Cultivating Connection: How To Accelerate Healing And Fight Disease By Forging A Relationship With Nature Transcript

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Introduction and Career Background

– Dr. Weiss, Ron Weiss, MD one of my favorite people in the world. So I'm happy to have you here and join this summit on cardiovascular disease. I know you've had tremendous experience actually taking people and getting them and nursing them back to good health through nutritional medicine and lifestyle medicine and I know it's one of the most rewarding things that you felt in your in your career, right? Because I know I'm different from me, you've actually had a more conventional career and then this new career in the law, I don't know, 15 years 10 in in um nutritional medicine and you'll be able able to really, you know, compare both worlds, right? Can you tell me about that experience?

– Absolutely. Well, you know, I, the first part of my career as a physician, I started off as an emergency room doctor. So I would, you know, I worked very hard, I would work 6-12 hour shifts a week, five of them from seven PM to seven AM not something good for the sleep. And you know, I was the only doctor in the emergency room, it was a very busy inner city emergency room and I would be taking care of almost every night heart attacks that would come in and all kinds of traumas and but mostly the endpoints of chronic illness in America right?

And I did that for a while and then decided there's gotta be a better way and maybe I could start to do something to prevent these people from coming into the emergency room. And so I opened a because I'm trained in primary care originally in internal medicine, I opened a beautiful full service like primary care, multi-specialty emergency care center in, in Hudson County, New Jersey. And we really did a good job at confronting people's illness upfront and trying to reverse it.

And that's when I first started to understand that food was critical in this regard and that it was really necessary to attack people's diets and to help them with that in order to truly prevent all the metabolic diseases and hypertension and cardiovascular disease. – Right?

And in the years I've known you, I'm sure that you've had, you know, scores of people with diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, cardiomyopathy. – Absolutely.

– You nurse that you've changed the trajectory of their life, right? – Yes. Very much so. But you know, I, while I was in that setting in Hudson County, I began to realize the pull of the food system was so overwhelming that it was, it was hard to detach people from these addictive, you know, omnipresent forces that were always there. So I decided to, you know, um, start all over again and this time it would be from building a regenerative food system from the ground up for the community.

And and so I closed that practice and bought the farm. No pun intended. Bought the farm.

From Emergency Medicine to Preventive Care

Organic 342 acre farm. Well it wasn't organic at the time, we transformed it into an organic farm. But, and, and I thought the best way to really help the community was to redo the food system.

And in that way you could best address cardiovascular and other chronic diseases. – I know what you're doing is utterly amazing. You're probably the only physician in America. Maybe the only position I know that actually is a regenerative organic farmer with knowledge of the soil, the ecosystem, the bacteria, the microbiome, the insects had to make the most healthiest food in the world and to protect our soils and our planet and utilize the that food to heal people. And as a physician and marrying those two together this knowledge of, of your physician, your lifestyle medicine, nutritional knowledge with your perspective as an organic farmer.

And it's very, very unique and, and and that makes you a very unique physician with incredible tools at your disposal. You know. – Thank you for those kind words.

I believe that there are deep connections um between the soil and human health and and perhaps that there's no profound, there's no connection more profound than the microbiome of both the soil and the human gut because they're connected.

And I think we are in the last decade or two decades we've begun to understand in terms of human health, how critical the gut microbiome is in determining in a major way as to whether people be chronically ill whether it's from obesity, how much they will weigh if they will get cardiovascular disease or diabetes.

And ultimately, that gut microbiome that determines our health is connected to what we eat and what we eat is connected to the soil microbiome. So when we first got here to the farm, my agenda was to not grow vegetables and fruits and food, but it was to grow a living soil to grow organisms to figure out how we can repair the microbiome of the soil.

Because once we did that, the vegetables and the fruits and the grains and the they would just come automatically. – Explode with growth with a new group of beautiful growth.

– Yes, – That's what I find to. Once I get a great soil and I put a plant in that soil, like whoa, it takes off, – It knows what to do. And, and you know, I think that addresses a larger problem as to where we are with our food supply.

