How Regenerative Systems Save the Soil, Animals & You – Robby Sansom – #970

Dave Asprey:

You're listening to The Human Upgrade, with Dave Asprey.

Today's guest is Robby Sansom who started a regeneratively sourced meat company based in Austin. And it's called Force of Nature, which is a really, really powerful thing in his background. He was at Epic for quite a while, as COO. This is a guy who's been working with grass-fed animals for a very long time, and because he's in Austin, that makes him extra cool. So welcome to the show, Robby.

Robby Sansom:

Thanks a lot for having me.

Dave:

You're a Texan, you were born and raised in Austin, and at some point, though, you become a land steward at ROAM Ranch, and you do regenerative raised bison. So is this a product of breeding or did you have an awakening along the way where, "This matters." Did you have an awakening along the way where, "This matters", because a typical Texan really, "Give me my corn fed barbecue and I'm good to go." Why are you different?

Robby Sansom:

Yeah, I think people might point out Austin as being a little bit different than typical Texas, it's got his own slogans to boot, but that's probably not the answer for me as it relates to your question. I grew up traveling. Texas is huge, has tons to offer. I grew up driving a few hours down to the coast and living in the bays and fishing and just enjoying all the natural wonder that had to offer, and then heading out West and being in the hill country and hunting and being around family that had been part of farming communities for generations. And then jumping in the car and making the 10 or 12 hour drive out to the mountains and having access to those and bugging people like you, but always that fondness for outdoors and natural places.

And in particularly, as I laid out, just connecting with those environments and part of that being forming relationships with your food and being able to source and procure and prepare food and do it as a family and a community. And that just developed a set of values inside of me, that were always fundamental to who I was. And I went down a professional path and did consulting and big business stuff. And like many people, felt unfulfilled and figured out, you know what? I can connect these dots. And that journey with [inaudible 00:03:14] and now of nature is the manifestation of that.

Dave:

Well, I like that. So little bit of the Austin hippie side and just caring about stuff that you can see, matters. When I made plans to move about, oh geez, 13, 14 years ago, I said I want to place where I can grow my own food, because food sovereignty matters. And it turns out, what your food ate is what is going to impact the quality of the food. So, my plants eat dirt, they eat soil. And so, I need a good soil and my animals eat plants that either did eat good soil or didn't. So, it all starts in the soil.

But I do that because I wanted to feed my family and I wanted to have control of my own supply chain. I'm on 32 acres, I feed my local community, 25 sheep, 25 pigs, this year, three cows. We're not selling those; we're just eating those. And it's been a labor of love and it loses money all the time, because having a small farm, 90% of small farmers have day jobs, even though a farm is a full-time job.

We've got to change that. And you've managed 600 acres, which is a bit of a, not small farm. What's your advice for people want food sovereignty? What do we do?

Robby Sansom:

First, I think what you're doing is remarkable. I think there's a Renaissance that people looking to get back to that. Over the last 100 years or so, you look about 1900, 30% of the US population was involved in food production. And now, here a little over 100 years later, it's down to two or 3%. A tiny fraction as our system has failed those people on communities and really families. And that's been in large parts of what we were talking about a few moments ago at the onset of the call. We delegated that procurement and processing and preparation of our food to large corporations. We've entrusted them to represent our values and what they offer us. And what they have done is in some ways, misled, misdirected or deceived us and made compromises in the name of profit.

How can we drive down costs? How can we cheapen food? And then, helped condition us to think and see the way they want to see it, such that we are complicit in the process. We are good little cogs and they're big machine doing what... Purchasing how they want us to purchase, what they want us to purchase, when and then where they want us to purchase it without asking the questions that we should be asking if we were really trying to find the value in our food and represent what it is that we are looking for. So, I think sovereignty starts with becoming an independent thinker and taking some responsibility and autonomy back to paying attention to what you were consuming, regardless of what it is, and signaling to the industry through how you vote and purchase, really where you place value in what you want. That's probably the biggest driver and the most powerful thing that we can do as consumers.

Dave:

Okay. So, understanding that it's important is one part of sovereignty and paying attention to it, but you still have to go to the store and buy your food if you're lucky enough to eat at somewhere besides a dollar store. So, is this about getting a goat? And people may say, "What are you talking about, Dave?" During the great depression, in New York City, there are photos out there of people with goats on their balcony, in skyscrapers, not one or two, not that they're skyscrapers, but large buildings with 10 plus floors, where people saying, "Well, I needed to feed my scraps to something that would make me some milk." So, people did it, even in that environment, but almost everywhere.

You could have chickens and a goat or a sheep somewhere, or one pig, which is one of the easiest ways of converting most food into protein and fat, which is what animals do for us. Pigs are incredible for that. You have one of those in your backyard, you're going to eat pretty well, and it'll eat anything and everything. They make gross sounds when they're off, your neighbors might not like it, but you can feed your neighbors to a pig in a pinch as well, especially if they're attorneys, right?

Robby Sansom:

And I think you could point to victory gardens in World War II as well.

Dave:

You're supposed to laugh, dude.

Robby Sansom:

Well, I did. I got a lot of attorneys, so it's extra entertaining for me.

Dave:

I do too. I'm just kidding, my friend.

