

ESSAYS

"Green" Eggs and Ham? The Myth of Sustainable Meat and the Danger of the Local

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Abstract

In the New York Times bestseller, *The Omnivores Dilemma*, Michael Pollan popularizes the idea of a "local" based diet, which he justifies, in part, in terms of environmental sustainability. In fact, many locavores argue that a local based diet is more environmentally sustainable than a vegan or vegetarian diet and concludes that if vegans and vegetarians truly care about the environment they should instead eat sustainably raised local meat. However locavores are incorrect in their analysis of the sustainability of a local based diet and in its applicability for large scale adaptation. Instead locavores engage in the construction of "a literary pastoral," a desire to return to a nonexistent past, which falsely romanticizes the ideals of a local based lifestyle. They therefore gloss over the issues of sexism, racism, speciesism, homophobia and anti-immigration sentiments which an emphasis only on the local, as opposed to the global, can entail. In this manner the locavorism movement has come to echo many of the same claims that the "Buy American" movement did before it. The conclusion is that a local based diet, while raising many helpful and valid points, needs to be re-understood and rearticulated.²

The first thing I ask Salatin when we sit down in his living room is whether he's ever considered becoming a vegetarian. It's not what I had planned to say, but we've been in the hoop houses with the nicely treated hens, all happily pecking and glossy-feathered, and I've held one in my arms. Suddenly it makes little sense that this animal, whose welfare has been of such great concern, will be killed in a matter of days. Naive, I know, and Salatin seems surprised. "Never crossed my mind," he says... Salatin is hitting his stride now. "We tried heritage chickens for

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three years and we couldn't sell 'em. I mean, we could sell a couple. But at the end of the day, altruism doesn't pay our taxes.³”

- Interview by the *Guardian* (Sunday 31 January 2010, 44)

I think there is an enormous amount of political power lying around on the food issue, and I am just waiting for the right politician to realize that this is a great family issue. If that politician is on the Right, all the better. I think that would be terrific, and I will support him or her.

- Michael Pollan, Interview with Rod Dreher, *The American Conservative*, June 20, 2008

Introduction

In 2007 Oxford University Press chose “Locavore” as the word of the year⁴. Such a move, while purely symbolic, at the same time speaks to the movement’s growing popularity and emerging significance in any discussion on food policy, environmentalism or animal ethics. The essence of the locavore argument is that because it is harmful to the environment to transport food over long distances (referred to as “food miles”) people should instead, for primarily environmental reasons, choose to consume only food which is grown or slaughtered “locally.” This idea of “locavorism” has been described and defended by a range of authors; such as Barbara Kingsolver in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, Michael Pollan in his *New York Times* bestselling book *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, as well as enunciated by Joel Salatin, the owner of Polyface farms and a featured personality in both *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* and the recent documentary *Food Inc.* However, despite this popularity, there is much I find deeply troubling in each of these texts and their ultimate justification for locavorism. For example part of Pollan’s main argument against “organic” meat is that it represents a false pastoral narrative, something produced by the power of well crafted words and images yet lacking ethical consistency, reality, or ultimately an awareness of animals themselves. He describes these problems, and his own motivation in addressing them, while shopping at Whole Foods:

³ Salatin’s answer as to why he does not use “heritage” birds (*i.e.* birds that have not been bred for such traits as abnormally large breasts)

⁴“Oxford Word Of The Year: Locavore” *Oxford University Press Blog* <http://blog.oup.com/2007/11/locavore/> Last Accessed April 1, 2010.

This particular dairy's label had a lot to say about the bovine lifestyle: Its Holsteins are provided with "an appropriate environment, including shelter and comfortable resting area...sufficient space, proper facilities and the company of its own kind." All this sounded pretty great, until I read the story of another dairy selling raw milk—*completely* unprocessed—whose "cows graze green pastures all year long."

Which made me wonder whether the first dairy's idea of an appropriate environment for a cow included, as I had simply presumed, a pasture. All of a sudden the absence from their story of that word seemed weirdly conspicuous. As the literary critics would say, the writer seemed to be eliding the whole notion of cows and grass. Indeed, the longer I shopped in Whole Foods, the more I thought that this was a place where the skills of a literary critic might come in handy. (2008: 135-136)

However, while I agree with Pollan about the need for literary critics in Whole Foods, I fear many locavore advocates, including Pollan in his own text, suffer from the same flaws of creating an unrealistic literary pastoral, which he attributes to the free-range organic farmer. Hence, as a literary critic, I hope to provide to the locavore movement what they have given to others and to view their work as a text in order to reveal the manner in which they too, create an idealized, unrealistic, and, at times, distressingly sexist and xenophobic literary pastoral which allows them, much as with the first organic dairy farm, to seem to raise the issue of care for actual animals even as they elide the issue of the animal herself. My intention is not to discount the possibility of a more natural, environmentally sustainable food system—a goal I deeply support—but instead to reveal the potential dangers that focusing purely on the "local," at the expense of the global, can contain for both the human and non-human animal alike.