You know, in all of my life, I've been involved with plants, growing plants since I was a child and I got a botany degree from Rutgers, the land grant Institution in New Jersey. And you know, plants are dependent upon soil organisms in order to create secondary plant metabolites.

So there are two levels of molecules or chemical constituents that plants make. What is the basic level, you know, like the carbohydrates and the proteins and the basic scaffolding of the plant's sugars like from photosynthesis. And then you have an upper level of chemicals and these are called phyto nutrients.

The plant creates these special and very expensive molecules in order to better survive and thrive in its environment. Because plants, you know, they can't they don't have arms and legs.

They can't run away from pests or enemies.

Soil Health, Microbiome, and Nutrient Density

They can't approach their partner and have sex with them. They have they need they've developed over millions and millions of you. These these molecules to do this work for them and these molecules create the vivid colors. The pigments that attract pollinators, the aromas that do that to the flavors that attract us to eat them.

And also molecules that ward off enemies like tests that are chewing on the plants and these are those secondary plant metabolites, these high end molecules.

In order to get high levels of them. The plant needs special relationships that are intact with special soil microorganisms because these organisms fan out through the soil beyond the reach of the little root hairs of the plants and gather um critical raw materials.

So the plant can then manufacture this. And when these soil organisms are there in a richly diverse soil, the plant makes extra amounts of these fighting nutrients and then guess what? The food is more brilliant.

We colored. It is more has a greater aroma, more beautiful taste. And these bio flavonoids or polyphenols have been demonstrated to better uh prevent cardiovascular disease. – So there was a brain dementia and to protect against cancer to – Absolutely do many things because you know I know this this this webinar that you're doing or the summit is on cardiovascular disease.

But there was just a few years ago there was an interesting um article in the B. M. The British medical journals, Heart journal that that demonstrated that that subjects hypertensive subjects who were fed high polyphony, all diets. And when we say hi, just involved maybe an extra few servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

Dark chocolate that they had significantly increased cardiovascular vascular responses in Plessis mammography which is the you know, a test that measures the health of arteries in our body.

– Well, I have to comment on the questions and one comment I feel that I felt what you're talking about personally. I feel it's the enrichment in the personal soul in our relationship with the soil and the world around us and that growing our own food and enriching soil with natural organisms in compost and doing all this too.

And you watching the fruits of your labor with your hands in the dirt and eating the fruits of your labor, eating vegetables and and things from and from trees that you don't taking care of yourself is somewhat peaceful and puts you in relationship with the natural world and even hunting for parceling in the woods and eating that even wild foods to in some way is good for the soul. So I know we relate in that respect and I'm trying to emulate you to a degree in serving and growing one of my own great foods here at my retreat. But I just want to say also that we're both interest in this concept that the better quality food, right? And the better nutritional quality micro nutrients, phytochemicals and your diet, the better quality individual health and the more the better reversal of disease we get. And it's not just any plant based diet that we're giving. People are not giving them a diet all of rice or all that. We're giving a diet with good variety and a huge and giving the high nutrient foods and and picking out the best quality food.

So I know you've done a lot of work in this field too, so so we have to pay attention to the quality and and even the way the food is grown, right? – We do.

And and this harkens back to your you know great formula right? Which is health equals nutrients divided by calories. Right, correct. So those nutrients that your talk talking about, I mean yes, you know, they can be macronutrients, they're important.

But the scale at which you're talking about and I think at this level where we're really trying to get to the upper reaches of a plant based diet. They're focused on high levels of those those secondary plant metabolites the phyto nutrients and and i it they are very much dependent upon the growing methods. It's not it's not good enough that you just just grow anything in any clay or sand or spray pesticides on it, or agricultural chemicals which tend to kill that light in the soil you're talking about.

And I think that's why you sound you know what you say, So poignant going through the woods and gathering purslane from wild places because these places tend to be undisturbed by, you know, humans chemicals and they probably do have good good living soil underneath. You know, I just wanted to this reminds me of a little experiment that my Rosie, my daughter who's now 15 years old did when she was 12 years old in the sixth grade.