Robby Sansom:

No, I was actually thinking of Silence of the Lambs, I think, anyway. But you could point to victory gardens too, in World War II and recognize that wasn't just an initiative, that was actually turning back to how things once were. Yeah, we should all to the extent that we're able, figure out how we can actually produce our own food. There's value in that, there's resilience in that, there's stability and security in it. I love this idea. I love what you were talking about, using monogastrics to up-cycle food waste, whether that be pigs or chicken. I love people that have laying chickens in their yards, which is really common around here, and sure, you could work in some ruminants goats and things like that.

Everybody should do that. And I think to the extent that we can make ourselves independent of a broader complex or food system, there is some protection in that. But there is still the reality that the overwhelming majority of what is being supplied into the food system is coming from that larger system. And so, we have an opportunity to influence and change that for the better, at real scale. And we shouldn't ignore that either, but I do think you're right. I think to the extent it's within our means, we should be doing that. In fact, from a pure protein perspective, I think the No. 1 avenue that you can take to prepare your own food is, either to produce it regeneratively in your own context, on your own land, or to get a backpack and a rifle or a bow and spend a week in the mountains and see if you can overcome adversity and struggle and actually produce some food for yourself and bring it back.

You'll have a story and a relationship and experience that's invaluable, along with food that is more nourishing than anything that you could purchase. Next to that would be, again, having an incredible multi-species farm, regenerative farm nearby, practicing the highest standards of agriculture. And then being a neighbor within your local community. I think if that's the case, go right to them. I think there's a lot of people that those aren't options for every day or all the time, or at the scale, they need to feed their families. And so, then we got to look at what we're trying to do, which is build a massive network of those family farms, build a massive network that are practicing the right practices on a large, national geographic scale. Same thing with processing, to make sure those farmers have access to a market. And then work with consumers to create awareness about these real issues and food.

And I'm sure we'll get into those, and then to make sure that they have access and that we're generating more and more demand so that we can create incentives that pass back to processors and pass back to farmers, that justify them raising the bar and that signal to the industry, "We're not going to buy whatever you serve up in front of us. We're not going to keep feeding into your lies. We're going to take a stand." And there's not a big, "Evil corporation" out there that's going to produce a product a consumer won't buy. And if they see consumer behavior going in a different direction, that's what they're going to start to try to produce. And we can drive that influence in really large scale.

Dave:

And you had some pretty good success doing that at Epic. You started saying grass-fed stuff and you got it out there and Epic got acquired, right?

Robby Sansom:

Yeah. Epic. Well, we sold Epic to General Mills, back in 2016. And yeah, we were pretty early on, not alone, but early in talking about grass-fed proteins. And the funny thing about Epic is it started as a vegan energy bar company, and the original founders, Katie and Taylor, now my co-founders of Force of

Nature, had these values of, "I want to do what's better for humans. I want to do what's better for the environment and for the welfare of animals, I want to do what's better for communities and health." And much like many of us, tried a diet and lifestyle that did not work out. And when looking-

Dave:

The vegan diet will trash you, I'm sorry. I did it too. It's a scam and it's going to cost you a lot of money in grass fed fat and protein to recover from what the vegan diet will do to you.

Robby Sansom:

Well, and it's misleading. It is not better for the environment. It is not better, as you said for you. It's not better for animals or welfare, and so on and so forth. And so, it's really those foundational principles though, that translated into Epic, which was not just about grass fed. It was highest quality protein, convenient, still trying to be mindful of ecosystem health and welfare. And that's what led us down the journey of understanding regenerative agriculture. And to your point, the success of that, and the influence that we were able to have in selling that to General Mills. I remember taking the Chief Sustainability Officer of General Mills out to a regenerative farm, because the deal was going to fall apart over the idea of regenerative, because it felt too good to be true.

How could it solve all of these problems? How could it truly be so virtuous across such a wide range of stakeholders? And they came back, and not only did the deal go through, but within I think, two years, General Mill became the first Fortune 500 company to make a commitment, to convert a million acres of its supply chain to regenerative. And then Danone followed and then PepsiCo followed. Again, that's that influence and intention at scale. A lot needs to be done to hold them accountable to those claims. And words are cheap, and actions matter more, but that's pretty powerful when you look at the ripple effect. And then, another thing I think is great is, and I'm sure you've heard of this is, the life cycle assessment that was performed out at White Oak Pastures in Bluffton, Georgia, empirically validating, in a cradle-to-grave analysis using Qantis Labs, the same lab that Impossible Foods used to show that, to offset the carbon impact of eating an Impossible or Beyond Burger, you need to eat a regenerative beef burger. And that's been held up across the industry. That then became-

Dave:

That's how it works.

Robby Sansom:

Everybody's leveraged that and been able to use that, to validate what we are doing broadly. And that was funded by General Mills. So, what a gift to this movement.

Dave:

Well, you're highlighting something that a lot of people who eat food out there, we're all paying attention. And generally, they say, "How dare you sell this grass-fed company to, insert name a big food company." Guys, that is the goal. That was one of the things that, when I decided to take funding at Bulletproof, same thing, grass-fed collagen, grass-fed butter, grass-fed or go home, kind of thing. And look, you have to create change at these large companies. And what happens is, they say, "Oh, someone figured out how to do this. So, we want to bring that knowledge and that team in." So now you have a company with incredible distribution and marketing power, who just gained consciousness when they did that with Epic. They're like, "Oh, now we get it." And you just told the story perfectly of how that works.