Part I: The Environment

The Vegan Utopia

Tellingly, one of the most forceful rationales for the environmental benefits of a "local" food system is expressed by Michael Pollan in a chapter of the *Omnivore's Dilemma* titled "The ethics of eating meat." Under the pejorative subheading "The Vegan Utopia" Pollan writes:

The vegan utopia would also condemn people in many parts of the country to importing all their food from distant places. ...To give up eating animals is to give up these places as human habitat, unless of course we are willing to make complete our dependence on a highly industrialized national food chain. The food chain would be in turn even more dependent than it already is on fossil fuels and chemical fertilizers, since food would need to travel even farther and fertility—in the form of manures—would be in short supply. Indeed, it is doubtful you can build a genuinely sustainable agriculture without animals to cycle nutrients and support local food production. If our concern is the health of nature—rather than, say, the internal consistency of our moral code or the condition of our souls—then eating animals may sometimes be the most ethical thing to do. (2008: 327)

In essence, then, Pollan takes one of the animal rights' movement's most powerful arguments--the significant environmental degradation that the meat industry routinely produces-- and inverts it⁵. It is now, according to Pollan, *because* of the environment that one is justified in eating meat, indeed required to do so, since the only alternative given by Pollan is a polluting globalization of large scale food importation. Indeed, the argument, if true, is even more powerful than quoted here. If eating locally slaughtered animals is the only way to prevent global warming, animal ethics itself might well dictate the necessity of eating meat because habitat destruction (in part fuelled by global warming) is already causing mass species extinction at unprecedented rates. Such an argument, therefore, represents a particularly powerful and nuanced refutation to veganism and vegetarianism that I fear few animal rights activist, or animal studies scholars, have yet to adequately address.

However, before I engage in a more detailed analysis of Pollan's argument, the main problem with it is that it is simply factually untrue. What is most telling about the passage quoted above is that it lacks any form of citation or footnotes, forms of documentation which *do* pepper Pollan's books in other places of possible controversy. Pollan is far from alone in this omission, for virtually every other locavore claim for environmental supremacy also lacks any form of documentation to

⁵ Of course Pollan himself also indicates this same environmental degradation of factory farming and his claim is that small scale local farm will solve the problem. My point here is simply that Pollan inverts one of the most common claims made by animal rights' advocates.

back up repeated claims that being vegan is *more* harmful to the environment than eating locally slaughtered animals. Instead locavores, almost universally, rely upon the “commonsense logic” that since transportation harms the environment, the longer something has been transported, the more harmful, definitionally, it must be to the ecosystem. However, recent studies have brought this common sense wisdom into question. For example, a study conducted at Lincoln University in New Zealand shows that the way apples, lamb, and dairy items are produced in New Zealand makes them more energy-efficient to buy in the U.K. than those same products grown on British soil. The study concludes:

Food miles are a very simplistic concept relating to the distance food travels as a measure of its impact on the environment. As a concept, food miles has gained some traction with the popular press and certain groups overseas. However, this debate which only includes the distance food travels is spurious as it does not consider total energy use especially in the production of the product.⁶

Indeed, the only study to date to focus on whether a local or vegetarian diet is more helpful in reducing green house gases, conducted by Christopher L. Weber and H. Scott Matthews at Carnegie-Mellon, reached the following conclusion:

Despite significant recent public concern and media attention to the environmental impacts of food, few studies in the United States have systematically compared the life-cycle greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with food production against long-distance distribution, aka “food-miles.” We find that although food is transported long distances in general (1640 km delivery and 6760 km life-cycle supply chain on average) the GHG emissions associated with food are dominated by the production phase, contributing 83% of the average U.S. household’s 8.1 t CO₂e/yr footprint for food consumption. Transportation as a whole represents only 11% of life-cycle GHG emissions, and final delivery from producer to retail contributes only 4%. Different food groups exhibit a large range in GHG-intensity; on average, red meat is around 150% more GHG intensive than chicken or fish. *Thus, we suggest that dietary shift can be a more effective means of lowering an average household’s food-related climate footprint than “buying local.” Shifting less than one day per week’s worth of calories from red meat and dairy*

⁶Caroline Saunders, Andrew Barber, and Greg Taylor “Food Miles – Comparative Energy/Emissions Performance of New Zealand’s Agriculture Industry” *Research Report* No. 285 Lincoln University, New Zealand, July 2006. 93.

*products to chicken, fish, eggs, or a vegetable-based diet achieves more GHG reduction than buying all locally sourced food.*⁷

In other words, shifting from beef to vegetables for even a single day a week would in fact be more helpful in reducing greenhouse gases than shifting the entirety of one's diet to exclusively locally produced sources. This conclusion becomes less surprising when we consider the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change findings that meat production contributes more greenhouse gas emissions than the entire transportation industry, including all automobiles, combined⁸.

In fact, recent research suggests that organic free range animals may, in specific cases, be more harmful to the environment than animal raised "conventionally." As the Audubon society recently reported:

Ironically, data released in 2007 by Adrian Williams of Cranfield University in England show that when all factors are considered, organic, free-range chickens have a 20 percent greater impact on global warming than conventionally raised broiler birds. That's because "sustainable" chickens take longer to raise, and eat more feed. Worse, organic eggs have a 14 percent higher impact on the climate than eggs from caged chickens, according to Williams. "If we want to fight global warming through the food we buy, then one thing's clear: We have to drastically reduce the meat we consume," says Tara Garnett of London's Food Climate Research Network. So while some of us Americans fashionably fret over our food's travel budget and organic content, Garnett says the real question is, "Did it come from an animal or did it not come from an animal?"⁹

Lack of Land

Moreover, while locavores imagine all factory farms eventually turning into more sustainable small-scale family farms, that ideal is simply not physically possible given

⁷Christopher L. Weber, and H. Scott Matthews, "Food-Miles and the Relative Climate Impacts of Food Choices in the United States" *Environ. Sci. Technol.*, 42 (10), April 16 2008, (3508) Downloaded from <http://pubs.acs.org> on May 1, 2009. Emphasis added.

