

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Jason Bradford:** Are we gonna starve if we have human labor and organic methods? If people are skillful? No overproduction of horrific, ecologically destructive farming is the real problem. Not small farmers figuring out how to grow food ecologically. So the problem is that most of the stuff we're actually producing on these conventional farms is not even feeding people.

[00:00:21] It's like we had to create whole industries for almost the waste product of overproduction in an agroecological system with people doing a really good job and internalizing a lot of cycling of nutrients and integrating livestock and having a diversity of crops that are adapted to your place, you're gonna have a lot of food abundance.

[00:00:45] **Nate Hagens:** Today I rewe my friend Jason Bradford to the program. he was on here two years ago or so. Jason is a farmer community organizer, and today we discuss small scale ecological agriculture and community building and potential future farming schools. Jason, currently co-managers a community supported agricultural program with the Oregon Growers Club at Oregon State University, where he practices land stewardship methods and cultivates community rooted in ecologically based agricultural practices.

[00:01:20] He's currently the board president of the Post Carbon Institute and a co-host of the Crazy Town Podcast, as well as a writer for resilience.org. Additionally, in 2019, he authored The Future Is Rural Food System Adaptations to The Great Simplification. In this episode, Jason and I explore how alternative agricultural systems, especially those rooted in community and low tech innovation, could play a key role in the coming.

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[00:01:49] Great Simplification. Jason also shares how he's piloting some of these ideas through the farming club and what that might look like, for these practices to scale and replicate across the United States. Along the way, Jason and I also share some of our personal journeys in learning to farm and grow food.

[00:02:09] In my opinion, projects and organizations such as Jason's give me little glimmers of hope for the more positive futures that could be possible in a lower throughput world. Before we begin, if you enjoy this podcast and would like to read more of the system science underpinning the Human Predicament, I invite you to join the our substack newsletter where my team and I share written content related to The Great Simplification.

[00:02:33] You can find the link to subscribe in the show description. With that, please welcome back my friend Jason Bradford. JB welcome back to the show.

[00:02:43] **Jason Bradford:** It's really good to see you, Nate.

[00:02:44] **Nate Hagens:** You and I have. Spent almost half our lives working, on these issues and understanding them.

[00:02:52] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah.

[00:02:53] **Nate Hagens:** So you, my friend, are formerly trained as a biologist, but thankfully you are also a farmer.

[00:03:01] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah.

[00:03:01] **Nate Hagens:** A land steward. And, from all the stories you've been telling me, off camera, you are a community builder as well. So we could talk about a lot of things today given yours and my historical background and the topics we talk about. But I'd like to focus on, you at least start us, off with giving a picture of your farm.

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[00:03:25] **Jason Bradford:** Okay.

[00:03:26] **Nate Hagens:** Including what you're doing, which you refer to as the farming club, and what an average day working on, these projects look like.

[00:03:35] **Jason Bradford:** Well, I, that's a little hard because you know what's interesting about. About the situation is, you know, I'm, I'd be officially underemployed. I do have a part-time job as a tennis coach, but, what it allows me to do is time to kind of sort through.

[00:03:49] All that has to be done and it's given me a really interesting perspective on stuff that's really not often. Thought of as, you know, high status or rewarding in this world, which is sort of domestic life. And part of what I've gotten better at as I quit my formal job, big, you know, salary job is taking care of the home, doing things like, oh, that, that needs to be fixed or a meal needs to be made.

[00:04:21] In fact, we should probably make extra so we have leftovers for the week. Making sure that, I mean, it doesn't always happen, but, oh, the dishes are washed and the laundry is put away before Kristen gets home from work. Just imagine what it's like to have a nice household where, you're well fed, things are repaired.

[00:04:43] And now extend that to then I live on, some really nice farmland in the Willamette Valley. So there's, it's a real blessing in a sense that I can also, just as I'm going out to the farm, I can take time to walk bird, check out a cool mushroom while I'm also looking at the crops, you know, seeing what's ripening.

[00:05:10] kind of checking in on projects, see if something is really as broken as I think it is and, what I need to do to fix it.

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[00:05:16] **Nate Hagens:** Well, you're, rich in all the ways that count is what you're really saying.

[00:05:21] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah. And, also, you know, I've made a place here that's not just for me and my family, but for a lot of other people.

[00:05:28] And so checking with them and how they're doing, and learning about, you know, what's going well for them, what's not, and readjusting sort of my expectations. So it's kind of a lot of relationship work, which, you know, as a, dude that grew up in the, late 20th century America, we weren't really taught this that well.

[00:05:53] You know what I mean? And I have kind of had to grow as a person a lot and learn how, important all these things are. I don't think I'm great at it yet. In fact, I know I've still, I get tired, I get, I can get cranky. I don't think I piss people off too much, but I don't necessarily follow through. with everything on a time.

[00:06:18] And, you know, I, probably, people are let down sometimes I like to joke that I'm kind of a mediocre farmer and, but I'm trying to get better, you know, so, so that's, it. You know, I, just approached the day with, well, what needs to happen today? And there's like lists, and sometimes it's practical.

[00:06:39] Sometimes it's about these relationships. Sometimes it's accounting, you know, getting your QuickBooks up to date, paying taxes. and sometimes it's like, yeah, organizing people to go plant something, right? Or harvest something.

[00:06:55] **Nate Hagens:** So we've known each other over 20 years, so, you know, I, We'll probably go off on tangents based on what you said.

[00:07:05] and what I'm curious about, you said Willamette Valley has incredibly productive soil. Why is that?

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[00:07:12] **Jason Bradford:** Oh, man. Okay. This is one of the things I like to do. I love to give tours of the farm and, I like donate a tour for like the local nonprofit for their, like auction or whatever, you know, and get people out and show them stuff.

[00:07:26] And, I do birding tours or whatever, but, you know, one thing I talk about is like, okay, we're standing here and why is this good farmland? And you have to go to the Rocky Mountains and you have to imagine the end of the ice age. And there was this giant ice sheet and there was a notch in the mountains around Missoula, Montana, where icebergs would kind of build up.

[00:07:46] But that as, there was a lake forming on the ice sheet during the melt, there would be a burst and, Glacial Lake would like flood through what's now the Columbia River Basin. And it would hit. It would scour that basin and bring an amazing amount of sediments and it would hit essentially a bend where there's the hills in Portland and the, Willamette Valley would be essentially a backflow channel where these flood waters, and there were about 40 mega floods would fill up with sediment from the Rockies.

[00:08:20] And and so that happened over about a 2000 year period towards the end of the last ice age. So we had a series of lakes, and then they would disappear, and then they re flood and they'd get sediment at the bottom of these lakes.

[00:08:32] **Nate Hagens:** But. Eastern Oregon didn't get that bounty

[00:08:36] **Jason Bradford:** parts of it did. So, you know, parts of the Columbia River plateau have some pretty nice farmland as well.

[00:08:42] Other places were so scoured, they call 'em scab lands. it's like the soil just got removed and there's these un really weird undulations to bedrock.

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[00:08:50] **Nate Hagens:** So we think about, the United States being a geologic province of unbelievable bounty because we've had more, oil and natural gas from this country Yeah.

[00:09:03] Than any other country in the earth because of where the ancient seas were and, et cetera. And you're saying we have a different bounty distributed in different places. The Willamette Valley being one of them, south of where I live in Iowa. also there used to be like six feet of topsoil here.

[00:09:22] **Jason Bradford:** Well, the upper Midwest is some of the, you know, most valuable soil in the world. Still to this day.

[00:09:31] **Nate Hagens:** Well, it used to be. I mean, it's getting less and less.

[00:09:33] **Jason Bradford:** Yes.

[00:09:33] **Nate Hagens:** Right?

[00:09:34] Yes.

[00:09:34] **Jason Bradford:** But relatively speaking, it's still amazingly incredible and it could recover, you know, I things recover pretty quickly if you treat 'em right.

[00:09:42] It's, I've been astonished by that.

[00:09:44] **Nate Hagens:** So what is this farming club like? What is it?

[00:09:47] **Jason Bradford:** The simple thing is a farming club is a bunch of people, mostly people I've known for a while, but some people I, kind of just got involved with, the club. And you can think of a club as an association of people that are getting together on a regular basis to do something Right.

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[00:10:03] for a purpose or cause or an activity or a, thing of interest. What we do is we come together and we farm and, it happens at our place here, our farm. And, I think of it as, as sort of evolution of what I've gone through. Like, I, so if they step back, you know, knowing what you and I have known for 25 years or whatever now, What happens if you have a piece of land like I do? I got, I just, I kind of lucked into it honestly. But, you know, say I happen to have this really nice piece of farmland. I think given what's gonna happen with The Great Simplification that we are gonna have to do things quite differently, right? On this land.

[00:10:48] So I don't wanna manage, I don't wanna manage this land like everyone else is doing. I want to think about it in terms of what can I do to restore that soil? What can I do to help provide opportunities for people to do the kind of things I would want more of us to do in the future? And so as a land owner steward manager, I thought to myself, how do I provide these opportunities?