And I've had a chance to meet the CEOs of pretty much everyone you'd expect for those companies when I was involved with Bulletproof. And I had the conversation with the then, CEO of Pepsi about sustainability and they're interested. The problem is twofold. And I want to get your take on this and see if I'm right or if there's more to it. Part of the problem is that they realize, if they do something that's a half a cent more expensive, that their competitors are going to do the cheap one and they'll lose market share. And they're terrified of that. So, they're literally saying, "How do we continue to maintain this level of profitability and this price and make it healthier, because we actually want to make it healthier." So, there's a sincere desire, but a fear. And then the other big problem is, they are just misinformed.

The Pepsi team was like, "Well, we've seen Dr Ornish's work, who we pay millions of dollars a year, to allow us to say that a calorie is a calorie, and it doesn't matter what kind of calorie. And so, using that flawed, basic knowledge, we can go out there and have an entirely plant based offering and tell ourselves it's healthy so we can sleep at night." And I'm paraphrasing quite heavily there, but truly, at the time this is a pharmacy, she's a vegan and a really powerful, amazing, incredible woman. But the flawed assumption there meant that they were just not looking at meat. And people say clean meat. Clean meat is a cow that ate grass, but they think clean meat is a laboratory creation. So, is it bad assumptions or is it the economics of, I have to have the cheapest food on the planet? Which of those, or both, are driving this corporate behavior?

Robby Sansom:

Oh, I think it's those and then some. I think the other premise that you would probably agree with, and I'd have to say, we need them to reject, is this idea that almost any compromise is appropriate to feed a growing global population. And I think that's a, "Well, this is in the best interest of consumers, but we have to make this compromise, because we have to be able to feed this growing population or whatever it else it is." And I think that's quite reductionist, in addition to being false in many ways. The other thing I think is, we were talking about it with institutions. These are large complexes. You change the president; you don't necessarily change everything about the United States.

It's meant to be resilient regardless of who's at the helm. And what I think I found in similar conversations with many of the large food companies is, they are large organization organizations of tens of thousands of people, who are generally well meaning, and generally intelligent. And I think for us, what was so wild to recognize. And finally, because we were protective. We were like, "No, pound sand, not interested. You'll screw up the product, our team, the people who have literally bet the farm on us." And they came back and said, "No, you don't understand. We won't screw up any of those things. We want to learn from you." All of those things. And I think there's this general desire and hope at the top, to influence change, and on the front lines to drive change and everything gets mucked up in the middle when you get to conventional thinking and what's safe and how do you keep your head down and not be disruptive, and stuff just fizzles and drags on and dies.

And so, I think some of that conventional thinking is, it has to be, the only thing that consumers value is cheapness. The truth is, consumers have an array of values, a shelf price is one of them. We can really dig into shelf price, because it's a fun one for me. And what's the true cost of food, and is regenerative protein really expensive or is it actually incredibly valuable? But yeah, I think as far as those big companies go, I really do think, with the right incentives and pressures coming from consumers, there aren't blockers in the building that are going to stop the right thing from flowing up. You just have to overcome decades of bureaucracy intent to make sure that these things don't swing and turn on a dime and end up taking it off a cliff or whatever analogy you want to use.

Dave:

Well, let's talk a little bit about grass fed and regenerative proteins. And to be really clear, it's possible to make non regenerative grass fed proteins, but in general, a grass fed animal is going to be better for you and probably better for the environment, but not always. So regenerative means something a little bit different. Walk me through what regenerative means, the way you're using it with Force of Nature.

Robby Sansom:

Yeah. I think for us, regenerative is a more comprehensive look at what happens pre and post life and death for an animal. What contribution did it make to an ecosystem? What ecosystem services did it bring, and diversity did it help create? And I think animals living in regenerative systems, as you said, lift up the system, create a better food product or protein product for a consumer, because they've lived and fulfilled their potential in nature. And that legacy then lives on the land, and then as you consume it, it lives into you and the people that you share that bounty with. And so, that can mean managing land and practicing management techniques of animals that are designed to emulate and honor the blueprint that mother nature gave us.

Simply saying, oh, hey, the mineral cycle, the carbon cycle, the water cycle, the nutrient cycle, all of these things are widely celebrated in nature. And it is through the millennia and large herds of megafauna since the last ice age, that all incredible, potential and fertility was generated on our lands. And we've been mining that with conventional, industrial agriculture, very extractive to the point where we've extracted so much, they've had to rely on inputs. They call them amendments or applications of fertilizers and pesticides and herbicides and so on and so forth, to make up for the loss of function in those systems. And a regenerative system actually regenerates and rebuilds that resiliency and maintains it in a way where it can actually continue to produce food. Again, our current system being this extractive industrial model, it has a shelf life. It is so extractive to the point of, it will not be able to work for us in producing food in the future.

Dave:

So, we've got about 50 years of topsoil left on the planet at the rate that we're consuming it, unless we start regenerating it. What we do is we say, "This is a problem that matters. Let's go solve it in a small way or a big way."

So, you're doing something about the problem. So that's why I really appreciate it, just having you on the show, because we need to do it. You put values in a company, to make the company have culture. What are the things that you did with Force of Nature.

Robby Sansom:

We have a set of core values that aren't just art we don the walls with. We talk about them as a team on a daily basis. They're meaningful and disruptive, and we recruit accordingly. We bring people in that want to be here and live the values that we have as a company. And in doing so, cherish and defend them.

And we of course have processes in place to drive accountability internally and externally, and to make sure that we're living the ideal that we expect of others, which is, there isn't a destination here. There's a journey and we need to be raising the bar and that's the standard. There's a minimum threshold, no doubt, but too many companies out there are erasing and cutting down to that and digging their heels in. And the reality is, we need to be improving. And so, those are the concepts and

efforts that we have, that will continue and must in order to continue to maintain those ideals indefinitely.