⁸Richard Black "Shun meat, says UN climate chief: Livestock production has a bigger climate impact than transport, the UN believes" BBC New, June 7 2008 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/7600005.stm>. See also the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United States (FAO) report [Livestock's Long Shadow](#).

⁹ Mike Tidwell, "The Low-Carbon Diet" *AudubonMagazine.org* Last Accessed April 1, 2010.

the world's current rate of meat consumption. According the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's recent report *Livestock's Long Shadow*, over fifty-five billion land animals are raised and slaughtered every year worldwide for human consumption. This rate of slaughter already consumes thirty percent of the earth's entire land surface (approximately 3,433 billion hectares) and accounts for a staggering eighty percent of the total land utilized by humans (Steinfeld *et al*, xxi). Even when the land currently used for feed crop production is subtracted, as theoretically it might be in a fully local farm system, the total area *currently* occupied by grazing alone still constitutes, in the words of the report "26 percent of the ice-free terrestrial surface of the planet" (Steinfeld *et al*, 2006: xxi). And this number is only expected to grow as both human population and human consumption of meat and dairy continue to rise.¹⁰ Therefore, in addition to problems of sustainability, meat consumption also entails a massive loss of biodiversity which, ironically, would actually be *increased* by a shift to a locally based diet, as even more land would have to be set aside for free-range grazing. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization report, "306 of the 825 terrestrial ecoregions identified by the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF)...reported livestock as one of the current threats." (Steinfeld *et al*, 2006: xxiii)

Nor would it be possible to keep such farms small, tied to the community, or even "local" in any meaningful sense of that term. As Joel Salatin himself admits to Pollan, in explaining why he primarily uses neighbors coming over to help out to kill the animals he raises: "That's another reason we don't raise a hundred thousand chickens. It's not just the land that couldn't take it, but the community, too. We'd be processing six days a week, so we'd have to do what the industrial folks do, bring in a bunch of migrant workers because no one around here would want to gut chickens every day. *Scale makes all the difference*" (2008: 230, emphasis added). I will return to Salatin's

¹⁰ "Growing populations and incomes, along with changing food preferences, are rapidly increasing demand for livestock products, while globalization is boosting trade in livestock inputs and products. Global production of meat is projected to more than double from 229 million tons in 1999/01 to 465 million tons in 2050, and that of milk to grow from 580 to 1,043 million tons. "(Steinfeld *et al*, xx) To be fair Pollan has himself, in his most recent work, started to make calls for people to decrease their meat consumption. However these calls are both not stringent enough and not echoed in the wider movement. Given the exponential rate of projected increase for meat consumption, what is need is a significantly long term and cross the board decrease of the number of animals raised and killed for slaughter.

comment about “migrant workers” later, but my point here is that locally based meat, regardless of its level of popularity, can never constitute more than either a rare and occasional novelty item, or food choices for only a few privileged customers, since there simply is not enough arable land left in the entire world to raise large quantities of pasture fed animals necessary to meet the world’s meat consumption. And even if such a transition were physically possible, the resulting size of such farms would undo much of their supposed sustainability and community integration and hence their very purpose in existing in the first place. Unfortunately, this simple physical reality is ignored by many in the locavore movement, such as Barbara Kingsolver, who tells her children that they cannot have fresh fruit, during the winter, but instead must consume meat because it is, purportedly, more sustainable (2007: 33).

Belgium Chocolate

Indeed, one is left with the feeling that local food activists themselves must realize the lack of environmental benefit as many of them fail to follow the practices which they themselves advocate with any version of environmental consistency. For example, in preparing his local based meal on Polyface farms, Pollan admits, “I also need some chocolate for the dessert I had in mind. Fortunately the state of Virginia produces no chocolate to speak of, so I was free to go for the good Belgian stuff, panglessly” (2008: 263). While this line of reasoning might make sense in terms of other arguments for going local, such as preserving local economies, in terms of global warming and green house gases it is clearly not intellectually consistent. Even if, for some unspecified reason, chocolate was essential for Pollan to have, it is not at all clear why that chocolate would have to come from *Belgium* instead of any of the more local sources of chocolate from within the whole of the United States (which also might be more effective in terms of preserving local economies). Indeed, most of the locavores mentioned continue to enjoy a variety of nonlocal based goods such as coffee, tea, olive oil, and, in my favorite example from Kingsolver, non-locally produced Budweiser (2008: 151).

Nor does Joel Salatin, the owner of Polyface farms whom Pollan holds up as a possible model, make much consistent environmental sense. For example, he refuses to FedEx any of his meat since he says, “I don’t believe it’s sustainable—or organic, if you will—to FedEx meat all around the country” (2008: 133) and instead tells Pollan that he will have to “drive down here” to Virginia to get it (*ibid.*). But *driving*, in individual cars, particularly from California to Virginia, is a significantly less effective form of transporting goods (think of all the extra steel) than a single fully loaded delivery vehicle. And Salatin is, in fact, proud of how far individual people will drive in order to purchase his food. As he posts on his own website, as a positive review from a customer, “I drive to Polyface 150 miles one way in order to get clean meat for my family.”¹¹ Hence romantic notions of face-to-face contact, perhaps even the great American road trip, seem to play a greater role in the Pollan-Salatin encounter than any environmental logic.

