
Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 76

Starting An Organic Backyard Farm

Show Notes are at: www.LivingHomegrown.com/76

Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, episode number 76.

Announcer: Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast, where it's all about how to live farm fresh without the farm. To help guide the way to a more flavorful and sustainable lifestyle is your host, National PBS TV producer and canning expert, Theresa Loe.

Theresa: Hey there, everybody. Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast. I'm your host, Theresa Loe. This podcast is where we talk about living farm fresh without the farm, and that can mean preserving, fermenting, small space food growing, and just taking small steps towards living a more sustainable lifestyle. All the different ways that you can live closer to your food even if you have little or no garden space at all. If you want to dive deep into any of these topics or learn about my online Canning Academy, just visit my website, livinghomegrown.com.

Okay. I get suggestions for topics to do on this podcast all the time, and I love it, so if you ever have a topic that you want to see me cover or someone that you want to see me interview, just go to my website. Go to the contact page, and send me an email, and let me know. I love getting that kind of feedback.

Just interestingly enough, I had a couple people write in asking me if I could interview someone who is just starting out in farming and I thought, "What a great topic." The idea was that they wanted to hear from someone who was transitioning into the farming world or the farming lifestyle. When I got that topic request, I knew the perfect person to interview. I wanted to interview my friend, Emily Aarons.

Now, Emily lives in Massachusetts, and we became friends through an in-person business workshop just a few months ago back in August. The entire room was filled with entrepreneurs from all different types of business, and of course, we were immediately drawn to each other because we were the only two businesses in the room that had to do with the local organic food movement. Obviously, we became fast friends.

The more that I spoke to Emily, the more I was fascinated by where she was in her business and what she's doing because she's currently in that in between stage with her farming business. She and her husband, Andrew,

have started a small scale farm in their backyard, and it's not a giant operation with tons of acreage. This is a small scale organic farming operation that they hope to grow into a full service farm that will serve their community.

Now, the entire property that they live on is 3 acres, so I'm not talking about doing a backyard farm like on a patio. They do have some space, but honestly, they're only using a tiny portion of their backyard right now for farming, and it's still doing really well. Even if you don't have acreage in your backyard and you think you'd like to learn a little bit more about how someone could use their backyard for business, I'm hoping that you'll glean some insights from what Emily has to say.

The tips that she offers would pertain to all different types of operations from produce to eggs to even honey or homemade preserves. The idea is that any home-based business takes a bit of gumption and a leap of faith. Emily and Andrew have a lot of both. Plus, they're just really cool people, so I think you'll really enjoy this episode. They dreamed about doing this, they moved to a new home with a large backyard, and then they opened shop. This has only been happening over the last year or so.

The name of the farm is "Little North Farm," and they currently have 90 chickens and 12 ducks in their backyard, and they sell the eggs, and they sell some of the produce at different locations around their home. I think you'll find it really interesting to hear how they made the leap and what they learned so far in this adventure. In fact, Emily offers up 5 lessons that she's learned so far that could be really beneficial to anyone thinking that they might like to dive into a small scale operation of their own.

Now, as always, you can get more information and all the related links in the show notes for this episode, and that will be at livinghomegrown.com/76. Also, I'm going to include a link to Emily's "Farm-to-Table Family Cookbook." Now, this is a free cookbook that she offers. It has over a dozen super easy, made from scratch recipes that are both quick and delicious. The idea is that she wants to help people dive into local seasonal eating without having to slave over the stove. You can get the eBook, and also, you can get on her mailing list on her wait list for her online chicken keeping school.

We're going to talk a little bit about that towards the end of this episode, but I love the name of her school. When she first told me the name, I said, "Okay. You have to go trademark that," which she did, but the name of the school is "Wicked Cool Chicken School," and it is for people who want to learn how to raise backyard chickens in their backyard with their family and have the benefits of all the eggs. Right now, the doors are closed to her school, but you can sign up to get on the waiting list so that you'll know when she opens it up

again. All of that will be in the show notes. All right. Without further ado, here is my interview with Emily Aarons from Little North Farm.

Hey, Emily. Thanks so much for joining me here today.

Emily: Hey, Theresa. Thanks for having me. This is like a dream come true.