And what we did was she won second prize by the way in her school science competition for this. What we did was we took soil from our farm from a completely untilled area. So this is we have a 300 year old farm which has been farmed for three centuries, but this area we took it from was a pasture.

It had never been tilled ground had never been broken. I took this soil with Rosie, we put it in flats and we had a an experimental arm and a control arm.

And what we did for Rosie science experiment is we took all the same soil. We put it in two flats, one flat was treated with one spray of a pirate Catherine Insecticide, one with an herbicide and one spray of a fungicide in each cell.

The other flat was a control, nothing was done. We it only had this rich organic soil. Both started with the same rich organic soil. We then planted radish seeds, a radish seed in each cell. And we chose radishes because you know, they have a 28 day uh life to harvest. So we grew them inside under controlled conditions, under grow lights in in our apartment.

We then harvested them and sent them for total polyphony, all content. When we pulled up these radishes, we saw that there was a different in the color red.

The control group which hadn't been treated with the bio sides was a deeper red than the than the treatment arm with the with the agricultural chemicals.

And when we tested the polyphony all levels the control group, which had not been treated at 50% more polyphony. All that red color in the radish, which goes, I think to support what we're saying that growing things in a natural way when when you have soil organisms, soil life presence helps to increase the nutritive value of your food.

Yes. – So the American diet with the processed foods and animal products, people are eating, people are ubiquitously soul micronutrient phytochemicals and antioxidants efficient.

It's amazing to even survive as long as they do, but it's and it's not it's not. We understand why people develop stiff blood vessels and and abnormal cells and build up a metabolic waste and premature aging and all these chronic diseases and every disease is exacerbated by these new tricks, by these ubiquitous nutritional deficiencies from what they're choosing to eat. And then they got to choose the right foods and then get rid of the wrong foods and then look at the best quality they can they can.

So you know, you're you're of course for people over the country's you're advocating people um choose organic and if possible, even regenerative organic agriculture and growing some of their own food. So Dr.

Pesticides, Produce Quality, and Farming Methods

Weiss, what you're saying here is that that paying attention to nutritional quality not even when we're moving, they're trying to have nutritional excellence and get rid of all the low nutrient processed foods and all the low nutrient animal products.

What I'm saying right now is both animal products and processed foods do not contain a significant nutrient load they do not contain, they're not rich in antioxidants and phytochemicals like colorful plants are colorful plants are the are the secret healers, the magic healers. What we're saying we even have to we should be going after trying to heal disease. We should trying to get the best quality even of the plants. And that should be people all over the country should be in increasing their healing by using organic agriculture.

Organic and even regenerative organic agriculture. – Absolutely. And there there are many things to unpackaged and what you've said, all of our mothers told us to eat our vegetables and fruits right, whose mother hasn't said that we we know that those foods are healthy for you, but it's not just eating vegetables or fruits.

And I absolutely. That if you have a diet of conventionally grown vegetables and fruits that come with a side of poison like pesticides on them, it is preferable to eating that over the standard American diet of processed chips and chicken and other kinds of foods. However, the data is beginning to show us that it is much more preferable and you can do much better by having higher levels of those plant foods that are created as I mentioned before.

So that there there have higher higher bio flavonoids or higher phyto nutrient levels, those which which helped to reverse and prevent cardiovascular disease.

And now we're finding out that the pesticides that are used to grow conventional produce themselves can cause increased rates of cardiovascular disease.

For example, there was a there was a study in Jama Internal Medicine that was published about two years ago or so that showed that pyrethroids which are a major class of insecticide now that has generally replaced the organophosphates which are very dangerous form of pesticide that was previously used on produce, which causes a lot of neurodegenerative diseases and autism that when they studied patients who had and this comes from in Haines, the National dietary survey study that when they studied the people who had the most of this pyrethroids

pesticide residue in their blood, they had significantly elevated rates of cardiovascular disease versus the people who had the lowest rates as well as all cause mortality. So we're beginning to learn that these pesticides that come in conventional uh grown grown food are harmful to and they do create, you know, cardiovascular events.

They do create cancer. They do create create neurodegenerative diseases. So we we need to move away from those. And if you want to talk about it in a little bit, we can also talk about how they destroy our substrate. So those chemicals are also very deleterious to our planet's health and in in many different ways.