[00:11:15] So one is I lease to a bunch of small farmers. I think small farms are really important. they're using, you know, organic methods, these kind of things as well. So, and then I farmed myself. I was one of the small farmers, so I wanted to have these skills and, learn how to do it. I had a really severe shoulder injury and I got a surgery to correct it, so I'm a lot better now.

[00:11:42] I feel a lot better. But when I got that injury, I realized I wasn't gonna be able to farm on my own. Like, and I had crops in the ground, I had contracts, you know, to grow stuff. I don't wanna let all those down. But I also, I knew it couldn't do it by myself, so I said, you know what, I'm gonna, let me see if my friends wanna come over and the deal will be, I'll teach 'em the farm and, they'll get great food and they'll help me get my crops done.

[00:12:09] Right. Well that sort of opened my, eyes to like, you know what, I've been talking about the need for people to become farmers and. It's a really hard

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thing to do. The problem is if you wanna become a farm small farmer, you're likely gonna ruin your body, ruin your finances, ruin relationship, you know, and I, and it's, of course, there's success stories and I think of it like, you know, I'm a tennis, I'm a tennis fan, right?

[00:12:37] There's like. A hundred tennis players that make enough money to be professional tennis players in the world. there are small farmers that make it because they are like, they're akin to professional athletes in terms of how good they are. Right. You can think of this for like musicians or artists, right?

[00:12:55] there's a lot, there's a lot of talented people, but only a very few actually can make a living at this business of being a small, say, ecologically minded farmer

[00:13:05] **Nate Hagens:** because they're competing with a model that's based on the wrong prices, the wrong long-term prices.

[00:13:12] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah. And this model also, so this model basically drives the substitution of labor for capital equipment and requires then, a, scale and acts to, deploy that large equipment that is labor efficient.

[00:13:27] 'cause labor is the highest cost of production on farms. If, you have a small farm model, you make it a low cost to production when you buy a bunch of equipment that you can finance and so, so as long as those fuels are around, right. and all of the markets are set up to, to take those commodities and turn 'em through the industrial machine into, you know, manufactured foods for the masses.

[00:13:55] The small farming is not economically a highly viable thing

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[00:14:00] **Nate Hagens:** when, denominated in dollars and profits. It's not Yes. But maybe in other areas it is viable.

[00:14:06] **Jason Bradford:** Yes. And so that's what I'm trying to figure out, right? So as a mediocre small farmer who's struggling and hurting myself, I'm like, gosh, this is terrible.

[00:14:15] Why am I doing this? Okay. What if I were to say. Even though I'm a mediocre, small farmer, I'm a professional farmer, and relative to these people who don't know anything, I'm like, Carlos Alcaraz or Roger Federer, let's say to them, and I can, train them in these farming techniques.

[00:14:36] **Nate Hagens:** So just, rattle off, some of the things that you grow to eat, on, your, land there, like some of the crops.

[00:14:47] **Jason Bradford:** The farm itself has people growing all kinds of stuff. Like there's a organic nursery, there's, someone raising lamb. there's someone who does, you know, grains, a lot of herbs for flowers, produce, we do mostly produce. And typically this is what you find for small farmers. They're gonna do vegetables and things like this because these are the heavy water crops.

[00:15:12] These are the things that have the highest costs, you know, relative to other foods in the market. You offset your food costs relative to your work best. When you do those things, it's very hard for you to spend time growing wheat and look, back at that and say that, many hours, I got a 50 pound bag of wheat when it's like super cheap, right?

[00:15:34] I can pay a few bucks for that,

[00:15:36] **Nate Hagens:** but someday that might change

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[00:15:38] **Jason Bradford:** that. Someday that might change. So I do dabble in these things, but mostly what we do is we think we plan for like a year and we say, okay, how do we grow food? How do we keep ourselves out of the, let's say the produce aisles all year round.

[00:15:51] That's like our, that's like our explicit goal. And, so for example, we had a 165 different planting units. So like things I could say this day in this location, we planted these 165 events like that. And that might be six kinds of onions planted two times a year. It might be four different kinds of cabbages.

[00:16:13] There was a summer cabbage, there was a, fall planted cabbage that can over winter. so I'm not saying that many species, but I'm saying. You have to figure out the timing of when you plant something, when that variety is gonna peak and be harvested, when maybe something you plant at the same time, but as a later maturing is coming in.

[00:16:33] Or you do what's called successional planting, like with spinach 'cause it just sort of finishes, you know, and bolts so successions of things or like cilantro. there's three different lettuce plantings. There's varieties of lettuce that are good for early midsummer over winter. Blah, blah, blah.

[00:16:49] **Nate Hagens:** If you lived where I lived, could you adapt your, roadmap, what you're doing?

[00:16:55] I mean, it's today's December 4th. This morning it was negative 25 Celsius outside. The only thing you can grow is frostbite on your mustache. Yeah. you can't do winter planting here.

[00:17:07] **Jason Bradford:** Right.

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[00:17:08] **Nate Hagens:** so would you have to like, totally, I mean, could you do your model here and tweak it?

[00:17:14] **Jason Bradford:** You'd tweak it, you'd have to, you'd like have a, you compress certain things and then you'd have to focus a lot more on storage,

[00:17:22] **Nate Hagens:** the varieties that you would, that do better to store.

[00:17:25] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah.

[00:17:25] **Nate Hagens:** Like potato varieties and such.

[00:17:27] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah. And yeah, we do that too. So like, you know, cabbage, we harvest, you know what happens here is things will rot, right? So it'll get wet. We don't freeze as much. It will freeze, but it, they'll, just get so wet. You can't harvest and will rot. So you, get a bunch of carrots finishing, or parsnips or root ABA is in.

[00:17:46] You get 'em out before the field is so saturated, you don't even wanna walk out there and you have a cellar and you just store 'em in the cellar and they're, and you know, the right varieties will last for months in a cellar. So it's pretty amazing.

[00:17:59] **Nate Hagens:** What you're painting is really, in many ways, a microcosm of the bifurcation that's in our society enabled by these armies of cheap fossil workers and available credit and a six continent global supply chain.

[00:18:13] Because time is what, especially since we're addicted to dopamine and stimulation, people want immediate. Feedback, immediate things and things are so cheap that, ah, I might be interested in growing a garden, but it's just so cheap to go to the Piggly Wiggly or it's, or Safeway. It's, and fill up my basket.

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[00:18:36] But those times are changing now. so this trade off between money and all the other things that we value in our life is becoming felt, I think, by more people. So, let, so let me ask you, this current agricultural production, at least in the United States, is dominated by large commercial firms.

[00:19:00] So in your opinion, what is the benefit of smaller scale farms in terms of food production, ecological health? Maybe community coherence, maybe personal satisfaction.

[00:19:14] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah. So there's that bookshelf has, is full of some of the books written about this. So that's sort of the problem. Like, that's such a big question, right?

[00:19:24] And I guess, okay, how do I do this succinctly? This, that giant equipment that runs over those, you know, let's start with that. Like the soil, whatever that giant equipment, those machines sort of demand a certain way of doing things and they, they change the mindset I think of the people. People become, part of their, that machine.

[00:19:46] Like what, tools you have really be, becomes part of your psyche

[00:19:50] **Nate Hagens:** cyborg farmers,

[00:19:51] **Jason Bradford:** right? And so they, see the, soil, they see the farms as production systems. And what production system people wanna do is they wanna simplify and they wanna homogenize. So you get attitudes like, you know, level the field.

[00:20:06] So there goes the topography that the river systems over time created depositing different kinds of soil at different depths. take down any borders that used to be there. So farms used to be smaller and there were these natural

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borders with fence lines for livestock. And, hedgerows remove those so that we now take a field that was 40 acres and now we connect it to another field, next door that's a hundred.

[00:20:31] Now we have 140 or more efficient. You start simplifying the landscape. and then because you care so much about, you know, this time component, you're gonna, you're gonna find whatever equipment you can, use to speed things up. That may be practices like, you know, I don't need to cover crop.

[00:20:52] That's all really, that's a really time and expensive thing to do relative to buying those inputs I can spray on. Right. and so you just get this ecological degradation because the machines are dictating a way of being that is not in sync with any kind of ecological reality.

[00:21:11] **Nate Hagens:** Well, the, ecological degradation has a zero weighting in the, optimization of the prices and the costs.

[00:21:19] Correct. 'cause we treat it in our economic system as zero.

[00:21:22] **Jason Bradford:** As zero

[00:21:23] **Nate Hagens:** basically.

[00:21:23] **Jason Bradford:** And I literally believe that most farmers lose, I mean, there's exceptions of course. Right. There's, gonna be some 20% of farmers who are big time conventional farmers and are really ecological minded and are trying to do the right thing and are caught up in this pickle.

[00:21:39] But a lot of people, I think because they get, they. You know, people are gonna justify what they're doing, what they're they wanna be, they want to have the self-concept of, I'm a good person and I'm doing, a righteous thing in my life.