Theresa: Thanks. I'm just glad you could come because I think you've got a great story, and I'm really excited to let everybody know really what it's like to do what you do which is starting a farm. You've just been doing this for a little over a year now, and I just thought, "What a perfect story." I had someone write to me and say, "Could you interview someone who's going into farming or who has started farming?" They wanted to see what it was like for that person, and so I thought, "Hey, I know somebody that I could interview." You're perfect for this, so thanks so much for coming. First of all, I guess we should have you start by ... Why don't you tell everybody about your business, Little North Farm, and what it is that you guys do?

Emily: Sure. First off, I am so excited to be here like I'm such a huge fan of yours and your show, so this is like the best. I'm Emily Aarons, and I am a certified organic chicken farmer. I have a small backyard farm of about 90 chickens, and we also have 12 ducks. We are in Georgetown, Massachusetts which is about 25, 30 minutes north of Boston and a suburb. We primarily do chicken eggs or we sell chicken eggs to the community. In the warmer months, we also grow organic vegetables as well.

Theresa: You're doing all of this pretty much in your backyard? How big of a space are we talking?

Emily: Our entire property is almost 3 acres, but the portion that we're utilizing is much smaller than that. I wouldn't even say an acre. We have built about 4 different gardens. We built a small greenhouse and the chicken enclosure. We actually have two of them, but the primary chicken enclosure is only about 35 feet by 65 feet, which I shouldn't say only because that's huge for chickens. Then, we have a secondary one that's about the same size, but we'll be expanding our efforts next year, but it's still a work in progress.

Theresa: If you were to be driving down the street in your neighborhood, your house would just look like all the other houses in the neighborhood, but when you go in the backyard is when people can see that you actually are farming?

Emily: Yeah.

Theresa: You're egg farming, but you're farming.

Emily: Yes, and that's actually like the number 1 thing that we hear from people who come over for the farm stand or just to visit and see what we have going on is they're like, "I thought I'd ... I drove by your house a couple times because I was expecting to see this like huge farm out front, and I just saw this little house." The house in and of itself is unassuming as well because when you're inside, it feels bigger as well. There are certain angles of which when you can drive by that you can see the chickens and you can see the gardens, but yeah, it's totally unassuming that we blend right in.

Theresa: What made you guys decide that you wanted to move to this area and start farming in your backyard? Where were you and what ... What were you thinking? What made you want to do this leap? What were you thinking, Emily?

Emily: What were you thinking? I wasn't thinking. That was the easiest part. It was actually ... So, my husband, Andrew, he owned a 2-family house in Melrose, Massachusetts which is just north of Boston and very much part of the city, very city-like, and we had a little small area of land, and we had a few chickens there. That was really Andrew's dream to one day have a farm, have a house that he could go outside and like literally have a farm there, and I thought, "That's pretty cool." I got into the chickens like I was sort of into them, and then I got really into them, and that's a whole another story, but it was his dream, and I was just his sidekick of like, "Sure, it sounds good. I like the sound of that."

When we were looking for homes, and Boston is like ... I think it's like the third most expensive city to live in in the United States. I'm not sure if that's 100%. You might have to fact check me, but it's really expensive out here, and we were looking for homes that had acreage, and that involved either this like 300-year-old antique homes on this huge open land or sometimes, like a relatively newer home, but the land was like thickly wooded or it was like swamp and preservation land, so we had a lot of trouble finding a house with land that was sunny, and open, and ready for us to make into a farm.

When we found this listing in Georgetown, it was in the dead of winter, and a couple of years ago, we had like basically the worst winter ever when we had multiple feet of snow on top of multiple feet of snow. We pulled up, and we were like, "Huh, I don't know," but Andrew started walking out back like he always does ... how he always did when we would look at a house, and he just kept going, and going, and going, and it was just this big open field. The trees were cut back and enough on either side, so it was literally just open and sunny. Even in the dead of winter, it was sunny and beautiful. He's like, "I don't care what the house looks like inside. This is our home." I'm like, "Okay, but let's just look at the house too."

Theresa: Yeah, so you had to take the leap with him?

Emily: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Theresa: Was that always the plan was to do chickens?

Emily: Yeah.

Theresa: What was the initial plan?

Emily: The initial plan was to do chickens, and I think we had 6 or 8 in Melrose. I think there were 6. When we sold that house, the ladies who bought it actually put in their offer letter they wanted to keep the chickens. We were starting from scratch again and we knew, "All right. Well, we want to do chickens again, but let's do it like way bigger." See, Andrew is like the visionary with the farming stuff, and I'm a little bit more reserved, so he's like, "We're going to need a hundred chickens," and I'm like, "You're crazy. Let's get 25 and see how it goes." Also, I was 30 weeks pregnant when we closed on our house, so I was like, "We have a human baby coming, so we should probably just focus on that."

