

## 20.11.07 Everybody's Gotta Eat Hour.wav

SM Sarah McConnell

AS Audio Sample

AT Andria Timmer

KD Kelley Deetz

JM John Munsell

WC Will Collier

[00:00:00]

**SM** From Virginia Humanities, this is With Good Reason.

**AS** Hey Forest, can you say hi?

**SM** Forest is just seven months old, but you can tell he has strong opinions about food.

**AS** I made all these days with organic fruits and vegetables, and he doesn't really care for it. And now we're doing like sweet potato sticks. So, that's where we're at with what we're trying to feed him.

**SM** That's his mom, DeAnn. You can tell she has strong opinions about food, too.

**AS** I do identify as being a natural mom. I try to provide whole food, plant-based food to my family and I try to provide organic food when available and when my budget allows.

**SM** DeAnn moves around a lot because her husband's in the military, but each time they land somewhere new, whenever she can, she starts a vegetable garden.

**AS** You want to go walking around the garden? You want to go check on our plants? Let's go check on our plants. You want to hold a cowpea? Do you want to hold a cowpea?

**SM** I'm Sarah McConnell. And today on the show, we explore food ways. From the natural parents who are shifting their lifestyles to source better foods for their children, to the enslaved cooks who helped shape American cuisine. Andria Timmer taught nutrition classes for years. This is healthy, that's unhealthy, the usual rhetoric. But once she became a mother, her perspective about food shifted. She's a professor of anthropology at Christopher Newport University and started interviewing other natural parents who had shifted their lifestyles to put family dinner in the foreground. Andria, how did your own motherhood pique your interest in what they were doing as natural parents in every way?

**AT** I had been an anthropologist, who had ask questions about food and then I had my first child and I just saw how much so many of the decisions that we made about how to parent for our children, were wrapped up in how to feed our children. And so many discussions about everything related to childhood revolved around questions of both food and health and making decisions about mealtimes and when to feed and what to feed. Natural food or healthy food became a way that mothers and myself included, were identifying ourselves as mothers who were really taking a vested interest into raising our children. So that just became the vehicle, food became the vehicle for all this other decision making and identity as a parent. In order to really embrace the idea of organic, local, natural, unprocessed food movement, a lot of time has to go into finding foods, researching foods, cooking foods. And at a certain point, I couldn't dedicate myself that

much in that way. But definitely there are a lot of elements of it that I still practice personally in raising my own children, or at least the values that I want to impart to my children.

**SM** What are a few of those, as it relates to food?

**AT** One of them, I think, is just teaching the importance of food. That a lot of times we're taught that food is fuel and it's something that you eat to keep you going. But really, food is a way that we communicate. It's a way that we gather, we celebrate, we mourn. And so, we shouldn't just shovel food into our mouths. We should think about what we're eating, and we should take the time to think about where it came from, what hands were involved in producing it, what intention went into making it.

**SM** How old are your children now? And do you steer them away from candy and chips?

**AT** I have an 11 year old son and an 8 year old daughter, and the answer is no, actually. I do not now. And I guess that's a way that I've kind of departed from this more natural food movement. I provide them with a lot of home cooked meals, a lot of fresh meals. We garden, we use a lot of foods from the garden. But if they want some candy, then they're welcome to it or some chips. So it's about balance, I think.

**SM** Around 2015, you interviewed and surveyed a number of these women who consider themselves part of the natural food, natural mother movement. Help me understand who they were and are, and what they meant by identifying with this group.

**AT** Right. Most of the women, most of the mothers just identified themselves as mothers who were making the best decision for their children. And in so doing, they were aligning themselves with a more national movement that was focused on local foods and farmer's markets and getting to know your farmer and community supported agriculture and homesteading. So most of the mothers that I spoke with had really changed their lifestyle in order to prioritize the sourcing and growing of food. For example, four or five people had made the decision to move to a rural area in order to keep animals and grow vegetables. They would spend much of their week going to different farms to find raw milk, locally processed beef, to find farm fresh eggs and pasture range to chickens. Moving away from the fast pace of city life and really slow down and focus on family.

**SM** It does sound wonderful and it also sounds as though they have the means or made the choice to stay at home. They didn't have to work nine to five outside the home.

**AT** Yes, absolutely. These are families who could afford to have only one person working. They could afford to spend more on grass-fed beef, on a share of a cow, on raw milk, on organic produce or to buy land. Everyone I spoke to; I would identify as middle class. Everyone I spoke to was white. There is another part of this national movement that is focused on urban agriculture in minority neighborhoods, in lower income neighborhoods that I was able to start to get into and would like - and at this point, I'm exploring more how this can be a way, this eating locally, knowing where your food comes from, can transcend class and race boundaries.

