Introduction to Functional Edge

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And if you've got an animal that has vibrancy and life into them, that vibrency in life translates into the quality of that meat. Whereas if that doesn't exist for that animal because the living standards that they're in are suboptimal, then you're just not going to get the highest quality of food.

And if we really think, well, what do we consume food for in the first place? For nutrition, right? It's to optimize our health. So why wouldn't we consumed the best?

Right, absolutely. Welcome to the Functional Edge. I'm Dr. Julia Ward, and this is where science meets real-world strategies for living healthier, sharper and stronger.

From uncovering hidden environmental toxins to unlocking peak performance and mental clarity, we cover it all. Ready to take control of your health and thrive?

Let's dive in. Hi, and welcome to the Functional Edge podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Julia Ward, medical director and founder of Balance Body Function Medicine.

Today, we're honored to welcome Dr Arland Hill to our show. In this episode, Doctor Hill will be sharing insights on clean eating and food and offering expert guidance to help you navigate your health journey with the latest advancements in functional medicine.

So stay tuned for an engaging conversation that promises to empower and inspire your path to wellness. Dr. Hill, welcome, and why don't you go ahead and give us a little information on yourself.

Dr. Hill's Background and Ranch Mission

Yeah, for sure. Thank you, Dr. Ward. I truly appreciate you having me on today. Yeah guys, like Dr Ward said, I'm Dr Arland Hill, and I currently own and operate Harvest Hills Ranch.

And you may be asking yourself, why is a doctor on this podcast talking about a ranch? And it's a pretty interesting story as to how I came to this point.

Just quickly share my background as a kid was in agriculture, but it was the conventional agriculture world. I inherently have a love and a passion for this stuff just from growing up in it, but as I became a professional working in the clinics, the thing that really promoted the jump back into this environment was that I recognized that the recommendations I was making to patients for sources of food, for the quality of the food that was asking them to go out and to purchase and consistently make their diet Well, that wasn't easy as that recommendation was, and they were finding that to be a pretty tough challenge.

And I said, That's it, I'm drawing a line in the sand. I am going to become the resource for these individuals that want the quality of food that I recommending and that wanna take back control of their health.

That's awesome. That really great. So you're able to combine your passion for agriculture, rural living, and providing great quality food for patients.

Absolutely. You spent over 20 years in clinical practice. What was it that finally pushed you to step away from the clinic and start the ranch? A little bit of it I just stated, but I can actually be much more specific.

There was actually an event that took place that was really the trigger moment for me and it was when I was already becoming suspicious of some of the things that I mentioned earlier and just patience not being able to find things.

But my wife and I had a routine of every Saturday morning or Sunday morning, and sometimes both, we would get up and go to the farmer's market. And you know, the longer you're in an environment like that and the more informed you become, you start to learn to be able to ask questions.

And I realized that some of the questions I had either weren't being answered or I was informed enough to realize that two and two wasn't equaling four anymore in these environments.

So when I started doing that, I did my own investigative work and just said, Some of these individuals aren't being honest with what they're portraying themselves as and that's not fair to the consumer.

That's what the customer expects and there's got to be a different approach here. What was it you were looking into the food industry or?

Farmer's Market Deception and Food Transparency

Well, it was even more so, you know, like most individuals think when you say go to the farmer's market, they think everything at the farmers market is wholesome and pure and it's raised with the best intentions and, and then truly listen, there are many, many producers out there that do have that mindset and that intention, but unfortunately, the bad seed tends to spoil the whole batch.

And we started noticing that. And really what I did is I traced the trail on this and found out that some of the vendors were actually just purchasing from wholesale locations and bringing it to the farmers market.

They weren't actually producing these things on their own. And what made me start to really question that was, Having a background in agriculture, I knew the process of producing some of these foods.

Week in, week out, some these food are just way too perfect, they're way to prevalent. What you're saying you have as far as the production facilities or the plot of land to be able to raise this.

