debating whether or not to eliminate the feeding of chicken manure and dead chicken carcasses to herbivores. Rest assured, when the edict comes down from the powers that be, it will be based on sound science.

Things are getting crazy. I've decided we all need some relief from sound science before it kills us. Please, relieve us from sound science! If all this is sound science, I want no part of it. And yet it is worshipped daily on the news by a fawning media too preconditioned to question pontifications from credentialed scientists.

It's time those of us in the alternative community shout a new truth from the housetops: “*Science is not objective!*” I've tried out this statement at several conferences this winter, and the result is a hushed, incredulous, shocked audience. Our Greco-Roman, Western, compartmentalized, disconnected, fragmented, linear, reductionist culture is steeped in the notion that we, more than any other people in history, are scientific. We wear the mantra of science as if it bestows everlasting life.

At the risk of being labeled a Luddite, I would suggest that equally powerful is what is *not* readily observed. Matters of the heart. Belief systems. Soul. This is a decidedly Eastern approach: holistic, connected, we're all relatives, community,

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we. Science without soul is just as imbalanced and whacky as soul without science.

In his classic book *Paradigms: The Business of Discovering the Future*, Joel Arthur Barker notes, "The essence of the pioneering decision is: Those who choose to change their paradigms early do it not as an act of the head but as an act of the heart."

Eco-agriculture, to use the preferred *Acres U.S.A.* moniker, was developed by paradigm-challenging pioneers. From J.I. Rodale and Louis Bromfield to Charles Walters and Phil Callahan, these framers of a new paradigm approached agriculture with a heartfelt, intuitive sense that all was not right down in the halls of the USDA. While farmers were dusting their children and cows with tons of DDT, these pioneering thinkers did not yet know about the legless frogs and sterile salamanders that would be part of its toxic heritage.

But their morality, their ethics — their *souls* — demanded an alternative view. Daily I am assaulted by the cultural elite as being "unscientific." What could be more unscientific than putting chickens out on pasture? Here in our neck of the woods, where the vertically integrated poultry industry got its start, I am known as a bioterrorist, because red-winged blackbirds, starlings and sparrows can touch our chickens — and thus, the reasoning goes, transport their diseases as they do to the immuno-deficient sound-science birds compressed in inhumane, fecal-factory, concentration-camp mausoleum houses.

Pigs out on pasture is a backward notion relegated to a bygone era — while sound science gave us first the confinement hog house, which necessitated the docked tail due to stressed pigs biting each other, and today is driving government-funded research to find and eliminate the stress gene so these inhumanely compressed pigs won't try to eat each other. The ultimate goal of sound science is to make pigs satisfied with their grotesque anti-pig quarters.

While I appreciate some of the scientific discoveries of our day, I also appreciate their limitations. I kind of like electric lights, four-wheel-drive tractors with front-end loaders, and low-impedence electric fence, to name just a few improvements. But when scientific discovery is used to destroy heritage wisdom contained in the DNA and the innate pigness of a pig or chickenness of a chicken, then it ceases to be an instrument of good and becomes instead an instrument of evil.



"Sound science" has created horrifying new environments for animals that bear no resemblance to those evolved by nature.

A diesel tractor can either pull an anhydrous-ammonia-fertilizer injector, or it can pull a manure spreader full of compost. It is the heart, the soul, the belief system that determines how technology will be used. Electricity can be used to power feed augers and ventilation fans, medication timers and artificial lights in a confinement poultry house, or it can power an energizer hooked to high-tech, information-dense, polyethylene-stainless-steel-threaded poultry netting in a pasture setting. The belief system defines the use.

Many of us who have been in this eco-farm movement for a long time remember the early sound science experiments on land-grant research plots. In one infamous example, two plots that had been used for countless toxic studies for decades were designated the organic plots, while two others were designated the conventional plots. Master's degree students dutifully planted corn in each plot. The organic ones received no amendments. The conventional ones received the regular dose: fertilizer, herbicide, pesticide.

