



Episode 994: Food and Farm Freedom — and How to Do It Yourself

Guest: John Moody

WOODS: I want to talk about Steader, which is one of these great marvels of the world in that we couldn't even have imagined it 20 years ago and now here it is, but first I'd like to get an update from you given that this is not an area I tend to keep an eye on. My eye is only so large and it only takes in so much at a time, so I rely on you to tell me what's going on in the world of farming and food and the state. So bring me up to date on any items of note that I and the listeners should be aware of.

MOODY: Oh, wow. So anything of note. It's been a real interesting few years in terms of food and farming. The growth of meal services, Amazon acquiring Whole Foods, just kind of the rapid changes to the kind of food distribution marketing machine has been something to watch and to see just how competitive food is becoming and the amount of money being thrown into the food industry. I was reading an article a couple weeks ago, and venture capital companies are throwing something like half a billion dollars a year into meal startup ventures. Just massive amounts of money being tossed around at the moment in the food industry and driving a lot of change. So that's just one fascinating aspect of what's going on.

The government's been somewhat quiet other than spending billions of dollars of our tax money on the same old, same old regulatory nonsense and cheap food subsidies. So we'll kind of see if anything new is coming down that pipe, but it's been a relatively quiet year over all.

In good news at the state level, there's a number of states that continue to make really good progress pushing for immense rollbacks in the regulatory state, at the state level in terms of food and farming. So I think we talked about previously that Wyoming was the first state to adopt a kind of food freedom legislation. And in really great news, out of Wyoming — because you know all the naysayers and the nanny-staters, they say like, Oh, you let these people make food and sell food freely, there's going to be all these illnesses and people are going to die and it's going to be so bad. And Wyoming, it appears, has actually had decreases in their annual number of food-borne illnesses and other stuff, and at the very least, there's been no increase, even though they passed this doomsday legislation to, you know, let you make a pie for your next-door neighbor without Uncle Sam having to take a slice. So that's really good news because other states are watching, and states that have good early results, it makes it easier legislatively to get other states to buy in.

WOODS: Let's talk about Steader, which is the reason I wanted to talk to you today. It's Steader as in homesteader, just without the "home." So Steader.com, is that the site?

MOODY: Yep, exactly.

WOODS: All right.

MOODY: So we're thankful to find that domain.

WOODS: That's amazing, because these days, to find a good .com is like a needle in a haystack. And you really, it's not like you can't function with a .us or .net, but there's something slightly shady about you when you have that, so it's really great if you can find what you're looking for. And for my sake, in my case, I just can't believe I found things like SupportingListeners.com, which is just my donation site. Why was that available? That's a beautiful name. That was just sitting there. Occasionally, you have a real beautiful find, and Steader, especially given that it's seven letters. To find a seven-letter .com that's still available, congratulations. That's hurdle number one.

What's great about it is what this thing is all about and what it means for our future, really, because in the old days, if you wanted to learn something, no matter what area it was, there was the formal, official route you went and it cost you a fortune and it was inconvenient and you hated it, but that was what you had to do. And suddenly, almost overnight we've been liberated from this in so many different fields, and now Steader is doing it for your field.

MOODY: Yeah, and we're really excited because, for people who want to learn skills in homesteading or farming, the options can be challenging in the sense of you can go to conferences, you can go to formal educational institutions, who, often what they're going to teach you is highly problematic, especially if you're more organically or naturally minded. Or so you can travel around the country to catch conferences or you can travel to people's farms and stuff. And you know, the on-farming training is often really great. Joel Salatin does a tremendous job with his on-farming training. But if you live in the middle of the nation or on the West Coast, going all the way to the East Coast is both time and financially costly. And if you want to learn a number of different skill sets, trying to make it to different farms in different regions of the country is going to cost you an arm and a leg in so many different ways. And we were watching things like MasterClass and Treehouse, and began to think, Could we do something like this for homesteaders and farmers? Could we offer them really, really high-quality content at a very reasonable price that they would just look at and say, *Oh, this just makes such good sense?*

WOODS: So give me an example of the kind of thing that I might learn there.

MOODY: We're hoping over time that it will cover just about every possible topic you would ever want to know, so whether you want to learn about growing stuff in raised beds, or you want to learn particular crops like garlic or sweet potatoes or tomatoes, or if you want to learn how to keep bees both in traditional hives or in kind of newer iterations of beekeeping like top-bar hives and other things. We hope to have classes

on foraging, especially classes that deal with different regions of the country, so that no matter where you are, you can learn about foraging for food, hunting for food. We hope to have entire tracks of classes covering all sorts of homestead skills, such as heating your house with wood or overall homestead design. If you're just buying a piece of land or looking at buying a homestead, how do you design it to maximize its fruitfulness and its efficiency and its value while also minimizing your labor and work and costs in the process? And that's the beauty about this topic and this field, is there's no lack of subjects and classes and courses we can offer over time, so that there'll always be something new and something interesting to benefit subscribers to the platform.