You're producing a whole lot more than what you should be able to produce. So these producers were going to like where HEB goes to get their produce and they're coming to the farmers market and portraying it as being organically grown small farm kind of a thing.

That's exactly what was happening. Okay, that's sort of deceptive. Very much so. Very deceptive. Okay. So what surprised you the most when you moved from advising patients to actually producing the food yourself?

The biggest surprise for my wife and I, who's my partner in this venture, if you will, was really the educational part, meaning as a whole. So when I was in the clinic, I had a very captive audience.

And that person was coming to me for expert advice. When I transitioned into the agricultural world, it was much different because now I'm actually unrecognizably having a battle against the food industry.

Having to have that conversation and realizing that I've got an entire marketing world out there that's educating consumers in one direction But here I am on the other side and I'm having to educate them with a different story and a Different line of thought and those two definitely don't merge with each other the majority of the time Yeah, yeah.

And so for families trying to make healthier choices, why are labels like organic or grass-fed often misleading? I think what you have to recall on that is it's not the producer that's responsible for that label being on there.

There's a company behind that that company has a marketing department and that marketing has done an

excessive amount of research and they continue to do an ongoing amount of research to understand what influences the buyer and their purchasing decision.

And that's when you recognize that and realize that those labels are just meant to influence an emotional response and the more of those emotional responses that you can have, for example, I always think about this as the checkboxes.

The more emotional check boxes they can get you to check, from looking at that label, the greater the probability that you're going to buy that food. But what we've come to recognize is that many of these labels, you have many these buzzwords out there, some of the ones that mentioned, grass-fed, pasture-raised, these have become very popular words, but unfortunately in the same time frame as their popularity has increased, they've also been diluted at the same rate, they don't have the meaning behind them, and many of them are just window dressing really on these labels if anything.

Misleading Labels and Grass-Fed Standards

Yeah, yeah. So there's not like a standard, or is there a stand definition for if somebody, if you see a label that says like pasture raised or grass fed, is their some standard that they have to keep too?

Or is this sort of? That's a great question. And grass-fed, I'll actually speak to that one very specifically here because that's one that I've actually been delving even further into of recent.

Just to give listeners an idea of this term, The USDA let go of that term back in 2016. They didn't want to oversee that turn. And so that right there says that, okay, we're not the USDA, the main oversight organization in our country for agriculture has made a statement that they're going to enforce how grass fed is utilized.

outsource that to someone else and they'll kind of sit back and look at it from the outside, but they're not going to be the authority organization that's actually going state whether or not something is grass fed.

Okay. The bigger problem you run into here with this term is that grass-fed What that term was intended to mean is that that animal is grass-fed from start to finish.

So when it's weaned off of its mother, it only has its natural forage in front of it for the remainder of his life. Fortunately, that term now means that that animal is grass-fed up until the point that it goes into the finishing process.

The finishing is really what makes the difference in the quality and the nutrition of the meat. So now you've got a term grass fed that's speaking to the earlier phases of that animals life, but not to that later phase of animal's life.

So they can grass feed this baby cow up until it gets to be more of an adult and then they feed it full of grain and antibiotics and whatever else they want to plump up its muscles and its meat.

Exactly right. They can literally take that animal and raise it on pasture for, this varies from operation and operation or breed to breed, but let's say anywhere from 18 to 30 months, and then they can send that animals to a feedlot and finish it in the feed lot, which most of your listeners and the folks that we serve at Harvest Hills Ranch, that's not what they're interested in.

they want it finished on grass, just like we do. But they can still use that terminology of grass-fed. Wow. So what other things do most consumers not understand about how grocery store food actually gets to their shelves?

That's a big one because when you look at these operations, these are large, multi-sector, vertically integrated. I mean, all these key words from the business world, they check all of these boxes, right?

