

## Green guru visits for Langley ag workshop

- by Glenda Luymes - Langley Advance
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There's no surprising Joel Salatin.

"I knew you were going to ask that," the famous farmer and hero of the chemical-free food movement said when asked if small-scale agriculture could really feed the world.

"It's a valid question," he said. "If what we're doing sounds warm and fuzzy, but can't do that (feed the world), it's not credible.

"So I never tire of hearing that question."

Salatin's answer provides food for thought, much like his farming practices.

Described by the New York Times as the "High Priest of the Pasture," the Virginia farmer rose to fame after he was featured in the films *Food Inc.* and *Fresh* and the book *Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan. Salatin has written nine books himself, including four "how-to's," which are used by many B.C. organic farmers.

The rock star farmer will be the keynote speaker at a Langley workshop about the future of food and farming on Nov. 8.

The event is hosted by the Langley Sustainable Agriculture Foundation (LSAF) and will also feature two local farmers – Chris Bodnar of Close to Home Organics at Glen Valley Organic Farm, and Julia Smith of Urban Digs.

The event follows on the heels of a successful workshop on small-lot agriculture and is aimed at generating production on some of Langley's un-farmed land, said LSAF director Karen Taylor.

Langley Township is unique among the Metro Vancouver communities: It has more farmland than any of the Metro cities, with 75 per cent of its area in the Agricultural Land Reserve. But unlike ag-giants Abbotsford and Chilliwack, 73 per cent of Langley's land is in parcels smaller than 10 acres. Only 55 per cent of the Township's ALR land is farmed.

But the interest is there.

LSAF was "overwhelmed" by the response to their last workshop from young farmers, second-career farmers and acreage owners, said Taylor.

Salatin hopes to speak on "nook and cranny farming," as well as integrated food systems.

On his Polyface Farm, Salatin uses portable shelters and feeding systems to rotate different animals between pastures. The goal is to benefit the land.

For example, after cows have grazed a pasture, chickens will follow, eating the bugs in the cow manure.

"Eggs are the byproduct," said Salatin.

In the same way, pigs are used to turn the farm's compost pile (which is essentially manure and bedding left behind when his cows leave the barn). The farmer adds corn to the mix, so that when the pigs come into the barn, they stir it in their hunt for food.

Salatin said he is involved in a "land-healing" ministry.

So back to the million-dollar question: Could small, sustainable farms really feed the world?

Salatin said the world does not have a food production problem. "No one is going hungry because there is not enough food. The world has never thrown away as much food as we do today."

Rather, Salatin said the world has a food distribution problem. Doubling production would not solve the problem.

Salatin also believes that acre for acre, small farms produce more food than large ones.

The farmer said multi-speciated systems (ie. farms that raise various livestock and multiple crops) are more productive than single-speciated systems. The problem is that no one measures aggregate productivity, or the total production from the farm as a whole, he said. Rather, each species is looked at individually.

The rock star farmer also pointed to the amount of unfarmed land available in the world. This may not be apparent in Metro Vancouver or the Fraser Valley, but the farmer cited a study that found over the last 15 years in New York, 3.1 million acres

of farmland has been abandoned.

Salatin is also interested in a largely untapped land source: Lawns.

“There is 36 million acres of lawn in the United States alone,” he said. “There is plenty of land.”

The LSAF workshop will be held at the Langley Events Centre from 8:30 a.m. to noon on Saturday, Nov. 8. Tickets are \$25 each, plus GST, and can be purchased by calling any Township of Langley recreation centre.

– Glenda Luymes is a Vancouver Province reporter.