

hog HEAVEN

is there such a place?

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For many, the slogan “Pork. The Other White Meat,” created by a top ad agency back in 1987, was the turning point in their newly acquired taste for pig, hog—or in some cases, boar.

Gaining national attention from this unforgettable advertising campaign—with a message that pork is the healthy alternative to poultry—the industry benefited by a jump of about 20 percent in annual sales after its launch.

Fast forward 20 years, and catch phrases like “free range,” “naturally raised,” or “grass-fed,” have become synonymous with animal welfare and healthy eating. And while the USDA doesn’t mandate the labeling differences of roaming herds of beef or pork from the factory-farm methods of raising and processing livestock, the government does state in a Farm Sanctuary Report: “The care and handling of farm animals is mostly unregulated in the United States and, as a result, animals here are commonly subjected to a number of inhumane practices. The marketplace has been identified as one avenue for improving the lives of animals raised for food.”¹



Further review of the report includes the admission that government oversight to animal welfare is pretty much nonexistent.

But, adding insult to injury comes to a head when we learn that stock which has been raised and slaughtered for our consumption has “no regulatory definition...and that the USDA preapproves product labels based on producer testimonials.”

The report goes on to say: “Compliance with labeling claims is not verified, with the exception of claims associated with third-party certification programs. It is likely consumers grossly overestimate the animal welfare significance of these claims.”

SO WHO'S WATCHING THE HENHOUSE?

From this, we can drill down to the fact that it continues to be an uphill battle to regulate meat producers to a uniform standard, and unfortunately, honesty runs along an unequal spectrum of unwritten rules and interpretation. Today's farmers are allowed to pin their degree of compliance along unregulated definitions—where and when it suits their individual needs, financial constraints, or profit motives.

As a result of the media's disclosure of the horrific treatment many animals face during their lives, the public is demanding humane and moral treatment of livestock, precise labeling of how and what the animals are fed, and most recently, demanding that Congress not take away the right of consumers to know what country of origin their beef was raised and slaughtered.

Justifiably, consumers want products from sources where animals are treated with respect and dignity from birth to harvest, and who allow the animals' instinctive behaviors to occur naturally in pastures rather than cages.

The call for the elimination of growth hormones and/or antibiotics often used in factory farms—where herding, caging, and raising animals in deplorable conditions is the norm and creates the need for pharmacology—is being reversed, although not across the industry.

Price often influences consumer purchasing behavior due to socioeconomic conditions, but there is evidence that as the public becomes more educated, they are more conscious of the rights of all living animals to live naturally and be respected, especially during final harvest. There appears to be unyielding support for humanely raised food, and while some detractors may consider it a fad, for many families it has become a way of eating.



THE GRASS IS GREENER

On a recent visit to the Granite State, we arrived at a winding dirt road leading to the wide open pastures that had once been thick woods—a real estate developer's dream.

This idyllic setting—now home to pigs, cattle, goats, and chickens—could have ended up scarred by rooftops and asphalt, if it weren't for businessman, artist, and gentleman farmer, Robert Stephen Moore and his wife Silvana Rinaldi.

In 2008, when Moore purchased the huge tract of land (which he now leases), he had decided this magnificent site needed to be rescued, cared for, and cultivated in order to retain its natural beauty.

Moore committed significant resources and invested a great deal of time to the mountainside location, where he now has only a couple of homes, a barn, and an orchard.

“This was a farm at one time, back about 40 years ago, but it became completely overgrown and unused,” Moore explained during an open house held in June of this year. “I wanted to bring the farm back, and at least create a viable environment for wildlife or farm animals.”

As a result, the palette had been created for someone with a dream and lots of ambition.

MEET THE NEVINS

A good example of people practicing what they preach are modern-day farmers Lane and Meryl Nevins of Prospect Farm in Lisbon, New Hampshire.

Deep in the woods, the Nevins run a grass-based farm comprised of livestock which is treated to thick green grass, plenty of room to roam, and rotational grazing which mimics their natural living environment.



This natural preserve was the perfect setting for two young people possessing the desire to make a difference and attempt to crank out a living.

When asked how they got started, Meryl explained, “We were both going to college. I was an art student and—”

“—I was going to write screenplays,” Lane chimed in with a laugh.”

She continued, “And after we ended up finishing our degrees we realized that this is what we are connected to.”

She went on to explain that they had begun their careers with vegetables in Vermont, but over time found that they wanted to do something more interesting. Because of the lack of cleared land and

the expense of maintenance and taxes, this type of farmland can be difficult to find.