WOODS: I like what you've got there right on the homepage at Steader.com. Just as clear as day, exactly what it is you're offering. "We find the leading experts and spend the day on their farm or homestead, capturing their workshops on video, and delivering their knowledge and experience to you." Now, for people who are looking for that kind of knowledge, that is amazing and it's going to be extremely valuable. But even for somebody like me for whom this is not part of my lifestyle, I still am amazed. I stand here in awe that that's possible that you can go and, for a day, be with somebody who knows an awful lot, capture that knowledge, and convey it to a potentially unlimited audience. How could you not be excited about that in principle?

MOODY: Oh, it's amazing, because again, you think about the cost of college or other educational options. One of the other things that inspired us to do Steader was a bunch of us already speak at these conferences, and if you want to go to a conference — you know this I'm sure from your experience — you're looking at four days of hotel and food, so right there you're looking at anywhere from \$300 to \$600. You have your travel expenses. That could be another \$200 to \$600. And then you have the cost of the conference itself, which can be anywhere from 50 bucks to \$500 or more. So just to attend a conference, you're looking at a four-figure outlay and losing four days of time as well. And a lot of these conferences, what you're going to get is a bunch of sometimes mediocre, sometimes fairly good, static PowerPoint presentations for \$1,000, \$1,500, \$2,000. Whereas with something like Steader, we can give you multiple hours of beautiful cinematography from a really gifted, vetted instructor in a particular area for basically the cost of a couple cups of coffee for the entire month, for something that's competitive with Netflix. One-tenth of the cost of going to a conference, you can have an entire year of dozens and dozens of classes to choose from is our goal.

WOODS: And I'm looking again on the home page, and you're discussing the range of topics that people will ultimately be able to get a hold of, and you've got — it's a diverse array of things. Backyard beekeeping, raising heritage breeds, heirloom vegetable gardening, a whole lot of stuff. So Steader.com is the site people should check out. Again, it's a miracle of the times we live in. We have a lot of reasons to complain and be frustrated, but at the same time, this would not have been believed by anyone 50 years ago. It would have been amazing to them. It would have been, "I must be dreaming. Such a thing can't happen." And yet here it is. It's just amazing. We do not pause often enough to appreciate what we have.

Now, let me switch gears a bit for a moment and ask you: given that you are involved in this kind of subject matter and you're very interested in food and farming, there are

no doubt a lot of people you encounter who have the same interests that you do but who, let's say from a policy standpoint, would disagree with you very much, would be inclined to think that what we need is the state as a steward of these things, as an overseer, as a guarantor of quality or whatever. And yet, you have a very different view. How do you deal with that difference with others, and how do you justify your what I'm sure is somewhat of a minority view?

MOODY: Well, interestingly, in food and farming, especially because of the influence of someone like Joel Salatin, a more liberty-minded view I don't think is quite as small policy-wise as in some other parts of the economy and nation and stuff, because Joel has had such a big influence.

WOODS: Right.

MOODY: He's a big boat that creates a lot of wake, so he's really left a positive mark on the movement from that perspective. And then the government through their own actions has certainly been immensely helpful to that line of thinking, because when you see the malfeasance and the foolishness of the government, when you see that every year 20-some billion dollars of our tax money goes basically to a handful of crops that get turned into ethanol and all sorts of other things and basically are a gigantic bailout to big food and big farm and have all these deleterious effects on us in terms of our national health and in terms of the economy and stuff, it's not a super hard argument for those who are informed — and you know, you also have the issue of you look at the FDA, you look at the USDA, and who's in charge of these organizations? Well, it's people who used to work for Monsanto, people who used to work for Cargill, people who used to work for Tyson. So you have this revolving door as well that even the most staunch pro-government people constantly have to cringe at. And so I try and be very diplomatic and really very kind and just point out, you know, on the one hand, you want the government to have all this power, but look, every time they have this power, it just gets turned against you. It's never harnessed and used in a positive, constructive manner, so why do you keep pushing to empower them?

WOODS: Right.

MOODY: But I think on a previous show with you, I pointed out that for liberty-minded people, the food and farming issues are one of the easiest, lowest hanging fruits for introducing people to why government involvement in things is so bad and why freedom and truly free markets are such an effective and efficient solution on so many solutions. And so for libertarians who are well informed on these things and who are paying attention to what's going on nationally — because you know, like let's take a state like Maine that I think is relatively blue overall. But you have a state that in some ways is relatively blue, and they have been pushing for food sovereignty harder and longer I believe than any other state in the country. And that push for food sovereignty, that push to allow people to feed their neighbors is being driven people who are very progressive, including Craig Hickman, who is an openly homosexual African-American Democrat either representative or senator in the state of Maine who's championing this. And so this issue is such a great gateway to the issue of broader liberty and freedom, because all of us see the reports of the government mowing down people's front yard gardens because it's illegal to have a garden in your

front yard. And even the most staunch big-government people just scratch their head and scream at what they see going on, that this is just insanity.

WOODS: John, let's take just a minute to thank our sponsor.

