

Missy Singer DuMars [00:00:04]:

Hello, and welcome to another episode of women in food. I'm your hostess, Missy Singer Dumars. This podcast is all about the intersection of 3 things, food, business, and the feminine. Each episode, I invite you Just sit down with me and my interview guest as we dive into this intersection to spark your food curiosity, share a favorite recipe, and give you some fun food explorations along the way. I'm inspired by these women, farmers, chefs, bakers, cooks, writers, and food makers who all bring their passion for beauty, nourishment, Community, pleasure, connection, and deep care to others through food. These are women who advocate and take action towards food awareness for themselves, their families, and their neighborhoods. Before I introduce today's guests, I have one request. If you could, go over to Itunes or whatever app you're using to listen and give us a rating and a review.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:00:56]:

It's a simple act that helps us A ton. Thank you so much. So today, I am thrilled to introduce you to Laura Robbins With a background in nonprofit fundraising, event planning, and for profit private equity, Laura is an entrepreneur at heart who turned her skills towards a passion for organically raised meat and eggs, opening Wild Robins Farm in 2020. Besides raising animals, she raises her 3 boys and has become the heart of community in her area, serving on local farm and agricultural boards as well as being vice president of the business association in her town of Sherburne, Massachusetts. She She's the 1st to tell you that she's not just growing food, but growing a community that is well fed. We'll be diving into that topic as well as chatting about some of the similarities in her and my farm stories and backgrounds, navigating the past few years through pandemic, making chicken wings and more. So, Laura, welcome to Women in Food. I'm so honored and overjoyed to have you join us today.

Laura Robbins [00:01:57]:

Awesome. Thank you so much, Missy, for having me. I'm really happy to be here.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:02:01]:

And in fact, we were just talking off Mike, I guess, off camera, off mic about how we started following each other, got to know each other. We don't even know, but What I know is as Laura started sharing more of her story on Instagram and I was following along, I realized we had, like, really similar paths in a lot of ways. And I was like, I gotta talk to this person. It's rare that I meet someone else who comes from a theater background through many other, chapters to land as a farmer.

Laura Robbins [00:02:33]:

I know. It's so funny because, like, the route that we both took, you know, we would never think To ourselves 20 years ago, oh, well, I'm definitely gonna be a commercial farmer. Like, it wasn't a route that made the most logical sense, but it does make Complete sense.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:02:49]:

Yeah. Gosh. I have no idea. I I never ever dreamed that. I never said the words I wanna be a farmer ever in my life until after I was 1, and then I'm like, I still wanna be a farmer.

Laura Robbins [00:03:01]:

Yeah.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:03:02]:

So that's kinda how it happened. So one of the similarities for both of us Is kinda growing up a bit in the upper middle class lifestyle, childhood. And tell us A little bit about how you got from that to farmer mucking around in these days at the end of winter, mud and Snow and everything else.

Laura Robbins [00:03:26]:

Yes. That is a great question. And it doesn't really make the most Sort of a logical sense, but I grew up in a town sort of right outside of Boston In a sort of neighborhood that had no big farms. I didn't even grow up in, like, a fancy, you know, horse area, if that makes sense. I grew up In a place that, you know, we had yards and people had dogs and cats and that was it. And we didn't even have an animal, Like, truly until I was in 5th grade, and I was, like, begging and pleading my mom, and we got a hypoallergenic dog.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:04:04]:

Yeah. So that's what this we we all ever had fish. We'd, like, win a fish at the carnival each year. It would die after a few months, and then the next year, we'd win another goldfish. Same thing. That was about the only pet

Laura Robbins [00:04:15]:

I had. Exactly. I wonder if, like, the lack of animals, like, sort of made me, you know, want animals more. But, you know, it was something I didn't have. And I always sort of took To, like, going to other friends' houses and being around their animals or, you know, we'd go to the zoo or, like, petting zoos. And I was always like, oh, I love this. And it wasn't until I went to this private elementary school that was a Montessori school, or actually it was a middle school, that I got any Exposure to farming at all. And it was a Montessori school that had a very small middle school class.