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And so there's a lot of denial that happens of, the, problem until it's kind of too late, you know, is, a, bummer.

[00:22:02] You don't need many people for this, kind of farming. Right. So community, right. What happens to the rural communities? What happens? It, yeah, I can hear stories of like, oh there, this is an old schoolhouse right there, there some of them still exist and there were all over the place. In my neighborhood here, there was a hundred, a woman who died at 103.

[00:22:25] And I go talk to her, Francis. And she died earlier this year. And she would tell you the greatest stories about what this was like growing up in this neighborhood. All the family that was around, it was like an extended family. She had her aunts and uncles and cousins and grandparents and mom and dad and her brothers and sisters.

[00:22:45] And they would all just run a run to each other's homes. Like there was a trail crew, the field where they would all connect to each other. And she had a tree here that she talked about. And we built a fort in that. And when I moved here, there was remnants of that fort and there were grain, there were little grain storage silos here.

[00:23:03] So everybody would store their own stuff on the farm. In, in, in equipment was totally different than now. There were windmills, there were wooden structures and they would wind or wind pumps, you know, they would mechanically pump water and that's in her lifetime. And the difference between that and what kind of life it would've been like in community.

[00:23:25] And what it is now is just absolutely astonishing. I, and so it's just, it's kind of a depressing thing to think about is that these rural areas are not as interesting and fun and vivacious as they used to be. And sort of part of what I'm

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trying to do, right? It's this little micro scale. It's bring people out, bring a lot of small farmers out here.

[00:23:47] I open my farm up to the neighbors, they can take walks on it.

[00:23:50] **Nate Hagens:** So the proximate goal is to grow more food for the people, but the ultimate goal might be community for the people, spending time with the land and each other on a human scale time sort of situation.

[00:24:02] **Jason Bradford:** And you need that time to get a relationship with each other and with the land and the place.

[00:24:08] And, so, you know, there's like movements of like land back and these sort of things which are really interesting. And, you know, on there, be the very far political left wanting to, get, people onto farms and, all that. And I think that's great, but also I think you've gotta do it in a way that's responsible because people don't have the relationship yet to the place.

[00:24:31] **Nate Hagens:** I forgot the first time you were on this show. I think it was in the first year, so it might've been three years ago. and I think I asked you then, but maybe you could repeat your answer or whatever new answer you have. How does what you are doing, or what small farms are capable of doing pan out with respect to food production itself?

[00:24:54] Mm-hmm. Relative to the conventional big ag, big tech methods.

[00:24:58] **Jason Bradford:** That's a good question. People often worry about that stuff. I don't worry about it from a theoretical perspective, like, people are, really capable if they have some guidance, and I think this is the key. What's happening with the, farming club is you don't just take people who.

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[00:25:15] Don't know what they're doing and throw 'em out there and say, farm. Okay, that's disaster. It's like, I think of it as, you know, I'm coaching people on how to be farmers themselves and they have to then create expertise, have roles and responsibilities that where they're paying attention to details that matter.

[00:25:36] And there's a lot of details that matter. So where you're talking about a cultural problem, if you were to imagine people nowadays going out to farms and trying to make it, no, they, they'd be flail, they'd just have no clue. If you have the time to develop a food culture where people know how to interact with the land, with their simpler tools, with the animals, with the plants and each other in ways that are effective and efficient, relatively speaking, then people are great at growing food.

[00:26:07] We got here, we got to this point because. We figure out this stuff, we figure out how to provide for ourselves. And I don't think, I'm not worried about that. Theoretically, I worry about it for other reasons.

[00:26:20] **Nate Hagens:** So you can grow as much or more food on your land as an equal, plot of, conventional fossil fuel land.

[00:26:30] **Jason Bradford:** There's a real interesting difference in kind. So what we would do would be so different than what they would do. It's hard to make a comparison. It's, almost like the question doesn't quite, I mean, I think I know what it's getting at is the question is, are we gonna starve if, we have human labor and organic methods, if people are skillful, no.

[00:26:52] **Nate Hagens:** Right. Well, and also the, question also has many different sub. Variables in it, because do you wanna make the most money per acre is a question. Do you wanna grow the most calories per acre is another question. Right? Do you wanna grow the biggest variety to make you healthy and happy with your diet is another question.

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[00:27:16] Right? Do you wanna become healthier and grow community in the process?

[00:27:21] **Jason Bradford:** Right?

[00:27:21] **Nate Hagens:** But just in terms of food, presumably you are substituting fossil workers with the time of more human workers and you use less off the farm inputs.

[00:27:36] **Jason Bradford:** Correct.

[00:27:36] **Nate Hagens:** Then a conventional ag a lot less.

[00:27:39] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah, I'd say a lot less. Now you can do so, you know, there's some other writers that have done a good job of looking at this.

[00:27:46] **Nate Hagens:** Chris Sage has a new book on that I think.

[00:27:48] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah, exactly. So you know, there's people that have delved into the details of this. Chris is really good and the basic answer is for certain crops in certain situations, you're gonna have a drop in yield. And mostly this has to do with things that have been bred really well to accept synthetic nitrogen and then the yields go crazy.

[00:28:11] That's a limited set of crops where that is super important. Wheat's one of them honestly. but otherwise, right. In a, in an agro ecological system with people doing a really good job and internalizing a lot of cycling of nutrients and integrating livestock and having a diversity of crops that are adapted to your place, you're gonna have a lot of food abundance and it's real food.

[00:28:37] So the problem is that most of the, stuff we're actually producing on these conventional farms, this is the part of the question that's sort of hard to get

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at address is not even feeding people. it's like we had to create whole industries for almost the waste product of overproduction.

[00:28:54] It's kind of madness, like the ethanol industry and these sort of things where, you know, the excess of chickens and, hogs and torture conditions just because we're overproducing. So I worry, I, think overproduction of, horrific ecologically destructive farming is the real problem. Not small farmers figuring out how to grow food.

[00:29:16] Ecologically we will not starve if we have enough skilled small farmers and their social, I mean, and social complexities breaking down isn't too awful and climate disruptions aren't too bad. So a lot of ifs, but, you know, I'm trying to work on models that may, help us navigate.

[00:29:39] **Nate Hagens:** So you have, described your land there and the Willamette value as a hub for projects such as dry farming.

[00:29:48] Mm-hmm. A habitat restoration. Permaculture design and various other small farm businesses. How is this all possible on, on just one track of land?

[00:29:58] **Jason Bradford:** Well, it's big enough. So, I mean, farms, vary a lot in size, right? And so there's some people that have just 10 acres or to say, have a thousand acres.

[00:30:08] I have an have like a little over a hundred acres and to give people an idea of what that is. And then it's about, you know, 40 to 50 hectares or whatever for, non-English speaking, metric people, which are great. but that's the size of a hundred soccer fields or football

[00:30:31] **Nate Hagens:** fields.

[00:30:32] Oh, that's a lot.

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[00:30:33] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah. So the farm is about, if I were to, like, I'm sitting at one end of it right now in my house, and if I were to walk east, it would be a mile to the other end, you know, one and a half kilometers. So it's kind of a, it's long and narrow, but I have a mile of riverfront that snakes through part, the southern and eastern section of it.

[00:30:59] So a lot of the restoration work is in this riparian zone. I have a 4,500 foot linear border with a neighbor that is, I'm trying to get a, nice hedgerow. I'm trying to remove invasive species, plant, more natives in there, make it healthier, make it more diverse. there's remnants of it in patchy and it's an incredibly important habitat.

[00:31:25] I'm planting shelter belts. I'm planting what's called a SIL pasture.

[00:31:28] **Nate Hagens:** What's a shelter belt?

[00:31:30] **Jason Bradford:** this is really, this is actually a really important functional aspect of a farm. when, there's high winds, let's say, you can have a lot of damage and you can have a lot of stress say where animals or crops.

[00:31:45] And so one of the problems that happens with farms that get over industrialized is they, remove a lot of vegetation that would have blocked the, fetch. It would've like shortened the fetch of the wind.

[00:31:59] **Nate Hagens:** what's the fetch?

[00:32:00] **Jason Bradford:** It's like the distance the wind has to travel and maintained and sort of corridor.

[00:32:04] And so when you break up that you slow the wind down, you create eddies. And so I see these, animals out here, and we get these hot summer winds, let's say that come from the east and we're gonna have a heat wave and there's

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no shade, right? The trees are, there's trees are, the trees are being taken down everywhere.

[00:32:27] So again, with the big equipment, homogenized, open up. They'd hate to turn these things around. They want to drive in long straight lines. with little equipment and smaller field blocks, you now say, oh, I would like the ecological function of a shelter. I'm gonna make a, I'm gonna, I'm gonna, I'm gonna bisect the farm with trees, that kind of thing.

[00:32:51] So, and that's what these hedgerows are doing as well, as the riparian forest. They're, making the landscape more ecologically, you know, diverse. I just say, I'm very excited about this. Well, I'm in, third place for the bird species, of yards in Oregon.