– Right, let's get into that in a minute. But but just to help the listener um, because a lot of people get conventional produce organic produce hydroponic, you know, different types of so your feeling is that in the stepping stepping stone of what's, you know, the best versus acceptable or not, you know, how should our hydroponics okay? Or organics better.

But then regenerative organic is the best and and growing your own food and if they are growing their own food, what kind of advice could you give them for even putting a garden in the backyard how to make that soil and some of the food they're raising to supplant their diet you know or whether they should be growing sprouts in their house to like that.

– Well I think we would have to define uh just very briefly define what we mean by these different methods. So in conventional agriculture you're growing there are no there are no real um boundaries or rules for growing things. You can do whatever you want pretty much and apply what other chemicals you need to in order to get a crop.

And you know most conventional food is grown with with with dangerous chemicals which humans have to protect themselves from with barriers and and face mask in order to apply them so they're dangerous to us. These chemicals also create very poor soil conditions. So the plants grown from them have very low nutritive value. And this has been shown over a century by data from the U. S. D. A.

Then the next up we have uh I guess you can say organic certified vegetables. That is certified by the USDA sub unit for organic agriculture. That's better in that the numbers of chemicals that are applied to the agricultural setting are very limited um and very restricted. However the problem is is that the organic certification for those foods doesn't tell you what the health of the soil is.

So in other words I could take completely inert soil which has no life in it and as long as I didn't apply pesticides or the ones that were regulated by the organic certification, I could be organically certified. You know it can grow in sand and I could put some water and and and artificial fertilizers and I can get fruits and vegetables, I can sell them as organic. So the problem with the organic certification is it doesn't guarantee you that the foods came from a living in a good soil and some some dangerous some dangerous chemicals can be used.

Like for example we eat apples that come from the pacific northwest most of the country does. And a lot of those can be sprayed with Tetra cycling which is an antibiotic which is generally liberated into the orchard that's not good and and pirate which is an um a direct extract from the chrysanthemum flowers which is a it's an organically certified pesticide but it's not, you know it has it's not healthy for human beings.

Then we go to regenerative methods, regenerative methods basically concentrate on what I said in the beginning. They concentrate on building soil health and in order to build soil health.

You have to pay attention to what you is going on there. Like you said in the beginning there's their compost amendments. You're making sure there's a lot of organic matter and you're focusing on microbial life in the soil and when you do that that ensures high levels of nutrients in the plants.

Then you have some other categories like you have you have hydroponic, produce vegetables and fruits. That's sort of a new area much to the chagrin of us.

Organic and regenerative farmers that has been approved for organic certification. But most traditional organic farmers do not agree with that. And the reason why is because the plant has lost its relationship, evolved a

relationship over millions of years with soil.

And like I told you in the beginning in order for the plant to grow these beautiful rich things that we eat, you need a workforce in the soil of bacteria assembling nutrients for the plant and it doesn't exist. So we don't have a lot of data or studies on the the nutrient content of those plants. But I would intuitively think that it's much lower than than produce grown in a regenerative soil for sure.

– And I think that there's so many nutrients that we haven't measured or even named yet that plant thousands of nutrients in them. And to get the full variety of nutrients that gives us this unprecedented opportunity to live longer into reverse disease.

When we get all these ma Micro nutrients that there are thousands of them in the tens of thousands. – We think now maybe up to 100,000 different molecules, maybe we've identified five or 7000 of them.

But the majority were not even, we're not even aware of. The last thing I just wanted to mention because you brought it up was the sprouting. So that's not hydroponic. Okay that that that does need a water source in order to sprout the seed. But the reason why we recommend that as a soil less way to produce food is because the nutrients you are getting when you eat sprouted foods are coming from the seed itself. Mother nature in its in its in its spectacular design, has designed seeds to have a package of dense nutrients in them. And that's why you recommend eating seeds and nuts right there seeds and and and grains. And and because those kernels the seeds are packed with nutrients. And then because when the seed is first sprouting it doesn't have access to soil organisms, it doesn't have any roots.

