[00:00:00] **Nate Hagens:** So last week I recorded a comedy, stand-up routine on issues around the metacrisis, stories in my life. I sent it out to our inner circle, who looks at my Franklys, and none of them thought that it was a comedy skit. but with that backdrop, here is my attempt at stand-up comedy. Probably my only attempt

[00:00:39] Hello. So I host a YouTube channel about the coming end of economic growth on YouTube, which is owned by Google, which is one of the largest companies in the history of the world, currently building data centers as fast as it physically can. So I am using a growth machine to explain why the growth machine, cannot continue.

[00:01:08] And so far, the growth machine has been totally fine with that. It even recommends my videos sometimes to people who just finished watching a video about luxury kitchen renovations and the like. And I think that probably tells us everything we need to know about how threatening this channel is to the system.

[00:01:31] I have been doing this for almost five years, and the algorithm doesn't reward me, as I have the ads turned off, but it also hasn't once tried to stop me, which means either I'm wrong about everything, which is possible, or the system has correctly calculated that a guy talking about energy depletion to a few hundred thousand people is less commercially relevant than a single short ad for a Ford F-150.

[00:01:59] And honestly, the system is probably quite right about that. I think I'm probably fine as long as I don't link the Superorganism to some secret cabal headquartered in the Middle East. But if I did, subscribers would probably, go up Now, yes, people have been predicting civilizational limits for two hundred years or longer, and they've been wrong every time.

[00:02:31] I do wonder what Thomas Malthus would think about getting king crab legs at Costco for thirty-two dollars a pound. you know, sometimes I reflect that maybe the single biggest driver of the metacrisis, bigger than AI, bigger than global heating, bigger than oil depletion, is men in their fifties and sixties with IQs over one twenty, smart enough to see the problem, old enough to feel mortal, insecure enough to crave attention, and certain that if you would just read their paper, you would understand and agree, which I'm aware to some degree is a description of me.

[00:03:15] So maybe I'm wrong too, but just in case, here are some things I've experienced and noticed lately about the absurdity of it all. So we just had an election on Tuesday. I vote. I have always voted. I drive to wherever they put the ballots that year, in my case, a local, basement of a church, and I smile mostly in silence at all the people that live in my township that I've never seen before.

[00:03:45] and for the ones I do know, I reflect on whether our votes will cancel each other out. Afterward, I do feel pretty good about myself for about an hour, kind of like a teeth cleaning. I got the sticker. I advertise that I voted on my jacket. And then somewhere on the drive home, little Nate on my shoulder, who is usually silent but always observing, starts in with the uncomfortable questions.

[00:04:17] What did I actually just do? I chose between two people who both promised me more. Different flavors of more, for sure. One wanted more of this, the other wanted more of that, and the two of them agreed on virtually nothing except underneath the yard signs and the negative ads, the actual platform, which is nothing you currently have will be taken away, and always there are gonna be additional things, shiny and comfortable things additionally.

[00:04:53] Nobody runs on less. You can't. Try to imagine it. Someone stands up at a debate and says, "I think we should all probably consume a bit less starting now." That person doesn't get elected in any country. In some places, I'm not sure

that person gets to finish their sentence. So even though it is not officially on the ballot, what I call the economic superorganism wins either way.

[00:05:22] Nobody has to rig anything because the ballot only ever has people on it who've already promised to feed the superorganism, and then we get to spend two years fighting about which one. And I'm no better. If somebody ran on, "Nate gets to live his current life just like it is today going forward," I would vote for that person twice if they let me, and I would wear the sticker.

[00:05:53] So, a few weeks back, I had a craving for hummus, homemade hummus, the kind you don't use a blender, but mash by hand, which requires lemons, and we didn't have any lemons. so with my brother, I got in my Toyota, a hybrid, of course, and we drove 12 miles to the grocery store. We arrive at the store. this store, which is not atypical, has 60,000 individual items for sale.