[00:33:10] **Nate Hagens:** third place in like the number you've seen?

[00:33:13] **Jason Bradford:** Yes. A hundred, I think 121 species this year are birds.

[00:33:17] **Nate Hagens:** And do you think that's correlated with your efforts to create hedgerows and habitat and such?

[00:33:23] **Jason Bradford:** Well, this is a great question. I'm trying to get involved some scientists here to study that. And I think I would, I know how we have this system in eBird, which has what are called hotspots.

[00:33:34] And so there's these local parks, right, that are near the farm really close by. You can do a species, you know, intense, an effort, a species curve by effort of observation and see how my curve at the farm corresponds to curves of local, like, you know, parks, right? Natural areas and, then do it on a farm that hasn't been sort of helped along.

[00:33:59] I think there's a lot more food here. I honestly do.

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[00:34:01] **Nate Hagens:** Well, there's no pesticides. So the, there's more bugs for one, right?

[00:34:05] **Jason Bradford:** There's more bugs 'cause the less pesti, no pesticide use. We put these trees in, you know, we, we have these orga more organic soils, and these soils are full of life. They're full of bugs.

[00:34:20] Right. There's a, biodiversity that happens if you were to shovel up the earth and look at it, and the difference between farms that are managed, like, I'm managing this, or we're managing it as a, as a, team here, right? And the nextdoor field that isn't managed like this is absolutely tremendous.

[00:34:34] It's sort of this invisible life. And you see all these animals, they're, you watch birds and they're just like looking around. You can't tell what they're looking at, but there's, food everywhere.

[00:34:45] **Nate Hagens:** Especially after a rain. My, I have 15 ducks now, which is about 10 too many. And they'll go out like constantly looking at Yeah.

[00:34:51] The ground slots and they don't even want me to feed 'em on those days. Right. They're like out on a, treasure hunt.

[00:34:57] **Jason Bradford:** Yes.

[00:34:58] **Nate Hagens:** So these methods you're using, Jason sound incredibly productive and beneficial for the land and the bird habitat, as you just said. So why aren't commercial farming operations adopting some of these practices?

[00:35:12] **Jason Bradford:** Well, I say a few of them are trying, like you're gonna get. There's organizations like the Zeri Society, this is a private, and there's NRCS, which is the USDA, you know, programs that try to encourage farmers to do this.

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And there's habitat set asides, you know, like there's all these like acronyms, CREP and equip and, all these practices you can do.

[00:35:34] And so the, government will, and foundations and private entities will help pay farmers to do some of this work. And when I was doing more large scale commercial farming, like I was vigorously going after grants and installing stuff as best we could, but. You know, honestly, it's hard to find an ROI for these things.

[00:35:55] Like if you have somebody who's the CFO and is asking you, why are you doing this? You can mumble through an answer about, you know, the ecological relationships. And there's this group out of uc, Berkeley that's like doing ecological studies and like the tomato, pests were less intense, closest to their ecological, shrub planting and blah, blah, blah.

[00:36:23] And, you know, but can you, like, can you satisfy them? Maybe not. That's the problem. It's very hard to get to, to speak their language and it may be that it's impossible. 'cause their time horizon isn't appropriate for the relationships you're trying to build over 5, 10, 20 years. Discount rate, blah, blah, blah.

[00:36:46] You, you know, all this stuff.

[00:36:47] **Nate Hagens:** So if we were somehow able to radically change our food systems, in the ways that, that you're proposing or describing, what would life look like for an individual, involved in, a farming club or an effort, the way that you're doing it, how many of those people would there actually be relative to the current proportion of people who are farming?

[00:37:13] **Jason Bradford:** Great question. How many would there be in proportion? That's a really interesting one.

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[00:37:18] **Nate Hagens:** 3% of our population is, well, 3% of our population in the US is energy and food employed.

[00:37:24] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah. I think one percent's food. Yeah.

[00:37:26] **Nate Hagens:** One percent's food relative to something like 75 to 80% of the population of the country of India is involved in food.

[00:37:34] **Jason Bradford:** Right. So I sort of think we would, evolve solely a peasant culture. And, that's a bifurcation. That would be a good one to have this peasant culture. And there's a tension between the, rural peasants and, sort of any kind of urban culture. And that's an important tension, that we have to sort of manage.

[00:37:56] **Nate Hagens:** I don't know if you watched the episode with Jean Mark Janko Vichi, but he said there's three ways to deal with, energy scarcity. one is efficiency, which is technology. The other is, so Brite, which is kind of, you know, resilience and actively choosing to live differently. And the third is poverty.

[00:38:16] So what you're kind of talking about is the food equivalent of that is we might all become peasants, as the futile techno future, arises, but not in a way we would like. But you're trying to describe peasants in a, positive way. Like we're actively choosing to live more that way.

[00:38:37] **Jason Bradford:** Yes, I think so.

[00:38:39] I see that. And so I joke around with my farming club that, you know, I say, you know, dearest neo peasants of Corvallis. You know, and I, we, have, we, come up with rituals, you know, it's a little tongue in cheek, but I think it's also something that's important. I think that, here's what's interesting.

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[00:38:57] Okay. And this is something Chris SM talks about in his book, actually, which I totally agree with. 'cause I had this, it, it gets to technology too, like cargo cults and these sort of things. Anyway, they're all wrapped together. you know, if you are, if you're a liberal urban person today, you might be like, oh, indigen, indigeneity, indigenous wisdom.

[00:39:20] Okay? And you're gonna, you're gonna nod at that. You're gonna read Robin Wall Kimer, and you're gonna like, you know, think about how do I, become indigenous? Well, guess who the indigenous people were. And maybe you're, if you're a white person like me in your ancestral past, and guess who a lot of the indigenous people are in places like the Andes of South America.

[00:39:43] these are peasants. You would look at them and you would say they're peasants. The Irish peasants, the Polish peasants, right? The German peasants, the Italian peasants. These were the indigenous people who had cultures that were food sovereign and knew their local ecology. Now, granted, you can also read, stories about deforestation, gilgamesh, whatever.

[00:40:09] You can read stories of the, of, systems of agriculture collapsing. Now, a lot of that was because you had power shifting too much to centralized urban states, and they then demanded they, there's, an extraction that happens from the countryside. When you get a, Rome of a million people. The, violence against the land and the people that work the land was horrendous so that Rome could, blossom.

[00:40:39] And so I see a lot of these. I go to these big places, I see these monuments, and I just realize like, they messed up North Africa for that. They, had, they destroyed the peasant culture in Central Italy and created these essentially like gentrified estates of now indentured servant workers.

[00:40:59] **Nate Hagens:** It's power and maybe dark triad all the way back.

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[00:41:03] **Jason Bradford:** Yes.

[00:41:04] **Nate Hagens:** And it's the two models that cleverness and short term power, outcompete wisdom and longer term, resilience over and over in our history. And now it's coming to a head.

[00:41:16] **Jason Bradford:** Totally. So what I suggest, if you don't wanna be one of these powerful people and good luck, you know, being one of the oligarchs or whatever, get these skills and embrace, embrace this other way of living that actually, you know, most people kind of liked it.

[00:41:34] Like people resisted. Deep peasant hood. It was an awful thing for these cultures to lose it.

[00:41:41] **Nate Hagens:** So what you're kind of suggesting is that in these tumultuous times, especially with AI and the other things coming our way, that personal agency, one direct route to it may be starting with food sovereignty.

[00:41:57] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah, I think that's probably one of the best ones, honestly. So getting some connection to a place where you can start to have food sovereignty.

[00:42:06] **Nate Hagens:** So how might a person with currently no access to land, but who wants to be involved with projects like you're describing, go about finding an opportunity, finding land and people to connect with.

[00:42:17] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah.

[00:42:17] **Nate Hagens:** To learn these school, the, these skills and get some of some, to much of their food in this way?

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[00:42:24] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah, it's tough. I think, you know, for a lot of people it may require relocating. It may require a voluntary simplicity approach where you don't need much, and so you can kind of manage to get it by without money.

[00:42:38] It may require living in conditions and locations that you're not as comfortable in. so it's like, I guess understanding that you may have, you know, there's, definitely a change that has to happen. but. How to do it. I, God, I think there's so many paths. I mean, one path might be if you're a young person to get some degree in related to food and, agriculture and, get a job somewhere with, a farmer who's experienced.

[00:43:11] **Nate Hagens:** Do people that go to college for agro food sort of degrees, is the thing that they're taught in and trained in commensurate with the future you're describing? Or is it all based on big tractors and large scale things?

[00:43:28] **Jason Bradford:** It's all over the place. I would say. For example, like uc, Santa Cruz is kind of famous for being this Agri ecology center.

[00:43:35] It's not even one of the land grant schools. I went to uc Davis, which was the land grant school, and. It was much more of like the commercial side, right? And there was this little tiny organic program because there were hippies that went through. They're in the seventies. And so you get these little offshoots and there's like, you know, you, there's giant fields.