“We found that there was a need for grass-fed livestock, but we didn't have enough land...we ended up meeting with Robert, and here we are,” Meryl explained.

Today the land is being worked by the Nevins and has become a viable community-supported agriculture homestead and farm.

Besides practicing humane treatment of their stock and the utilization of pasture farming techniques, they are experts in teaching consumers about working with the environment in a responsible manner.



The couple, required to be on-call 24 hours each day, while working the land from sunup to beyond sundown, ensures the viability of a local, farm-to-table experience, by raising pork, beef, and chicken that are allowed to grow and thrive naturally.

During an open house and tours running throughout the day, groups of as many as 30 people each got a firsthand look at how it is possible to raise animals in a natural environment and treat them with kindness and love.

During the hour-long walk, it quickly became evident that both Nevins possessed impressive knowledge in every aspect of natural pig farming, and will soon apply the same practices with their newest enterprise—raising Highland beef cattle. This unique opportunity allows visitors—young and old—to approach the animals and see firsthand what it takes to treat food animals in a caring and healthy environment.

While walking from pasture to pasture, the duo disclosed that there is a demand for their naturally raised products, but are sometimes difficult to find in supermarkets. And while they are not labeled organic, Lane shared with us that they practice under very similar guidelines.

Lane's belief is that by participating in natural farming, you meet the inherent needs of the animal; their focus is on creating a habitat that will allow their animals to grow uninhibited in a safe place without stress or injury from improper handling.

"We have plenty of land here, and this allows us to run our pigs through pasture, into the woods, and give them full opportunity to root. They also are given the chance to do what they love to do, and that is play in the mud," Lane explained.

"Pigs do like the mud; it's because they don't sweat and they use the earth—mixed with a little water—to keep cool and rid themselves of pests and parasites," Meryl added.

And as far as rooting—a characteristic innate in pigs that cannot be stifled or removed—many pig farm operators practice what is known as *ringing*, where they insert a ring through the snout of the animal, making rooting very painful. Because this comes natural to the animal, the pig will continue to root even though it is accompanied by intense pain. This practice—violent and inhumane—causes a wide variety of physical and psychological problems for the livestock.

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As the group walked from pasture to woods, it was evident that care and concern about the animals' welfare was center stage. "We treat our animals with respect and decency; we don't give our pigs or cattle antibiotics or growth enhancements," Meryl told the crowd. "They grow as intended...you'll see that they appear happy and live stress-free."

And if you didn't know any better, you might believe the animals were actually smiling at you.

An interesting question which came up repeatedly during the day was, "Why is there no smell?"

Lane was quick to point out, "Unlike many traditional farms or factory farms, we spread our stock around large areas; they end up fertilizing the land—not overdoing it with waste."

During the four hours spent at Prospect, only a few flies were found, and the air was fresh and clean; at no time was there any odor present at any of the open fields around the large enclosures. As we walked the trails, we found that everywhere we went on the farm had an abundance of natural growth for feeding and more room than any of the animals seemed to need.

Prospect Farm is committed to the proper care of their animals, so when it is time to harvest them, they are transported to neighboring Vermont where the final preparation is handled humanely and then packaged for transportation back to the farm's freezers or to their new partner, the Littleton Food Co-op—found in nearby Littleton, New Hampshire.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The continuum of an animal's life shouldn't end with stress. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations: "Severe, short-term stress [of the animal] just prior to slaughter, for example during off-loading, handling, holding in pens and stunning...may result in biochemical processes in the muscle, in particular, a rapid breakdown of muscle glycogen, [leaving] the meat [to become] very pale."² Often, industrial-farmed meats can also be tough and lacking taste or flavor.

This seems to make sense, considering many consumers report that they have noticed differences in color, texture, and taste of small farm products which are raised vastly different than major producers—many of whom revert to immoral and abusive methods of slaughter.

Of course there will always be a debate surrounding the eating of meat, but that isn't what this story is about. Rather, we have attempted to focus on what many consumers desire: appropriate and caring methods for raising animals as a food supply, in addition to allowing a transparency that will hopefully give rise to legislation that will safeguard both man and beast. ★

For more information, contact prospectfarmvtnh.com or call 603-838-2395.

¹An Assessment of Product Labeling Claims, Industry Quality Assurance Guidelines and Third Party Certification Standards." Retrieved from <http://www.fda.gov/ohrtms/dockets/dockets/06p0394/06p-0394-cp00001-15-Tab-13-Farm-Animal-Welfare-01-vol1.pdf>. ²<http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/x6909e/x6909e04.htm>