At the end of the season the two crops were measured, and the organic was woefully lacking. Plugging the results into a computer proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that half the world would starve under organic farming. That finding of sound science became the backbone of the

industrial warning against large-scale organic farming. Of course, anyone whose heart is in the right place understands that organic by neglect is far different than organic by design.

Witness the current research regarding genetically engineered food. Corporate giants have carefully selected mature rats in their feeding trials to avoid ill effects. In Scotland, when pre-pubescent rats were used under the same feeding regimen, all sorts of maladies occurred — poor organ development, behavioral changes. The agenda defines the discovery, and the heart defines the agenda.

Wall Street science will only find what satisfies Wall Street. The fact that it is championed as sound science makes it no more sound or truthful than a cult leader on an ego trip. Anything trumpeted as "science" needs to be filtered through the heart. And if it is touted as *sound science*, you'd better filter it twice. It's almost like the adjective "sound," when linked with "science," is a dead giveaway for: "We're really making this one up, so we'd better dress it in more profound verbiage."

The problem with sound science is that it changes every day. Look at the many instances of what has been commonly accepted as sound scientific practice, but has later been proven disastrous. Here are a few examples:

- Spreading manure on dormant ground. Now it's illegal in many areas because this material is winding up in city water supplies. Intuitively, I know that nature does not apply soil amendments in the winter because the living soil cannot metabolize nutrients when it is hibernat-

ing. I don't need a bunch of scientists to tell me that.

- Feeding brains and spinal cords to herbivores. *Duh!* Herbivores in nature never eat carrion, or grain, or fermented forage, for that matter. I don't need scientists to tell me that feeding herbivores dead animals may not be a good idea.

- Dusting everything with DDT. Not too long ago, this was the universal elixir, the key to the Green Revolution. Intuitively, I can't figure out why I should use a bunch of stuff with the suffix *-ide* (Latin for death) to grow my food. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that out.

- Cleaning out and sanitizing poultry houses. Now most farmers are aerating the bedding between batches to stimulate decomposition and encourage nature to grow the good bugs. We've been doing this for decades on our farm because virulent decomposition is nature's sanitation model. No scientist needs to tell me that.

What are the new darlings of sound science? Irradiation, genetic engineering, more concentration, less domestic production, and a Wal-Mart on every corner stocked to the hilt with Archer Daniels Midland, amalgamated, extruded, reconstituted, chlorinated, adulterated, manipulated, constipated pseudo-food. The only problem with this scenario is that the 3 trillion critters inhabiting my intestines — and yours — were not designed for these Wall Street concoctions. These critters

don't know anything about the liberal left or the religious right. They don't even know who is running for president.

They certainly aren't familiar with the term "sound science." Nevertheless, if we do not respect and honor them, they will fail to function as the Creator planned — and if they fail, no miracle from sound science can reenergize them. I'm betting on heritage wisdom. I'm betting on moral and ethical parameters that make sense to my heart. Everything else must fit that template.

In eco-agriculture, we must boldly and humbly hold fast to our heart. It is what anchors us. It is what moors us to truth when our culture vacillates every Monday morning with the latest discovery from sound science — *not*. Enjoy science, but only when it reinforces the spiritual, the heart. This reduces confusion and liberates the soul.

Joel Salatin operates Polyface Farm, a model diversified farmstead in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. His books — Family Friendly Farming, You Can Farm, Salad Bar Beef and Pastured Poultry Profits — are available from the Acres U.S.A. bookstore for \$30 each, plus shipping and handling. To order, call 1-800-355-5313 or visit our website at <www.acresusa.com>.

The Salatin Family's Polyface Farm will be hosting two sessions of Intensive Discovery Seminars this summer — one on July 9-10, 2004 and the second on July 23-24, 2004. Participation is extremely limited, and these seminars always sell out quickly. Early registration is advised. For more information, call Acres U.S.A. toll-free at 1-800-355-5313, or register online at <www.acresusa.com>.

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