Indeed, one of the revealing ironies associated with all of the locavores mentioned is the surprisingly large amount of driving, flying, and transportation they themselves regularly and apparently “panglessly” engage in. For example, Michael Pollan travels all around the country, from Kansas to California just within in the pages of *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*; Kingsolver is even more extreme, leaving by car from Arizona so that that she can farm in rural Georgia, then driving all the way to Canada (from Georgia) for a family vacation, which she particularly enjoys because she is now able to consume so many food products which otherwise would have been out of season. As she writes, “Like those jet-setters who fly across the country on New Year’s Eve, we were going to cheat time and celebrate the moment more than once. Asparagus season, twice in one year: the dream vacation” (2007: 158). Kingsolver and her family even fly to Europe, in part, to enjoy the local cuisine (2007: 243). And Joel Salatin, who was unwilling to ship his meat to California, recently agreed to fly there himself for a talk at Stanford. Ironically, the talk was, in part, on the environmental benefits of a local economy. Perhaps a certain amount of irony and hypocrisy within the locavore movement can be justified by the argument that while still far from fully realized, it is on the path towards ever greater locavorism. What is distressing is the

¹¹ <http://www.polyfacefarms.com/story.aspx> Last accessed April 1, 2001.

manner in which violation of even the basic ideas of locally based lifestyle occur “panglessly” and the manner in which the movement justifies itself via actions more harmful for the environment than the current food system, such as driving to purchase far away local produce, and enjoying out of season food in Canada and Europe.

T-Shirts and DVD’s

Moreover, the aspect which most clearly belies all the reasons purportedly given to justify the locavore movement-- not just in terms of the environment, but also in terms of protecting local business and protesting against the abuses of globalization-- is that it resolutely focuses *only on the question of food*. Neither Pollan, nor Kingsolver, nor even Salatin, is attempting to learn how to weave their own clothing, although cotton, as an agricultural commodity, raises many of the same issues as imported food. For example, the journal *Environmental Health Perspective* recently documented similarities in the environmental effects of the food industry and the fashion industry, in terms of both pollution and worker exploitation. According to the article:

Cotton, one of the most popular and versatile fibers used in clothing manufacture, also has a significant environmental footprint. This crop accounts for a quarter of all the pesticides used in the United States, the largest exporter of cotton in the world, according to the USDA. The U.S. cotton crop benefits from subsidies that keep prices low and production high. The high production of cotton at subsidized low prices is one of the first spokes in the wheel that drives the globalization of fashion.

Much of the cotton produced in the United States is exported to China and other countries with low labor costs, where the material is milled, woven into fabrics, cut, and assembled according to the fashion industry’s specifications. China has emerged as the largest exporter of fast fashion, accounting for 30% of world apparel exports, according to the UN Commodity Trade Statistics database. In her 2005 book *The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy*, Pietra Rivoli, a professor of international business at the McDonough School of Business of Georgetown University, writes that each year Americans purchase approximately 1 billion garments made in China, the equivalent of four pieces of clothing for every U.S. citizen. (A450)

Hence, at least in terms of “miles,” cotton is actually a more egregious example than food. Nor is this the end of the “clothing miles” as the United States purchases so

much clothing that domestic charity outlets simply cannot process it all.¹² So the extra clothing is then shipped *back* to the developing world (where in most cases it was originally manufactured), which for some developing countries actually constitutes the number one import from the United States.¹³ A single cotton t-shirt, then, comes from cotton grown in the United States, is sent to the developing world to be manufactured into clothing, then back to the United States to be purchased, and finally shipped to the developing country where the clothing is either donated or purchased. And what is true for cotton is equally true for almost every other product regularly consumed in the United States. Almost every item currently is both produced and consumed in a global marketplace and is therefore part of these exact same systems of production and distribution. In terms of shipping distance it is just as significant to discuss “clothing miles” “computer miles” or even “cell phone miles,” many of which are actually transported far longer distances than food and are far more toxic in their results. And in terms of non-environmental concerns, working conditions for many non-agricultural products may well be worse than for the more traditional rural labor of farming (excluding certain products such as coffee and chocolate)¹⁴. My point here is not to criticize locavores unfairly for minor hypocrisy or failures of judgment which do not undermine the logic of the argument itself. Rather, my concern is that a narrow-minded focus on only “food” and “food miles” renders invisible many other environmentally unsound practices, whether they are conscious decisions to drive around in search of the best local food, or unconscious participation in the consumption of non-food goods with an environmental and human cost. For example, in Salatin’s online “gift store” in less than four lines he both states that “We do not ship food items, anytime, anywhere, period” and, at the same time,

¹² “Only about one-fifth of the clothing donated to charities is directly used or sold in their thrift shops. Says Rivoli, ‘There are nowhere near enough people in America to absorb the mountains of castoffs, even if they were given away.’” (A450)

¹³ “Clothing that is not considered vintage or high-end is baled for export to developing nations. Data from the International Trade Commission indicate that between 1989 and 2003, American exports of used clothing more than tripled, to nearly 7 billion pounds per year. Used clothing is sold in more than 100 countries. For Tanzania, where used clothing is sold at the *mitumba* markets that dot the country, these items are the number one import from the United States.” (A452)

¹⁴ For example in the case of clothing “According to figures from the U.S. National Labor Committee, some Chinese workers make as little as 12–18 cents per hour working in poor conditions. And with the fierce global competition that demands ever lower production costs, many emerging economies are aiming to get their share of the world’s apparel markets, even if it means lower wages and poor conditions for workers.” (A450)

advertises for all nonfood based products, such as tote bags and DVD's¹⁵, that "All shipping is free! Please allow 2-4 weeks for delivery." There is no discussion of how, where, or by whom any of these other products have been made. Therefore a vegan who drastically decreased her consumption of nonagricultural products, particularly electronic products, wore clothing purchased from second hand shops, and made sure that all of her waste was disposed of in an ethically consistent manner would, in fact, be a far more effective "locavore" even if the entirety of her diet were imported from other countries.