**SM** How are you finding it can transcend it, when the necessities of everyday life just grind us down?

**AT** Oh, that's the great question. One thing that I have heard said from many different people quite often is when it - when it comes to eating, we need fewer farms and more gardens. What I have noticed and when you say that the daily life is grinding is down, I immediately think of the very current moment, where we're all living in this pandemic. I mean we found so many people have started to engage in gardening as a way to deal with being stuck at home, as a way to deal with the fears that the grocery store are going to have the food that they need. And that is really accessible to many people, to have community gardens or food forests in the area, or just have your own backyard garden.

**SM** One of the lovely side effects of the focus on food and the time it takes and the adventure of gathering it, and making it, and putting it together is the opportunity to spend all that time with your children.

**AT** Yeah, definitely. And that's something that I found with all of the mothers with whom I spoke as well. Children are out in the gardens they are planting. They are helping to raise baby chicks or maybe baby sheep, and feeding them, and taking care of them, involved in the kitchen and cooking. And that is such a beautiful way to connect with children and really impart the values of family. I mean, so many conversations happen when you're cooking together, when you're eating together and so many lessons are learned.

**SM** You actually interviewed a number of these women in their homes. Tell me what the dinners were like and what that experience was like.

**AT** Yeah, the meals were very simple, very informal, and it was lovely. This is the food that we've harvested today, this is what we're eating. Or this is the foods that I was able to locally sourced today. So very simple meals of casseroles or bread and meats. And it really replicates the kind of conversations that you want to have around a family table.

**SM** Can you remember the food on one of your plates?

**AT** Yeah, and I think the one that I'm remembering the most was the tuna melt on a sprouted bread that she had made herself, with a cheese that was purchased from, you know, a local farmer's market, goat's milk cheese. And I was I was not excited because I thought that tuna melt, that doesn't sound good. And it was absolutely delicious.

**SM** That sprouted bread and goat cheese. Sound wonderful, right?

**AT** Yeah, it was the tuna that threw me off, but it turned out delicious. Another time, I was interviewing a couple of mothers that lived very close together and I asked one of the children, what is your favorite food that your mother makes? And the child, which was probably 11 or 12, thought for a minute and said, oh, well, last week my mom made this chicken, asparagus and rice dish and I really like that. And the mother just grimaced, she goes "that wasn't one of my healthy meals". And then the child thought a little longer. She's like, "oh well, chicken and dumplings. I like that too". And then the mother smiles, she like "that's one of my healthy meals, that was from our chickens and that was spelt dumplings cooked in lard and that was one of my healthy meals". And I was a little blown away because I was thinking lard, chicken and dumplings. That's not the first thing that comes to mind when I think healthy. But the - the lard was all locally sourced. It was, you know, from grass fed animals. The dumplings were made with spelt so they weren't made with these processed grains. And the chicken was a chicken that she had raised. And there was so much connection and love that went into the preparation of that chicken and dumplings. And it was at that point it struck me, oh, much different definition of what

healthy is. "It's so healthy" isn't about calories or low fat or low sugar. Healthy is about where is the food coming from? How connected to the ground is it? Did that chicken live the life it was supposed to live? Was it slaughtered humanely? It's such a different way of thinking about what health is, than what we normally think.

**SM** Are many of these women devotees of a particular natural food writer or advocate?

**AT** So many of the mothers that I spoke to are connected to a organization called the Weston A. Price Foundation. The Weston A. Price diet is an example of something I call a nostalgic diet. So looking to the past to explain how we should eat now, saying that there's something that our human ancestors knew that we don't know and we should we should look to that. Like the paleo diet is an example of that. But the Weston A. Price Diet is one that I don't think is as well known. It's the idea that we should look to our agricultural grandmothers or great grandmothers, that were living on the farm and were raising their own chickens and growing their own food. So looking, you know, 100, 150 years into the past. And the Weston A. Price diet promotes things like eating a fairly high fat diet, but all of those fats should be natural. So full fat, dairy, butter, lard, coconut oil is a big one, and eating very few grains. Or if you do eat grains, they should be sprouted or soaked. It's fairly anti-vegetarian because if you're living on a farm, you're not going to be eating vegetarian, you're going to be eating your chickens and your pigs. So there is an emphasis on meat, but meat that is free-range of grass-fed or eating the diet that it should be eating. That was what most women I spoke to adhere to.