So we need that package to fuel all the growth of that new vegetative growth.

Sprouts, Microgreens, and Food Synergy

And that that's coming from the seed. So that's why when you take if you measure the nutrient content of an unscripted seed versus the nutrient content of the sprout, it can be many times the sprout the nutrient content of the sprouted seed.

So we that is a good way to get nutrients by sprouting in clean water. – What about microgreens? – Yes, it's also a good way because those microgreens really they still you know, they haven't been alive very long and they do they still have a lot of the nutrients that they were born with from that sprouts.

– So we're saying that these young plans these young seeds these young microgreens made make a nice addition to the general salad and food by having some concentrated nutrients. – Absolutely. But then as the plant grows, you know it has to has to support itself umbilical cord to the seed and it needs to grow itself and that's done through routes. So you need that relationship with rich soil, live soil and it can't be anything else. – Right. It's almost like I'm what I'm saying our relationship is that when we include seeds and nuts and greens and mushrooms and onions, we have variety in your diet, including the ligaments and sterols and standard oils and fats and seeds and nuts.

It works symbiotically with the nutrients from the vegetables. Because now we're not only broadening our exposure but we're absorbing the phytonutrients and antioxidants the vegetables more because we consume seeds and nuts in the same meal.

And the fact facilitates the absorption. It's the same thing. We're going after this complex inter relationship that extend human life that that increases health and extends human lifespan.

– Absolutely. That's why we we always recommend that our patients uh if you want to reverse that coronary artery disease the best if you if you want to get those higher levels of phytonutrients and the carotenoids in your bloodstream um that you do combine your beautiful greens that you're eating with some uh some healthy fats from the seeds and nuts.

– Right? Exactly. So tell us about you know this is a really great conversation. So now transition a little bit if you can

just for a couple of minutes into your lifestyle medicine practice and the and the patients you've seen over the last decade and the transformational results you've had you using the methods we've just discussed, you know, um – Well I think if you go to our website which is ethosprimarycare.com, we have testimonies of people and what they've accomplished and and I and I have to say that I, you know, the reason why although this is very difficult. You know, it's difficult enough being a doctor and doing this especially, you know, this is kind of the frontier lifestyle medicine go, you know, it's not, you know, it hasn't been exactly figured out, you know, as far as systems approach are concerned, not the way to treat patients, but you know, as far as a professional career is concerned.

But it's not only is that going on, but it's the farming that's going on as well, which is also very difficult. But when you combine the two together, I mean we have amazing results. I mean we are able to reverse people's diabetes.

We are able to uh you know have them lose, you know, huge amounts of weight uh to get them off all their medications, we have, we have something which is called the sort of a 30 day program which is called the 30 day detox, which we will be presenting our data at the American college of lifestyle medicine.

This at the annual convention this November, we were selected for a poster presentation where we um that within 30 days, 75% of all medications are removed uh including blood pressure medicines, diabetes medicines, uh statin agents, cholesterol agents.

And there's tremendous uh, tremendous improvements in people's health. Uh wait metrics, cholesterol metrics, sugar metrics. You know, it's just very fulfilling to do.

Lifestyle Medicine Results and Patient Transformations

– Yes, very fulfilling for us for us physicians we love to see the people get well because it's giving us joy to our life. And I think that this connectedness with nature and the quality of the food and the magic healing powers of the food.

It does something for the soul of the patient as well. They're not in prison having to eat healthy food and give up all their illicit love affair with jump with their actually intellectually and emotionally connected to the food now.

And we show them how to make it taste great. But they also have an ability have like optimism, confidence, the brain father and gratitude for the beauty and their connectedness with nature that fuels into their their healing.

– I can't agree with you more. And that's why we place ethos, primary care in the middle of the growing fields. I wanted patients as they were driving onto this ancient farm to be surrounded by their medicines. It's inspirational as they're driving in through here to go past the farm market where they meet the people who labor day in and day out to give them these beautiful things.

It's meaningful. You know, when you see what kind of effort this took to give this to you and then you taste the difference in, in in vibrant flavors aromas, you can see the difference in colors.