[00:43:54] Davis has, you know, thousands of fields that they're doing trials on. And then there's like the organic garden area, and there's, they've got these alternative structures that they built these domes. and so Santa Cruz kind of just did that. they didn't bother with the big ag. So the, your, land grant, ag schools, or maybe even better, your non land-grant Ag schools, who just, for some reason there was the right combination of people that showed up.

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[00:44:22] And at some liberal arts school, what was the guy, what was the guy in Vermont that was, we met,

[00:44:28] **Nate Hagens:** Kenneth Mulder.

[00:44:29] **Jason Bradford:** Geez, genius. Exactly. That school's not there anymore, for God's sakes. But he was farming with, oxen, right?

[00:44:37] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, with oxen at this little

[00:44:39] **Jason Bradford:** school.

[00:44:40] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah, and, he wrote half of my PhD thesis to boot.

[00:44:45] **Jason Bradford:** So you have to find these little, like, you know, places like Oregon State University. Plenty to do here in big commercial ag. Also, tons of opportunities. There's organic programs. There's permaculture horticulture itself, just learning horticulture, which is a standard ag degree. I see our future as more of a, like a livestock and horticulture like.

[00:45:08] You know, small herds of livestock and horticulture rather than the big field agriculture with the equipment.

[00:45:13] **Nate Hagens:** What is horticulture?

[00:45:15] **Jason Bradford:** Well, horticulture is more of this sort of hand work, you know, things with the simpler tools. It's learning how to propagate plants and plant them and tend them in sort of smaller scales.

[00:45:26] And so, it, it's a, set of techniques that gardeners will often use, but also small farmers because they're not gonna be using these big mechanized equipment as much.

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[00:45:36] **Nate Hagens:** So for small scale farmers and landowners, maybe even with a house and three quarters of an acre, especially in the United States, what do you recommend they do with their operation if they're interested in replicating what you're doing with the farming club?

[00:45:50] **Jason Bradford:** Okay, so this is the thing. So I have different hats, right? I have the, hat of the guy that actually has a farm and, then that led me to think about. What should I do? Right? And so part of what if I had just had a homestead, a smaller, I would just like trick it out with, you know, permaculture kind of designs thing for, and gardens everywhere and trees.

[00:46:13] And it, it would be just this beautiful little place you'd show up. It'd be like paradise. So can you make your goal? If that's what you're gonna, I'm here, I'm gonna be staying here, say I'm gonna make my place an absolute paradise that I can eat out of and have it be just like a retreat center for anyone who shows up as well.

[00:46:32] **Nate Hagens:** Dumb question there. what about people that do have three quarters of an acre, but most of it is a green grass lawn?

[00:46:40] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah,

[00:46:41] **Nate Hagens:** that's what I'm saying. Would you suggest that? Oh, rip it up.

[00:46:43] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah. Make it a paradise. You know, like, in other words. Completely redesign things around

[00:46:48] **Nate Hagens:** Okay.

[00:46:49] **Jason Bradford:** Around this idea that you're gonna need to be more food sovereign in your locale.

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[00:46:54] Right.

[00:46:55] **Nate Hagens:** And is there any comparative advantage, guns and butter sort of economic example from people living in the suburbs that they each have a little bit of land and they do kind of what you're doing? they learn and share crops. You do the rutabagas, I'll do the potatoes, and then we share the outcome is, have you, what are your thoughts on that?

[00:47:17] **Jason Bradford:** No idea. That's an interesting question. I mean, I think it ha it's gonna happen more informally than formally. Maybe you're gonna get to know people, see a lot of this stuff. I think it's hard to plan this stuff, honestly. I think a lot of this is just gonna evolve and every year might be a little different as new people come in and new opportunities and your, life changes.

[00:47:37] And, but yeah, it's more like, you know, what happens around here is I had a gardener neighbor and it'd be like, I've got a bunch of extra this. And he'd be like, eager, can you please get these cucumbers off my plate? And I'd take a bottle of wine over 'em and, he is like, I don't need wine. I'm like, I know, but I'm trading you and I grab the cucumbers.

[00:47:56] So I think a lot of it's gonna be like that more, you know.

[00:48:00] **Nate Hagens:** So let me ask you this. the current model, is not sustainable for many reasons that, you wrote a white paper on it. what was the name of that again?

[00:48:14] **Jason Bradford:** Oh yeah, the FU is rural.

[00:48:15] **Nate Hagens:** The future is rural. Yeah. But we're running into this khap economy that the top 20% are doing great stock markets at all time highs.

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[00:48:25] But the bottom 40% are not. Yeah. And the middle is starting to be pulled back down.

[00:48:30] **Jason Bradford:** Yes.

[00:48:31] **Nate Hagens:** So when there's economic tough times, there's gonna be two dynamics going on. One is people are gonna try to make more, squeeze, more profit out of land that they have. and that's gonna mean kind of doubling down on the giant tractors and the mechanized things so that they can make a profit.

[00:48:53] But simultaneously there's gonna be a lot of people that either don't have jobs or don't have food security. Yes. But they do have time and they wanna learn and contribute. So they would want to do some of these things.

[00:49:05] **Jason Bradford:** Totally.

[00:49:05] **Nate Hagens:** So both tho that's gonna be pulling our society Yes. In two different directions.

[00:49:09] Do you have any thoughts on that?

[00:49:10] **Jason Bradford:** Well, this is what, this is sort of the other side of the, if. You know, there's one idea, is this suburban, like retro suburbia, like a David Gram sort of thing? And the other is, what I'm trying to do here is say I've got a pretty good sized piece of land. And so there's so many farmers that are lonely, right?

[00:49:28] Lonely men that have giant acres and. If you have any connection to the, to a community, right? It's like, do your kids go to the same school as people that live in that town? You know, are they in the same, on the same basketball team? find connections. Both of you, both sides find connections, then they get people connected from the town or whatever to that piece of land.

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[00:49:52] It's your land, your big family acres, you have 500 acres and work together with the club to figure out how to grow food.

[00:49:59] **Nate Hagens:** It's such a no brainer I think in, communities around the world because this gets back to the expanding the definition from narrow boundary to wide boundary capital. Because if we use narrow boundary capital, that landowner, that lonely farmer is gonna measure his or her output in dollars.

[00:50:19] This is how much money I made for my land. If you use wide boundary capital, yeah, I need some dollars to pay the bills and, put my kids in school and whatever. But I also want. Community relationships. Yeah. I want safety because everyone knows each other. I, want diversity, of, food crops. Yeah.

[00:50:38] Instead of just one. Yes. I want hedgerows, I want lots of birds. here, I wanna think of my asset and widen the definition of how I get a return on it

[00:50:49] **Jason Bradford:** and think how well you'll eat as a farmer, for God's sakes. Most farmers don't eat anything they grow in America. It's really upsetting.

[00:50:55] **Nate Hagens:** is that true?

[00:50:56] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah. I mean, what do you, I mean, what do you're going Corn, soy. Yeah,

[00:51:00] **Nate Hagens:** right.

[00:51:00] **Jason Bradford:** Alfalfa. Yeah.

[00:51:01] **Nate Hagens:** What's for dinner tonight? Corn. Corn and soybeans. Honey.

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[00:51:05] **Jason Bradford:** I like, they don't eat 'em these. Most of this goes to feed or ethanol too, right?

[00:51:09] Yeah, So, I mean, just, it's incredible. This is, again, you know, so you have like, you know, you got the farmer that's running all this equipment and spread thin and they're just in big trucks and dragging, combines around whatever.

[00:51:21] You often maybe if have a wife, she's a teacher or a nurse or a, secretary in town and. The household is like vacant and now who's making dinner? Where are you getting that food? You live in these rural areas, it's pretty rough. Now imagine you're growing some of the best food you've ever eaten in your life because, and it's on your farm and you're figuring out how to help these people.

[00:51:47] You're a inventor of some kind. So I, this is what I'm doing and I'm pretty involved because I'm not super distracted with other things, right? This is one of the things I really wanna do. So you can imagine levels of it.

[00:52:00] **Nate Hagens:** So you are, After all the things you and I have talked about and done, you, are trying to meet the future halfway by educating and looking two or three steps ahead of what you think is going to be necessary, not only in society, but in the Willamette value with the people around you.

[00:52:19] **Jason Bradford:** Yes.

[00:52:20] **Nate Hagens:** And, this is a way to take back some agency from the Superorganism ahead of the really dire

[00:52:28] **Jason Bradford:** Yes.

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[00:52:29] **Nate Hagens:** straits and build social capital and knowledge and skills. Yes. On And what better skill? I mean, there's a lot of skills that are needed, but one, a central one is we have to eat every day. So Yeah,

[00:52:44] **Jason Bradford:** it's pretty fun too.

[00:52:45] I should say that people are pretty happy when they're out here.

[00:52:49] **Nate Hagens:** How could this scale, how could farming clubs or the, something that rhymes with that scale in our country, the United States at this time?

[00:53:00] **Jason Bradford:** Well, I don't think the idea is kind of novel. I think, I mean, there's gardening clubs and there's community gardens, but nothing at the kind of the scale and goals I'm talking about.