Theresa: Yeah.

Emily: We got our first 25, and that was great, and then I had the baby, and then we got another 25, and we added on incrementally, but we built the enclosure knowing that we were going to get a ton of chickens, so that was me going along with what Andrew was like, "Okay. We're going to have a hundred chickens, or 200, or 300." I'm like, "Oh my gosh, that's too scary."

Theresa: Yeah. Right, so you ... We were going to talk about this too is that you dove into this, so you guys started, and you started with your initial 25 chickens, and you moved, and everything else while you were pregnant.

Emily: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Theresa: You are so cute because you were always doing Facebook Lives and you have Tristan, your son, on your back as you're walking around. That's why as I got to know you a little bit better, I was a little shocked to learn that you weren't out in the middle of farmland and that you didn't have 50 acres because when you see the pictures of you walking the property, it does look like you were out in the middle of nowhere. It is really laid out perfectly for what you guys are doing, a backyard farming business.

Emily: Yeah.

Theresa: It's just incredible that you're actually in a neighborhood, so it was the perfect piece of property.

Emily: I know. Yeah. What's funny is like we don't have fences around us, so like we can see our neighbors on either side. When we first got the chickens, we didn't expect to have roosters, and then a couple showed up.

Theresa: Sure.

Emily: We had to check with our neighbors like, "Hopefully, this is okay." We don't know. We're new to the town. We don't want to make anybody angry with us, so that. We had a lot of learning, a lot of learning experiences.

Theresa: When you guys started, what was your ultimate goal, or what is your ultimate goal with this?

Emily: Our ultimate goal is really to really provide the best quality food that we can for ourselves and our customers. We want to stay small in the backyard, and we want to utilize our land to the best of our abilities. We do want to become a CSA for people in the community so people can get stuff every season from us, but we're not looking to like start here in Georgetown then leap to the middle of nowhere and have 900 acres like we really like where we are.

Andrew's vision of being in a farm, he wanted to like move up to the middle of New Hampshire or Vermont and literally be in the middle of nowhere, and I was really too afraid to do that, and I still have no desire to do that. I like being near civilization and I like having all this community around me. We named ourselves "Little North Farm" because we want to stay little and be part of a community.

Theresa: Yeah. I know you're very into local food and providing local food, and you push that a lot, teaching people about the advantages of local food which ... My listeners are really into local food, so they're going to totally get you.

Emily: Yeah.

Theresa: You are very ... providing a very big service because you also are teaching people in the community. Really, you've been learning by doing. I love the idea that right now, you guys are ... You're very in your infancy with this. You still have 1 foot in each world. You still have other jobs as well as your backyard farm. Eventually, you do plan on both of you being full-time at the farm, correct?

Emily: Correct. Yeah.

Theresa: Yeah.

Emily: Andrew is still a full-time plumber, and I also ... I have a side business. I have a wellness practice, and being a mom, and having ... Both of us are independent contractors. We don't have like a job where like it's every day is like the same and there's no stress like it's definitely a balance. There's days in the summer where Andrew is like, "I would rather be here on the farm, so I'm not going to work today," which is great, and then there's days where like he just ... He has so much work like plumbing work that he really can't be home.

We do have to like communicate a lot and plan a lot. We each have like our own "responsibilities" like our different chores that each of us do. Depending on the day and what's coming and going, we may have to change it up a little bit, but we try to like keep that balance and keep that all going while maintaining some sort of normalcy with the family, and sitting for dinner every night, and all that.

Theresa: Yeah. I'm sure balance is the keyword, definitely trying to keep the balance.

Emily: Yeah.

Theresa: Yeah, but you're doing a really fantastic job. It's a whole balancing act with any business, but with what you guys are doing, it's a whole lifestyle transition, so that's why I thought this would be so interesting because you're right in the middle of it right now.

Emily: Yeah. We're like super young infants in all of this, and we're like just absorbing and learning so much. It's fantastic, and we've made so many amazing friends who are also farmers or who've been doing it for generations, and they've given us such great advice, and feedback, and help. Like when we had ... Like I said to you before the call like we were picking 50 pounds of heirloom tomatoes every day. We couldn't sell them fast enough like, "Okay. Well, these are going to go bad. We have to do something." Andrew was able to reach out to his farmer buddy, and he's like, "Hey, do you guys need tomatoes to sell at your farm?" They're like, "As a matter of fact, we absolutely do." Like having those connections and reaching out to other farmers has helped us tremendously as well.