The the food is so fresh that it stays 2 to 3 times longer at home. You save money because you're not, it's not being wilted. It's inspirational to read it, eat it. And then when you do that with every bite as those flavors are making their way through your upper airways and your scientists who knows you can feel that there is a connection as you said to the natural world which is in trouble these days. And I think it gives it, it gives our people who eat these medicines a special deep understanding of where their health is coming from.

– Yeah, it's it's really great. And, and so I know we can talk forever about this, but before we close, I just hoping that can you give some constructive advice for people living throughout the country, um a good place to start of what they could do in their own environment in their own home, to improve the quality of their diet with a few um, you know, just or even to work work, start to work on their soil or just give absolutely take home message here. – Absolutely. I can do that.

And you know, I just want to say that, you know, often when I talk or when I speak at different events, someone

usually gets up and stands up in the audience and says, but organic food or is too expensive or you have to pay more for it than conventional produce. And I my response to that is that conventional produce is the most expensive food ever created in the history of the world.

And it's because in order to get it to us, we're wiping out our planet, the cost of that. We are sheltered from eating it today. But our grandchildren, our Children and future generations will pay that bill.

So keeping that in mind, I have some very practical ways in which you know, we can get access to and feed ourselves beautiful high level nutritious vegetables without chemical pesticides and agricultural chemicals.

Number one, do it yourself. So during World war two, um you know, there was this concept of victory gardens because we were very low on resources and you know, there were a lot of men who went off to war and women as well.

And a lot of the industrial, you know, output had to be put towards the war effort. The federal government at a program at encouraging what were called victory gardens and in this ran for about a few years in the last year of this program, just growing food in your backyard. Okay. produced 40% of all the produce consumed in the United States. That was from home gardens in like I believe it was 1944, 40%. This was not produced by farmers, it was produced by individuals in their backyards.

It just goes to show you how much food you can produce in a small space in your own backyard.

Practical Tips for Growing and Buying Better Food

So um there are all, if you don't know anything about garden gardening, Eliot Coleman has written uh the the bible of growing foods, regenerative regenerative li uh he has an organic growers handbook that you can buy um and you can get started with that next season.

What else can we do if you're, if you're not going to grow food? What you can do is you can, and, and by the way, if you live in an apartment or you live in an urban setting, there always community gardens somewhere around where you can get access to a lot. Or usually there is where you can get at a low cost or no cost ground to grow up. We can… – Sprout and you use a grow box too and – You can grow those sprouts that we talked about on your window sill, broccoli sprouts. What else can we do?

We can you can now, even in urban areas, there are farmers markets all over the place. And you should go into a farmers market and identify a an organic regenerative farmer asked the farmer what their methods are.

Farmers who are growing foods well are proud of what they do. They'll even invite you to see what they're doing and you can walk onto their farm and make sure that you know, they're doing things as you like them to be done and they're growing good food. If you have a if you have uh snap benefits um because your finances um are your finances um need to be supported from the from from the food perspective, um There are in many places double bucks back of food benefits where you can get double your amount of money, a value on the card, on your benefits card if you buy produce and so you can do that at at a farmers market as well. Um um So those are some, those are some helpful hints as to how we can um try to choose produce that's healthier for us and healthier for our planet. – Thanks so much.

We unfortunately have to end. But obviously we are what we eat and we can and we become in our later life, what we ate in our earlier life and their later life, looking back is seeing, well, did we take, did you take care of me when you when I was younger, were you caring for me by the quality of foods you put in your your body?

And it's all right. So now we're we're motivating people to make these better choices and and you run of course, or um tremendous motivator educator and role model for doctors, farmers and for people trying to get well.

So really we appreciate your work and for you and my but most support and admiration. – Thank you so much, Joel as you know, I stand on, you are a pioneer. You're one of the great pioneers in lifestyle medicine and the plant

based world. And I stand on your shoulders.

I wouldn't be here if it were not for people like you. So I credit a lot to what I've a lot of what I've done to the foundation that you've laid. Thank you so much. – Thank you.

Well, All right, good luck everybody be well and get well and see you again soon. All right. Thanks man.