[00:53:10] And I ran across this guy who is a professor and he decided he was gonna try to figure this out. Like his question was how, hard is it to grow my own food? It turns out he's gotten pretty good at it. And he spends, 96 hours a year growing his own food. Everything doesn't go out. What? And he's that

[00:53:30] **Nate Hagens:** I find very hard.

[00:53:30] He's

[00:53:30] **Jason Bradford:** figured it out. He's published his paper, pure Review.

[00:53:32] **Nate Hagens:** I spent 96 hours just weeding my potatoes and I still had a half of a good crop.

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[00:53:37] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah. So anyway, the, I, the idea being, and so then I was thinking about this as like, okay, how much time do we expect club members to, to come farm? And it's about 90 hours a year we say.

[00:53:51] And where are they gonna get Really? Yeah. And what are they gonna get out of it? They're gonna get out almost all their produce deeds and a few other things. And they're not great farmers yet. They're just, okay. Right. So there's a learning curve.

[00:54:01] **Nate Hagens:** They're gonna get all the produce they need for 12 months.

[00:54:05] **Jason Bradford:** Pretty much. I mean, obviously sometimes, like we ran low on carrots, I bought carrots or there wasn't, there was a gap in lettuce and I got lettuce. I'm not getting avocado, but just about all my produce besides the bananas, the avocado, the citrus. And every once in a while there's a gap. Yeah. You know, there's plenty of food.

[00:54:25] So I was doing some math, I was looking at USDA stats and I was looking at this and it's like, right now it's something like the average household is spending \$8,000 a year on food, and now maybe it is up to \$10,000 a year. Right. This is kind of old data. And the average, this is median, I'm saying median.

[00:54:42] Average by the way. And the median. The median after tax wage wages, about 20 bucks an hour. And so you look at that and you go, oh, that's 400 hours of labor time for a household that you're gonna convert into going to a grocery store to get food.

[00:54:59] **Nate Hagens:** So they would need to ask off their boss 15% of their time so they could put in 90 hours a year to get right.

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[00:55:08] I mean, well,

[00:55:09] **Jason Bradford:** or, you think about, yeah, if people are underemployed or part-time, like you as a, some, as a member of a household, if you have one member of a household who is underemployed, they can, they could grow food for everybody else, honestly.

[00:55:24] **Nate Hagens:** But what, so what's the bottleneck here? Is the land availability.

[00:55:27] **Jason Bradford:** I think it's just the idea in your head that, 'cause think about your reluctance of this. You're, everyone thinks the machines have done everything so efficiently that there's no way we could do this ourselves. When if you go to like peasant cultures and you study how much like time studies. They're pretty busy.

[00:55:47] Sure, yeah. They're busy, but they're, they know exactly what they're doing. They're efficient. And then I can't tell you how many times you see them par partying or laying back and relaxing and enjoying life as well. Right. Music, dancing, it gets dark. You can't do much anymore. And what do you do? Right? You do other things.

[00:56:05] so without all the lights, without the streaming service, there is, there's, seasonality, there's downtime, and then there's crazy periods of time where you're, it's all hands on deck and you wear yourself out. Sure. Okay. It's like, football season when you were in high school, whatever.

[00:56:21] You get over it. And, so the, I, you know, people have this idea that are in, modernity and in fully industrial like world, that there's no way we have the time to do that. Like, what are you talking about? No. And these machines are

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efficient. No, they're not. They've taken the labor out of it, but they've added all this other crap to it.

[00:56:44] The, processing, the transportation, the packaging. We only spend 8 cents of a dollar on the raw food.

[00:56:53] **Nate Hagens:** What

[00:56:53] **Jason Bradford:** 92 cents is all the other junk?

[00:56:55] **Nate Hagens:** Like what?

[00:56:56] **Jason Bradford:** Packaging the energy and processing the, all the, finance and management of all that. the grocery store and you know, the retail outlet, the trucking, the packaging, everything.

[00:57:09] 92 cents goes to everything but that raw ingredient. So that, so imagine this, you suddenly are eating raw, pretty much close to raw ingredients from something you grew. I only gotta, I only, I gotta make, I got this 92% that I'm just gonna get rid of, that I'm competing against now.

[00:57:25] **Nate Hagens:** Well, not only that, but the 8% that's actually food now that you have is much healthier for you.

[00:57:31] **Jason Bradford:** Exactly.

[00:57:32] **Nate Hagens:** Because

[00:57:32] **Jason Bradford:** not a manufacturer food product.

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[00:57:34] Yeah, And so then what does that do to your energy level and your, health and wellbeing, your ability to sleep, you have social relationships, you've gotten outside, you've gotten exercise, you've had a good meal.

[00:57:47] **Nate Hagens:** So with people watching this show or, just generally in our country that are.

[00:57:55] Sensing what's ahead? Some sort of not as stable as the past. Could we have some sort of a pilot where. A philanthropist. It wouldn't have to be a zillionaire, just someone in Topeka, Kansas or Yeah. Bemidji, Minnesota, that has gained some savings in the bank, and is a respected local person. Yeah. Get a tract of land, say a hundred acres, and use it as an anchor in their community.

[00:58:28] They somehow gifted to the community with different protocols so that young people and other people can do some of these methods that you're talking about. And we have those all over the nation.

[00:58:39] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah. It'd be cheaper than the AI build out we're doing, lemme tell you that.

[00:58:44] **Nate Hagens:** Well, it'd be hugely cheaper, but,

[00:58:47] **Jason Bradford:** and, here's the, and it wouldn't cause a bubble, a financial collapse from a bubble.

[00:58:51] And it wouldn't cause job loss or extinction. So you can either put your money into financial bubble, massive job loss and social arrest, or human extinction.

[00:59:01] **Nate Hagens:** Maybe you're not the right guy, but sometimes there is no right guy and you just have to do it. Could you write a, manual for how to get something like that started?

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[00:59:09] **Jason Bradford:** I literally just submitted a grant to Western C for \$35,000 so that I could write a manual. And here's one of the ways I'm thinking about it as I'm thinking about it like this at the highest end. Okay? I work for a tennis club that is a member owned nonprofit, a 5 0 1 C seven. All the assets of the club are owned by the dues paying members.

[00:59:36] And if you think back, you know. A long time ago, early 20th century. Prior to essentially the, the, reforms that happened after the Great Depression, when government really started providing social services, what you had was, you had these clubs that provide a lot of social services, insurance, healthcare, and you know, even funeral services.

[01:00:02] They were the places you would go to have, see music and stuff, and have friends and play games and dances. Social

[01:00:08] clubs,

[01:00:08] **Nate Hagens:** In the 1920s.

[01:00:09] **Jason Bradford:** Exactly. Now

[01:00:10] **Nate Hagens:** I didn't know that.

[01:00:11] **Jason Bradford:** Now imagine this was before, we had Social security and Medicare and all these sort of things, which kind of removed the need for them.

[01:00:20] The state was doing it now, So imagine you have a 5 0 1 C seven owned farm. Members pay dues. Like they pay dues to a country club right now to play golf. It'd be the same scale as a golf course club. And instead of golfing, you have professional staff who are paid wealth as professionals to help people become farmers and grow their food.

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[01:00:47] I get paid as a tennis coach, okay. I get paid as a tennis coach and people are willing to pay me as to teach their kids how to play tennis. Play tennis. I'm just imagining. Or, and retired people are willing to pay me to help them with their serve. Okay. I've done a lot of good for people community service.

[01:01:06] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. No,

[01:01:08] **Jason Bradford:** but I think to myself, if I could take my coaching skills and transition them to having like a serious organization that is managing all this, 'cause, you know, it would be incredible. And so yes, you could franchise this like instead of, you know, having the, moose Club with their funny hats, but instead of being Moose Club, their farming, whatever, right.

[01:01:34] The old Elks Club or whatever. Like you could get 'em all over the nation as a franchise.

[01:01:38] **Nate Hagens:** The challenge of course is our cultural, narrative of technology and, colonizing other planets and it's energy and systems blind. So most people are not yet getting the signal Yeah. The memo that things are gonna change except maybe ai.

[01:01:58] I think people are worried about AI taking their jobs. Yeah. And therefore there's gonna be more food insecurity.

[01:02:03] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah.

[01:02:04] **Nate Hagens:** So we have to build these models.

[01:02:07] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah.

[01:02:08] **Nate Hagens:** and the networks and the mycelium and the islands of coherence before the whole society gets the memo.

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[01:02:17] **Jason Bradford:** And even today, the. The underemployed low wage people would be far better off working.

[01:02:26] To grow their own food, financially speaking, not to mention all the other benefits. Then they are now going to the store. I, believe this.

[01:02:35] **Nate Hagens:** And what's the bottleneck there? How can those people move in that direction?

[01:02:39] **Jason Bradford:** Well, I think about if I drive around here and I just sort of, I'm driving around the country and I look left.