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All right, let's swing back to Steader.com for a minute. First of all, how do you define a homesteader? This is not a familiar term to a lot of people.

MOODY: So I think a homesteader is someone who, whether it's on half an acre or five acres or ten acres, is seeking to be more self-sufficient and kind of more resilient with their life and their resources. So up until last November, I had a paying job per se, where I worked X number of hours a week and I got paycheck X no matter what, pretty much. And that ended. And for most people, when the paycheck ends, the problems begin and the panic sets in. But because our family our homesteaders, well, we produce our own heat, so we don't really have a heating bill, and we produce a lot of our own food, so we don't really have a grocery bill, and we get water from a well, so we don't have all of these water bills and these other things. And so it's people who don't want to have to always be roped right back into the modern economy in all of its risks and things that it throws at them. So I basically had a year to pursue other projects and other things with little or no stress and disruption to our family, because we've achieved a certain level of self-sufficiency that means even if we're not bringing in X number of dollars per month, we really don't have to worry about it. And I think that's a lot of what drives the heartbeat of a lot of homesteaders. It's the ability to produce some of your own food or most of your own food to be able to take care of yourself and your neighbors if things go sideways or if things get hard, and to also just get to develop skills and understandings that the modern world doesn't often appreciate or value anymore.

WOODS: So given the sorts of challenges that homesteaders and farmers face, how does Steader help them? Doesn't your typical farmer already know what he needs to know? How does this help him?

MOODY: Oh, I would say no given the number of emails and Facebook messages I get every year from people who have really messed up their farms or homesteads in different ways. One of the challenges of being somebody who grows food and then sells food is there's an idea in our culture that it's really easy. It's just throwing a seed in the ground or a plant in the ground, or throwing some manure down and throwing some plants in the ground and then everything else is like magic. But every spring to summer, I get probably a dozen emails from people who have totally destroyed their gardens through over-fertilization or importing herbicides in their compost or in their mulch. So it's not as easy as a lot of people think.

And then couple that with – the Internet is a marvel because I can go on Google and type in six words and get 600 articles on a subject. But how do I know which of those are actually correct? So anybody now can throw up a YouTube channel and they can start talking about their homestead success and stuff. And a few of us were talking about the other day that we know firsthand that some of these really popular homesteading YouTube channels, one of the person's a neighbor with them and sees

them actually buying their groceries at Wal-Mart and they're homesteaders. So with something like Steader, we wanted to be able to provide a resource where you have really high-quality, vetted instructors who have years and years of experience and who are really doing what they say and really living this lifestyle in a successful fashion, rather than merely trying to profit off the interest that homesteading and farming has currently in the culture.

WOODS: Well, I wish you all the best with Steader.com. Are you crowdfunding it? Should we talk about that aspect of it?

MOODY: Yeah, so what we're going to do is, in September we're going to launch a Kickstarter to supplement some of the private investment we've had in the platform. So we've had enough investment where we're going to shoot four or five classes just to give people a really good taste and feel for what courses are going to be and feel like. Because another thing that will make Steader unique is, rather than having to sit down and watch an hour video or sit through an hour lecture, we're going with the digestible content model. So each class we're calling a path, and each path is made up of a bunch of small steps, and each step only lasts anywhere from 5 to 15 minutes. So you'll be able to work through classes on your lunch break, if you're trapped in traffic somewhere, while you're waiting to pick up your kids from music lessons or soccer practice or baseball. As long as you have access to the Internet, you'll be able to take in content in a curated, organized fashion to help you succeed. And if you have bigger blocks of time, you'll be able to work through bigger blocks and stuff. But we are going to fund it to get to the next stage of the platform by doing a Kickstarter in September with hopefully some fun rewards for people who want to help us out and see this idea get fully off the ground.

WOODS: All right, so do you have any sense of what part of September that will be happening?

MOODY: We're going to be launching the first week of September with the Kickstarter.

WOODS: Okay, all right, so in that case, I'm just trying to think of when I want to run this and what episode number this ought to be. Let's see — I don't know. Why am I doing all of this on the air [laughing]? I'll figure it out. Well, because I need to give people the show notes page, that's why. So we're going to say Episode 994 to make absolutely sure that we've got it so that the timing works for everybody involved. So TomWoods.com/994, we will link to Steader.com, and because I know John will send me the link, we'll also link to the Kickstarter if you think this is a worthy project and you're able to contribute to it, well, that's how a free society is supposed to work, isn't it? So I'll have both of those things available for you at TomWoods.com/994. All right, so now you know the secret of the show, that sometimes when I record the first few minutes of the show, it's after I've talked to the person and I already know what number it is at that point. You know, it doesn't matter. I'm glad you all know the inner workings of the show now. But anyway, that's none of John's concern. John, best of luck with this outstanding and very, very interesting project.

MOODY: Yeah, thank you so much for having me, and thank you for all you've done to inspire people to consider just the possibilities that innovations in technology and markets make for ideas like this.

WOODS: Well, I appreciate that. I'm glad to do what I can.

MOODY: That's great. Thank you so much for having me.