Dave:

What do you say to people who say, "Well, look, I have this plant based amino acid blend. It's the same as protein." What's your net reply to that?

Robby Sansom:

You're talking about the sludge that comes from those processing plants? That plant-based meat?

Dave:

It could be anything, but they're just saying, "Hey, this stuff, wherever it comes from, has the same amino acids as the grass fed steak. It's the same thing."

Robby Sansom:

Yeah. I did. I had a conversation with one of the executives at Impossible and his whole shtick was about how much more efficient what they were doing was, than animal agriculture.

Dave:

It's insane, but okay.

Robby Sansom:

And I just couldn't get my head around it, because to your point, the macro, the micro profile, you really start to get into phytonutrients and actual science. And what they're offering is toxic, and at best, an incredibly poor, almost embarrassing representation of what evolution has given us in the form of ruminant proteins. But to make the claim that it's more efficient, it's absurd to the point of not even really being addressed. Animals have lived in these systems, the largest herd of megafauna, the last ice age was the American bison. It co-evolved to be keystone in our ecosystem, Keystone meaning, it has a disproportionate and positive effect on the ecosystem. It is necessary to perform its function. And part of that function is to ensure everything around it thrives.

And in doing so, up-cycle protein. We talked about soil. Why is soil important? Because all life on the planet that is terrestrial relies on soil and soil is this thin few inches that cover some of the globe. And the most prime soils are on about 30% of the land scape of the earth. And those have been 70% deserted or degraded through agriculture. And so, these animals that were put there to efficiently ensure that those systems are resilient and thriving and not desertifying, are also up-cycling protein for the omnivores, the carnivores and everything else who will then die, and guess what, decay. And that life will feed new life, including plant life and the soil and so on and so forth. So, this is why that argument is so frustrating, because the most efficient thing is already there. We can't be turning our backs on it.

Dave:

How do you go about measuring what happens when someone eats, say an Impossible Burger, but there's all sorts of other fake meat stuff out there. Do you look at human health as an output, or are you just looking at the inputs and saying this is less efficient per calorie? What's the math look like for you?

Robby Sansom:

I guess I'm just not following the specific question. What's the math look like in my choice, as a consumer, to whether or not to eat that? Or you're-

Dave:

You're sitting here saying grass fed meat and regenerative agriculture is provably better for the planet. And so, that means you have to have a provably better metric and you have to have a cost metric. So, when you're doing that math in a spreadsheet somewhere, what does it look like? Are you measuring health in humans? Are you measuring health in soil? Are you measuring number of animal deaths? How do we break down into this?

Robby Sansom:

Well, I think there's the human outcome and we can dive into that health nutrition. I think there's the ecosystem, ecological outcomes. I think there's social issues, like in communities, farming communities, rural areas, there's those animals, the welfare, their ability to exhibit. And there's measurable and anecdotal and empirical and financial measures across those. I think to start though, I'd say these plant-based systems and alternative systems, you're the expert on nutrition. I think the food is garbage. I think we have a perfect design for an item that we should be incorporating in much greater amounts into our diet, to be part of a healthy lifestyle in the form of meat that is consistent with the definition of meat that occurs in nature. And I have to reject the premise that the alternative of plant or cell-based meats, which are reliant on the conventional agriculture system, are an option.

I would say, anything reliant on the conventional agriculture system is truly not an option. There's only an illusion of choice. We are racing towards a cliff and our ability to produce food. We can sustain that pace, and we're still heading towards a cliff. We can slow that pace, and we're still heading towards a cliff. Or we can redirect our course and start to rebuild the resiliency and fertility into our lands and ecosystems and address, not just human nutrition and the fact that things like glyphosate are showing up in urine and breast milk, dead zones and oceans, droughts, and floods, pollinator die off, loss of topsoil as you alluded to. These other incredible weather events, nutritional density in our diet that is lacking, on and on and on down the list. So, I would say, the cost and value of replacing a vicious system with a virtuous one is almost too profound for me to even quantify.

I will say this just for scale, because it all sounds very nebulous and theoretical. I don't know that the average person appreciates how profoundly impactful agriculture is. We begin to appreciate that when we get in a plane, and we look down and we see the checkerboard beneath us. We like to think there's a few farms out there, there's a few cities and there's a bunch in nature. But when you fly you recognize, there's a lot of farms out there. In fact, the US is about 2 billion acres, and we practice some form of agriculture on about 1 billion of those acres. Half of the land mass of the United States is under some form of management for food. And you expand that globally, it's about 30 billion acres of land and about 11 billion of those are being impacted. So, if we're tilling that land, about 40% of the legacy load of carbon in the atmosphere, as a result of just tilling land. That destroys soil, it disrupts ecosystems, causes erosion, screws up water infiltration in the water cycle. Makes-

Dave:

I'm going to pause you for a second there. I love what you're explaining for everyone. The vegan movement will argue that, because some of those plants are fed to animals, you should not eat animals. It is a logical fallacy to say that, but it is something I think we have to acknowledge. Yes, right now industrial farms are taking corn and soy and other grain and they're growing it, extracting from the soil,

putting it in cows to make unhealthy cows, to put in people, to make unhealthy people. That's what we have to break.

Robby Sansom:

That, and taking inputs from Ukraine and Russia, because our system is so depleted of the nutrients needed to create food, that we have to import it from elsewhere to be able to even do that on the lands that you're talking about.