**SM** What sort of identity do you think is motivating these women? How are they seeing themselves?

**AT** And I think a lot of it is tied up with being a mother. I was looking for people who I called feeders of the family. I didn't want to just interview mothers. I wanted to interview people who consider themselves to be feeders of the family. And of course, that turned out that it was primarily mothers. I also came across some really interesting notions about feminism and being a woman, that in many ways countered my own ideas of what it meant to be a feminist and a woman. The idea that the best thing that you can do as a woman is to feed your family and take care of your family and a kind of rejection of being a working mother. And as a working mother, that was a bit of a roadblock for me. But what I did take away from that and what I embrace now is that, you know, feminism is the ability to make a choice of how you want to live your life as a woman and not having to be constrained.

**SM** Now as you teach and during this pandemic, are you still employing some of these - some of these principles in raising your children?

**AT** Yes. So we garden. We eat together almost every meal. My son is responsible for Friday night meals. So together we cook a meal. He finds the recipe and gets all the ingredients. And we'll probably start having my daughter join in and making her own meals. I mean, they've always helped me in the kitchen, but now giving them that responsibility, we've been able to connect so much through that.

**SM** Right now, a lot of us are looking ahead to the holidays and worried. Have you given any thought to how, let's say, the Thanksgiving holiday will happen in your house?

**AT** We are not a big holiday celebrators.

**SM** Yeah.

**AT** And I think that's because we try to make just special moments whenever. For Thanksgiving we usually try to find a local farm that's selling chickens and just have a small meal with just our family and my parents, not traveling. And I think that is a lesson right, is that we do have to change the way that we think about interacting with people.

**SM** Andria Timmer, thank you for talking with me.

**AT** Thank you so much. I enjoyed it.

**SM** Andria Timmer is a professor of anthropology at Christopher Newport University.

[00:16:45]

**SM** For many years on grocery store shelves, we've seen images on packages of Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben, supposedly happy, enslaved cooks. Kelley Deetz, a visiting professor at UC Berkeley, says this is one of the most successful and long-lasting propaganda campaigns about slavery. That the cooks were happy, and the living was easy. She says, not true, but they did leave their mark on American cuisine. Kelley, what first interested you in the role of enslaved cooks and their impact on American cuisine?

**KD** Yeah, so my father was an archeologist and an anthropologist, and he brought me out to a plantation in Virginia called Berkeley Plantation. We got outside and I looked, and I asked what a building was and I said, that's the kitchen. That's the old colonial kitchen. And I ran over there, and I looked in the window and all of a sudden I had all of these questions and it was like a spark was struck. And I felt this sort of urge to know more about not just the food that was cooked in there, but who cooked in there specifically. And that was the beginning of a very long relationship I've had with food and slavery in Virginia.

**SM** And who was cooking in those kitchens, over what era?

**KD** Yeah, so beginning very early. So 1619 in Virginia, you have the first 20 odd Africans coming from - from West Africa to Virginia. And in that early era, Virginia was the colony that didn't have a lot of women, it was pretty much, you know, those early settlers, those early colonists. And as soon as women started coming over, which was the same period as those enslaved Africans, and these plantation complexes were starting to be built all around Jamestown and then spreading throughout the colony, you had these - these formal kitchens being built as well. And so these enslaved Africans became the enslaved cooks in these spaces.

**SM** Slaveholders rarely bothered to keep records of the people they held in bondage, except to note them on ledgers of sale. But did you find writings about the cooks in either journals or narratives?

**KD** I absolutely used hundreds of letters and diaries written by these plantation mistresses. So, these white ladies on these plantations, their biggest responsibility was to put on these parties and really entertain fellow Virginians and fellow colonists and other colonies. And so, they would absolutely be writing about not just what they were going to have served, but what you know, who was going to be coming and how important it was to have a certain kind of meal to show off their wealth. These cooks would have to - to put on a three-course meal, each course having about seven to nine dishes on the table. So think about, you know, arriving at a - a plantation house and you're about to eat and your first

course is going to be a series of meat pies and - and maybe an oyster stew and some seafood if you live near the ocean or the river. And the second course was going to have a Duck a l'Orange and, you know, potatoes and turnips from your garden and all different sorts of items like, you know, crab with mustard sauce. And, you know, these recipe books that I looked through had so many recipes for these European influenced dishes, and a lot of them were served at these large dinner parties. And of course, then the last course would be a sort of a dessert course, where you would eat things like pineapple, which was this exotic fruit, you know, back during the colonial era and dried fruits and figs and you'd be drinking Madeira. So, these enslaved chefs had to not only cook an enormous amount of volume, but it all had to be cooked to perfection and good enough for heads of state to eat.