Theresa: Yeah, I bet. The connections, I'm sure, are super-duper important. I know that we've talked before about what it means to be organic. I featured on our television show about what people have to go through to be organic and the importance of organic, and the people who listen to this podcast totally understand that, but I would love to have you explain to everybody what it means to be an organic chicken farmer. What exactly does organic mean when you're talking about eggs?

Emily: Basically, you are feeding the chickens certified organic food and nothing else. All of the seeds that we bought are also certified organic, and the soil on our

property has never been treated with anything, so the soil, the seeds, and their food is all certified organic. For instance, part of the certification process was having somebody to do an inspection of our property, and part of the application as well was for them to see all the things that we are planning on doing with the property, so we had a field affidavit we had to get.

Actually, because we hadn't been here for a certain amount of time, we had to get it from the previous homeowners, so it wasn't that difficult. It was just a matter of making sure that everything that was going into our property that could possibly be shared with the chickens was not contaminated in any way. Like if we have a tomato that we wanted to throw into the chicken coop, we know that it's safe to do that.

Theresa: Right, because you grew it yourself. You know it's organic.

Emily: Yup, exactly.

Theresa: That means then as a consumer, if it has that organic, certified organic label, then every input for those chickens should be organic?

Emily: Exactly. That's the other thing is like people like on our street sell eggs, and our neighbor and one of our good friends sells organic chicken eggs, but he's not certified organic like he hasn't gone through the paperwork like we have, and it's actually illegal. You cannot use the word "organic" unless you have become certified organic. You can't say like, "Oh, these eggs are organic." You feed them organically. Yes, but you actually can't say to somebody that it's an organic product unless it's certified organic and that's to protect the consumer to know that yes, every single thing that has been fed to this animal or if you're growing plants, everything that's got into the growing of this plant is 100% organic.

Theresa: Yeah. That brings up a really good point that I had told you before I would love to talk about just for a second and that is the labeling because it gets so confusing for the average consumer to understand what the different words mean because some of the words are totally meaningless that you'll see on eggs, for example, and some of the words actually could mean some things, but might mean something else. Organic is really to me the most important because it has to be certified organic to be able to say that.

Emily: Me too. Yeah.

Theresa: If it says, "Certified organic," on the eggs, then you know that they can't ... It's illegal for them to say that unless they've gone through the process that you went through.

Emily: Yes. Yup, yup.

Theresa: There are so many other terms that are on a package of eggs that there is no regulation on what that means, and it's all up for interpretation.

Emily: Yes.

Theresa: Could you talk about that for a second?

Emily: I will, and I'm not ... I'm probably not the best person to speak to every single label because I'm not aware of all of the different labels. I have seen some that I'm like, "What? What does that mean? Certified happy? What is that?"

Theresa: I haven't seen that one.

Emily: I've seen some really wacky labels, and I think they're trying to say that the chickens are raised humanely. What is humanely? What does that even mean? I think a lot of people have a different interpretation of what humane is. To me, humane and cage-free means there's literally no cages. We have predators and we have an enclosure around for our chicken so that they don't get knocked off, but they have a ton of space, and they have grass, and they can get bugs, but if they're inside of a facility, and there is metal around them, and there's 3 or 4, 5 other chickens shoulder-to-shoulder, I feel like that's not really humane.

Theresa: Correct. Right.

Emily: That's one thing that I really love to share with people and especially with kids because kids get it so fast. They see what animals really want and they can tap into if an animal is happy or not happy. I teach kids and adults about when you're paying whatever X ... however many dollars extra for your organic eggs, or your free-range eggs or cage-free, whatever the titles that they're using, you're paying for that animal to have better life, to have better living conditions, and to actually really act as the animal that they appear to be. They get that in some ways. Like we sell our chicken eggs for \$4 for half dozen. In this area, that's totally a going rate. That's totally a normal rate, but you can also go to the discount supermarket and get a dozen eggs for 79 cents.

Theresa: Right, but how were the chickens treated?

Emily: Exactly.

Theresa: Yeah.

Emily: People have been saying, "You know what? There's nothing better than one of your farm fresh eggs like you've totally made me an egg snob because

they're so better. The difference in the taste." I'm sure you hear it too from people who have had your eggs or ...