Dave:

That is totally true, because they're depleted already. And so, what do we do then? I'm in a position and you are too. I either can grow my own animals, or I can go to the restaurant and say, "If it's not grass fed, give me the wild caught fish." Which probably has some mercury and plastic, but I'll deal with that as best I can. That's what I do, otherwise, give me some veggies and maybe some rice and I'll put some butter on it and I'll take some cow based protein powder. I'm just not doing it, but for, I'm just going to say most people, yes, you could actually save a lot of money by just cooking at home and is cheaper than restaurants. But if you're traveling, you have life that gets in the way, it's really hard to do this.

So, what are you doing to make it so that people like me, maybe a little bigger than me, who have a few extra animals, can get them to market it. Getting food to market as a small farmer is incredibly difficult. There's butchering and slaughtering, where people screw it up all the time. The regulators are in the way. And then there's distribution. For me, I guess I have a big enough name, I can Asprey Farms on it, and I can put it in a local market. It'll sell. But for most people, you don't even know how to sell your meat right now, if you can produce it and then some other person's going to come in and say, "You have to ship your cows 500 miles to stress them out, to be killed heartlessly in cruel Chinese owned slaughtering plant. And you have to do that by law, or you can't sell it." So how are you fixing that?

Robby Sansom:

Well, again, I think it starts with demand generation and the consumer. And so, for us being a brand and aiming to be a lifestyle brand and active in the digital space, being a thought leader in this category and intentionally trying to reach consumers that are falling in the different groups, to help create awareness and inspire them and hopefully help to create more demand. We've proven that we can scale regenerative systems. That, we were able to accomplish. We recognized that accelerating demand would be a key driver in all of this. And so, we call it creating awareness and then creating access. Because to your point, it's difficult to gain access for a producer and a processor, therefore it's difficult to get access for a consumer.

So, if we can make the call to action and the access for consumers much easier by offering it in a variety of retail stores across the country, available direct to consumer online and food service and so on. All of a sudden demand starts going up. And so, we can start paying more prices, higher prices back through to processors, back through to farmers. And we can start aggregating in different regions at different scales and start to actually build a significant enough supply that justifies creating that supply network that you are talking about, and further even achieving a level of efficiency that helps to make it as affordable as is reasonably possible for consumers who now actually have access to it.

Dave:

You ever think about putting a ring of homes around your 600 acre ranch?

Robby Sansom:

Well, so you said that the ROAM Ranch is owned by Katie and Taylor, my co-founders. I have bison in the herd. I get to go out there a bunch.

Dave:

So, it's owned by some of the other founders of Epic and you're working as range manager.

Robby Sansom:

Yeah. And it's our home farm, so to speak. It is separate from Force of Nature, but we work with dozens to hundreds of family owned operations like ROAM ranch, all across the country. As far as making a super community out of it. I can't speak for that. I haven't had conversations with them about it, but I think there's merit in that, I think those ideas and instances of that actually happening are popping up all over the place.

Dave:

I like living around a farm and I recognize how much work it is to do that. And I also recognize that I'm pretty lucky and I've worked really hard so I could do that, but I want a world where other people who desire connection to the land and to animals, so you can nourish the animal that actually is going to end up nourishing you and your family.

Why would we not want to have a hundred homes, ringing a hundred acres that have animals and plants, and an active farm manager and standards about no pesticide, no poison, no light pollution. So, I would pay to live in a place like that, where I get a share of the food. And it's basically like having your own co-op, where you get a vote on what you grow and how it works. That I think, is a sustainable map for the future.

Robby Sansom:

We have a massive problem to address and there's more than one solution for it. And I think that's what nature teaches us. Diversity brings value. And people doing more of forming those types of communities, where they take more control and exercise more autonomy in how and what they're producing and feeding themselves is, I think, a part of that solution. And I think there's other paths and avenues that are great and worthy pursuits as well. So, I love that. I want to just use that idea to bring up too, though. Let's not forget that the outcomes and the breakdowns in the current system, aren't just offering us poor quality food, or not only poor quality, but even maybe toxic and poor quality food.

Those communities have existed. Small groups of people, scattered all across the country, involved in producing and procuring food for themselves and their community, is how it was. And the current system is failing those communities to the extent where we're losing five to 10,000 farms a year, and a farm isn't a stat on a piece of paper. That is a family, that is people's identity. That is their sense of self-worth. And it leads to the fact that, farmers, the average age is, as you well probably know, over 60. We're losing those five to 10,000 farms a year. Next generation isn't coming back, because it's seemingly hopeless and rates of farmers suicide in some places exceed rates of suicide from veterans returning from war. So, this is the plight of the farmer at present.

Again, if we don't in some way, improve this system. And so, bringing communities together and finding ways to circumvent that system and be successful, I think is important. I also don't want to turn our backs on the few soldiers out there who remain, that are the actual neighbors and human beings

involved in our food production system, where if they fail, our food production system will be entirely reliant on large corporate organizations with a profit motive, almost entirely.

Dave:

How hopeful is you?

Robby Sansom:

I'm pretty damn hopeful. I don't have enough time to waste. I honestly think this is so big. I'm speaking to the scale of agriculture. I think it's so big that a little change can be profound. And I think we live in this age where access to information and I guess false information and everything else, it is what it is, but it's so available that I think that we can reach people. And I think people are getting tired of being fucked with, just to put it frankly. And this is a situation where, we've had the blinders pulled over us and we've delegated with trust. Again, as I said, the production of our food to these large organizations who have focused exclusively on how they can improve their profits at great expense.