Laura Robbins [00:04:49]:

And as part of the week, Every Friday, we would walk down the road and work on an organic community farm. And, you know, it was actual work. Like, we were in charge with mucking out stalls and Scooping rabbit poop. And, you know, back then, we were allowed to do on farm harvests for turkey for Thanksgiving and, you know, tapping the maple trees and maybe Making the syrup and I felt for the first time ever this sense of belonging that I had never felt, and this sense of ownership of the land And an ownership of, oh, I can do this. It was a feeling that I wasn't exposed to, back in my little town, You know, away from animals. And I think I had sort of committed that somewhere deep in my bones as I sort of went on with my life, that really wonderful feeling that, you know, that bring you get when you sort of are in touch with nature, as corny as that sounds, Or when you're, like, digging in the dirt or you're doing actual work. So, like, okay, go clean out this chicken stall. It sounds like a nightmare job, but when you Complete it.

Laura Robbins [00:05:54]:

Right? You go beginning, middle to end, and you see that you've done this and you've created a great environment for these chickens and you're reaping the rewards of their eggs, That brings me a feeling of greatness and accomplishment that I sort of took with me in life and then promptly did nothing with.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:06:13]:

So one of the things that's really similar about our background is that we both have this theater background where we were probably spending all day and night in the dark in a dark room. And, you know, now we have this life where we're outdoors all the time, wildly Opposite lifestyle.

Laura Robbins [00:06:30]:

I know. It's so funny to go from, like, essentially a concrete jungle to, like, being outside for hours and hours each day. You know, the benefit of being in Manhattan though is, you know, I had to have all these jobs just to, like, pay my rent. So I was, yeah, I was working in theater, but I was in casting, and I was working in kitchens, and I was managing restaurants, you know, not all at once obviously, but over the 5 years I was there. And I developed this, like, Huge love and understanding of, like, good food. And I didn't have a huge budget all the time, but I did, you know, get to Taste really good things or meet chefs that made awesome things. And I started asking questions like, why does that taste better? What where is this From, like, how is, you know, the way that this chef is cooking this? Is it the recipe? Is it the meat? You know, and all that stuff, I was sort of filing away in my brain, You know, as I was, you know, living in Manhattan, still again doing nothing in farming. Absolutely nothing.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:07:23]:

Right. And we both had kinda circuitous roots from theater that eventually landed us in farming, but what's evident when I follow you is that your your passion and care for Quality and good food and feeding people and giving access to food comes through, which it sounds like started in those early days in New York.

Laura Robbins [00:07:44]:

I think so. I think that's a good way to say it. And, you know, having this newfound passion for farming really did come from, you know, the idea of growing my own food. Because from Manhattan, we moved to Missouri where my husband it was from so we had met in Manhattan and then moved to Saint Louis, you know, bought house, had kids, You know, still worked in the nonprofit sector and, you know, then got my MBA and transferred the nonprofit work to for profit work. But what that was Able to do for me is I had, more exposure to people who were farmers. Because in Missouri, you drive 20 minutes, and then you've got these huge farms. You know, we were right outside Saint Louis, but then you you literally, you drive 20 minutes and you're in farm country. So going to farms, Buying from farms, meeting people who were farmers became much more common in a way that we had really good friends Who were farmers, who literally ran a commercial farm, and I started hanging out there more.