[01:02:44] Oh, that's Brooks' place. And oh, you know, those are the, that's the warden farm and I'd imagine these guys going, come on out. I'm just thinking, no,

[01:02:56] **Nate Hagens:** we need, to apply AI to be a matchmaker with those people that have land and social goodwill. Yes. To, and then those people that are needing and wanting to learn and to have food and community.

[01:03:10] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah.

[01:03:11] **Nate Hagens:** I mean, seriously, I wouldn't know how to go about that, but it seems like it could be a thing.

[01:03:15] **Jason Bradford:** I think it, I think, I mean, that's what I'm, that's what I told the people I wrote the grant to.

[01:03:20] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. Awesome. Well, good luck with that. so JB, before this recording, off camera, you mentioned wanting to explore what Simplification really means.

[01:03:33] not just theoretically, but as embodied knowledge.

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[01:03:36] **Jason Bradford:** Mm-hmm.

[01:03:37] **Nate Hagens:** And, how has working your land and living in community with the people you mentioned and interacting with the actual ecosystem around you shaped or changed your worldview in ways that academic theory ne never could have?

[01:03:52] **Jason Bradford:** I think of it as like, you kind of become what you do.

[01:03:56] Right. And there's a difference. You know, this is why also when I was a biologist, I was, you know, I'm spending my time, most of the time you're spent, I'm spending in like a big city at a university or a research institution and you're reading papers and you're, you know, and I'm like, every year I said, I have to get outta here and actually go into the field and look at the stuff that I'm supposedly becoming an expert at.

[01:04:23] And so you, it's always, this is why I think AI is kind of absurd in some ways is because. It has no body, it has nothing. It has no, senses. We're an animal that has senses that moves through the world and feels the pressure of air and, the ground on our feet and, what it, smells like after it rains and what the different soundscapes are, depending upon what season it is and which bird species are coming through or what time of day it is.

[01:04:55] Or, and, so, you know, what's changed with me is, I was in my head so much analyzing spreadsheets, writing, communicating, sitting in meeting rooms for God's sakes. I quit all that and I've been on this property and it's very hard to explain to somebody who hasn't just gotten outside and been outside a lot, what the difference is and the feeling of, it.

[01:05:26] and so I think that when we imagine. Like The Great Simplification, a world that's different if we're just trapped in our head and our rumination. We

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can't, imagine how we would even get through something like that until we, go out and we actually practice some of the things that we believe from, you know, reasonably believe will be helpful.

[01:05:55] And so I just can't emphasize enough. There's probably tons of your listeners who are doing things, but I think The Great Simplification is gonna lead to a forced reconnection of people with locally ecologies. And what scares me is like people when they come out here and they've never been out on a farm and they don't how dumbfounded they are.

[01:06:18] And it's a sense of awe often and it's wonder, and I enjoy it. But I can't tell you how many times, like I have a give a good tour and the people are like, I've never experienced this is incredible. I had no idea. And I'm just like, wow.

[01:06:32] **Nate Hagens:** Because they're used to going to the Piggly Wiggly and just filling up their basket and doing a credit card and then going home and eating and they missed all the steps.

[01:06:42] Yeah.

[01:06:42] **Jason Bradford:** No idea what farms are like. No idea. And this is the other thing, because farms can be awful for God's sakes. They can be absolutely awful industrial wastelands. So what also I want people to see is that farms don't have to be that way. Farms can be places. It's a weird kind of beauty in a sense that, you know, we're sort of engineering it, right?

[01:07:04] But it's still there. I'm still out there walking through my cabbage, you know, and checking for, mo for moths or whatever, caterpillars. And there's still Golden Crown Sparrow and there's Junco and there's Song Sparrow, and there's Towhees and there's White Crown Sparrow, and there's the kessels flying around and, you know, there's, still an incredible amount of life.

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[01:07:28] And so we have to find a way of sort of figuring out, 'cause we are just one, one kind of absurd, insane species. It's got too big for its britches. And we need, humility and we need, we need, awe of beauty. And so we need to like embody that in our lives more than I think it's so important.

[01:07:53] It's hard to like intellectualize this anymore.

[01:07:55] **Nate Hagens:** I agree. I mean, I'm not as good a farmer as you. but I have farmed

[01:08:00] **Jason Bradford:** yeah. Potatoes

[01:08:00] **Nate Hagens:** to grow at one point. Well, more than potatoes.

[01:08:05] **Jason Bradford:** chicken eggs,

[01:08:06] **Nate Hagens:** like yeah, chicken, eggs, kale, brussel sprouts. Yeah. hazelnuts, tomatoes, tomatillos,

[01:08:15] **Jason Bradford:** yeah. Your hazelnuts of things.

[01:08:16] I forgot about the hazelnuts. How are they doing?

[01:08:20] **Nate Hagens:** Not great. the squirrels a few years ago, all of them, I have 270 plants. Yeah. trees. And they're 12 feet tall. last year we had a bounty crop, but they were a little bitter. This year we didn't have such a good crop. I, I don't know. It's an experiment, but

[01:08:37] **Jason Bradford:** Are you gonna manage them by copying, do you think?

[01:08:40] **Nate Hagens:** I've been copying, quite a bit. Okay, good. probably 25%.

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[01:08:45] **Jason Bradford:** Nice. I think that's smart for like home scale stuff especially.

[01:08:48] **Nate Hagens:** Isn't it amazing that you can cut. Certain sort of trees like hazelnuts. Yeah. And I think chestnuts and some other things. Most of these trees completely to the ground.

[01:08:56] **Jason Bradford:** Yes.

[01:08:57] **Nate Hagens:** And they'll come back up because the energy's in the roots.

[01:09:00] And some of these hazelnut chestnuts are

[01:09:03] **Jason Bradford:** hundreds

[01:09:03] **Nate Hagens:** of a thousand years old or, something. Yeah.

[01:09:05] **Jason Bradford:** Yes. No, i, think, and this is the detail, like these are the details that are fascinating that I think about all the time. Like people don't know what cop singer is or how it works or what time of year you should do it or why you would do it.

[01:09:17] We've got, this Ash Boer here that's coming in. The emerald ash Boer might be as devastated. You.

[01:09:22] **Nate Hagens:** Oh yeah. It went through here too. It's just so terrible. I have hundred trees that are dead from that.

[01:09:27] **Jason Bradford:** It's one of the dominant trees in my forest. And I'm just terrified. And I know they're all probably gonna die.

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[01:09:32] But I have a plan. I'm gonna try where the ash B likes to have diameter of a certain amount because it needs enough cambian. And if you get a narrower enough diameter, it, doesn't like those trees as much. So imagine you have these ash trees that are of modest size. Coing doesn't work when the trees are gigantic.

[01:09:53] **Nate Hagens:** Wait, you can copas ash trees.

[01:09:56] **Jason Bradford:** Yes, they beautiful. In fact, that's how they work. Standardly MA managed in Europe to get the nice poles, ashes or handles and stuff. So cop them. They resprout and then a bunch of these little tiny shoots are, may not be as interesting to the Ash. Bo and I have talked to some people around the country that like manage the estate and these sort of things, and they said yes.

[01:10:19] So once I've caught this, are still alive. All my other trees are dead.

[01:10:22] **Nate Hagens:** So how can we get more people to be interested and care about things like that instead of Candy Crush and Facebook and TikTok? Is Candy Crush

[01:10:31] **Jason Bradford:** still

[01:10:31] a thing?

[01:10:31] **Nate Hagens:** Well, I don't know. I use it as an example.

[01:10:33] **Jason Bradford:** You like you that I know, you, you keep saying Candy Crush for 15 years.

[01:10:36] I'm like, really? Nate?

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[01:10:37] **Nate Hagens:** Have I really updated? Updated? Okay, what? Update to what? I don't know. I don't do that

[01:10:41] **Jason Bradford:** stuff.

[01:10:41] **Nate Hagens:** So TikTok AI videos I guess are getting, I'm sending videos of like, giant antler bucks running in a field to my 85-year-old dad and he texts me back. He's like, that's ai. Like my dad knows

[01:10:57] **Jason Bradford:** cynical now

[01:10:58] **Nate Hagens:** and before I know.

[01:10:59] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah.

[01:11:00] oh my

[01:11:00] **Nate Hagens:** God. Ai,

[01:11:01] **Jason Bradford:** so

[01:11:01] **Nate Hagens:** like. Does it, it feels like the default path is in a few decades we're gonna be watering plants with brodo. or, I mean, like seriously, we're losing this cultural knowledge of the type that you are suggesting here today. what do we do?

[01:11:21] **Jason Bradford:** I'm scared too, like it's bifurcation.

[01:11:23] I'm so worried about social media addiction and porn addiction and all this stuff where it's like, you know, the AI chat bot stuff. I like, you know, that's like the next level and who, what kind of relationships are people gonna be having with, you're gonna have relationships with machines. No, you need to have

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relationships with other people in your community that you can do stuff together that is meaningful and purposeful and build skills and you feel part of a place and, have a role in it.