[00:06:27] I'm not exaggerating, 60,000. Fruits from Chile, cheese from France, chocolate from West Africa, sparkling water from Fiji. Literally Fiji water shipped across the ocean so we can have H2O with a marketing-approved mineral profile. 60,000 items sourced from every continent on Earth available to me at any hour of the day, well, in eastern Minnesota, up until around 9:00 PM, at prices that would be incomprehensible to any human being alive 100 years ago.

[00:07:06] And on this particular day, for the first time in my American life, they were out of lemons And I was devastated. I stood in the produce section, and after asking two employees if this indeed was the case, I was genuinely upset because this had never happened before. How could this happen? bizarrely, I remember my mood shifting as my expected reward had disappeared, and my whole afternoon, had been derailed, and my plans.

[00:07:45] What are you supposed to do when life doesn't give you lemons? We drove home empty-handed. well, not empty-handed. I ended up buying a bunch

of other things, obviously, but no lemons. And I was a bit perturbed about it. And sure enough, on the drive home, little Nate started up with his wide boundary musings.

[00:08:09] I had just driven twenty-five miles round trip in an air-conditioned vehicle burning prehistoric sunlight to buy a citrus fruit grown in Florida or maybe South America, a fruit that would have cost me about a dollar. And I am, at least in the short term, feeling great injustice that I couldn't obtain lemons.

[00:08:33] I was experiencing genuine emotional distress over the temporary unavailability of a subtropical fruit in Minnesota. So everything in that store, every single one of those sixty thousand items would have been an unimaginable luxury to virtually anyone on the planet two generations ago, and to be blunt, to many or even most humans on Earth today.

[00:09:00] My grandmother, who I was very close friends with, would have wept with joy at the produce section there. And I can't imagine what she would have done in the candy aisle. And I'm legitimately annoyed because they don't have lemons for my hummus. This is the hedonic treadmill. It's loss aversion. It's the carbon pulse.

[00:09:26] It's the complexity trap. This is the whole more than human predicament, all of it in a single lemon run. We have been so thoroughly adapted to miraculous abundance that its temporary, partial, inconsequential interruption feels like a personal insult And when the interruptions start getting bigger and more frequent, which they will, we are going to be the most unprepared psychologically privileged population in the history of our species.

[00:10:03] And I'm one of them. On that day, I couldn't even handle the lemons Staying on the topic of food, I raise chickens, and I have for over twenty years. I love them. They are, scientifically speaking, remnant dinosaurs who every day

concentrate bugs and sunlight into eggs that I eat most mornings. Tiny feathered theropods delivering me a daily miracle of biology, and I've never once been appropriately grateful.

[00:10:41] I just eat the eggs and complain when they sneak through the fence into my garden. Here's a fact: seventy percent of the weight of all birds on Earth at any given time are chickens and turkeys. Seventy percent. Every eagle, every hummingbird, every parrot and penguin, all of them together are thirty percent of Earth's bird biomass.

[00:11:08] The rest is poultry. But that's just at any one time. The average age of a chicken when it's slaughtered is nine weeks old, so during a year, it's like ninety-five percent chickens. We have replaced wild birds with edible birds at a ratio of almost twenty to one. The planet is mostly chickens now.

[00:11:35] Chickens and pigs and cows and humans and our stuff. That's what's here. We raise and eat eighty billion chickens every year. For context, there have only been around a hundred and ten billion humans ever born in the entire history of our species. So we eat almost that many chickens annually. So every eighteen months, there is a chicken apocalypse, roughly the scale of all human history.

[00:12:08] And nobody mentions it, especially at dinner, especially in the weeks before Thanksgiving. Now, I would never eat one of my chickens. They are my friends. I know their personalities. I know which one is brave and which one is anxious, and which one likes to shadow me when I'm weeding in case I uncover a worm.

[00:12:31] That would be Goldie. I do still eat chicken, though. I just eat other people's chickens, chickens that I've never met. And I think that's a pretty honest summary of the human moral situation today. We have deep, genuine love for the

beings we personally know and near total indifference to identical beings that we don't.