Part II: The Danger of the Local

Blood and Soil

If being local is not then "really" about protecting the environment, what is it about? One answer is suggested by Professor Ursula Heise, of Stanford University, in her recent text *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. Heise illustrates how the emphasis on "the local" within the broader environmental movement as a whole can possess a deeply disturbing strain of conservatism, provincialism, xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment. Indeed, she even goes so far as to excavate genealogically the Nazi's emphasis on *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil), and the bizarre manner in which they interwove calls for environmentalism with a hyper-nationalism based on a romanticized *autochthonous* relationship with both the soil and the local. Of course none of these arguments, by either Professor Heise or me, is meant to suggest the locavore movement, or the local move in environmentalism, possesses any connection with Nazism. It is meant rather to speak to my fear that an outspoken concern for the environment can also contain and support conservatism against those viewed as alien to the speaker's sense of his/her "local" community. Specifically, I believe that many in the locavore

¹⁵ According to the Environmental Protection Agency, DVD's are a particularly egregious source of e-waste pollution since they derive from rare mined earth materials, are virtually impossible to recycle, leach into water supplies, and produce toxic results for both the environment and human health. Furthermore, as flyer made by the EPA for school children tries to explain "Once discs are packaged, they are ready to be sent to distribution centers, retail outlets, or other locations. Transportation by plane, truck, or rail requires the use of fossil fuels for energy, which contribute to climate change."

movement are moved by a desire for a nonexistent literary pastoral, of a wholly inaccurate nostalgia for a by-gone age. For example, Pollan invokes precisely this image in his description of his first wholly local dinner at Polyface farms “much about dining with the Salatins had, for me, the flavor of a long-ago time and faraway place in America” (2008: 203). However, the danger of this literary pastoral fairytale is not only that it is wholly inaccurate (the Salatins use ATV’s daily to move around their cattle) but that it also possesses the potential to mask the darker side of the nostalgic past that an exclusive focus on “the local” likewise elides.

Women in the Kitchen

For example, since locavores choose to focus, unscientifically, only on the question of food, that focus blends over into negative portrayal of women and particularly feminists, who are frequently portrayed as culprits because of their decision, supposedly, to no longer to cook. And, following logically from this first claim, there is tendency to argue for the return of traditional gender roles of heterosexual men farming and ranching while heterosexual women cook and clean. For example, both Michael Pollan and the movie *Food Inc.* specifically hold up Joel Salatin and Polyface farms as a possible template for a local based economy. But what Pollan does not tell us (and may himself have failed to realize) is that Salatin believes so firmly in traditional gender roles that in the past he did not even accept women as workers or interns for the farm labor aspect of his farm although they could work in the kitchen.¹⁶ Salatin’s attitude—that the proper place for women is in the kitchen and that their role has somehow been “lost”—surfaced in a recent interview:

Hey, 40 years ago, every woman in the country – I’ll be real sexist here – every woman in the country knew how to cut up a chicken... Now 60%

¹⁶ <http://www.irregularartimes.com/polyface.html> accessed May 1st, 2009. Note: this may be changing due to outside pressure. However it was certainly the case when Pollan attended the farm. Indeed the website, while stating that they will accept six men and two women, still reads at the beginning “ An extremely intimate relationship, the apprenticeships offer young men the opportunity to live and work with the Salatin’s.” (emphasis added). It is unclear how many, if any, women have been allowed to serve in the farm labor aspect of the apprenticeship.

of our customers don't even know that a chicken has bones! I'm serious. We have moved to an incredibly ignorant culinary connection.¹⁷

Barbara Kingsolver, too, express explicit gender conservatism; throughout her book, she argues against what she sees as the excesses of feminism which she describes as “the great hoodwink of my generation” (2007: 127) because it wrongly removed the woman from hearth and home, concluding with her complete pride in becoming the type of housewife who finally knows how to make her own cheese (2007: 126-127 and 156). As Jennifer Jeffrey has written in a particularly insightful article “The Feminist in My Kitchen”

One day during the *Pennywise Eat Local Challenge*, as I was dashing between meetings and wondering how on earth I was going to create an evening meal composed of local ingredients within budget with almost no time to shop, this thought flashed through my head: this whole eat local concept is *so not friendly* for women who work...

If eating local is still a challenge for me, what about women who, voluntarily or not, log 8 to 10 hours a day, five or six days a week, in an office or hospital or courtroom? What about women who, in addition to working long hours and commuting back and forth, also have children at home who need love and affection and help with homework? ...

Can we call ourselves feminists (simply defined here as people who desire the equality of all women, everywhere) and still suggest that an ideal dinner consists of handmade ravioli and slow-simmered marinara from vine-ripened, hand-picked tomatoes and a salad composed of vegetables that (let's be honest) are Not Available at Safeway?