**SM** And as a cook yourself, how much work do you know that to be?

**KD** When you're looking at a menu, when you see something like an oyster stew, for instance, that's one of, say, seven dishes for one of the three courses - you have to make a roux, you have to shuck 100 oysters, right, and make sure there's no grit or shell. And then you have to clean them. You have to make sure that the roux and the - the beautiful broth with sherry doesn't break. And this is all again, not only is it important for it to be cooked to perfection, but you're cooking on a hearth, on the ground, on an open fire. So it's not like you have these elaborate stoves that we have now. They were literally cooking in pots and pans on the ground in these kitchens.

**SM** How large a team might the head cook have?

**KD** On a plantation like that you would have a head chef and then you would probably have about two or three assistant cooks and then a scullery maid or two, and then people that would be doing sort of the - the busy work, the prep work, the peeling of the carrots. Sometimes you would even have a butcher.

**SM** Were these mostly women or men?

**KD** So in the earlier period, most of the enslaved chefs were men. And it's because most of the enslaved people being brought over were men in the very early period of Virginia. So, the early 1600s. But as more women were being brought into the colony and as more enslaved women in particular were being brought in, and I would say by the 19th century, you would see predominantly African-American women in the house, although some of the more famous cooks were African-American men.

**SM** Do you see evidence that foods came from West Africa where the enslaved people were being brought over by a ship?

**KD** Absolutely. You know, you can read these cookbooks and you see a lot of these European recipes being sort of woven into this American fabric of American cuisine and these cookbooks. But by the 19th century, you start seeing things like peanut stew, you know, hoppin' john, okra stew, gumbo, jambalaya. These are all direct recipes from West Africa and came from crops and ingredients that were brought over like the peanut, the black-eyed pea, watermelon was brought over from West Africa, okra was brought over from West Africa, the technique of making jambalaya, of cooking gumbo - all of these things are historically West African. And they made their way on those boats, in the minds of those enslaved Africans, into those kitchens and onto the table in the colonies.

**SM** Is there evidence in the writings that you see of abuse of the cooks by their enslavers?

**KD** Yes, absolutely. And that's one of the things that - it's a very sobering bit of history. You know, a lot of people want to know about the food, and they want to know about the puddings and the pies. But you have to tether that with the reality of these people being enslaved, you know, being at the mercy of those who enslaved them. And so, you know, during my research, I found a lot of information in the slave narratives of people recollecting, you know, their - their loved ones being abused. For example, there was a woman who talked about her mother and how her mother had burned the biscuits on this plantation in Virginia and that she burned the biscuits and that her mistress took her out naked and beat her while pregnant. So these kinds of moments of abuse were very much part of that experience in those kitchens. And if you think about the proximity to the house, the proximity to guests that might have felt, you know, the right to abuse these women as well and these men. Definitely rape was - was something that was not recorded, but I can infer that it absolutely happened to many of the women who were enslaved working in these homes and in the kitchen as well. So, yeah, no - abuse was absolutely tethered to the food and the cuisine that was being produced in those spaces.

**SM** For a long time, many of these plantations have become sort of living history museums. And you have complained that almost always in the recent past, the people leading the cooking demonstrations have been white women, which would have been an inaccurate portrayal of what actually happened.

**KD** Yes, it would have been. And, you know, that's something that has always bothered me. And if you think about the responsibility of these plantation museums to tell a truth, right. To provide insight into the past and to represent the actuality of the past, I think that it's incredibly bothering to see a white lady dressed in a very cute outfit, all clean in there doing the the work that actually would have been done by an enslaved cook who was African-American. And I think those sorts of misrepresentations are really hurtful in the long run. Fortunately, in the last I would say, a year or so, there's been a - I think a change of the tide. And I wouldn't even say in the last couple of years. Michael Twitty, a culinary scholar and of African-American descent, really set the bar for - for this kind of work that's being done in these kitchens. And there's a lot of people as well that have worked with him, people like Dontavius Williams, Cheyney McKnight, Nicole Moore, these phenomenal African-American hearth cooks who do that interpretation. And they are finding themselves being booked a little bit more now, in the last year. I think there's a change of - of ideas about what's responsible in these spaces, but most plantation museums are still relying on that old, you know, Jim Crow-era narrative of these white ladies cooking in the plantation kitchens and not hiring the African-American interpreters. And I've heard people say things like, oh, but we can't find any. I could give people lists, four days of an African-American interpreters that can come and do that work and bring integrity to these sites.

