

The animals practicing complexity essay sample

[Food & Diet](#), [Organic Food](#)



In Michael Pollan's essay "The Animals: Practicing Complexity," Pollan explores an organic farm and garden known as Polyface, where a complete ecosystem is allowed to thrive without human tampering, the farmers only taking from the land as they see fit, without adding additional cruelty to the animals. Pollan notes that, despite the relatively damaged nature of the property these farmers work on, it is "harder to believe that farming such a damaged landscape so intensively, rather than just letting it be, could restore it to health and yield this beauty" (p. 281). In the essay, he describes how the farmers and the whole organic farming system works, showing that organic gardening is most definitely a much different method of cultivation than in industrial enterprises.

In organic gardening and farming scenarios, soil building, feeding and maintenance of livestock, and many other aspects of agriculture are performed in as natural a way as possible - compost is used as well as organic pest control, and conservation is of paramount importance to organic farmers (McConnell, 2003). Where it comes to livestock, a great variety of animals are kept on a single range, each of them performing a unique set of tasks and duties for the farm. The pigs, for example, make compost, and are allowed to follow their natural patterns, unlike industrial systems which encourage set systems focused on rote efficiency that the pigs then have to conform to (p. 288). This allows the pigs to fall into beneficial rhythms where compost and production is concerned, without artificial means of induction, without becoming depressed or being treated inhumanely.

What surprised me the most in Pollan's essay was the effectiveness by which organic farming was working for Polyface, maintaining efficiency while still

humanely handling the livestock and plant life. Says Joel in Pollan's essay, "I'm convinced an Eggmobile would be worth it even if the chickens never laid a single egg. These birds do a more effective job of sanitizing a pasture than anything human, mechanical, or chemical, and the chickens love doing it (p. 283). With that said, it surprised me that the idea of organic gardening does not necessarily mean less efficiency, or more work involved on the part of the farmers. The morale of both the farmers and the livestock seems to be fairly high. " Because of the Eggmobile, Joel doesn't have to run his cattle through a headgate to slather Ivomectrin, a systemic paraciticide, on their hides or worm them with toxic chemicals" (p. 283). The animals do all of the work, eliminating the need for harmful and inhumane practices to artificially increase efficiency - nature's own methods of regulation are seen as far more preferable than the artificial practices seen in industrial models as opposed to biological ones.

In Pollan's essay, he uses the term " holon" to describe the aspect of organic farming that sees every part as a discrete whole, while still being dependent on the rest of the body. The Eggmobile is a 'holon,' as is the Raken House, the facility where the rabbits and chickens coincide to provide organic compost and food for the hens. This concept is at the heart of organic farming; each segment of livestock or facility creates a self-sustaining system that allows the process to run by nature and not by artificial chemicals or intervention. The aforementioned pigs provide both pork and compost, the compost being used for planting, and the subsequent food used to feed the pigs. It is this cycle and many others that keeps the organic

farm running smoothly, and improves morale for both the farmers and the livestock.

One of the most prevalent things holding back organic gardening is its comparative cost effectiveness. While it is still a relatively efficient operation, there is not as much control over the livestock and the land as industrial models care for. With that said, not as much is cultivated at once, making production slower and less economically viable. What's more, industrial models wish to do the most with the amount of space they have, and the larger spaces required to allow the livestock enough room to live are not feasible to maintain. Furthermore, the main thing holding back the advent of organic gardening is the already-established lobby for existing industrial models. To make the changes needed to switch to organic gardening is also unfeasible from an economic standpoint, or so is commonly thought by many industrial farmers (Solomon, 2006).

In the end, Pollan notes that the most sincere advantage that can be attributed to Polyface is its "awkward hybrid of the economic and the spiritual" (p. 292). Essentially, the economics of the organic farming facility come from everything having its own purpose, and nothing being wasted - everything is self-sufficient, which lends to the "holon" aspect of the farm. Furthermore, there is an intangible connection between everything, with some parts supplementing others and creating a perpetually sustainable cycle that does not harm the animals, nor does it create extra work for the farmers. In essence, organic farming is shown to be an immensely rewarding and effective system of agriculture, one which is only prevented from further

application by its relative youth and the stubborn practices of the established industrial market.

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