So it's truly a business. And what they're doing is just like any other manufacturing sector, you know, the analogy I'll go back to is, it's kind of funny I'm using this as an analogy, but McDonald's, right?

The person who's working the French fries or the person whose flipping the burgers, You keep that person doing that one job because that optimizes productivity.

And we, we you see that in all facets of industry, all the way back, to Henry Ford and all of the things he did. But that same mindset is translated into food production where you have the processing facility and they're doing one specific job at the process facility.

How Grocery Food Reaches the Shelf

And then they send it to the next location where they are going to do the packaging and then if they sent it the freezer facility, if it needs to stay in a freezer, commercial freezer for a period of time.

So my point is that you have multiple stops that this meat is going through as opposed to just the direct from producer to consumer like it should be.

Yeah. So you talk a lot about transparency. What does that really look like on a ranch? Open door policy, you know, to be able to say, Hey, I want to see your herd.

I won't to look at what that herd is foraging on. What are they eating in the warm season when they have ample grass? And then what are the eating and the cool season?

When the grasses aren't growing as well, it's being able. You know? One of the things I like to do to keep our transparency out front is I liked to create content.

you I always feel like, look, if I'm being out-front, um, If you have a voice, lead the way, then you're pretty proud of what you are doing. Yeah. And if you hanging back in the shadows, you don't want to answer questions.

You don' want talk to folks. That's a red flag to me. Right. Unfortunately, when it comes to the food industry, that's how the industry operates. We always joke.

You know, if you have concerns about a food product you buy, like let's say you bought a package of chicken, well, you can take it back to the store you brought it from, but as far as actually getting on the phone and talking to folks at Tyson or Purdue or entities and actually understanding, oh, forget that.

That's never going to happen. It's ever going happen, right? So there is that transparency. Right, absolutely. So you've said that food quality should never be compromised.

How does that play out in your day-to-day decisions on The Ranch? I'm trying to optimize the health of that animal and the nutritional intake of the animal as much as possible.

And some of ways that we go about doing that, for example, with our cattle herd, and this is really applicable to even our chicken flocks, is that those animals are constantly moving.

They're not staying in a stationary location, they're always moving from paddock to paddock every day. That's one of first things we do around here in the morning is move them to their next padlock that day, Okay.

So that's one thing. And we optimize with their nutrition. For example, I keep an organic sea salt in front of these guys all the time.

Ranch Practices and Animal Health

Right now, it's pretty warm this time of year in this late summer. They're going through a lot of that salt, but as it gets cooler, they'll taper off on their use of it.

but that optimizes that animal's immune system. And what that means for the consumer is that you have access to

a product that does not have any vaccines, it doesn't have antibiotics, It doesn' have exposure to any other chemicals.

It's living in as pristine an environment as I can possibly create for that animals. Maybe the icing on the cake, that's a terrible analogy. But maybe the exclamation point here is we operate in a way where the, for example, the chicken flocks integrate with the cattle herd.

And we do that because the… For example the manure from one species is an optimal, it optimizes the other species environment in some way. So for the example of the chickens, when we take them across the pasture the grass becomes so much more vibrant and just productive It's so funny to me, every time we turn the cows in behind them doing that, they will just eat that area down first before they touch anything else.

Interesting. Yeah, that's really cool. What's the biggest challenge you face fighting against the quantity over quality model of corporate agriculture?

Well, when you're in the quantity model, essentially in that model you are doing everything off of a price per pound mindset. And I think that is very much a disservice to the consumer because it prevents the customer from being able to ask the question, what about the quality?

And consumers are smart when it comes to this. I mean, we've all inherently bitten into, whether it's chicken or beef or some other product, and you're like, the mouth fill on that wasn't right, right?

And so you know the quality's not there. If the characteristics of the meat, just in terms of your mouth feel with it, isn't there, then that translates to the nutrition is not optimal for that animal either.