Theresa: Yes.

Emily: You talk to people all the time, and they're like, "But really." They say, "They taste so different." You're like, "Of course, they taste different. They're like the happiest animals, and they're eating, and they're behaving like they should be."

Theresa: Yeah. They're healthy, and the egg even has a ... The yolk even has a different color, and they're fresh. That's the other difference I think is that the supermarket eggs are not as fresh as what they get, what you can get at a farmers' market or from your local farmer. On the labeling, I think this ... because really the other terms are not regulated, the thing that the listeners can do because it's not ... Someone can say cage-free, and to you and I, cage-free means that they're maybe pastured, but really, someone can just put thousands of chickens inside a big room, and that is also ... They can say they're cage-free because it's not illegal for them to say that even they're not in cages, but they're still crammed in shoulder-to-shoulder in a big ...

Emily: Yeah.

Theresa: I think what's most important as a consumer is if you do go to a local farmers' market or a local farmer if you can, or you can check out whoever you're buying your eggs from, in some way, whether it's online or in-person, then you know how those chickens are being raised, and that whatever term, whether they say it's certified happy or if they say that they're pastured chickens, which pastured ... not pasteurized, but pastured means that they're out on the grass.

Emily: Right.

Theresa: There's no certification for that. There's no one going out and checking, so it's really up to the consumer to do the checking, and that's one of the reasons why we're such advocates for local because you can not only check on it yourself, but the reputation of the farmer is on the line when you're buying local, and so that's definitely though ... I know what you mean about ... It's so frustrating I'm sure for you especially as a farmer that you see 79-cent dozen eggs, but oh my gosh what those chickens are going through.

Emily: It makes me feel really sad because I know what that means.

Theresa: Yeah. Yes.

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- Emily: The other thing that you just brought up which reminded me was part of our certification is they check to see how much daylight the chickens are exposed to. For instance, like in New England, like there are certain hours of daylight we just aren't getting, and they want to know, "Are you running a light all year round? Are they being overproducing their eggs? Will they get fresh water?" They're not just saying, "What do you feed them?" They're also checking how are these animals treated. Like you said, like the USDA certification for organic is almost like ... It almost like trumps everything else because they really are looking into so many different facets.
- Theresa: Yes, exactly. How do you guys sell your eggs? Is it you can't do it year-round because of the winter because you get a harsh winter? I'm in LA, so we don't have a harsh winter, but you have shorter daylight hours which means the production stops or slows down.
- Emily: It does slow down. Yeah. We got more hens because of that. We wanted to make up for like if they're molting or in the winter time, so we have ... The numbers go down, but that's okay. Like we said, this is not our 100% livelihood, but we sell our eggs directly to customers in the community if they reach to us or if we have a farm stand, and then there's 3 different stores that we wholesale to, and they're in different areas nearby us primarily because I didn't want to have ... Like I said, we have neighbors on the street who have like a little penny jar and a little cooler. They're like, "Here are some eggs." I just didn't want to deal with people coming by the house. We had a baby. We have dogs. I didn't want to deal with the cash flow like go around that whole ... like people driving up to my house to buy eggs thing. I didn't want that.
- Theresa: Right. No, I understand, especially with a family. That can get weird.
- Emily: Yeah. Yeah.
- Theresa: Speaking of family, I have to ask you. How in the world do you juggle being a brand new mom and everything else that you guys are doing? That's got to be tricky to keep that balance.
- Emily: Yeah. Any new mom has to deal with juggling of sorts, whether they're going back to their 40-hour-a-week job or they have other kids. We all have to juggle. This is unique in that I have like a hundred ... A lot more than a hundred animals at this point, but I involve my son in everything I do, so like you saw in my Facebook Live videos, he's on my back a lot in a backpack or like when he was smaller, he was in like the front-carry backpack, and I was like on my hands and knees going through the garden with him on me, and so he's always been a part of it, and it's been really cool. This year, where he's old enough to like eat food, so I'm harvesting tomatoes, and he's like, "Uh, uh," like reaching out for a tomato, and I'm like, "Oh my gosh, this is such a mom win like my mom sees plants as food like this is amazing."

Theresa: Yeah. Yup.

Emily: Like that totally lights me up. I didn't grow up with my family gardening, and so this is like all happening for the first time with me experiencing it through my son's point of view. I wheel him up to the chicken coop in the middle of the day, and I park it there while I give them extra water and food, and I get the eggs, and then I'll let the ducks run around, and he'll chase after them. He's always part of the mix, and it's weird when he's not around to do all those things at this point.

