

Paleo Solution - 263

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Robb Wolf: Howdy folks, Robb Wolf here, another edition of the PaleoSolution Podcast, something very different today. We're not talking abs. We're not talking skinny jeans. We're talking about a new concept which is artisanal local decentralized meat production and butchery. I have two friends here, Ross Flynn, who I met on the epic hunting trip to Texas a year or so ago and also Eliza MacLean. Eliza runs or is part of the Cane Creek Farm. We're gonna talk about both of their backgrounds, but guys, how are you doing?

Ross Flynn: We are doing great.

Robb Wolf: Awesome.

Eliza MacLean: Very well.

Robb Wolf: And then we are hijacking our Skype fee through another mutual friend, Aaron. When folks go leftbankbutchery.com and go to team Aaron is the dude who looks like Ron Jeremy sitting in the lounge chair, so I also got to meet Aaron on the hunting trip a while back, but guys, can you give folks a little bit of your background and what went in to starting this Left Bank Butchery operation?

Ross Flynn: Well, it all actually started. First, Eliza gave me a job on her farm, Cane Creek, and I worked for her for about 5 years and decided we wanted to maybe control a little bit more of our meat and our distribution and the products that we made and along that time, the plan to start a butcher shop, was hatched soon. Now, I no longer work at the farm, but all the meat comes from the farm and we've been open only a few months, but everything is going well so far.

Robb Wolf: Nice. Now, Eliza, how did you get in to all this stuff?

Eliza MacLean: Well, I first want to say that I now work for which I'm really quite proud of.

Robb Wolf: Nice.

Eliza MacLean: I'd like to tell everybody that part of the story. I took a look around North Carolina in 1996 or 1997 and thought I should probably help out with some sustainable agriculture projects and one thing led to another. I jumped into the deep end and started raising animals myself a good way, I mean, a way that gives them a lot of room to have their habits and their feelings and still have that willing relationship with me, the manager, the producer, to turn them into food, which is an interesting...

Robb Wolf Dynamic.

Eliza MacLean: Interesting thing to do...

Robb Wolf: Yeah.

Eliza MacLean: But, it works. I have a really beautiful farm, that is, you know, a rotational grazing operation with gardens and chickens and eggs and everybody has a job there including Ross back in the day. You know, part of the problem with something like that is the secondary job of marketing and getting it out to the consumer in an equally dignified way and we run into problems as many processing facilities as we have in the state of North Carolina. We don't have very like-minded folks handling our products on their last day of life and handling our animal as well is one

thing handling the product when it becomes meat as another and we really run into a lot of issues with that, so here we are controlling that aspect of it.

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Robb Wolf:

So, why it is important for you guys to have that kind of soup to nuts control from the rotational grazing kind of the planned holistic managements all the way through to the slaughter and the butchering. Why does that matter? I mean, in this age of Costco and even like Whole Foods type stuff where everything is so mega farmed and centralized everything, I have my own thoughts on this from just kind of a decentralization and a food security standpoint, but everybody thinks some are not a case for thinking that. I mean, why is this stuff important to you?

Ross Flynn:

Well, also on the farm, you know we've raised grass-fed beef as well and so all of our animals that bred on the farm, you know, all of our animals take significantly longer to raise than in an industrial model. So, as far as the self-satisfaction, if you spent two and a half years raising a cow, and then also the whole time that taking care of its mother while mother was pregnant and then you take this animal to a processor who doesn't care at all what they're cutting, really do a horrible job on it and then we really want to control that last step there. How do we get this to our customers in the best way possible? We raised that animal for so long and did it in all the best ways that we possibly knew. We want to be able to see that all the way through, both as a business and just also, like I said, from a satisfaction standpoint.

Robb Wolf:

Eliza, how have you integrated like I guess some of the sustainability element of this, I mean, to me, it seems somewhat obvious in that you've got a rotational grazing plan. You have beef, pork, poultry. You grow vegetables and fruit on the land also. So, to me, what that starts looking like is an ecosystem. Like if humans weren't there and we were to take a cross section of a forest or land or like prairie and habitat, then there would be predators and omnivores and herbivores and they would all be kind of interfacing in some sort of fashion. It seems like you've at least somewhat replicated that, but what are your thoughts on kind of the sustainability piece, like how do you try to make that a closed-loop system?