An argument she, likewise, specially connects back to Barbara Kingsolver's own book:

Barbara Kingsolver took a year of her life to grow a garden to feed her family, and proceeded to write a beautiful book about the experience, but what if she had done the same thing twenty-five years ago, near the start of her writing career? My guess is that such a book (if it made it to publication at all, which is doubtful), might not have had such a receptive audience, but *more importantly*, all of that weeding and

¹⁷Interview: Joel Salatin This article appeared on p44 of the *Observer Food Monthly* section of the *Observer* on Sunday January 31 2010 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/jan/31/food-industry-environment>. Last accessed April 2010.

watering and meal-planning might have distracted her from the hard, lonely work of learning to write.¹⁸

All American

Furthermore I am concerned by the criteria that Joel Salatin uses to determine who will receive one of his, now highly, competitive internships on his farm. For example the very first requirement reads that the candidates must be “[b]right eyed, bushy-tailed, self-starter, eager-beaver, situationally aware, go-get-‘em, teachable, positive, non-complaining, grateful, rejoicing, get’erdone dependable, faithful, perseverant take-responsibility *clean-cut, all American boy-girl appearance characters. We are very, very, very discriminatory.*”¹⁹ (emphasis added) In the first place this list reiterates that same tendency towards gender conservatism as already discussed, since it is hard to imagine that a woman who wears only male clothes would be considered a clean cut all American girl appearance. Nor would, I imagine, a man who wears women’s clothes much less a homosexual or a transsexual be considered an all-American boy girl appearance. In fact it is odd to me that “appearance” is such an essential category of who Salatin will, or will not, allow to work on a farm.

There is also a second concern that this litany of traits suggests to me, particularly in his use of the phrase “All American.” For what does an “all American” appearance even mean in a nation of vast racial and immigrant diversity? I find these comments of particular concern as the college that Salatin chose to attend, Bob Jones University, prohibited African-Americans from attending until 1975 and still prohibited interracial dating in the year 2000 when a media uproar and declining student attendance finally forced the university to overturn its rules²⁰. And furthermore, Bob Jones University has throughout its entire history prohibited, as official policy, all acts

¹⁸Jennifer Jeffrey, *The Feminist in My Kitchen*, <http://jenniferjeffrey.typepad.com/writer/2007/06/one-day-during-.html> Accessed April 1st, 2010.

¹⁹ <http://www.polyfacefarms.com/apprentice.aspx> Accessed May 1st, 2009.

²⁰“Statement about Race at BJU” Bob Jones University <http://www.bju.edu/welcome/who-we-are/race-statement.php> Last accessed April 1, 2010.

of homosexuality as perversion condemned by God.²¹ Therefore, at least when he was choosing which college to attend, issues of racial inclusion, gay rights, or even social justice were not particularly strong motivating forces in Salatin's life. Nor has Salatin repudiated this relationship with Bob Jones University, which in 2009 recognized Salatin as the "alumus of the year."²² Salatin has also described the conservative talk show host Glenn Beck, who is both anti-gay marriage and anti-immigration, as "agendaless" and "truth-seeking."²³ And furthermore, as earlier mentioned, Salatin is himself prone to make remarks concerning migrant workers which seem at times to portray them in a negative or at least a demeaning light. For example, in testimony in front of Congress on how to make a more transparent meat system, Salatin claimed "Industrialized food and farming became aromatically and aesthetically repugnant, relegated to the offcasts of society C and D students along with their foreign workers."²⁴ Nor is this tendency limited to Salatin alone. As Kelefa Sanneh writes in the *New Yorker* "Agrarianism, like environmentalism, hasn't always been considered a progressive cause, and there's nothing inherently liberal about artisanal cheese or artisanal bikes...Rod Dreher, a *National Review* contributor and the author of 'Crunchy Cons,' is ardently pro-organic and ardently anti-gay marriage. Victor Davis Hanson, the author of 'Fields Without Dreams: Defending the Agrarian Idea,' is also the author of 'Mexifornia,' about the dangers posed by immigration."²⁵ It is, therefore hard to imagine how Michael Pollan can both, perhaps rightly, indict organic produce

²¹ Student Handbook, Bob Jones University, '05-'06, 29

²² "Headlines: Giving Due Honor: Accolades for Students and Grades" *BJU Review* Winter 2009 (Vol. 24 No.3) 2 http://issuu.com/bjureview/docs/bju_review_winter_2009__vol._24_no.3 Accessed April 1, 2010.

²³ Lewis McCrary, "Cultivating Freedom: Joel Salatin practices ethical animal husbandry— no thanks to the feds." *American Conservative* November 1, 2009. <http://www.amconmag.com/> Accessed April 1, 2010.

²⁴ Testimony of Joel Salatin, Polyface Farm, Swoope, Virginia United States Congress "After the Beef Recall: Exploring Greater Transparency in the Meat Industry" *House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform* April 17, 2008. While I agree with the view the migrant workers are exploited in factory farming systems it is unclear to be how grouping them intermediately with C and D students and referring to them as social outcasts helps to improve their working conditions. Please see footnote 23 for additional commentary on this point.

²⁵ Kelefa Sanneh "Fast bikes, slow food, and the workplace wars" *New Yorker Magazine*, June 22, 2009. http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2009/06/22/090622crat_atlarge_sanneh. Last accessed April 1, 2010.

harvested by recycled biodiesel tractors as insufficiently progressive because of their unfair treatment of Mexican farm workers and, at the same time, support Joel Salatin as a representative of the future vanguard of a progressive and egalitarian food movement.²⁶ As the British columnist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown recently argued:

Should good people be party to a vociferous movement which wants to refuse entry to "alien" foods? Look at the language used and you realize it is a proxy for anti-immigration sentiments: these foods from elsewhere come and take over our diets, reduce national dishes to third-class status, compete unfairly with Scotch broth and haggis, both dying out, excite our senses beyond decorum, contaminate the identity of the country irreversibly.