And I think as we start to succeed at awakening, the beast that is the consumer, change, it can happen. Change is very real, and it can happen very rapidly. And I think a big part of that is understanding the true cost of food. And so, we're talking about some of that, and much of what we've been talking about is some of the costs that aren't reflected in the shelf price and the intangible costs and the social costs and the healthcare costs and so on. But I think if we can fully scope out and frame out this conversation and picture for the consumer, they'll wake up and say, "Holy shit, this is insane. You mean to tell me what? I've been led down this path and the truth is completely counter. And I'm supporting and complicit in something that is counter to my best interest and intentions. I'm going to make a change." Because that's the system.

Dave:

Let's talk about shelf costs for a little bit. Tell me about the components of shelf cost. You and I both know this, because we've run large CPG companies.

Robby Sansom:

Well, a standard food item, whether it's in a store or in the perimeter of the store, you source ingredients, in our case, proteins. They end up getting processed or packaged in some iteration. So, you go from party one to party two, there's distribution in between each of these legs. So, truckers and logistics, usually it's warehouse, sold to a distributor, who gets a cut. Then again, distributed to a retailer who puts it on their shelves, and they take a cut. So, there's lots of players. The person in this equation who gets the least, is the farmer in the rancher. And the person in this equation who gets the most, is the last person at the end, in this case is the retailer.

Dave:

Let's say that you're a farmer and you have a grass fed regenerative cow. And we're just going to talk, hanging weight. Hanging weight guys, is basically after you take out the organs and take off the skin and the head. I think that's what it is. Tell me if I'm wrong in any of this.

Robby Sansom:

No, hot hanging weight. Yep.

Dave:

Yep. I don't know if you keep the hooves on, I think those come off too, but anyway, it's basically the usable parts of the animal that aren't going to be jackets or automotive upholstery or collagen. So, if you do that, what's the going rate for a farmer to sell 500 of those. What on a per pound basis, all in?

Robby Sansom:

I'd have to look at the USDA data, it's published. [inaudible 00:44:27] I'd say it's probably in the $1 to $2 a pound range, on the conventional side, because we're not there.

Dave:

Sure. It's a $1 or $2 a pound, right?

Robby Sansom:

Right now, it's a drought. So, folks are lining up to downsize their herds. And so, they're probably getting hammered. It's opportunistic, big companies can afford to load up on inventory at cheap prices right now.

Dave:

So, the price comes down when there's a drought or heat waves, like there are right now, especially in Texas. So, you can't afford to have 200 cattle anymore, because you can't get water for them. It's too hot. So that happens as well. And that can depress the price. So, then someone who is counting on making money, suddenly has to sell their cows for half what they thought they were going to get. And that can be the end of the farm right there. And then, some large billionaire will come in and buy the farm and then convert it to glyphosate soaked corn soil destruction land, so that you can eat crickets and corn. Yay. Okay. We got meat that was $1 or $2 for the farmer, and then it goes to a processor. So, someone's already processed it to that point. So, the farmer had to pay the processor also. So, of that $1 or $2 the farmer got paid, they had to pay to have the animal taken to a processor, and then have the animal killed and skinned and all that kind of stuff, right?

Robby Sansom:

Yeah. So, there's a slaughter step. Then there's a [inaudible 00:45:51] processing step.

Dave:

This is all ballpark numbers.

Robby Sansom:

Yeah. I don't think the slaughter fee is really the big thing. It's probably in the few hundred bucks an animal range, depending on scale.

Dave:

So, the farmer gets $1 or $2 a pound and they pay .10 cents a pound maybe for slaughter? The farmer [inaudible 00:46:13] the animal?

Robby Sansom:

Yeah. Well, because you're probably getting 500 pounds usable meat on that carcass, 400 pounds usable meat, depending. Maybe 80, 90% of that's going to be stuff you're going to grind up as trim. And only 10% of those prime cuts everybody seems to be so fond of or buys filets. And the real chunk of processing comes from that further processing, de-boning, cutting, packaging, grinding, that's where you can get into the .50 cents to $1.50 a pound processing fees even.

Dave:

And if a farmer is selling directly or selling through Force of Nature, a lot of that stuff is cut out. But when people are paying $13.99 a pound for something, you got to understand, the farmer got a $1 or $2 and paid some fees along the way. And then it went to someone who cut it up and took some fees, and someone who wrapped it in paper or plastic and took some fees, and that there's trucks along the way. And then it goes to the distributor and the distributor is going to take another, what, I don't know, in cold chain, I only know for bars and all, but the distributors have to take several dollars a pound, right?

Robby Sansom:

Yeah. It could be anywhere from 5% to 15% or more percent depending, 20% in some cases.

Dave:

Got it. And then it goes to a grocery store. And a grocery store takes what, a 50% margin?

Robby Sansom:

Oh, it depends who you are, buddy. Probably [inaudible 00:47:36].

Dave:

Tell me more.

Robby Sansom:

Probably 20 to 40% depending on which category of the store you're in and who you are, because you know what the top driver of traffic into a grocery store is, it's quality meat and produce. So, grocery stores really want to make sure that they're bringing folks in and that they've convinced their consumer, that they have the best produce or the best protein, which is why there's so much private labeling in that category, or lack of labeling. It's a meat case with no brands or no values or no story behind it, most often, because that they want to be able to tell their consumer that they're not getting the exact same meat from JBS, that the other chain next to them is, that the other chain next to them is and so on and so forth. So, they want to differentiate themselves.