Theresa: Yeah. That's so idyllic though. He's getting to live the farmer life even though you're not in a farmland area.

Emily: Yeah, so it's fun to be part of a community not being in the middle of nowhere and to like really be ... This is like just our lifestyle, and it's really fun.

Theresa: That brings us to the 5 things that we were talking about beforehand. You have 5 things that you have learned that you would like to pass on to anyone that is even considering this sort of thing, so why don't we go through those 5 lessons that you guys have learned?

Emily: Yes. Number 1 and first of all, if you're thinking about doing it, just do it because you're going to love it. I didn't even know I was going to love it as much as I love it, and I just ... It's everything to me. Number 1 is get ultra-clear on your end game. Like I mentioned earlier, the whole becoming organic thing was a hot topic for me and my husband. Is it going to be more expensive and more time-consuming? Is it harder to find seeds? Are we going to have trouble disease, and how are we going to treat it? Like all these questions come up.

For us, the whole end game was we want to provide the best quality food for ourselves and everyone else, and that meant becoming certified organic. That might not be for you. It might not be your end game. That's totally fine. In terms of like animals, how many do you want? What kinds? Are you raising them for meats because that's another thing that Andrew has talked about? We have our vision. Even though we're not 100% yet, we really know what the end game is, and of course ...

Theresa: Yeah, so you have your goals? You have your ultimate goals laid out before you dive in?

Emily: Yeah. Even like as we were getting started, like suddenly, when we were selling our eggs, they were ... We're like, "We'll just sell them for like a few bucks a dozen. I don't know. Whatever." Then, we really had to do like a cost analysis like, "What's our profit margin?" Like, "Oh my gosh, no wonder we're

paying so much money out of pocket because we're selling them too cheap. They're not even paying for themselves." Like really, you should sit down and do a little bit of analysis on that. It depends on what you want to do it for.

Number 2 is to know your farmer. Meaning, the farms around you in your area. Shopping there as much as you can, getting to meet them. Know them on a name ... Like one-on-one like first name basis because those farmers have been our friends, and they have been going through all of the trials and tribulations, the good and the bad, and what worked, what didn't, and they're saving us a lot of time and money because we're learning from their experience, but on that same sort of space of like having all these friends to give you advice, you have to stop listening to all the knows that you're going to get because just like in any business, you'll get people who say like, "Oh, that's impossible. You'll never be able to do that."

Some of our farmer friends advised us against becoming certified organic because, "Oh, it's too hard. It takes years. It's so expensive." None of them had become certified organic, so I started asking some friends who were certified organic. They're like, "It's not that bad," and I'm like, "You know what? I'm just going to look into it because I think that it's worth a shot."

Theresa: That's really wise. In other words, if you get a lot of noes, just investigate for yourself because everybody is different. The states that you're in or the counties that you're in can be different, so what might be hard for one person might not be hard for you. Definitely, investigate it yourself. That's really good advice.

Emily: Yeah. Especially with the organic part, it's really ... it's just filling out an application and making sure that you are fulfilling the obligation of really becoming organic. It's not that complicated. Again, you just have to like just find out for yourself. Number 3 is know what people want in your area.

Theresa: Ah, yes, which is good. That's good for all business. You want to know what your customers are going to want.

Emily: Totally. Like I mentioned, we had all these tomatoes that we needed help selling because like our little farm stand in our house wasn't cutting it and customers kept saying, "Oh, great, tomatoes. Do you have any corn?" We're like, "No." To grow the amount of corn, like we would have to literally dedicate an acre or two just to corn, and we're like, "We're not there. We're not ready for that." We're like, "But, we don't have it, but you can go down to this farm or this farm, and they have tons of corn that you can get."

Theresa: Right.

Emily: Number 4 is community support. When we were looking into moving to Georgetown and really buying this house and turn it into a farm, I was looking into what the regulations were with agriculture, and in calling the town, I was like, "Oh, we're from Melrose. In our town, it's \$50 application fee and another ..." Every year, you have to renew the license, and then you have to send a letter to your neighbors about you want to have chickens, and you have to get their approval.

I called them in, and I was like, "Yeah, so what is your regulation? What's your process for getting a license for chickens?" They're like, "Oh, yeah. There's no license. You could have them." I'm like, "By 'have them' like what does that mean?" Like if I ...