Turn to the clamour for the west to cut imported foods and a further bitter taste spreads in the mouth. If we decide – as many of my friends have – not to buy foods that have been flown over, it only means further devastation for the poorest. These are the incredibly hard-working farmers in the developing world, already the victims of trade protectionism imposed by the wealthy blocs. It means saying no to Fair-trade producers too, because their products have to travel to our supermarkets. Are we now to say these livelihoods don't matter because we prefer virtue of a more fashionable kind? Shameful are the environmentalists who are able to be this cavalier. They could only believe what they do if those peasant lives do not matter at all.²⁷

Hence, I fear that the “locavore” movement possesses within it the same potential for anti-immigrant sentiment that the earlier “Buy American” movement displayed. For example as Dana Frank argues in *Buy American: The Untold Story of Economic Nationalism*, the early 1970’s, 1980’s and early 1990’s were filled with calls to “Buy American” which foreshadowed many of the same reasons now provided to support locavorism including fears of globalization, support for union labor and critiques of

²⁶ While it could be argued that Salatin comments about migrant labor only reflect concern about labor standards Sanneh makes, I believe, an excellent rejoinder: “Proponents of homegrown food and “(very) small business...sometimes talk about how artisanalism improves the lives of workers. But the genius of this loosely organized movement is that it’s not a labor movement; it’s a consumer movement.” Although I have search extensively I can no evidence of where Joel Salatin has been directly working with farm workers unions to improve their labor conditions. And farm worker unions were reportedly kicked out of talks before the screening of *Food Inc.* <http://www.ciw-online.org/news.html>

²⁷ “Eat only local produce? I don't like the smell of that: The language in this debate is a proxy for anti-immigration sentiments” *The Independent* May 12, 2008 <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/yasmin-alibhai-brown/yasmin-alibhaibrown-eat-only-local-produce-i-dont-like-the-smell-of-that-826272.html> Last Accessed April 1, 2010.

exploitive labor practices in other countries, all interwoven with a desire to protect traditional “American” ways of life. However as she documents throughout her book:

Popular “Buy American” advocates promised, nonetheless, to protect and to serve the American people; but the inward-looking protection of “us” against the threatening “foreigners” spiraled downward into narrower and narrower clubbiness. What began innocently at the border of Orange County, Florida, or the State of Alaska ended less innocently at an economic border drawn by race or citizenship. (1999: 243)

This is in turn the basis of my fear that any movement which seeks to prevent the importation of goods from certain countries possesses the danger of justifying nationalistic fears of those nations and groups of peoples. And this worry is perhaps all the more relevant when the product being boycotted is food since an increasing number of both anthropological and sociological texts continue to highlight the deep connection between a culture and the food that it eats²⁸. Hence to stigmatize a food, purely because of where it comes from, runs the extreme risk of serving as proxy to stigmatize its people as well as decrease diversity as a whole. As James McWilliams writes:

A final paradox: in a sense, any community with an activist base seeking to localize the food supply is also a community that’s undermining diversity. Although we rarely consider the market influences that make community diversification possible, a moment’s reflection reveals a strong tie between cultural diversity and market access. Critics of globalization argue (often with ample evidence) that global forces undermine the world’s range of indigenous cultures — wiping out vernacular habits, wisdom, and languages. They overlook, however, how the material manifestations of diversity are brought to us by globalization.

Localization, by contrast, specifies what is and is not acceptable within an arbitrary boundary. In this sense, it delimits diversity. Anyone who doubts this claim should imagine what the culinary map of New York City would look like without open access to globally far-flung producers. It’s only because globally sourced distributors are able to provide

²⁸ For a partial list see: Mintz, Sidney W., and Christine M. Du Bois. "The Anthropology of Food and Eating." *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 31 (2002): 99-119.

specialized ingredients that Harlem, Chinatown, and Little Italy are such vibrant emblems of urban, culinary, and cultural diversity²⁹.

Saving Souls

It is therefore revealing to return to Michael Pollan's earlier claim, made in the context of putting locavore against veganism, that what solely motivates veganism is a desire for absolute moral purity, even to the point of destroying nature, in order to save the vegans' "souls." He continues this theme throughout his text with references to vegetarians as overly self-righteous, indeed to the point of claiming that they are "Puritans" since "A deep current of Puritanism runs through the writing of the animal philosophers, an abiding discomfort not just with our animality, but with the animals' animality too. They would like nothing better than to airlift us out from nature's "intrinsic evil"—and then take the animals with us. You begin to wonder if their quarrel isn't really with nature itself" (2008: 322). However, the irony of this argument is that while Pollan routinely indicts vegans as being metaphorically self-righteous puritans, the only option both he and Kingsolver provide are people who, for religious reasons, feel no complication about killing animals because they lack souls. As Pollan writes, "When I was at the farm I asked Joel how he could bring himself to kill a chicken. 'That's an easy one. People have a soul, animals don't; it's a bedrock belief of mine. Animals are not created in God's image. So when they die, they just die'" (2008: 331). In fact, since they have no souls and are therefore wholly unrelated to people, Joel Salatin encourages even young children to slit the throats of animals:

Interestingly, we typically have families come – they want to come and see the chicken butchering, for example. Well, Mom and Dad (they're in their late-20s early-30s), they stay out behind in the car, and the 8-, 9-, 10-, 11-year-old children come around to see this. We have not found any child under 10 that's the least bit put off by it. They get right into it. We'll even give them a knife and let them slice some throats.³⁰

²⁹ James McWilliams "Is Locavorism for Rich People Only?" *New York Times* Blog October 14, 2009 <http://freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/10/14/is-locavorism-for-rich-people-only/?pagemode=print>. Last Accessed April 1, 2010.

³⁰ "Annie Corrigan, Joel Salatin And Polyface Farm: Stewards of Creation" *EarthEats* March 26, 2010 <http://indianapublicmedia.org/eartheats/joel-salatin-complete-interview/> Accessed April 1 2010.