**SM** You've said the images on boxes of food, of happy black cooks like Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben were really a successful propaganda campaign for years and years. It's only been the summer since the George Floyd protests began that these companies have removed those images. How could they still, in this day and age, have been selling more rice and sirup for these companies with those images?

**KD** It was a very bizarre turn of events, of one using those images as propaganda to promote the institution of slavery and then using them after slavery ended to then sort of ease the white angst about these newly freed African-Americans and sort of putting them in their place, putting them in the kitchen on the box. Keeping this happy slave narrative

literally in people's kitchens. And then, as you said, it was literally just the summer where these companies finally thought to themselves, you know, maybe we should actually think about what this propaganda campaign was, what it means and what it should be. And I'm very happy that they've changed their - their imaging.

**SM** So much for us to atone for as a nation and re-learn of this hideous part of our history.

**KD** Absolutely. And I think that, you know, to learn it is to understand it and to understand it can cause you to act. And I think we need action in this moment in our history.

**SM** Kelley Deetz, thank you for talking with me today on With Good Reason.

**KD** Thank you.

**SM** Kelly Dietz is a visiting professor at UC Berkeley. She's also the author of "Bound to the Fire: How Virginia's Enslaved Cooks Helped Invent American Cuisine". This is With Good Reason. We'll be right back.

[00:28:00]

**SM** Welcome back to With Good Reason from Virginia Humanities. Stesha and Jeremy Warren have been forest farming for six years now. Instead of clearing lands to make a field, they keep the forest intact and grow within its canopy.

**AS** As far as what we do exactly, we grow ginseng, we grow mushrooms, we grow black cohosh and goldenseal. The mushrooms have been a very quick turnaround for us. Adding to farmers market, the ginseng and the other forest medicinals have been more of a long term investment.

**SM** In the natural forest, many of these roots and herbs have been overharvested. Stesha loves reintroducing plants to their forest ecosystem and educating other farmers.

**AS** Everything about this is rewarding. Honestly, I love it. I love that we're helping to pull our family together. We're helping other people and we are helping species not just be reintroduced but thrive and survive and hopefully go on for generations.

**SM** Our next guest helped Stesha and Jeremy get started with forest farming. John Munsell is a forest management specialist at Virginia Tech and is director of the Appalachian Beginning Forest Farmer Coalition. He's helping new farmers meet the demands of the booming herbal medicine market. John, you've been awarded money to help farmers in Appalachia intentionally cultivate lucrative crops that many people have harvested in the wild for years. Tell me about what sorts of crops?

**JM** Well, the focus of our work is on what we call non-timber forest products. They are the crop species in woodlands that are harvested and sold into markets that are not associated with timber. You know, oftentimes as part of my job, I go out into the woodlands looking for these species to, you know, assess their health and how many of them we can find. You know, it's always exciting when you come into a cove and you see that cove covered, say, with ramps. You've been walking for some time and there they are. You found them. And, you know, you can harvest those and have them with your soup or with your meal. They're great.

**SM** How do you know they're ramps? Do they look like the long, green, thin onion shoots?

**JM** Right. I mean, they have a very distinct profile above ground. They have this nice deep green leaf. There's several leaves actually that come out. And the other thing that's interesting about ramps is that there are spring ephemeral. That just means they come out early once things start to warm up before the forest has put on its leaves, so that it can capture sunlight and feed itself. And then there they are. So in the early springtime, they're easy to find.

**SM** What about goldenseal? What does that I think of goldenrod...

**JM** Goldenseal is a medicinal botanical native to Appalachia, pretty much cherished for its roots in terms of how those roots are processed to provide medicine.

**SM** You're talking about the joys of rounding a bend and seeing a curve with lots of ramps growing there. Give me a feeling for that with goldenseal.

**JM** Well, the interesting thing about a lot of these species that we focus on here in Central Appalachia is that they're companion species, meaning they generally grow in somewhat similar conditions. So, where I might find a couple of ramps, there might also be ginseng or goldenseal nearby. Galax is one, where there's a town in Virginia named for it. It's got deep, rich green leaves and is a nice compliment to flowers and other types of decorative materials. Bloodroot is one. It's got a beautiful flower, quite nice to see in the woodlands and is harvested for several properties. Some of the markets include Europe.