And if you've got an animal that is has vibrancy and life into them, that vibrency in life translates into the quality of that meat. Whereas if that doesn't exist for that animal, because the living standards that they're in are suboptimal, then you're just not going to get the highest quality.

And if we really think, well, what do we consume food for in the first place? For nutrition, right? It's to optimize our health. So why wouldn't we consumed the best?

Right, right, absolutely. And I'll just say on a more of a personal note, I've been up in different parts of rural Texas and I have seen some of these cattle feedlots where the cattle are just packed in shoulder to shoulder, nose to tail.

You see the undulation of the hills, but it's completely covered by cows. They can barely move. And you know, and there's a big meat packing plant nearby.

It's kind of a dangerous place to work, but I suspect that those, that type of meat, you're just not getting good quality nutrition from. You're really not, and again, the transparency component is what resonates in that scenario.

If you have a question about that product, who are you gonna go ask? I mean, if you go knock on the door, they're not gonna acknowledge you. They're gonna entertain your questions, right?

Whereas if your dealing with someone locally, you can ask all the questions you want. Yeah, yeah. So why does it matter so much, not just for you, but the next generation, that food is raised differently?

There is an emerging paradigm that is known as transgenerational nutrition and this is not something that I came up with. This is a pretty well established concept in the literature now and it applies to things even outside of nutrition.

But what it, what its state is that if, and I kind of have to work from the negative side of this first, but it's that, if someone makes negative, let's say a younger individual makes.

Negative choices, like food choices that are harmful to their health and they're like, eh, so what? It's my health. So

be it. Right. Yeah. Well, let's say it's a female.

Quality vs Quantity in Corporate Agriculture

When she gets pregnant, she's passing on some of that dysfunction through the genetics to that next generation and setting that Next Generation up for a suboptimal environment.

And now that can couple over into the Next generation even beyond that. The evidence on this shows that right now to undo that takes about three generations.

And so what I'm suggesting is that if you start out and you create that optimal environment, you have the optimal food choices, your keeping your health up to as high of a status as possible, that transgenerational downward slide actually goes the opposite direction.

You're becoming more in tune with your environment and being able to function in an environment without succumbing to the elements of health that we too often see.

Wow. That's great. So for someone new to buying direct from a rancher, where should they start? Well, it is a different mindset when you're buying from the ranch because many individuals are accustomed to just running down to the store and grabbing a package of meat and that is truly not ideal when it comes to buy from ranch.

You want to think in larger quantities and larger quantity doesn't mean it needs to be unreasonable quantities. you can start literally like from us, if you just wanted to buy three chickens, like we'll sell you three chicken.

It's more than just buying a chicken, right? Or just more then just buy a pack of chicken breast, just as a comparative. So you could start from smaller sizes like that, but go all the way up to say for example, a quarter cow or a half cow, or if even someone wanted do a whole cow.

The idea is that You always have accessibility to quality food in your freezer. And there's a security element on this. Maybe five years ago or six years, nobody would have cared anything about this part of the conversation.

But after we saw the reality of what can happen in a pandemic situation where our shelves become bare. Well, you don't have to worry about that because I have food in the freezer that I can provide for you, right?

So it's a much easier process when you always have things in your freezer to work from. Yeah, absolutely. What's the real difference between a freezer full of grocery store meat and a freezer full your beef and chicken?

Oh gosh, let me start with the chicken. I will say hands down, if you have never had truly pasture raised chicken, when you eat pasture-raised chicken it's going to knock your socks off.

It is a completely different culinary experience. It tastes different, it's moist, its juicy. I mean, It's just a different bird altogether. Uh, I'll give you some examples.

of some of the difference here too, and this is looking at the same lifespan, the grow out time, if you will, on these birds, is that our birds in this last batch that we ran, we typically had a bird that would dress out a whole bird at around five and a half to some even up to seven pounds.

and you go and buy the birds at the grocery store, a whole bird, and that bird may be around four pounds, three and a half, four pound. They're probably not gonna make five pounds.