Hence, I wish to suggest, many of the proponents of the locavore movement seek to re-inscribe the very speciesism it first seems to draw into question. Indeed it is hard to imagine how a locavore movement ever could translate into an actual improvement of animals' lives since many of its most famous proponents hold that animals lack souls and furthermore that man's domination and consumption of them is the very definition of our humanity. For example Pollan and Kingsolver claim, with no citations, a laundry list of increasingly esoteric human characteristics which, supposedly, only eating meat has produced in humans including large brains (291), all forms of social interaction including the undefined "pleasures of the table" (272), human free will (297), a variety of children's books (Kingsolver, 2007: 222) and even "civilization" itself (*ibid*). In the most amusing example of this attribution of human traits, Pollan suggests that the reason marijuana works on humans is because it mimics the effects of hunting within human brains. He writes:

Later it occurred to me that this mental state [while hunting], which I quite liked, in many ways resembled the one induced by smoking marijuana: the way one's senses feel especially acute and the mind seems to forget everything outside the scope of its present focus, including physical discomfort and the passing of time... . Could it be that the cannabinoid network is precisely the sort of adaption that natural selection would favor in the evolution of a creature who survives by hunting? A brain chemical that sharpens the senses, narrows your mental focus, allows you to forget everything extraneous to the task at hand (including physical discomfort and the passage of time), and makes you hungry would seem to be the perfect pharmacological tool for man the hunter. (2008: 342)

Therefore, one of the oddest parts of the locavore literature is that even as its proponents graphically and indeed poetically describe the abuses of the factory farms they, at the same time, remove any reason why anyone should be concerned at all; since animals lack souls, we cannot understand what, or even if, they think or feel, and our domination of them represents the very essence of what defines us as humans. In fact Joel Salatin has, repeatedly, spoken out *against* so called "Prop. 2" ballot initiatives around the country sponsored by the American Humane Society in order to outlaw the worst abuses of factory farming such as battery cages and gestation

crates³¹. While Prop. 2 initiatives are themselves controversial within the animal rights community, since they result in larger cages instead of no cages, Salatin's critique is not that they do not go far enough. Instead his claim is that people should be able to, legally, do whatever they want with farm animals. Hence he actually argues for less oversight and control of how farmers raise their livestock. While such a practice may, or may not, as he claims, help small farms who process animals expand their operations, at the same time it would seem to increase the already horrific abuse of all animals that do receive at least some minimal protection under the law currently as well as undercut any other efforts to increase the level of such protection in the future.

I Am A “Locavore” (and a Vegan)

While each of these critiques might seem to suggest that I am opposed to all of the goals espoused by “locavorism” this is in fact not the case. I support urban community gardening, farmers markets, Community Support Agriculture (CSA's), and organic farms which eschew the use of monoculture crops, pesticides, and treat their workers well. Indeed, perhaps my greatest concern about the manner in which the locavore movement articulates itself is based on its repeated, but largely false, dichotomy between “vegan and vegetarians” on the one hand, and conscious food consumers on the other, as though it were impossible to be concerned about the welfare of animals, the environment, and the broader questions of food policy and food justice all at the same time. Hence, perfectly reasonable arguments against monoculture crops are morphed into unreasonable attacks on vegetarians as though the only two possible options were eating meat or conventional produce from large scale industrial farms. However, the reality is that many vegetarian and vegans, since they have already taken the step to self consciously control and direct their diet, are frequently more aware of the dangers industrial farming practices pose and therefore more likely to seek out ethically grown fruit and vegetables--wherever in the world

³¹ For one example among many see the interview “Joel Salatin - The Pastor of the Pasture” Mandy Henderson *Columbus Underground* February 28, 2010. <http://www.columbusunderground.com/joel-salatin-the-pastor-of-the-pasture>. Last accessed April 1, 2010.

these may exist. In fact, my opposition to industrial farming practices stems, in part, *from* my life-long commitment to animal rights. Hence as Pollan and others have pointed out, confined animal feeding operations (CAFO's), or "factory farms" are economically feasible only because of the massive subsidies that the government routinely provides to large scale industrial farmers who grow vast acres of soy, wheat, and corn which in turn are sold to factory farms who are the largest consumer of such products in the United States.

It is, therefore, not my goal to end the movement for conscious consumption of all food products, including vegan ones, since I believe large-scale industrial agriculture is deeply harmful to the environment, workers, and animals. It is instead meant to suggest that we need a new understanding and new articulation of the manner in which the locavore movements goals are expressed and understood. What matters is not the overly simplistic notion of "food miles" but the total carbon foot print, as well as the total environmental impact of any food purchase – a concern which can only lead to a significant decrease in the amount of meat consumed if not vegetarianism or veganism -- and not only food, but the whole array of services, including clothing and electronics, which are marketed in the current global market place. Moreover, it deeply matters how and why these calls for "locavorism" are framed, and the tendency of many in the movement to unfairly and inaccurately criticize feminists and immigrants as corrupting to an idealized, romantic state of a local community is deeply troubling and potentially quite dangerous. As the Buy American movement, originally started by anti-sweat shop unions, demonstrates, originally "progressive" causes which fail to consider the intersections of gender, race, class, and citizenship can devolve into only nationalistic regionalism. And it is my hope that the false division between vegan and local can be ended, so that both animal rights activists and food policy activists can unite into a shared and, therefore, exponentially more effective movement. It is my hope not to end the growing consensus on the need for a more just diet, including my issues raised by locavors, such as farm subsidies for agribusiness, but instead to expand the struggle to include a consideration for the full panoply of social justice issues that a truly just and therefore truly "green" diet must entail.

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