**SM** Is it true that Appalachia is really the hotspot of herbal healing remedies?

**JM** Well, from a woodland standpoint and of course most of the Appalachian Mountain chain is wooded, about 50 percent of the species that source the global nutraceutical industry are native to Appalachia. So, yes, Appalachia is a hotspot, and it has a substantial footprint in the herbal remedy market. You know, the iconic ones include things such as ginseng and goldenseal, black cohosh, which is actually by volume the most commonly harvested woodland medicinal botanical in Appalachia.

**SM** Why do you think there's been this steady market over the last 14 years? What has it been that's made them so popular now, or so widespread in terms of who we market to?

**JM** I think that it's a kind of growing consciousness around, you know, an old tradition that has found its way back into our awareness. And people are interested in utilizing natural products and connecting with nature in that regard and using some of our traditional knowledge around ways to treat themselves and care for themselves.

**SM** Has most of the harvesting and selling of these products in Appalachia recently been people growing their own ginseng, growing their own cohosh and other products? Or is it mostly been people expertly and consistently foraging and selling?

**JM** Well, the majority, if not all of the market for many of these non-timber crops, has long been sourced by wild harvesters that are not necessarily invested in, say, the establishment and tending of some of those plants, but are engaged in activities where they go into the woodlands and look for the right types of habitat, harvest those materials and then take them to market and sell them. But what that's led to is some concern around the pressure on the plant and fungi populations, given that we've seen such a dramatic

rise in market demand. But we have little in the way of inventory regarding the status of some of those plants and mushrooms. And what we're interested in doing is trying to increase the amount of intentional cultivation of those non-timber species, such that we can continue to source our markets in the future. But we have a handle on the impact and the sustainability of the activity.

**SM** So are there ginseng poachers so to speak?

**JM** Yes, certainly a element of poaching, illegal harvesting, trespassing that occurs with the acquisition, the harvesting of some of these crops, but there is also a great deal of stewardship on the part of some of our wild harvesters that do care about these plants and mushrooms deeply. And they do depend upon them to add value and, you know, improve their livelihoods. And the concept of forest farming, which is the intentional cultivation of these crops, kind of takes that problem off the table because it's at a particular place, managed by a particular person that can then demonstrate to the companies that buy those raw materials that they are managing those stands in a sustainable way.

**SM** Are there many people now forest farming these products?

**JM** There is a growing base of forest farmers. Some of our data show that in the last two or three years we've seen an uptick, particularly within our network, of about 20 or 30 percent of new forest farmers that have set out crops. But all told, the market is still sizable and substantial, such that the network of forest farmers presently are not able to - to really make a significant dent in supply.

**SM** So what are you doing with your grant money in this program? You're teaching young farmers or seasoned farmers in Appalachia how to intentionally plant these crops on their land?

**JM** That's correct. We have been working with the USDA in building networks of folks that have kind of a deep and rich knowledge around the cultivation of these non-timber species and then engaging with those aspiring and new forest farmers so that they can learn from those experts and improve their operations or get started off on a good foot and then make connections with some of the organizations that are helping to source the raw material to companies.

**SM** What's been some of the most satisfying result that you've seen with some of these farmers so far?

**SM** It's the holistic approach to using their forest lands, not just thinking of them as something that's extensive or, you know, not really used all that often, or maybe just for recreation, kind of passive uses. But really thinking and engaging in forest farming activities to manage a whole forest. And in doing that, taking ownership of their operations to share that information with others. Because one thing that is lacking historically around forest farming and non-timber forest products is research, basic research around kind of production functions. So, you know, that kind of agronomic research that you might see tied to tomato crops, we don't have that necessarily for goldenseal cultivation or black cohosh cultivation. And it's really been our early adopters and some of our risk takers that have documented their successes and failures and have then turned around and share that information with other members in the coalition. A good example would be some farmers in southwest Virginia. They were farming black cohosh and it was their first season to actually go full bore with their agricultural operation. And there were a few

unknowns in terms of how it would work regarding the amount of time they have to spend to harvest and then clean and get things to spec, so that they could sell to companies. And what they did was they tracked their harvest information and then shared that data. And we analyzed it relative time and looked at the costs. And we found out that they were spending an enormous amount of time on some post-harvest processing activities that made the operation essentially non-economical. And to solve that, other coalition members worked with companies to develop in an herb hub, where that raw material could be processed after harvesting only minimally by the farmer, but then taken to the herb hub where some of the final processing could occur. And that would save the farmer some time. And that then allowed farmers to kind of aggregate their raw materials so that a larger sale could go forward at a scale that some of these companies are seeking.

