Emily: Hello Everyone! Welcome to our portion of the show, “Knowing Nature Through Food.” My name is Emily Trojanowski and my co-hosts Brody Smith and Phoebe Wilks and I will discuss how producers and consumers experience the link between food and nature in different ways.

Brody: We will use different examples to highlight how farmers and the hungry people of the world are connected to nature through what they grow and eat every day and how society has moved very far away from nature through food and what is being done to bring nature back into what we eat.

Phoebe: First of all, farmers have always been close with nature and the experience of growing food provides a dual perspective on the nature of agriculture. Both in large and small farms, the farmers have an understanding with nature that is hard to find anywhere else. On a large farm the farmers have to know how to produce a huge quantity of products and decide how to balance that with their quality.

Emily: While doing this Phoebe, they also have to make the decision of using chemicals to create some ease in the growth and bring in more profit or go for the organic certification and let things develop in a more natural way. Also big farms will usually focus on one product to make it the best it can be. Families owning large farms come to know this one product extremely well and will understand how to care for it on a level not many consumers will ever reach.

Brody: And small farms have a similar closeness to products. The more intimate setting of a small farm allows for a wider range of products to be explored and in a less intense, non-commercial atmosphere.

Phoebe: Speaking of farming Brody, many young kids are first exposed to the idea of a farm from the famous Beatrice Potter book, “The Tale of Peter Rabbit.” This stars Peter Rabbit, who steals farmer McGregor’s precious carrots. McGregor was the ideal farmer. He interacted with the animals on his farm, along with the pests that surrounded it. He treasured his crops and painstakingly labored for their success. He understood food and nature, mainly through the fragility of his crops.

Emily: Yes Phoebe it is true, while there are several small farmers that fit this innocent stereotype, this stereotype is not true for today’s farming industry.
Brody: However, our farming of the 21st century has become commercialized, selective, and increasingly chemically altered. Yet as the amount of farmers decreases, the supply and demand exponentially skyrockets. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, the retail equivalent value of the U.S. beef industry alone has risen $19 billion from 2002 to 2011, while the pork trade has risen from about two billion pounds in 2004 to over 4.5 billion in 2008. The net return per acre of corn and soybeans have risen from under $150 per acre to around $350 and just under $300 respectively from 2000 to the present. But how far away from nature are we placing ourselves to meet the quotas of meat and dairy that populations ask of farmers?

Phoebe: This increase in production has changed the face of the farming industry into an unknown beast compared to the farm that Farmer McGregor loved. The soil deterioration due to over-farming, the creation of giant waste ponds, and the drastic genetic remake of livestock has taken the production of food far away from its most natural state.

Emily: But, there is the organic movement within our country that is raising awareness about how far the production of food has moved away from nature. Issues such as grass fed versus corn fed animals, strictly organic versus chemical fertilization, and also inhumane practices with the meat industry have all been placed into the limelight. For example, PETA spearheads a lot of the protest against the “inhumane” methods of the meat industry such as the treatment of animals as they enter the slaughterhouse. One of the ways farmers are trying to bring about their appeal to the public is through organic certification.

Brody: That’s right, and the process of getting organically certified is a three-step procedure of application, inspection, and the review and decision. It is ironic that being closer to nature requires governmental action when it actually is very close to the natural state. The production of food has become more like a science experiment and less like the labor of trying to make the fruits of nature into the fuel of the human population.

Phoebe: Yeah, and farmers truly understand the nature behind what we eat. They know the process behind it and know how to care for it. They know the origins of the food we eat and the natural settings in which it thrives. They know the root issues. However, they have gotten distant from the ways of the past, and that is leading the food we eat further and further away from nature.

Emily: That’s a good point Phoebe. Now we will move on to how the consumption of food and how knowing nature through what we eat has been put to the back of our minds and is affecting many aspects of our lives.

(Music Introducing Next Part: “You Are What You Eat” By Wayne Brady section 0:28-0:58) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4Ot0nU19AE
Brody: Everyone knows the cliché “you are what you eat,” and when looking at one’s diet and how that diet correlates to nature, it is easy to see how this cliché is very appropriate.

By the time a meal reaches your placemat on the dining room table, it has gone through a long journey and many people have no idea where it came from. All people know is that farmers or a food company put in hours of labor so that this meal could be made possible.

Emily: But what are we eating? Do we even know? Does the majority of us even know where it came from?

Phoebe: That’s a great question Emily. Consumption of food is a choice. What we eat is completely up to us. No one is forcing us to eat a perfect food pyramid every day. We can choose to eat at McDonald’s for every meal, or choose to take fresh greens from our own gardens. What we choose affects the human experience. It affects one’s health. Also the act of eating is an important part of being an animal, so it is a part of our basic need to survive.

Brody: Part of nature is health. When things are healthy they’re in their best state, and humans are no different. What one eats affects them both physically and mentally, both in the present and in the future.