Laura Robbins [00:08:48]:

They convinced me to get chickens, you know, in my little suburban town. You know, from chickens, I was able to then do meat birds. I was meeting people who, you know, grew beef and, you know, had this whole idea of, like, grass fed beef. And, you know, I bring them into my little suburban town almost as if I was doing, like, I don't know, like selling Tupperware. I would bring the food these people in to talk to my friends about, like, why this meat is better. And I began sort of the I think the passion from my middle school mixed with this new exposure to farmers and farming sort of a little bit on the side Gave me the ability that I could do more, that I could do it too, if that makes

Missy Singer DuMars [00:09:33]:

Totally makes sense. Totally make And I I love your stories. It reminds me I as I was listening to you, I was thinking about, like, what was the first experience I had of really Eating something straight from the land or pretty close to straight from the land. And, for me in the vegetable world, I can remember I lived, A different chapter after the theater chapter and a few other chapters was, massage therapist chapter. And I went to massage school on Kauai and lived with a family that was living off grid and off the land. And just the first time, they Pulled a carrot out of their garden and hosed it off and handed it to me fresh and

Laura Robbins [00:10:12]:

Oh, wow.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:10:13]:

Just that, oh my god. I've never tasted something like that. And that's when I started seeking out farmers markets. And when I moved back to the mainland, seeking out farmers markets and living in California where I could go Strawberry picking and, you know, pumpkin. I remember going pumpkin picking, at a farm and and driving all over The county, you know, finding finding these these things now. And,

Laura Robbins [00:10:37]:

yeah, there's so much joy I've I've found in Tasting something or growing something or having something that you made or you contributed to is such a cool feeling. And then also, It's a great thing when you hear from your customers. Right? That, oh my gosh. This is the best chicken I've ever had, or why does this pork Tastes so good. What did you do? Or, you know, people, like, having access to that taste and that feeling, it brings me so much Joy sort of meets everything

Missy Singer DuMars [00:11:08]:

I do. Totally. Totally. Totally. Totally. I people say that about my eggs. I'm like, I You don't know what I do. I mean, my chance have names, and I love them dearly.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:11:18]:

And I I cuddle them. And and, to what you were saying about, You know, raising your own food and then eating it, I think also besides this joy and satisfaction is A different kind of sense of devotion. Do you feel that at all?

Laura Robbins [00:11:38]:

Yeah. I think so. I mean, I think, you know, there's 2 ways that I think about this. So What I do now like, I'm a commercial farmer selling meat, direct to consumer. Right? So that's a business And the reason that I do that is, you know, I I have this incredible urge to, like, Feed community good food. Right? Mhmm. And that's almost separate from, you know, the idea of, like, Feeding myself in, like, a homestead raising my own food sort of way. You know? Yeah.

Laura Robbins [00:12:14]:

Operating a business is A business. Right? And my my the way that I make money is by selling commercially, but it also is so much More filled with, like, passion and devotion, in a way that was always there when I was doing it for myself. And I and I try really hard to carry that through. I don't want that to get lost in the commercial side of the business when you're, like, trying to look at numbers and making money and profit. Do you know what I mean?

Missy Singer DuMars [00:12:44]:

Yeah. So what are some of the ways that you keep that in the equation, shall I say?

Laura Robbins [00:12:50]:

Yeah. So The goal of my business is to be profitable. And what I do is I raise animals, you know, for meat and chickens for eggs. And I have to make sure that I'm scaling appropriately in a way that I don't sort of cut any corners in quality, if that makes sense. So in order for me to do what I'm doing at a scale that makes money, I can only be at a certain scale before things start getting sort of in a way where I can no longer touch aspects of it. So I figured out the number of chickens I need to raise to make enough money to do things in the way that I believe is the right way for me and my farm. So if I were to triple that, you know, I look at what sort of corners I would need to cut in what aspects I would then no longer be part of. And so I have to be really careful about how I scale and what I scale in order to not, to sort of keep what is important to me about raising outside, about, you know, being on pasture, about, you know, sort of putting animals in a in a place that is healthy for them and the environment.