**SM** Who owns this land? What sort of people are interested in this are you finding right now?

**JM** We're seeing a lot of younger folks show up to our meetings. We're in the midst of the largest intergenerational transfer of force that this country's ever seen. And a lot of these younger people are coming into ownership and are curious about the variety of opportunities tied to their forest land. And they're thinking more holistically and thinking about sustainability, and forest farming really provides a springboard for them to kind of consider what they can do underneath the canopy. It's people in their 60s who in terms of kind of an estate transaction, they've come into ownership. But it's also 20- and 30-year olds. Some of them are back to the landers, but others are also, you know, coming into that through inheritance or taking a part of the family property and doing something with it.

**SM** Could it be a kind of industry that would become more like wineries and breweries? Where this next generation will make it hands-on for the consumer?

**JM** I mean, if - if what we see in other sectors is any indicator. If this continues to grow, I think that kind of specialization and product differentiation will take root in the forest farming community. And I like to point to saps and syrups you know; we go down the aisle and we see what used to be yellow mustard is now 30 varieties of - of mustard. And then you get to the maple sirup section and it's all just maple sirup. But a lot of these younger forest farmers are experimenting with flavorings and kind of palette distinctions with their sirups and also harvesting sap from other trees, such as black walnut, which can turn into black walnut sirup, butternut sirup. So there's a variety of different kind of approaches out there. And the young folks are driving a lot of this in terms of creating those specialty products.

**SM** John Munsell is a forest management specialist and an associate professor in the College of Natural Resources and Environment at Virginia Tech.

[00:40:57]

**SM** Over the past few months, many farmers have had to trash their harvest or till it back into the fields at the same time that thousands of people elsewhere were desperate for food, often waiting hours at food banks to get their share. Will Collier is a professor of environmental science at Longwood University. He says farmers markets are one way we could reimagine our food distribution system. Will, you have a philosophy that America doesn't really have a food production problem, but it does have a food distribution problem. How can that be?

**WC** Yeah, you know, I think that that has a really long history, but that's something that we're - we're seeing very clearly as something that COVID is - is illuminating in our society right now. On the one hand, people are standing in line or waiting in line in their vehicles for food, while at the same time farmers are actively having to destroy or throw away the things they're growing.

**SM** I remember seeing that early on and just being shocked at the waste.

**WC** Right, yeah. Early on in the pandemic, say, March and April, there were a lot of reports that came out and the media covered them, where you heard about dairy farmers who were dumping millions of gallons of milk by the day because they have to keep milking the cows, but there's no place to - to send the milk now, that the food service and hospitality industry has been unable to operate as usual. And then you have farmers growing produce things like onions or tomatoes or other things, corn, where they've had to literally just plow the crops back into the field. And now they're replanting, hoping that things will improve before it's time for the next harvest, but with tremendous uncertainties.

**SM** So that, of course, is a food distribution problem. But isn't it confined to this crazy moment we're in, the pandemic?

**WC** Oh, definitely not confined to this moment. I think the pandemic has revealed, you know, this is almost cliché at this point, but crises reveal underlying social structures. And so, it's not as if COVID has created this distribution problem in the United States or globally even, if we wanted to think about international food and hunger. It's that the pandemic has revealed the inefficiencies and the vulnerabilities of our food distribution systems.

**SM** You know, so what are you seeing as the vulnerabilities and deficiencies of our current system? What do you - what do you notice and what is being revealed by the pandemic?

**WC** I mean, I think one of the obvious things we all - we can see in this sort of an immediate reaction to hearing these stories about long lines for food banks and farmers wasting food is, how come we can't get the food from the farmers to the food banks? And there are a lot of reasons why that can't happen. So on the one hand, there are regulations in place about how food is delivered to food banks and other organizations. There are problems with storage of those food banks and those organizations being able to handle this influx. Another aspect is that we've also seen a drop-off of monetary donations.

**SM** One of the things that you have been thinking about is how might farmers markets open their farmer's markets in rural areas, help address some of that hunger and some of what is wrong with the food access problem in America.