That's because there's been a brand revolution and a values revolution that began in the center of the store and has been permeating into the commodity sectors and yogurt and dairy and eggs. And we're seeing it go through that, commodity historically be priced above all else at the expense of all else. So now, these grocery chains are saying, "Hey, wait a minute. We need to bring in higher attribute stuff to improve our set and to draw in that type of consumer, as in a grass fed item."

But they're still working with these large players who are enjoying the tricks and marketing and funds with words, to offer a "Grass fed beef item", but in order to offer at the best price, they'll put that on the shelf at a loss, or at no market, because they're offering that to drive foot traffic. But then, our product that is significantly better, is grass fed and regenerative, our markup at the shelf might be $3 or

$4. So that's a hurdle we get to overcome on the price tag that I would say is unfair to us, but hey, it's a free market. People can do what they want. That's just a reality that consumers may or may not see.

Dave:

A lot of people never have the chance to go back and study the history of consumer packaged goods, but I'm a nerd. And I like that kind of stuff and I like understanding systems. So, if you trace these large food companies, even General Mills and Kraft and all those, and you go way back into their DNA, the first big consumer package goods were coffee. And there were these incredible wars. And I say wars, in marketing wars, between companies who are trying to say, coffee. And 120 years ago, coffee was a commodity. It's all the same. The quality issues that we do now, no one even knew about that stuff. So, either you had coffee, or you didn't. And so, they spent huge amounts of money, and they learned the techniques of lying to consumers to say that theirs was different than something else.

And what we have going on now, is corporations have become so good at that, they're like, "Well, I'm just going to buy some damn meat and say it comes from whatever, put some stuff on there that isn't necessarily even true, but isn't necessarily a lie either. And then consumers still fall for it." But consumers, especially younger ones have become more and more, I would say suspicious, for good cause.

So, I know that, with Force of Nature, you're spending your time and energy on making sure that your grass fed regenerative stuff actually is that. How soon do you think we're going to have people recognizing the quality differences? Or do you think it's always going to be 10% of people?

Robby Sansom:

Oh, like I said before, I'm hopeful and I think pretty soon, if you look at the data-

Dave:

Yeah. Pretty soon though, how soon? Are we talking, is it a five year thing or a 50 year thing? Give me, that's the prediction.

Robby Sansom:

So, organic came around what, at the very early 2000s. And I think some of the latest data says roughly 80% of consumers purchased an organic item in the last year. So that implies that, broadly, even price sensitive consumers recognize there is some value in that claim, worthy of paying a premium for. And if you look within meat, specifically, grass fed as a sub-category within the industry, has been outpacing, has been growing its portion of share at triple digit rates for year over year, over year. So, it is already happening. I think in addition to that, there is more and more momentum being added to that fire and more fuel being added to that fire every single day, as more information comes out. As we have opportunities to have these dialogues that reach people and others are doing similar things.

I think we're on the cusp of it, to be frank. I think, when I started in this world a decade ago, this wasn't even underground. This was a whisper. Now I think it's taken root and I'm really excited to see where it goes, especially as we break down some of these food lies. Again, I'd love to talk to finish the true cost of food and talk about whether meat is expensive or not because I think there's some perspective that we can give there that might inspire some people.

Dave:

All right. Let's finish that up, because I want people to understand that for sure.

Robby Sansom:

Yeah. Well, I just get this idea that, you hear often that it's not scalable. We've spoken a little bit about that. I think you're over that one just like I am. This can be scaled nationally, globally and beyond. And then you get faced with the cost question. It's too expensive. There's food deserts out there that don't have access to whatever, how are we going to solve all these things? And I just think that we're looking at it and entirely wrong. And we don't really understand some of the math, like you said, to get on the shelf, but that math is generally speaking. Besides the example I gave, at parody for everybody. Everybody's dealing with the little middlemen. The bigger the scale, it gets a little more efficient, but some of the things that are influencing the shelf prices that a consumer will see, are surprising and they're hidden in there.

So, No. 1, obviously buying poor quality food is going to have long term impacts on your health. And we're spending trillions of dollars in healthcare in this country. That's a tradeoff. And I don't think that the manufacturers of low quality food should be exempt from having to acknowledge, or we as consumers should have the reality veiled that, eating terrible toxic things, however cheap, are going to have massive costs that we're deferring to the future. And I think it's bizarre to me, that consumers think that animals that were sentient and have lived a life, should be the cheapest things in the grocery store and should be cheaper than olive oil and vinegar and wine and nuts and things like that.

And so, somehow, we've been conditioned to think that the most nutrient dense foods that should be literally the cornerstone and staple of our diet, should be the things we invest financially the least in. I think government tax subsidy, the farm bill, is billions of dollars, upwards of $15 billions of dollars a year, going into a system that causes farmers to fail and allows the shelf price that those products are offered at, to be lower than it would otherwise be, due to the tax dollars that have funded that system to keep those prices falsely low. Again, we talked about loss of family farms. 80% of antibiotics are used in this agriculture system and that's going on directly to support these super bugs and antibiotic resistant bugs. Look at what's happened early in the COVID period with excess supply and demand simultaneously in meat.