Eliza MacLean:

Well, I mean, you just had to nail on the head. That's exactly what it is. I am a master of recycling like my pigs are a master of composting. I mean, everybody has a job. I've got animal power working the farm too. I've got fertility in the in the dung of a lot of these animals, so I don't ever have to use synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides. I don't administer

antibiotics. I don't produce waste that I can't deal with. I mean, when you blow it out and you think about these huge industrial models, when we talked about costs, external costs that are not embodied in the cheap meats we can buy at Costco, all of those things are addressed in a system like mine. So I don't have disease resistance. I don't have parasite resistance, I mean excuse me, I don't have parasite pressure. I have things that sort of kind of sterilized with regards to each other.

The soil is being improved instead of degraded. The animals have healthy immune systems. They are not passed some therapeutic antibiotics that are going into waterways or humans' bodies, you know, we're developing super bugs or things like that. All of that gets kind of brought back down to basics the way it would be if we weren't there. We can take that cross section. Does that make sense?

Robb Wolf:

Absolutely yeah and I am nodding vigorously and this is some of the stuff I think I told you guys a little bit before I rolled. My kind of job in this Paleosphere has been helping people understand their health and to get them abs and fit in their skinny jeans and that's all been really rewarding and it's done a lot of good and I think it's raised some awareness about food quality, but then, I feel like the next stage of my life, the next area that I really need to push on is sustainability front and the decentralized food production.

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One of the things folks don't really understand when we talk about an operation like what you guys are doing versus like some of the factory farm models and you mentioned this somewhat peripherally that the meat that you get at Costco looks cheap, but there are all this hidden cost on the farm subsidies that go into supporting that kind of caffo model of food production that we all end up ultimately paying for it. It just isn't on the sticker price of the food. You know, when you go into a supermarket to buy food from that direction, so people will complain and will say, well, this grass-fed meat looks expensive. If I go to Left Bank or someplace like that, you know that my food appears to be more expensive, but they are not taking in all the externalities of an operation like what you guys are doing is not promoting antibiotic-resistant bacteria. It is not promoting nitrogen waste into the waterways. It is actually building soil and sequestering carbon, which is reversing atmospheric CO₂ buildup. There is like all these other pieces that go into the cost that you guys were actually truly representing.

It is not a legitimately balanced playing field and one of the ironies to me and I don't want to jabber too much, I want to talk to you guys, but one of the ironies to me is the way that does become a balanced playing field,

as if oil spikes to \$300 a gallon or a barrel and suddenly, the mega producers are not in a position to keep doing what they're doing. But we really don't have a fallback plan for how we produce food either of plant origin or animal origin because of the centralization and the intensification.

What type of reception do you guys get from your neighbors or the people on the area that are maybe still in the more traditional food production scene? Like are they open to this, do you think you are complete dirt-worshipping hippies that have no idea what you're doing? Like how was all that received?

Eliza MacLean: We're kind of here together, so I think there is some level of respect. I mean when you are a farmer, you are a farmer. So a lot of these people on their farms are minding their animals. They just have totally different outlets. You know they get picked up in semis and taken to the feed lot or taken Cargill or Murphy, you know, Brown or whatever. I think they think we're a little bit of –you know, we might think highly of ourselves, but generally, we're still complaining about the weather. We're still thinking about the price of fuel and all those other things.

But we addressed in my opinion a whole lot more. I'll let Ross talk for a minute. We can go back to it, but things like flavor, health benefits, health-promoting foods, I mean with that cheapness comes a lack of those things as well as the departure from the local economy.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Eliza MacLean: So, it is always interesting to see those guys that are generally buying their white bread and their sliced baloney when they are producing animals themselves and not even eating them.

Robb Wolf: Right.

Eliza MacLean: I mean they are going through the whole chain.

Ross Flynn: Robb, I kind of smiled when you said the neighbors that are doing the more traditional model and that's right, and that's how we word it all the time. You know, think about that traditional. I mean for all of the human agriculture here, we are really the ones that...

Robb Wolf: Are traditional [Laughs]

Ross Flynn: [Laughs] But I mean, I hear you and I think a lot of our neighbors we're actually -our butcher shop is actually in a very tiny little village. We don't have a stoplight here and it's not a particularly wealthy; actually, it is not a wealthy community at all. So, our neighbors are very rooted in agriculture, which we love and that's - we could open this in one of the many cities in North Carolina, but we didn't want to do that. This is our home.

So we do have an appreciation. I mean every single day, farmers come into our shop and they maybe a little surprised at the prices, but overall, there really is an appreciation. I feel an appreciation. They want to talk cows. They want to talk pigs and this is what I imagined, but I really and firmly believe as I see them... I think that they really wished that they could be a part of the system like that and a lot of farmers are farming the way they are right now because that's where the government subsidies are, that's where the programs have been laid out. This is the diet that we're all supposed to have. But the truth to the matter is I think a lot of farmers really would like to control a bit more of the system. I think that they want to be able to feed their family, the meat and the vegetables that they raised. So...