Laura Robbins [00:14:07]:

And that is how I sort of balance it, if it makes And, you know, I just don't have the money or the land to do it at a much greater scale, if that makes sense. So I have to I have to weigh all of that, in a in a thoughtful way at the level I met in farming.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:14:23]:

Indeed. And that's something you know, it's interesting. That's something I think about a lot 2, for me, being a solo farmer is also getting real on your own capacity And capability, you know, like this time of year right now, I'm getting a lot of calls from all the area farmers markets, like, come really because I'm a solo farmer, and I, a, the scale I can grow out is not enough for my small CSA and chefs and Events on the farm and a farmer's market, but also when I've done markets, I felt like, Oh my god. I'm here all day doing this all day, and nothing is happening on the farm all day. No one's watering the gardens. No one's Harvesting. No one's taking care of the animals. No one's you know, like, all those things.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:15:13]:

Now I have to go home and either do all that at night or, You know, not do the market. And so I think there's something kind of what you're getting at is getting really real about your

Laura Robbins [00:15:27]:

Capacity, I think. Your capacity

Missy Singer DuMars [00:15:28]:

Yeah. But also as it balances with your values, with what you, you know, what you wanna put out into the world, and like all the factors and then asking yourself, like, what what business model, what style of doing things, what scale matches this Unique combination that is me and and what I have at hand and what I can do. You know, for me, working with local chefs, a, feeds my Passion for food and culinary, but to deliver one order to a chef is way easier than to pack for a market and stand at a market for hours, you know, when I'm by myself. Now when I have help and I have multiple peoples, which I do in the summer with interns, you know, I sometimes do occasional markets, but I also only do markets where I can decide at the last minute that I can do it, and it can be occasional, and I don't have to make commitments or have huge fees to vend and things like that because that matches my capability and what I can grow and and my values.

Laura Robbins [00:16:30]:

Yeah. I think there's something to be said about, like, keeping really true to yourself. And, like, for us, like, we do a lot of farmers market. I also do have staff just based on, like, the size we're at, but what is an important value to me is, like, as I'm building a brand for what it is I'm doing and growing and selling. I am not at a point where I can give up being the face at those markets, which then like, my husband can do it. He's he works Full time off farm, but he's really the only person that I feel at this point can help Me, make sure that we are not losing sort of the the story and the way that we sell. I have a really hard time, giving that side up and, you know, I could probably do even more markets if I was able to Train someone up to sell the way I sell, but I'm I'm not there yet. So what I'd rather do is hire the people to, you know, water the chickens on-site Right.

Laura Robbins [00:17:33]:

So that I can sort of be the face of the market. So it's, like, keeping keeping that balance and checking in with that is, like, it's I think it's really important and, You know, figuring out, like, what is actually attainable in this growing season and making sure that I'm not doing more. You know, it's it comes down to, like, okay, so Let's take a perfect example of I have a poultry CSA, and I have x number of people that I need to make sure that I provide chicken for. On top of that, I have, you know, x number of markets that I'm serving. How many chickens with the equipment that I have, with the time that I have, with the trailer I have, with the crates I have, You know, with the money I have, can I do? So it's like this whole long thing that you gotta sit there and, like, figure out and make sure that nothing Will ever, you know, falter. That your chickens won't suffer, your markets won't suffer, your customers won't suffer. It's like such a balancing act.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:18:28]:

Truly, I feel like that was garden planning. It's like, okay. I have to rotate the gardens appropriately, but I also know which things prefer which kind of soil, in which garden, and the quantities I need, and the seasonality, and what things I want to grow, what Do I have room to grow? What time of year is it? What's the weather gonna be this year? Like, so many sometimes that stops me. I'm like, ah, too many Deepgram. Well, I do feel like, really good farmers love puzzles. We like we like to figure out The puzzles. But going back to you know, it's interesting. I think all these skills that we build on the way or you and I have built along the way before we were farmers comes back into play.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:19:10]:

Like, I know my theater skills, my technical theater skills come into play. The lighting is part of growing plants and knowing the right kind of light and sunlight and things like that. But one of the things we talked about with what you're Building is, community, and what I've seen in your social media and whatnot is This beautiful well, you have a beautiful gift for storytelling, which probably partially comes from the theater directing background and knowing how to Tell a story and take your audience on a journey with all the creators, cocreators on stage, and you do that beautifully with your farm too, the telling of the story, and you've created community around you. And one of the things I've Come to realize, and I think prob I don't know if you've ever thought about it this way, is what I loved about theater was that it was truly a collaborative art. You know, all these different creators, the directors, designers, the actors, the, you know, every the playwright, everything comes together to create this art. It's truly a collaborative art as opposed to a solo art. And now what you're Creating with your farm is a is a community collaborative experience involving all kinds of people as well. I don't know if you ever thought about it that way.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:20:33]:

I completely

Laura Robbins [00:20:33]:

agree with you. I think that's a good a good good good way to say it because it's the opposite of being in a silo. Right. So a lot of these tasks could be lonely or, you know, you could do them alone, but there's so many different People and stakeholders along the process that you need that you need in order to do the job, just down from, like, you have to buy the chicks somewhere. Right? So I'm not hatching them, so I have to find a really good relationship and develop a relationship for my source of chicks. Right? Then, you know, where my feet where am I getting the grain? Where am I feeding them? So it's like for me, like, I needed to find a good local provider who was easy to work with, who I really liked their product. Right? So that's a whole another relationship. On top of that, it's like, okay.

Laura Robbins [00:21:16]:

Well, where am I putting these chicks? Because personally, we don't own all the pasture space we use. We had to lease the land. Right? So I had to, like, find a relationship and cultivate a relationship of, like, least past your space, which is a whole another, you know, relationship management. On top of that, I had to, like, you know, convince my husband and friends of ours to help us build these chicken tractors. Right? And so then it's, That whole, like, aspect of that relationship came into play. And on top of all of that, so you're needing to then, for us, We send to a USDA butcher. Now there are ways that you could do a state licensed butcher or even get a, sort of the ability to process on farm. For us, we don't do those.

Laura Robbins [00:21:58]:

We send to a USDA butcher. So it's like, you don't just go to the butcher that you've never met and expect to get all these appointments. Right? That's a whole another race.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:22:06]:

Especially these days, you probably do you have to plan some of your appointments before the animals are even born?

Laura Robbins [00:22:11]:

Oh, for sure. I my entire growing season is planned out through 24.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:22:16]:

Yeah. Yeah. I was just I went to a butcher yesterday who I met for the 1st time about 45 minutes from here, because rumor had it, he had a ton of extra tallow, and I use it to make soaps. And so I got, like, a £100 of tallow, which was A lot of towel. My freezer is very full right now. But, the I was talking to him for a little bit about the nature of the business and and Things like that. He's like, oh, yeah. People are booking 2024, 2025.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:22:45]:

The animals aren't even born yet, but based on their butchering appointment, they'll plan The birthing plan, the, you know, lambing plan, the calving plan, whatever it is based on that.

Laura Robbins [00:22:56]:

Yeah. I mean and it's you have to, like, back up So, like, what day do you want the food or the meat in someone's hand? Right? And then 1 and then you have to back up from that. And that's That takes a lot of relationship, you know, building because you also rely on these people to also be able to squeeze you in or make a change if there's something that happens because stuff always happens. Right. Stuff always happens. You know, you grow you grow out a chicken that you think will be ready for the butcher at 48 days, and you're like, oh, no. It really needs to

be 52, And, you know, this is for Meatbirds. And then you need that flexibility and that relationship and that goodwill in order to do that, you know, and that is also part of community.

Laura Robbins [00:23:34]:

And then okay. So you do all of that and say you're really good at all that. You you need to then sell that. So who are you selling it to? You're selling it to people who need to trust you, Need to be able to get the the meat in their hands in a way that's not putting them out, and they need to feel like it's a good ROI. Right? So I have to balance all of that. And on top of that, you don't want them to just buy one time. You want them to be your customer for years to come. So that takes a whole lot of, like, Finding out what's important to that customer, figuring out how to get them, you know, the product in the best possible way, and then On top of that, making sure they feel good about all of that experience.