**WC** Farmers markets have gotten a lot of attention, rightfully so, in urban locations and in cities where they've popped up and have links to upper class folks in fancy restaurants that do farm to table service. But farmers markets and access to the kind of high quality, low-cost food that you find at farmer's markets is more difficult to come by in rural areas, which might seem in and of itself a little bit of a paradox, because you would think you're living in a rural area, you're sort of embedded in an agricultural landscape. Certainly, you would be able to access food easier in a rural setting, but that's not necessarily the case. We can take, for example, the town that I live in now, Farmville, Virginia. Farmville is a relatively small town. There's, you know, some 4000 plus people that live here, embedded in Prince Edward County, agriculture surrounding central Virginia. But the poverty rate in Prince

Edward County is just below 20 percent. And so, people were very limited in their options, not only of the time they have to spend to search for different places, that food could be available, but also difficulties with transportation. And then options, so in Farmville, we have a Walmart, and we have a Food Line. Those are the two main places you can get food without having to drive an hour to Richmond or to Lynchburg. And so, farmer's market, even in rural areas, I think provides on a very basic level, the potential to provide more points of access.

**SM** Wouldn't you think in the more rural areas, that what people are doing instead is raising their own food? That they have land nearby and maybe small markets where they can get local food at a lower cost and more readily accessible?

**WC** I think that might be the case for - for some people, but certainly not all people.

**SM** You've talked about farmers markets in rural areas being not just a place to get food to the people who need it, but also a place of reconciliation. How so?

**WC** That's right. When I say reconciliation, I mean that along a number of different lines. So, reconciliation in terms of class and in terms of race. Farmers markets, I think, have been seen as a place where certain bodies and certain people are accepted and expected to be there, but not others.

**SM** What do you think causes that? Do you think it is because they're located in high income, high end areas like that, or because people feel a vibe, or because the produce is too expensive?

**WC** Well, I think it's probably a combination of those first two things you mentioned. I don't think the issue is - is a financial one, because if I compared buying some produce at a farmer's markets to buying produce at ecofriendly grocer, I think nine times out of ten I'm going to come out cheaper, buying directly from the farmer at the farmer's market. So I don't think it's a it's a financial barrier so much is a barrier in terms of - of class and also race and geography - where they're located and who can access them.

**SM** Do you think there aren't enough farmers markets in these rural areas? That they have gravitated in and been created more in the urban areas?

**WC** Absolutely. And I think there's also a place there to think about farmers markets as a space for political reconciliation. So, with farmers markets in urban areas, I think of them as is places that are mostly progressive. But when you come to the rural countryside of central Virginia, people involved in food production here have - have a different politics. And so a rural farmer's market provides a potential space for political cross pollination.

**SM** Right. What do you think it would take for us to change our distribution system, as you say, if our food distribution system in the U.S. is broken? And one solution might be to help encourage and foster more rural food markets, what would that take?

**WC** Sure. You know, I think there's a few really, really important things we can think about with how we reimagine our - our food system in the United States and distribution as a part of that. At sort of a fundamental level, I think we're going to have to reimagine agriculture or start to think of agriculture in much more ecological terms. And so that means understanding how food is linked to water and food is linked to energy. Food is linked to health rather than treating these things in silos. So I think that sort of ideological shift,

that's going to be incredibly important. In terms of distribution, I think an ideological change we're going to have to think about that that can be pushed forward through policies, is diversity in our food system. Thinking about the amount of certain types of crops we grow, the subsidies that we give to certain types of crops. So, the - the food systems that we've created both in the US and internationally depend upon a few key crops in different places. And so diversifying out those options of what we grow and where we grow, it will not only be advantageous to our food distribution systems in the U.S., but will have significant impacts on nutrition. You know, another thing that I'll say is democratizing the decision-making around food. Who has a say in what kind of food they eat and where they can get it from? Is it simply policymakers and private firms or do scientists and everyday citizens?

**SM** Will Collier, thank you for talking with me on With Good Reason.

**WC** It's my pleasure. Thanks so much for having me.

**SM** Will Collier is a professor of environmental science at Longwood University. Major support for With Good Reason is provided by the University of Virginia Health System, pioneering treatments to save lives and preserve brain function for stroke patients. [UVAHealth.com](http://UVAHealth.com). With Good Reason is produced in Charlottesville by Virginia Humanities, which acknowledges the Monacan nation, the original people of the land and waters of her home in Charlottesville, Virginia. Our production team is Allison Quantz, Matt Darroch, Lauren Francis, Jamal Millner and Aiden Carroll. For the podcast Go to [WithGoodReasonRadio.org](http://WithGoodReasonRadio.org). I'm Sarah McConnell. Thanks for listening.