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Eliza MacLean: They've been told to, you don't hang hams in your house anymore, I mean some of them do. We still have pig killings in November here...

Robb Wolf: Right.

Eliza MacLean: And that's kind of cool, but they get the pigs from a big confinement barn and they are looking at us like hmm, maybe, like those remind me of my grandfather's pigs, maybe we will try that next time and they're definitely curious and perhaps a little wistful. It is interesting.

Robb Wolf: You know why, I put a descent amount of time into supporting this outfit, the farm to consumer legal defense fund, which these are the guys that like when the feds show up at an Amish farm that is selling raw milk or some folks probably not dissimilar to you that are using artisanal traditional, low temperature, curing method and whatnot, you know, the feds show up in body armor and the armored personnel carriers and storm the ranch and collect the milk and meat and destroy it and everything. But these are the guys that really defend those folks and it's interesting to me how crazy the legalities, litigation and kind of fear-mongering around traditional dairying practices, meat curing practices have woven into the system, you know?

And it is funny folks do things in a more traditional way, typically, they just kind of want to be left alone to do what they're doing. They're not necessarily saying we need to do away with the factory farmed approach or with the kind of mega farming approach to say like salami production or something like that, but I just like to be left alone so that I could do this the way that I want to do it and if somebody wants to buy it, they can buy it and we have like a free exchange of goods and services. Where are you guys in that whole fracas as far as the curing of traditional meats in low temperatures and all that stuff? You guys running some black market operation? [Laughs] What's the deal?

Ross Flynn: No, not at all Robb.

Robb Wolf: Okay. [Laughs]

Ross Flynn: No. I mean a lot of what we do is going back to traditional models. It takes a lot of hand holding when it comes to dealing with the county or the state, explain to them that this is how it has been done thousands of years and there is a reason that it has been done in this way. We ultimately are fighting now against, in my opinion, a really big industry and they have a real incentive to see the system continue the way it is. The only thing that we can really offer, I mean, we can't try and get into fighting the lawsuits. We can't get into fighting the farm bill. We can't do these sorts of things, but what we can do is offer a different role model and hope and tell our story as well and hopefully people will rally around it.

Eliza MacLean: We rely heavily on our smoker and fully cook a lot of product that we can do legally. We're not hanging our prosciutto ham or making a lot of sausage with the hams right now. But hopefully that can be a bit of a spinoff and there are a few places in this country where you can still do that. But the more that we offer this alternative, the more people seem to get excited about it and want the same things for their community is taking the story home and that's where grass is all about and it seems to be pretty well sticking this go around in this good food movement with the likes of Michael Polen at the helm and other writers.

Robb Wolf: Right, yeah.

Eliza MacLean: That are out there.

Robb Wolf: I think the cat's kind of out of the bag on a lot of that stuff and as you know the Paleo scene has definitely been changing some ideas on kind of food quality. There was some sort of a report that for the first time in 30

years with things that are considered junk food, the total sales of junk food in the US had been on the decline, like the last 2 years and so that's fascinating to me. I feel like this artisanal food movement, the ancestral health kind of Paleo diet type movement, I think is out of hand in all that stuff so it is very very exciting. Ross, when I first met you, was at this fundraiser for the Silent Warrior Foundation and we were pig hunting and deer hunting and you showed us how to butcher a whole pig and you showed us this thing called seam butchery. Well, what is that and why are you so go geeked on that?

Ross Flynn:

Seam butchery, some people call it continental butchery too referencing continental Europe, but it is a way of isolating the different individual muscles in an animal. This does not work well with our industrial system. We have an industrial way of also cutting animals, which is to say we run things through band saws, we cut things into squares and what have you. The nice part about seam butchery is you isolate different muscles and different muscles are doing different things for the body. Depending on what they're doing is going to give them a different profile whether that's in tenderness and in flavor.

So, imagine for a second, the easiest example that I can use is, if you think of a chuck roast. You know, chuck roast is just a squared-off, to most people, it is just a squared-off cut from the shoulder of the cow. Well, some of those muscles are tender. Some of them are tough, but because some of them are tough, you got to put it in our crackpot and that's fine. But some of those were tender enough that if you pulled those out, you put them on the grill.

