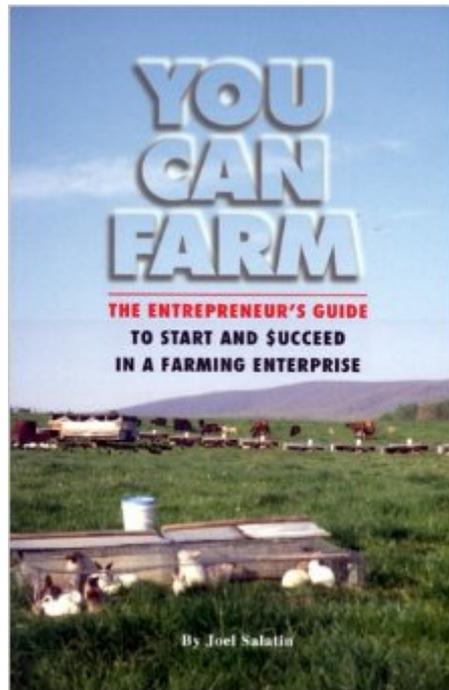


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You Can Farm: The Entrepreneur's Guide To Start & Succeed In A Farming Enterprise



Synopsis

Have you ever desired, deep within your soul, to make a comfortable full-time living from a farming enterprise? Too often people dare not even vocalize this desire because it seems absurd. It's like thinking the unthinkable. After all, the farm population is dwindling. It takes too much capital to start. The pay is too low. The working conditions are dusty, smelly and noisy: not the place to raise a family. This is all true, and more, for most farmers. But for farm entrepreneurs, the opportunities for a farm family business have never been greater. The aging farm population is creating cavernous niches begging to be filled by creative visionaries who will go in dynamic new directions. As the industrial agriculture complex crumbles and our culture clambers for clean food, the countryside beckons anew with profitable farming opportunities. While this book can be helpful to all farmers, it targets the wannabes, the folks who actually entertain notions of living, loving and learning on a piece of land. Anyone willing to dance with such a dream should be able to assess its assets and liabilities; its fantasies and realities. "Is it really possible for me?" is the burning question this book addresses.

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Customer Reviews

I read this book the year my husband and I first started our organic vegetable farm (five years ago). It was a VERY inspirational book, and at the time I wanted EVERYONE I knew to read it. Salatin is highly entertaining and motivating -- the book is well organized into topical chapters with lots of lists and bullet points. It's a great read, and several chapters are RIGHT ON (such as the chapter on what to avoid and how to deal with moving to the country). However, there are also some big scary

flaws in the book that make it somewhat dangerous in the wrong hands. First of all, Salatin's list of BEST farming enterprises is very persuasive but doesn't account for differences between farms, regions, and markets. He ranks poultry operations as being highly profitable, but today chicken feed prices in the west (can't speak for elsewhere) are so high that all the small-scale poultry operators I know have gotten out of the business. Meanwhile, new farmers keep trying to do poultry because of Salatin's book, but I have yet to see it pencil out in reality for anyone. Also, there's a big math error in that chapter as well. While he endorses vegetable growing as a viable enterprise option, he kills it with faint praise when he says this: "In order to move \$30,000 worth of stuff, you need a lot of pounds of stuff, and you need a lot of customers. If the average person spends \$600 per year on fresh vegetables (which I'm sure is a high estimate), you would need 500 customers in order to gross \$30,000. Because the price per pound and average purchase is higher for animal proteins, we here at Polyface can do that volume with fewer than 100 customers, on average. That's a hefty difference." The problem with this analysis? $\$600 \times 500 = \$300,000!!!!!!$

If you don't like reality checks, don't read this book. With his no-nonsense attitude, Salatin walks you through several opportunities in farming that show tremendous potential as profitable enterprises, and he also tells you what to stay away from and why (e.g. starting a horse or alpaca farm is NOT the best way to break into farming and turn a real profit, no matter how pretty or cuddly they may be). Yes, occasionally he does break into a radical conservative rant--but who cares what he thinks about healthcare and New York City? What matters to me is that I come away from the book equipped with knowledge that will help me make wiser decisions. For someone like me who's starting from scratch, what I want to know is how I will do things differently after reading this book, and in that regard, this book was EXCELLENT. The most important message that Salatin drilled through my head with "You Can Farm" is this: Carve your niche first, start the farm later. Most of us have it backwards. Perhaps too many people have seen "Field of Dreams" and assume "Build it, and they will come." It simply doesn't work that way with farming. That's why so many agricultural operations depend on off-farm income and/or go out business completely. Then there's the little fantasy of having a patch of land to call your own. I'm no stranger to it; I want to own the land I farm, too, for no reason other than I just want to. But it comes at a high cost, and Salatin won't let you forget it: "Land should only be acquired when you know what to do with it, and the size should be less important than location. Be patient and let your farming enterprise drive the land base, rather than the land base driving the farm."

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