Theresa: Define that. Yeah.

Emily: Right, and she was just so laid back, and I'm like, "This is weird." It's like strict regulations.

Theresa: Yeah.

Emily: You definitely should look into the community around you. If they're super excited about agriculture, then like you have got a great spot to start a backyard farm for sure. In Melrose, even though they have these really strict licenses because they have ... because they're so close to the city and because they don't have a lot of land, so if there were problems like it could be bad, but even in that, they have a great farmers' market. Every summer, they do a local backyard farm tour, so the community can really see all the good stuff that's going on in people's backyards.

Theresa: Wow, nice.

Emily: Yeah. The community support of if they're excited about what you're doing and your mission, and are they willing to put their money where their mouth is, and support you, and come to your farm stands, and go to your events, and get educated from you, and all that? We have been so fortunate. We have the best community ever just like the people in our community are family, and we love them so much, which leads me to number 5 which is ...

Theresa: Oh, wait. Before you go to number 5, I have a question on number 4.

Emily: Okay, go.

Theresa: Yeah. In doing that and the community support, would you just recommend like if someone is thinking of either starting something in their own backyard or if they're thinking that they're looking at an area to move to, so is the best

thing to do is to like call city hall, call like ... Is it just more like doing your research?

Emily: Yeah, doing the research. You definitely should call city hall first, and I teach a backyard chicken school, so teaching people how to have backyard chickens, and that's like do not do anything until you check the regulations in your town because that would be the worst thing ever if you decided to, "Yeah, I'm going to be a backyard chicken farmer, and I'm getting all these chickens. They're being shipped to me tomorrow. Oops, my town doesn't allow chickens."

Theresa: Right. Yes.

Emily: That's a problem. That's a big, big problem.

Theresa: Do your homework. Yeah.

Emily: Yes. Do your homework for yourself, for your neighbors, for those poor animals whose lives are dependent on you [crosstalk 00:39:32].

Theresa: Yes, yes. That's a really good point because it's not just about your time and your money, but you have animals involved here, so you don't want to then suddenly like you have to find a home for a hundred chickens really fast. That would be tricky.

Emily: Yeah. This is what it's all about. It's about giving them a better quality of life.

Theresa: Exactly, exactly. Okay, so I didn't mean to get you off track, so go ahead and number 5.

Emily: It's okay.

Theresa: What's number 5?

Emily: Okay, so number 5 is being transparent. Just like we talked about with going to your town and getting the regulations, you want to go to your neighbors and let them know what you're thinking about doing. Not that they need to know your business exactly, but you want to be an open book so that like they're not going to be upset if all of a sudden, a bunch of chickens show up and they're making noise. They're your friends as well, so being transparent with your neighbors, your community.

If you do decide to have a backyard farm of any capacity, I feel like what's worked really well for us is just being an open book like our customers and our Facebook community is like our family, and there's nothing that goes on behind closed doors like everything is out and open. We do Facebook Lives.

Like you said, you could see everything, and it is really inspiring to other people who may have thought about doing it as well. Even for people who were like, “No, that’s not for me, but I love watching you do that.”

Theresa: Right. I think the transparency thing is so important also because it gives them trust in what they’re buying from you, so they know you really ... You’re walking the walk. It’s like you’re really doing what you’re setting out to do. If you had everything behind closed doors, they’d be like, “Okay. Do I need ... Should I trust this person?” This way, you’re certified organic. You’re right out in the open. They can see how the chickens live, this wonderful free-range, grass-fed, seed, organic seed lifestyle, and they can see that the eggs ... where those eggs are actually coming from.

It’s like what you and I talk about all the time which is it lets the customer be part of the food story. It brings them closer to their food, and that’s the whole idea, and so I absolutely agree that it’s the people who are completely transparent in what they’re doing that will really bring the ... draw the customers in because then, they feel like, like you said, they can ask you anything. They can see exactly what’s going on. It makes them feel confident in what they’re buying.

Emily: Yeah, and it’s funny you just ... You have such a great way of articulating things. It’s just like ... It’s wonderful. You also brought up another thing which was a couple months ago, I was giving a talk on the chicken school, and there was a woman in the audience, and she was asking questions. Everybody was asking questions, but at the end of my talk, there was a woman who came up to me with a carton of my eggs in her hand.