[01:11:57] That is valued. Oh my gosh. Do we need that? We need that for everybody. Especially like, you know, young men who I worry about who are lonely and isolated. They're like, the, you know, who, tends to shoot other people?

[01:12:12] **Nate Hagens:** Yeah. It's the powder keg. Yeah.

[01:12:14] **Jason Bradford:** Gosh darn it. Can we get, young pe young men, especially we women of course, but out doing stuff that's healthy, give them skills that are about providing, for gosh sakes, providing they don't need to make money.

[01:12:29] Don't ask them to make, we can stop asking 'em to make money, to get a girl or whatever, to be worthy. And we can say, Hey, guess what you can do? You know, you know how to cop this well, lay a hedge row, manage sheep for gosh sakes, skills. Having a way to give people skills and connection that is valued.

[01:12:53] I think it's so important.

[01:12:54] **Nate Hagens:** I agree with you. let me ask you this, what, do you think some of the biggest gaps are between what we think we know about sustainability versus what you've seen play out on the ground at, your farm?

[01:13:06] **Jason Bradford:** Boy, it's a, that's an interesting question. I mean, I don't know what the average person thinks.

[01:13:11] All I see like, you know, I read headlines or whatever. I read the news. Maybe it's representative if it's the media representative. But the media is

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ridiculous. The media thinks, you know, the media kind of has this belief in, technology and sort of green energy transitions. He has a belief in things like green chemistry, right?

[01:13:30] That we can, like, make plastics that aren't gonna be as harmful. it's like how do we, take every single thing we see in this ridiculous built environment that we have and find a way to swap it out at scale, at cost, and. We are gonna figure this out and oh, you have doubts that we're gonna make it in time.

[01:13:52] That's why we have to double down on ai. 'cause AI is gonna be so smart. It'll tell us how to both make money on this investment we made and save ourselves. Oh, but it might kill us. So I don't know. Nothing makes sense, but I think most people have some view that smart people out there, whether they're academics or business types or some, remnant functioning governance is going to steer this ship.

[01:14:23] But I think it's completely bogus. I don't think it's ever gonna come from that level.

[01:14:27] **Nate Hagens:** So given the challenges ahead that, you and I and many of the listeners here, are imagining or seeing or experiencing already, what role do you see for projects like yours? the farming, school, whether that be safe havens or prototypes or educational sites or, something else?

[01:14:50] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah, I mean, the best thing would be that it's a early prototype of a way to get people reconnected to the land and learn important skills that will help us as sort of we, I guess, de industrialize and lose financial ability to pay for basic needs, which is happening more and more. Obviously that part, at least right now.

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[01:15:16] and. That if it scales, right? If, it scales, then these become these sort of safe havens, right? I expect some, I expect periods of kind of chaos. I'll be honest with you. I don't see a easy, smooth path. So, you know, if you get these safe havens that become then models, maybe as there's islands of coherence instability, maybe it's that then those safe havens become the local replicates for how things were done.

[01:15:49] I think also housing's super important, right? Like we're, right now we've depopulated the countryside and. You've got these vast farms without any place to live. So part of this has to be like, not just growing food, but every, all these other material needs,

[01:16:06] **Nate Hagens:** you know, as I'm just thinking about it and listening to you, I agree with you.

[01:16:11] We're not going to have the incentives and the Superorganism isn't gonna voluntarily shrink and become sustainable. but I also don't think we're gonna create these safe havens organically. And I almost see something like, something very much like farming clubs as being the intermediate step towards the safe havens.

[01:16:34] Yeah. 'cause it builds knowledge, it builds social capital and it produces something that everyone's gonna need.

[01:16:40] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah. And actually I, our friend Ascher Miller was, wrote a letter. He's in the club and, He wrote a letter, and in that letter he talks about how this is in support of the grant.

[01:16:54] Right? Okay. In the letter, he talks about his family sort of living in, in the, nearby town, city, and that he, they think about this stuff, right? They think about the food system. They think about how unsustainable it is. They wish they

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could embody these practices and until it just be just because they knew me and I'm their friend and had this wacky idea and happened to get my shoulder hurt.

[01:17:18] And so I needed my friend's help. They, he was like, this is this gracious path. Now I have where I can, I'm gonna keep my job in this crazy modern world because I, don't have a, i to get away from this would be like jumping off a cliff. But what I'm, having is, I'm seeing a staircase now, like I'm having some steps I can take that are practical steps and it's not scary and it's, not like giving up on everything.

[01:17:49] So that's the thing, when you say like, you know, some people have these like young, you're 23 years old, they graduate from college, they have a dream. I'm gonna start a farm or whatever. It's like, great, you're young, you can make mistakes and you're probably gonna land on your feet after doing some back flips.

[01:18:05] You're a middle aged guy with a mortgage and kids. How do you do anything like this? Oh, the club. You can show up. It's reasonable there. You've got help. Your family's getting healthier, your kids are learning.

[01:18:20] **Nate Hagens:** I, think it's a really good idea. keep forging ahead on that, my friend. 'cause I do actually think there's a, just a 10 rule of giant hope and possibility in this idea.

[01:18:33] **Jason Bradford:** Yeah.

[01:18:33] **Nate Hagens:** So this is a repeat time, for you joining me here. so I'm not gonna ask you the usual closing questions, but I will ask if anything about your work or your worldview or perspective on society in the future has changed since you were last on the show, which might have been two years ago or even three years ago.

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[01:18:55] I'm not sure.

[01:18:57] **Jason Bradford:** Well, I've been rather shocked and odd by how fast things are moving. Both in social political systems and environmental systems. You know, there's these things about systems get pushed to a point and then they, flip system states. Okay, that's phase shift. Phase shift, right? Tipping points, phase shift basins of stability.

[01:19:25] Then there's islands and anyway, it feels like we're in one of these phase shift kind of moments, right? And, and so none of it's how, I don't know how much of it is exactly how I thought it would unfold, I guess. the madness of the AI is quite shocking to me. this large language model, which at first I'm like, eh, kind of, it kind of helped people write a little bit, it doesn't seem to know what it's talking about.

[01:19:56] You know, it's making all these mistakes and in a few years it's like Elon Musk is talking about creating these gods that take over the energy supply of the galaxy, right. to, to you know, it's like Ray kz, wild type bizarreness and, everyone just, so I'm going along with that. It seems like without a lot of a pushback and they're getting addicted to it already, I'm kind of shocked at how, hard it is.

[01:20:26] To like break free from this machine, this Superorganism, like, there's so much pressure going on right now with people being like swept off the streets and who disappeared kind of to the billions, that hundreds of billions trillion, \$3 trillion. They're trying to invest in billing data centers. It's just, it's just overwhelming, right? All this is just so overwhelming. And so how do you stay sane in this situation?

[01:20:58] **Nate Hagens:** Go out and count birds and get your hands in the soil?

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[01:21:02] **Jason Bradford:** Well, that's what I'm saying, that's what I'm kind of trying to get to, is that I don't think there's any way to make sense of all that or to do any, do much of anything about it.

[01:21:13] Obviously you've written a direct harm

[01:21:14] **Nate Hagens:** or maybe to stop it until it stops on its own weight.

[01:21:18] **Jason Bradford:** A lot of these things, if you're most normal people, these things are gonna, you know, vote, cite your opinion, everything like that. But you, know, people don't seem to be able to get out of the situations in these multipolar dynamic kind of stuff you like to talk about.

[01:21:35] And, my hope is that it all actually kind of falls apart sooner than later. Like, there's this duality of like, I would like the farming clubs to scale across the nation, and we're gonna have a million of these chapters and we'll have trained a hundred million people to be small farmers. And okay, how long is that gonna take?

[01:21:57] Do we have time? Is the Amma gonna shut down? You know, and we're gonna start freezing in Europe and we're gonna have just the wackiest weather everywhere and the glacier's gonna, you know, the, is gonna slip off of Antarctica and we're have rapid sea level rise. I mean, I feel like we're at these tipping point moments in almost all these systems simultaneously, is what I'm saying.

[01:22:17] Yeah. So if there's a time that you need to move and do something big. For God's sakes. You know, if you haven't yet, I'm sure a lot of your listeners have, but if you haven't yet, I it, it's, pretty darn late. But do it, do, go.

[01:22:35] **Nate Hagens:** Great to see you, my friend. Keep up the good work. Yeah, and, maybe I'll make it out there in, in person next year.

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[01:22:41] **Jason Bradford:** That would be awesome. I hope to see you.

[01:22:43] **Nate Hagens:** If you'd like to learn more about this episode, please visit [The Great Simplification dot com](https://thegreatsimplification.com) for references and show notes. From there, you can also join our Hilo community and subscribe to our Substack newsletter. This show is hosted by me, Nate Hagens, edited by No Troublemakers Media, and produced by Misty Stint and Lizzie Ciani.

[01:23:05] Our production team also includes Leslie Balut, Brady Hayan, Julia Maxwell, Gabriela Slayman, and Grace Brun. Thank you for listening, and we'll see you on the next episode.