So what we do is isolate those muscles, which means that our case is filled with a bunch of steaks you've never heard of before.

Robb Wolf:

Right.

Ross Flynn:

But if we say well, hey if you want to braise or put in your crackpot, then yeah, here are some less expensive cuts. But if you do want to grill, you've never heard of this cut before, but it is tender enough to do so, and so that again is that sort of artisanal side of butchery that we're trying to bring back.

Robb Wolf:

Why are you so fired up for that? Like you guys are doing such good work on the sustainability side, grass finishing, otherwise doing kind of an artisanal approach, why not get the band saw out and just why another layer of education? Like every layer of education that we need to do with the folks, usually, we get some drop off and adherence and buy in, why is

the seam butchery still important enough that not only you educating people on the way that the meat is raised and the environment that is going into that, but now you're changing the very cuts of meat that people are familiar with. Why is that important?

Ross Flynn:

Well, ultimately, the reason we buy whole animals and there is a lot of reasons, but first and foremost, is that how it comes to the farmer. When Eliza gets the whole animal and so she does not just get chops and a little bit of bosom butt. I mean, she gets a whole animal. So if I want to buy from her, I am doing her the biggest favor by committing to that whole animal. You talked earlier about how meat is more expensive under our model because we can't hide a lot of those costs and so we were conscious of that and it is not something we're happy about. So we're constantly figuring out how do we bring down cost and one of the ways that we do that is through the best cutting possible.

So I have people [inaudible] asking what are they going to be doing with it and they tell me as I'm wrapping it up and I say hold on, I open up the package, I have a pork chops back and I say hey, you can spend half as much money on a different cut and it is actually going to be better for what you are doing. We've got into a system where we go to grocery stores and what are your choices in the grocery store? The New York strip, fillet mignon, ribeye, and ground beef, they're like the only choices you have.

Robb Wolf:

Right.

Ross Flynn:

Maybe one or two more. When we cut up a cow, I mean we're talking about we got 40 different cuts there and so again, every time we sell a steak that could be grilled to somebody whose just going to throw out in a pot roast, they are over paying for it. So, we can only do so much and we pay our farmers a lot of money for our animals, but making sure that the person walks out of there with the cut that is going to serve them best and making sure that they don't pay more than they need to is a way that we can sort of make our meat as accessible as possible.

Eliza MacLean:

One of the things:

Robb Wolf:

Go ahead, go ahead, Eliza, yeah.

Eliza MacLean:

I was just going to say one of the things that they've done and I'm sure you've seen lots of these little kind of cartoon aspects of this where we've turned raising animals into a factory model. So we're basically stamping out something old like car batteries except that they're animals.

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So on one hand, you've got an animal welfare issue and when you raise animals in a great environment where they are literally having fun and playing. I mean I could do National Geographic specials on the play that happens on my farm. But you revere them and so you revere each and every muscle that come, with that comes savoring and that is one thing that I see that is finally, finally changing.

I mean I grew up in the '80s and we didn't savor much in the '80s except Madonna and Cyndi Lauper, but I mean that was when doritos showed up and there was a game. It was a gimmick actually. It was some combination of nasty ingredients to make you want more and more. We're literally isolating the steaks and these cuts that they have the mouth feel, they have food memory. They have health benefits there. You slow down and think about the whole picture. I mean I think honestly, it makes people feel more human to sort of buy into our model.

Robb Wolf:

Well you know, it is interesting within this kind of Paleo land scene, I would say one of the largest kind of refugee groups are folks that were formally vegetarian or vegan and maybe due to health reasons or a variety of reasons, the vegetarian vegan approach did not work. But because at least some people on this Paleo scene have really been championing like snout-to-tail butchery and sustainability and whatnot, they can kind of wrap their head around, kind of the morality piece. It is a little bit more accessible for them.

Eliza MacLean:

Exactly.

Robb Wolf:

Yeah.

Eliza MacLean:

Yeah. I mean that's a big connector. I mean when we tell the story and we are showing the steak, it all seems to make sense. It's on a continuum and people bring it home and that's the next step for a lot of us. I mean food writers and book writers and even the restaurant folks who saved me and gave me a market when I started all this, now, we are getting people to take this home and have and cook again. They're sitting down with their families and it just seems to finally come full circle and if that really is pervasive across this nation then we'll really have done something. I don't mean against the big machine, but we will be an undercurrent and a fallback hopefully.

Robb Wolf

Yeah. Yeah. We're doing it for us, not necessarily against something, but for us.

