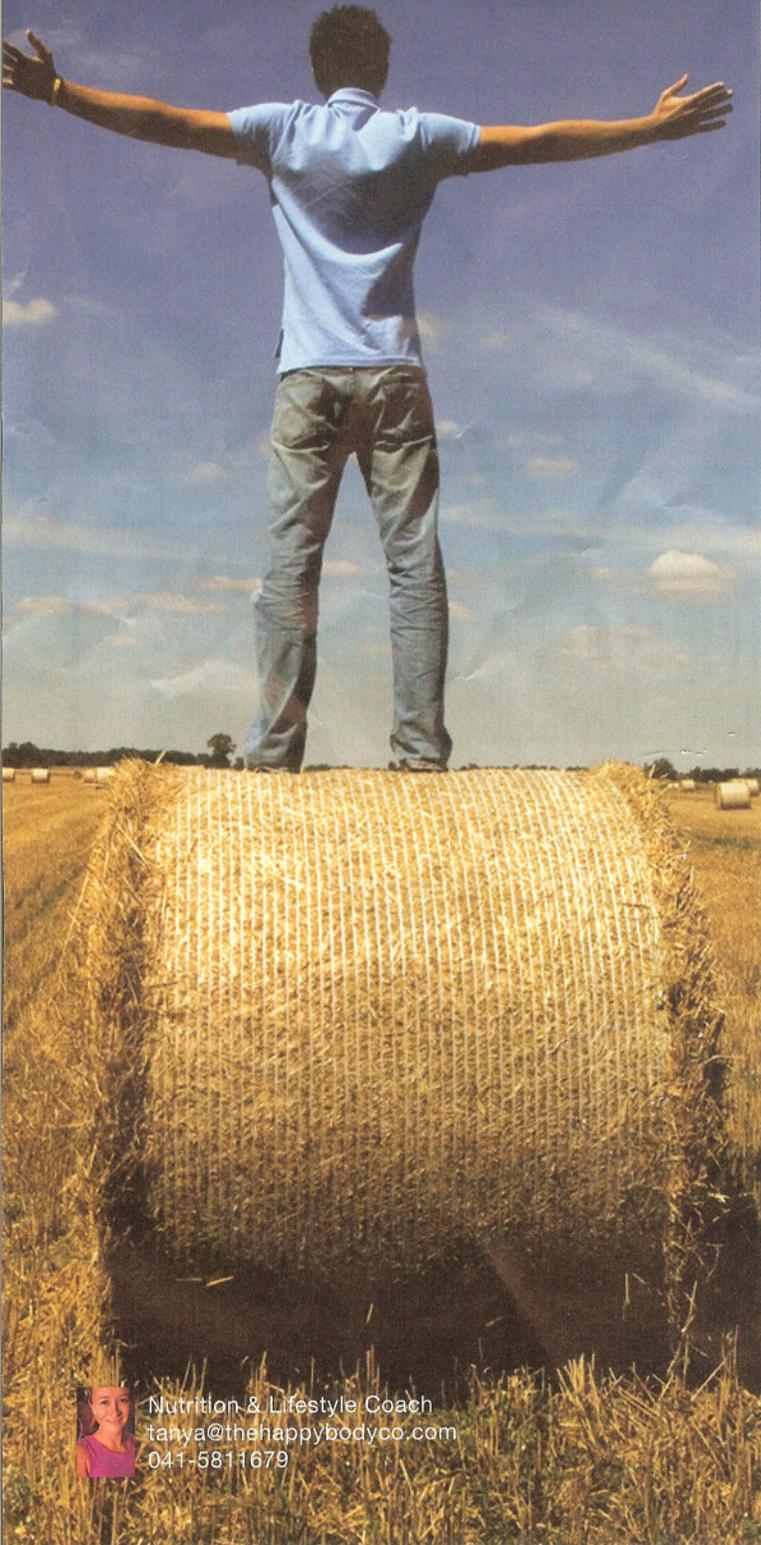


FROM THE FARMER'S MOUTH



Last month I wrote about some wonderful farmers who offer free-range and close-to-organic meat and vegetables. This month, I thought it would be appropriate to get to know the man, who, in my humble opinion, is the farmer of all farmers - you may recall the farmer whose chickens, beef and lamb graze on pesticide-free grass, supplemented with specifically designed 'clean' feed.

Robin, tell us how you got into farming.

I'd always wanted to be a farmer and so, when my wife became very ill and couldn't eat commercially grown food, or live in town anymore (owing to pollution), we decided to move to a farm where we would be able to produce our own natural food, have access to cleaner air and drink cleaner water. So many producers (even free-range and organic) give customers false impressions and their labels frequently don't state everything the products contain. Since changing our lifestyle we've found that our medical costs and recovery periods for illness have been reduced. Although my wife's condition is quite serious, it's much improved and we believe her life may actually be extended by a good many years due to this lifestyle change.

What made you decide to farm 'cleanly'?

It felt like the right route to follow, although we knew that it would be going against the flow. The fact that my wife wasn't able to eat any food we bought in-store made us believe that her body was telling us we needed 'clean' food. We felt this would be the best way to nurse her back to health. My feeling is that for all our technological advances, society has gone backwards instead of forwards. But we are now living the way my grandparents lived ... small scale, natural farming methods, the only sustainable way to go.

How important is animal welfare to you in your farming methods?

We feel very strongly about good animal welfare. The animals must be in their natural environment and free to roam. If the animals are happy and eat what Nature intended them to eat, they are healthier. It's also better to have indigenous animals that are from a particular natural environment because they tend to self-medicate if they are unwell. If the animals are healthy and eat the correct diet, the meat is tastier and is of a higher quality. It's equally important to us that the animals are under the least amount of stress, as this will also have an effect on the quality and tenderness of the meat.

Is farming in this way financially viable?

What is financially viable? If you mean 'Will we get rich?' then the answer is no. The way we farm is not financially viable because it's not a high income-generating business. We look at quality and animal well-being, as opposed to quantity. We also practise this method of farming for our own well-being and the lifestyle it offers, and, to be honest, so that we can face people and not have to lie about how the products are produced. Please don't think for one moment that this is an easy lifestyle, but it is a nice lifestyle and we'll live healthier, longer lives because of it!

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