[00:12:57] This is true for chickens. It's also true for people. If the rainforest were in my backyard, I would chain myself to a tree to protect it But it's in Brazil, so I buy the soybeans, that I like. If, those are the frozen edamame, I'm not sure. So if we only protect what we know, the fix is kind of obvious, which brings me to what might be the most radical act available to any human being on the planet right now, and I'm not being dramatic, I mean this literally.

[00:13:33] Know your neighbors. Actually know them, not just wave from the driveway. Know their names. Know what they're good at, what they worry about, who has a generator, who has a garden, whose kid is good with animals. This costs zero dollars, requires zero technology, zero political changes, zero papers by men in their 60s.

[00:14:00] It has been the foundation of human survival for 300,000 years. Every ice age and every drought, every plague, every historical collapse, the thing that got people through was knowing who was next to them and being able to count on each other. And it is now considered in our current culture slightly weird, if you knock on your neighbor's door with a jar of soup, just like chicken soup or chili, not a sales pitch or sign this petition, but I made too much soup, here.

[00:14:35] They will look at you with genuine suspicion. They will wonder what you really want and if something is wrong with you. Because we have reached a point as a civilization where showing up at someone's door with free food is a really confusing act. That's how far we've drifted from the baseline of what kept our species alive Meanwhile, ordering that same soup from an app on your phone that takes a 30% cut and delivers it in a disposable plastic container that will still be on Earth in a landfill, a thousand years from now using underpaid gig labor and fossil fuels, that's normal.

[00:15:18] That's convenient. That is our economy working as designed We are all alive at the most consequential moment in the history of our species. The decisions being made this decade will determine the trajectory of life on Earth for thousands of years. No generation has ever had this much information about the consequences of our actions.

[00:15:50] We can see what's happening in real time, and we're doing it. Previous generations could claim ignorance. We cannot. And that knowledge comes with an obligation that I increasingly believe is sacred. We don't have the right to look away. Every one of us has something to contribute, and I believe all of that, every word.

[00:16:21] However, sometimes it's Saturday night and I just want a cold beer in a frosty mug with an entire thin crust mushroom and onion pizza, and not to think about the carbon pulse for just two or three hours. Just a few hours where nobody asks me about planetary boundaries. Just one night where I'm a middle-aged man with a pizza And Little Nate would like me to mention that the pizza is also unsustainable.

[00:16:51] the cheese comes from factory farm dairy, the wheat and the Haber-Bosch process, and the fifteen hundred mile supply chain, and the like. I can't even eat pizza without knowing things. There's no off switch for Little Nate. He has ruined pizza for both of us. The funniest thing about the absurdity of all of this, the election sticker, the lemons, the chickens, the sus neighbors, the pizza, is that the stuff that would actually help is not complicated, nor is it expensive.

[00:17:28] Most of it is free. Know your neighbors. Fix things instead of replacing them. Grow some food. Learn some skills. Spend time with people you love. help out in, ways that are useful to people around you. Pay attention to the place where you live. Show up unexpectedly to the local meeting. Keep a promise to yourself this week.

[00:17:56] That's it. That's the list. Doesn't require a fancy framework or a conference in a hotel ballroom. It just requires us showing up in our actual lives, in our actual places. We are living inside a system that has convinced us that the most important things are the things we can buy, and the least important things are the things that are mostly free.

[00:18:24] And then we measure how much we buy, and we call it progress. And many of us now believe it, even the ones who know better, even me some days, even some of you who've watched all two hundred podcasts here. But the older I get and the more I study these systems, the more I think the shift, if it happens, will not look like a revolution.

[00:18:54] It will look like a lot of people just starting to live differently, making soup, maybe sharing it, planting trees that you won't sit under, fixing the fence, having the conversation that they've been putting off, not doing these things because someone told them to, not because of a how-to guide they watched on YouTube, but doing them because it's what makes sense when you stop believing the story that none of what we do matters.

[00:19:27] Thanks for laughing with me, or at least smiling, or maybe having smiled once. I will see you soon. I am off to Walmart. They have a sale on lemons, and I'm gonna stock up