So let’s first explore an example of poor choices in eating leading one further away from nature.

Emily: Processed foods contain high levels of sodium and chemicals that are not naturally found in what one eats. This can lead to obesity, heart disease, and therefore a shorter life expectancy. There is a perfect example in the movie “Supersize Me.” Morgan Spurlock eats McDonald’s food for 30 days, with little exercise because he is trying to exaggerate the lifestyle of a typical American. This man had no idea where the food he was eating came from, but he kept eating it and his body and mind were greatly affected. Spurlock came out of the experiment depressed. His mood had been changed just by eating. He also had signs of liver failure, because what he ate gave his body very few benefits, only toxins.

Brody: That is very true. Such a diet shows how eating less healthy, more processed foods is a detriment to our health.

Furthermore, the connection to nature is evident in someone who is eating less healthy, higher processed foods. They will most likely not be able to list you the ingredients.

As 11 year old Birke Baehr says during his TED talk on what is wrong with our food system: (Birke Baehr lecture section 1:13-1:58)  
http://www.ted.com/talks/birke_baehr_what_s_wrong_with_our_food_system.html

Now who would want that?
Our friend Birke reiterates food in a McDonald’s commercial may look delicious, but it might be so unnatural that we are more apt to know what we eat through a tub of oils than through the natural products of farms and gardens. Therefore it is clear to see how eating unhealthy is leading us in the opposite direction of nature.

Phoebe: However, if one eats a balanced diet, a healthy diet, incorporating organic, natural foods, especially fruits and vegetables, they will see the benefits when they go to their doctor’s appointments, but they will also see it in their everyday lives, because their mood has proven to be better.

Emily: Yes, and The Nutrition Journal gave a report this year on a study about the restriction of meat for omnivores, or most people. The report showed that a lower amount of poultry, meat, and fish in one’s diet positively affects their short-term mood. Thus, it makes one happier to eat healthy.

Phoebe: Clearly, there is a connection between the choices one makes in what they eat and nature. The closer one eats to nature, the healthier and happier they are being.

Brody: Yes, organic, natural, self-grown food would make one quite close to nature, but there is so much more interaction between humans and food that nature has extended food much further into our lives. Without knowing anything about our food and just being complacent with what is put on our plate, we become ignorant of an important part of our world. Everyone eats, everything eats in some way. If we just blindly take what we are served without knowing anything about it, the things we are ignoring can be quite surprising. If one knows what they eat, there are not only health benefits, but they will have a better understanding of the nature in our world.

Phoebe: By extension, food connects us to nature through the simple act of eating. Humans have greatly increased the ordeal of eating through the culinary arts and the striving for an incredibly memorable taste in every meal.

Emily: And how do you think we get to this point, Phoebe?

Phoebe: Well, the ultimate connection between the production and consumption of food is cooking, Emily.

From personal experience as an amateur chef, I can say chefs have a unique connection to nature through their food. Knowing how every ingredient smelled when it was still raw and fresh, knowing how long it was cooked so the textures and such are just right. It allows one to know nature can be really tasty. A chef can therefore search for the best ingredients in the marketplace and understand where they are coming from because they understand that fresh is better.

Brody: So going back to what we said earlier, what is your opinion as a chef, of eating organic?
Phoebe: I think that if everyone tried to eat organic and move away from heavily processed, junk food, the positive effect on society’s health and well-being would be clear to see. Especially in cooking foods. Cooking with better quality foods will end with a better quality product. However, from my experience, there is also a clear hierarchy in place already of quantity for cheap over quality, and there are many problems in the way of creating change for a healthier food dynamic in society.

Brody: I’m not so sure our listeners would be completely on board with your opinions. Watching your calories and carbs and fat intake can make you a lot healthier, too.

Phoebe: Yes, but such diets take us away from nature because usually it leads us to consuming more processed foods.

Brody: Oh yeah, I see what you’re saying... Liquid egg whites are pretty nasty. I’m not even sure they’re eggs!

Emily: Good points you two. Essentially, the food cycle or just how food has such a broad territory in our lives makes the connection with nature very different for different people. Farmers understand nature in connection to food at its face value. They understand the land they live on, the idea of cycling crops, the appreciation of the delicacy of growing crops and many other things.

Phoebe: And consumers see food and nature in a much different way. What one eats affects their health and mood. The more natural and fresh and organic the food, the more benefits there are for the consumer. Our society has made the production and consumption of food a detriment to the earth and to mankind.

Brody: Overall, food is part of nature and our lives. It is a clear agent for anyone on this planet to know nature.

Emily: You said it, Brody. Well that concludes our discussion today on food in nature. We hope you all enjoyed learning about the different ways nature is connected to us through our roles as producers and consumers of food. Thanks for listening!

(Exit Fiesta Computer Music)