And you ask yourself, well, you've got two birds, they live the same amount of life, how does one waste so much more in such a healthier product? It's the environment that that birds was in.

It is what it had access to around it. So I would say just really the eating experience with chicken is so much more robust and vibrant. Beef, beef the same thing.

And we do some really interesting things with beef. So for example, organ meats are a big topic right now.

Transgenerational Nutrition and Family Health

And we do a 85-15 blend where we have it's 85% ground, 15% organ meat. And so for those individuals that are looking to get organ meet in their diet, you can do it through that ground beef.

Honestly you never know that it is in there. You don't know you're eating that organ. But it too, it feels more, I can't just say it feel more nutritious.

Maybe someone says what does that really mean? It just feels more satiating when you eat it. Okay. That's so interesting. And what advice do you give to families who want to eat better but feel overwhelmed by cost or convenience issues?

There's a couple of ways to look at this. You and I being in the healthcare space, I tend to start from that perspective maybe because that's what our background is in.

I look at it as you're going to pay one way or the other. Either you can pay for prevention or you could pay treatment. I think everyone would rather pay prevention and enjoy the experience of preventing, if you will, right?

This is not the need just to take a tablet or something or anything. You actually get to fully enjoy and stimulate your frontal lobes in your brain and have that dopamine response from eating this food, so why not take advantage of that?

But I think the other thing is that also acknowledging the satiety part of what I just mentioned is at when you eat quality food, you're not eating calories.

You're eating nutrient density and it tastes less nutrient, density to reach the same outcomes. Yeah, that makes total sense because I think a lot of our processed foods is just nutrient depleted, but it's calorie heavy.

And that's the problem. I've often heard in functional medicine that you can either pay the farmer or pay a pharmacist. We'd all much rather pay farmers for good nutrition and prevention.

So how has this shift allowed you to not only serve your patients, but also support the patients of other clinicians?

Buying Direct from the Ranch

This to me has been the biggest thing that I've just truly, it's been a personal satisfaction for me because when I was in the clinic and I one-on-one with the patient, I could support them and and, and.

I, was able to help them. And there's a great satisfaction in that. But now, because there's so little accessibility to the quality of food that we produce, and listen, I'm not saying that I am on the island by myself.

There's other phenomenal producers out there that do an incredible job. But the problem is that the connection between those individuals and the healthcare community is not as, it's not good as what it should be.

And so just like with you and with other providers to be able to pick up the phone or send an email and say, look, this is what we offer. It's something that literally your entire patient base can benefit from and we're behind it.

We're going to keep focusing on this. Like this our mission. That to me is so rewarding because I know that it becomes an exponential effect at that point.

that there's so many more people that we can get quality food in their hands that would have never possibly had that experience or would've had a misguided experience otherwise.

Yeah. And so what do you hope the future of food production looks like if more families start making these choices? I hope that a lot of it becomes decentralized and right now we live in a world where our food system is becoming more and more centralized.

There's fewer and fewer entities that are controlling it. And I think that certainly sets us up for some big concerns in number of different ways. and it also breaks that connection to your food.

I think more individuals would make better food choices if they truly felt connected to their food, and the easiest way to do that is just to build a relationship with the producer.

Allow them to have that conversation with you, be able to shake their hand, look them in the eyes, just have the human experience where When you look at someone and you have that interaction, all of us inherently know, yeah, this person's a solid individual.

They're telling me the truth. Or your BS meter goes up and is like, something's not right here, right? That's the kind of thing that we, if you're not going to produce it and grow it yourself, that's kind relationship you need to have.

And that my goal for, for everyone would be that they can have top of experience. That's great, yeah. All right, so where can people go to learn more about your ranch and connect with you directly?

You can go HarvestHillsRanch.com and on that you'll be able to get some information about the ranch. You'll able see what we offer when, for example, right now we're doing a pre-sell on our fall beef harvest.