That food system is brittle. It broke down. Look at what is happening right now with baby formula or what is going to be happening with food crops, particularly to countries in Asia and Africa, as we go into a period where they can't get those inputs that they're reliant on. This brittle food system has massive costs, and the human toll will be profound. Now, these are all costs of continuing to perpetuate the system, in addition to those environmental consequences and so on and so forth. And that's only if we accept that, we're just not seeing the actual cost. But what about the actual shelf price? We just disregard all of that, which we shouldn't. But if we did, and we just looked at the actual dollars on the shelf, that $11.99 expensive regenerative beef you were talking about, that's .74 cents an ounce. A full serving of that meat is four ounces.

So, you're looking at, what, $3 for 20 something, between 20 and 30 grams of protein, all macro micronutrient profile. It gives you everything you need if you're buying one of our ancestral products, that's got organ meats blended in. You can survive on that. That is a meal. In fact, you can add in some pretty basic things, and for $7, be feeding your family, which it costs $10 or more to feed your family at a fast food restaurant, like a Chick-fil-A or so or something else.

Dave:

Let's just break in a minute there. If you want an equivalent amount of calories of kale. Kale is enormously expensive compared to grass fed regenerative beef. There's no food in there. You literally have to buy pounds and pounds of kale to get enough energy from that stuff.

Robby Sansom:

And then, there's the harm it will do.

Dave:

To your body. And probably won't hurt the soil that much, it'll extract the thallium from the soil, which is a toxic metal. Maybe that's good for the soil.

Robby Sansom:

Well, and then I think kale's a good example, but how about some other more ridiculous examples? So, meat, if the premise would be, meat's expensive and better meat is even more expensive. And so, let's look at what some things we think are cheap. Is candy cheap? Are bags of chips cheap? I'd say those are pretty widely regarded as inexpensive and cheap. They're at the checkout register. They're the last things you think of. But I just did this for a podcast episode that we, that we're putting together, on the true cost of food. The price per ounce of a Hershey's bar is $1.24. It's .50 cents an ounce more expensive. It is almost double the cost of the highest quality regenerative protein that we offer.

Dave:

Look at the game of selling food, for most companies, is to put as much air and water in the food as possible and sell it for as much as you can. And that's why chips and popcorn that's pre popped are so popular, because you're selling almost entirely air and you're going to be able to choke a sea turtle with a packaging, and you deliver a food that made people more hungry a half hour after they ate it. It's heroin for business people. They're like, "Oh my God, this is perfect. It doesn't cost me anything. And it makes people have to eat it all the time."

It's not cheap in any way, for the environment over the person who eats it, but it costs less money upfront. I guess, on a per calorie basis, maybe not. And even then, who cares about calories if they're the wrong calories. And satiety isn't something you talk about that I've heard you talk about at least much, but if you eat some ground beef, you'd probably be full for at least two hours, maybe four. And if you eat an equivalent dollar amount of any of the food you just talked about, you're going to be starving.

Robby Sansom:

Quality regenerative protein will nourish you. And it will satiate you. These alternatives that are significantly more expensive. Hershey's $1.24 ounce, Ruffles, $1.14 an ounce, on and on down the list. Like you said, they will not satiate you and they will actually harm you. And then you have to deal with the cost of those up to and including, Pepto or whatever other garbage, sick care item that you have to incorporate into your daily protocol to exist.

Dave:

You're totally right. If you think about the impact of what you eat on how you feel and on your gut and all the other stuff you're going to have to deal with, it's a big deal.

Robby Sansom:

And the things you care about.

Dave:

It's totally true. All the things you value in the world. I went into Whole Foods, and I saw some Force of Nature stuff. I was like, "Oh, that's remarkable. That's really cool." Including the fact that you've got organs and you do those blends of meat and organs, which I thought was really cool. I still am never going to be a lover of liver. But when you put a little bit of organ and you grind it in, to do a nose to tail thing, it's pretty healthy. So, I like it that you do that kind of stuff. And it's one of those things where look, if you're going to make a product that makes someone feel good after they eat it, that helps the environment and treated the animal with respect. It actually, provably costs more upfront to make, than an industrial animal that was mistreated and fed a bunch of stuff that depleted soil.

Grass fed meat tastes different, but what you're hearing here, the true cost of meat and what it does for you is really important.

Forceofnature.com, code Dave10, to get a discount on your first order. Mail order works fine, and you can buy it in many grocery stores. How many stores are carrying Force of Nature right now? I didn't even ask.

Robby Sansom:

I think it's probably in the neighborhood of several thousand across the country, tens of thousands of products available across the country. And then, direct to your door order. You can order it online; we'll deliver it to you. And then, starting to grow out in some food service chains and be available in some restaurants, like Hopdoddy is a chain that's got good representation across the Southwest right now.

Dave:

Well, I absolutely believe, listening to the show, give it a try, that you're going to feel different if you've never gone grass fed. Even if you just do it for a week and say, "Wow, that's interesting." I notice the difference in the quality of my consciousness. My brain works better when I eat grass fed, and the fact you're supporting lots of small family farmers, I absolutely support. And I'm doing my best with the show, to highlight small family farmers, to highlight ranchers, soil agriculturalists. And if you're listening to this going, "Dave, I thought this was a show about human performance?" It is. If you live in a sterile world, it'll be a terrible, short, low performance existence. So, we're bringing life back into the planet, which puts life and energy into you, which gives you the energy to do more good stuff, to keep the world working the way it's supposed to work. And that's why this is all tied together. Thanks again, Robby, for the work you're doing in your second round of bringing more grass fed goodness to the world and I'm excited about it.

Robby Sansom:

I appreciate it. Thanks for giving me this chance to talk with you.