She said, “I really loved the talk, and I can tell how much you really love your chickens, and that’s why I’m buying these, and I’m a vegan. I don’t ever buy anything that has to do with an animal product, and this is something that I know that you love your animals. I know you treat them absolutely the best they could possibly be treated, and I want to experience part of that.” She’s like, “I was really not here to learn about the chicken school. I wanted to basically interview you, and I didn’t want to tell you that upfront.”

Theresa: That’s amazing. She was vegan and she was buying your eggs.

Emily: Yes. I was like, “I am so moved right now. That is so amazing.” She’s like and she goes, “Every now and then, I will buy eggs or maybe I will buy something, but it’s very seldom.” She’s like, “My whole life, I’ve been vegetarian, and most of my life, I’ve been vegan,” but she’s like, “A lot goes into why I would buy these, and I know that these animals are treated humanely and like ...”

Theresa: Wow, that’s really nice. Yeah, that’s a big validation for what you’re doing.

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- Emily: Yeah. I'm like, "I love that you were secretly interviewing me. That's so cool. I'm glad I passed."
- Theresa: Yeah. Yay. Emily, tell me. Has there been anything in all that you've experienced so far since you guys started this, has there been anything that just completely surprised you?
- Emily: The thing that surprised me was how many people have felt inspired by what we're doing, whether it's to buy more locally, or to actually cook their foods, or to maybe get chickens. I think to me, that's like the biggest thing that we could have such an impact on other people. This last year alone, I think it was something like 6 or 7 families had asked me about our chickens, and subsequently, from what I had given them, all the knowledge and my years of experience boiled down then, they got chickens themselves, and it's transforming their whole family dynamic, and it's like a rippling-out effect like it's just amazing.
- Theresa: That is really amazing. Since we're on that topic, I would love for you to tell everybody about ... and I absolutely love the name of your course, so tell everybody about Wicked Cool Chicken School.
- Emily: The Wicked Cool Chicken School is a self-paced online course where you can actually go through it with your entire family and learn everything about backyard chicken farming whether you want to have like 6 chickens or you want to be totally wild and go all out like we have a hundred, it teaches you all the ins and outs of raising chickens. You don't have to do it alone and spend weeks or maybe years researching, reading books, and blogs, and Pinterest, and doing all this stuff by yourself like you can actually do it with your family as well.
- We've just finished up the foundational course with my founding members, and it was amazing. That was something surprising that I didn't realize what a community was going to be formed like I knew it was going to be fun, and I had these people apply to the course, so they got in through application, and they have become real life friends. Not just people in a group who are doing the same thing, but real life friends, and they're from all over the country. We all have the same passion, and the group energy and vibe is just so positive and so fun. We're all open to learning new things and sharing funny chicken stories. It's just become like an amazing part of our lives, and I just love it so much.
- Theresa: I want everyone to know that I'm going to have you back next year after the first of the year. We're going to have you back because we're going to do a whole episode on backyard chicken keeping, so definitely, we'll have you back, and you can talk all about that, and everyone can learn more about

your Wicked Cool Chicken School because I know the doors aren't open right now because you do it like I do in my Canning Academy.

Emily: Yeah.

Theresa: You open the doors, bring in a group of students, and work with them, and the doors are closed, and then you open them up again.

Emily: Yeah.

Theresa: When you open them up again, we're going to have you back because I know everybody would really love to learn more about it, but that is amazing. That sounds like a really great group you got.

Emily: Yeah. Thank you. Some of the people in the school have chickens already, and some of them aren't ready until the spring, and some of them are like, "I just wanted to learn more about chickens," so it's like a mix. It's a mixed group, and it's just a lot of fun, so I can't wait to come back and go into it even more. I'm so, so grateful for you having me on this show, so thank you.

Theresa: Thank you. Thanks so much for coming on the show, and we'll definitely have you back, so thank you.

I hope you enjoyed that interview with Emily Aarons of Little North Farm. Now, remember, you can get links to everything that we talked about and including her "Farm-to-Table Family Cookbook," or you can sign up to get on the waiting list for her chicken school, the Wicked Cool Chicken School, and all of that will be in the show notes for this episode. Just go to livinghomegrown.com/76. Thanks so much for joining me here today. I really appreciate that you took the time out of your busy day to join me here. In the meantime, just try to live a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care.

Announcer: That's all for this episode of the Living Homegrown Podcast. Visit livinghomegrown.com to download Theresa's free canning resource guide and find more tips on how to live farm fresh without the farm. Be sure to join Theresa Loe next time on the Living Homegrown Podcast.