And so you will be be to access and get information on about that. And then the other area that I would recommend is to go to YouTube and just look up Harvest Hills Ranch as well.

And I put out content every single week. Just like I said earlier, you want to know who you're buying from, what their mindset is, and what the philosophy and thought is around your food production.

You'll learn pretty quick what mine is. I don't tend to bite my tongue very much on putting content out. So I want people to learn the truth that's out there.

That's great. And how would I, I mean, how do you estimate, like, How much of a cow do I need? Do I a whole cow? do i need half a Cow? How many chickens, you know?

Yeah, that's a great question. So I would say most individuals don't even need to consider a whole cow. That's just, a hole cow is a lot of meat. And I'd say even most individual probably don' really, if you've never experienced buying a share of beef, you probably even don''t need really consider half.

Beef and Chicken Quality Differences

Now quarter makes sense for a lots of families because quarter cows are going to give you, your going get good steaks, grind out of that, get some roast out it.

So you'll get a good diversity of meet. and it'll generally last most families a couple of months. So on the beef side, I would recommend starting there.

And the chicken is, for many individuals, can be an easier entry point simply because the smallest bundles we have are going to be three chickens, three birds.

We can give those to you as whole or we can get them to use cut. So whatever your preference is on that, I will say, and I always try to nudge this for individuals.

Most individuals are scared to cut chickens, but your real value is in a whole bird. And I've even got a video up on YouTube that you guys can check out.

It is so easy to a chicken. I mean, you can do it in no time flat. Okay. And these chickens are already like plucked, right? Oh yeah. They're just like you would most, what you'd be accustomed to seeing them in the store, they're what we call dress.

So they, just the skin of the bird, all the internals have been removed. Okay, okay. Just the meat and the bones. You get the drumsticks, the breasts, thighs, and then the carcass.

Great. Well, before we wrap up, I'm going to let you give your special introductory offer. Yeah, so what we've done, guys, is like I said, we wanted to connect not just with the individuals that I have relationships with, but we want to support, for example, the patients and the audience and listeners of Dr.

Ward as well. And so, what were offering is what call our $50 gift card. You go to Dr. Ward's, and I guess maybe you'll have some follow-up information as a part of the podcast here, too.

But you guys can get $50 off of your initial order with Harvest Tools range. And frankly, guys, we'd be honored to send it to you. Great. That's awesome.

Do you ship the meat?

Supporting Patients Through Better Food Access

I do. We ship into Texas and Louisiana. OK. So that's our primary method of delivery. Literally, you can put it right on your doorstep. That is so great.

Well, thank you so much for your time. And that was really fascinating to hear about the ranch. I love the, you know, the organic and of like whole pasture raising of animals.

That's wonderful. Where, where is your ranch located? So we're over in East Texas. We're in a little community called Hillister, Texas I'll tell you a quick funny when we move out here I got a map of the county and the County had cities towns and communities We didn't qualify for a city or a town.

Were only a community Yeah, so we're pretty small, but we are over here. The great thing about where we at is we in what's called the Pawnee woods and literally our ranch is surrounded by pine forest.

So I don't have to worry about what neighboring ranches are doing or neighboring farms are as far as spraying chemicals and risking exposure to things like that.

It's just not a consideration here Yeah, awesome. That is so great. Well, thank you for joining me on the functional edge. I hope today's episode gave you fresh insights and practical tools to level up your life.

If you found value in what you heard, don't forget to hit subscribe and share the podcast with someone who needs it and leave a review. It's the best way to support our mission of bringing powerful health solutions to more people.

So for more resources, updates, and behind-the-scenes content, visit drjuliaward.com.

Future of Food Production and How to Connect

And until next time, stay strong, If you've found value in what you heard, don't forget to hit subscribe, share the podcast with someone who needs it and leave a review.

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Until next time, stay strong, Stay healthy and keep living on the functional edge.