- Eliza MacLean: Exactly.
- Robb Wolf: I have a quick question that just to throw in there. What's the span of offal offerings that you have, you know ranging from heart to kidneys to intestines to stomach? Like how are you guys handling all the offal and is there anything really wacky or interesting that you're doing with that?
- Ross Flynn: Well, we do a lot of charcuterie in the shop. Unfortunately we are limited, surprise, surprise as to what we're legally allowed to get back. If there's ever processing on a farm, which would not be for other consumption, we have done that in the past just for ourselves. There is a lot more being done. But right now, we're allowed to get the heart, tongue.
- Eliza MacLean: Liver.
- Ross Flynn: Liver and kidneys. Those were pretty much the only ones, which is a bit unfortunate and a little curious as to why they won't let us take other things home, but we still get to play within the system to some degree.
- Robb Wolf: You guys just need a larger Hispanic population and once menudo hits that area, then I think, you will get people change that a lot.
- Ross Flynn: Yeah.
- Robb Wolf: Have you guys headed in –you know, I know mainly beef, pork, poultry. Have you guys headed into any types of a little bit nontraditional directions like goat or alpacas or llamas or anything kind of wacky like that?
- Ross Flynn: We do lamb and goat. We bring in fish and our whole approach to fish is sort of in line with our approach to meat, which is to say some of the fish that people are not familiar with they are oftentimes the healthiest and most affordable...
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- Robb Wolf: Right.
- Ross Flynn: We're lucky in North Carolina were not too far from the ocean, but outside of lamb and goat, that's pretty much kept us busy so far.
- Robb Wolf: Very cool.

- Eliza MacLean: There are other interesting things out there. There is rabbit, there is guinea fowl, there is duck, but we also need to keep things moving through our case and we have...
- Robb Wolf: Right.
- Eliza McLean: We are experimenting with new products every single week still with what we do bring in.
- Ross Flynn: In the future, we would like to offer some sort of processing for people who hunt.
- Robb Wolf: Uh-hum.
- Ross Flynn: But that would be out probably next hunting season.
- Robb Wolf: Got you. Are you guys doing any type of brined products for Saint Patrick's Day?
- Ross Flynn: Oh yeah. We're starting a whole back on our brisket here because everybody wants some corned brisket.
- Robb Wolf: Right. Right.
- Ross Flynn: In a week or two.
- Robb Wolf: Awesome.
- Eliza MacLean: Now we have already had requests for Easter Lamb, so you know, the word's out. That if you want the best, come this direction.
- Robb Wolf: That's fantastic. Well guys, what else can you tell folks about the operation? Where can everybody find you guys on the inner webs?
- Ross Flynn: We are at leftbankbutchery.com and I think we're on Facebook as well. I stay away from it, but I'm sure we're there so.
- Robb Wolf: [Laughs] It's better for your sanity doing minimal social media, trust me. Eliza, how can folks find you? Where is Crane Creek Farms? What's the URL for that?
- Eliza MacLean: It's canecreekfarm.us and I am also on Facebook too, but I only let another people handle that, same idea. Too much.

- Robb Wolf: [Laughs] Smart. Smart. I still have not fully farmed all mine out and it steals a little bit of my soul every day, so I am jealous of you guys. Guys, I am really stoked to have had you on the show. I will have links to both Cane Creek Farms and to Left Bank Butchery in the show notes. Really excited for what you guys are doing and I think I'm going to get out your direction at the end of the summer so I'll be swinging by and grabbing some chow.
- Eliza MacLean: Nice.
- Ross Flynn: Alright, that sounds great.
- Eliza MacLean: Hey Robb!
- Robb Wolf: Yeah.
- Eliza MacLean: I hate to a – you said we could poke fun at you but this isn't poke fun, there is a Cane Creek Farms in the area, just drop the S, it's Cane Creek Farm, singular.
- Robb Wolf: Farm, okay.
- Eliza MacLean: Big difference. Big, big difference.
- Robb Wolf: Very big difference there, okay. Well, I've got it pulled up in my URL, so canecreekfarm.us and we will definitely have the correct URL in the show notes.
- Eliza MacLean: Okay, cool.
- Robb Wolf: Okay.
- Eliza MacLean: It's been great talking with you.
- Robb Wolf: Great chatting with you guys. Very excited for what you're doing. We'll get links to all this in the show notes and looking forward you coming out and seeing you guys in person.
- Ross Flynn: All right, that sounds great. Thanks Robb.
- Eliza MacLean: Take care.
- Robb Wolf: Okay guys, take care. Bye-bye.

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