Laura Robbins [00:24:14]:

Right? Because the worst thing is, you know, you build this relationship with a customer and they stop coming You know what I mean? And then all

Missy Singer DuMars [00:24:20]:

of you

Laura Robbins [00:24:21]:

know, all of that legwork you did, is for nothing. And so I do think that I think about it as, like, I'm directing a play, right, with all these different stakeholders that need to be bought into the process. And on top of that, I feel like I need to have transparency to also, you know, make people feel really, really good along the way. Not that I'm showing people my bank account, But, like, you know, if someone wants to say, oh, where did you buy these chicks? Like, where did you get your feed? You know, what's the, you know, butcher process like? I want everyone feel like they can ask me those questions and I will fully answer them. That's really, really important to me. And then on top of all of that, I really believe that my food or what I grow shouldn't just be accessible to people who could afford to pay what I need to charge. So I part of my business is also making sure that I can get food to people who don't necessarily have the budget. And, you know, I had to build that into my entire plan whether that's, you know, I just got accepted to accept SNAP, like food stamp benefits.

Laura Robbins [00:25:26]:

I also have a portion of everything I bring to markets It's free for anyone's that asks. I have a part of my store. There's always a shelf for free, no questions asked, because I don't think that, you know, farm Raised food, which essentially all food is, raised on a farm, should be only

accessible by people who could, you know, afford to pay, Now what farmers are charging who sell direct to consumer?

Missy Singer DuMars [00:25:50]:

Yeah. It's a tough balance. I love that you've figured that out because that's something I think about a lot too. It's like, I know I need to charge a lot for the level of quality and care that I'm put in and the expense. You know, like, my my feed is, like, the most expensive feed, and it's so interesting. Like like, egg prices is such an interesting thing because my egg prices Have been that high long before everyone was freaking out about egg prices, you know, and hasn't changed because that's what it I have to charge to At least break even, if not, make a little money. And, everyone's like, oh my god. Eggs are suddenly \$5.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:26:27]:

I'm like, my eggs have been \$7 dozen, and that hasn't changed in, like, 4 And I work really hard to keep my feed costs within that, so I don't have to change it up and down all the time, but I still sell out. I've sold out of eggs. It's interesting because early on, I had someone, with some amount of authority, Come to me when I was first starting the egg business, and I said what I was gonna what I was charging, and they were like, there's no way you're gonna sell eggs for that price. I can't keep them on the shelf. Shelf at that price, and actually I've gone up from that price. I you know, I've only raised my prices once. But, yeah, it's such a balance, and it bothers me that That question of, like, how do I also create accessibility for people who can't pay that price is a question that I'm always sitting with. So, I know for me, one example is that there's someone who's doing urban food access in Buffalo near me, and she's gotten grants to subsidize.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:27:26]:

So I still get paid what I need to be paid for my eggs, but she's actually underselling them to her customers because she's subsidizing it with a grant.

Laura Robbins [00:27:34]:

Oh, that's great.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:27:34]:

Which was a great way to do that. And I was like, you know, she's my number one place I call when I have Extra dozens. And in the winter, she's been calling me all winter. Like, my people keep asking for your amazing eggs. I'm like, I don't have eggs in the winter. I don't really have enough eggs It's here for you. But as soon as I have more eggs in the spring, I will be calling you. Don't worry.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:27:55]:

She's like, I know. I have to educate my people about how chickens lay eggs, and they don't lay as many in the winter. Look. I'll help you educate if you need it. So

Laura Robbins [00:28:03]:

Yeah. That that is like so that the grand idea is such a good it's such a good one And needs to be a way to figure out how to do that more, from the farming, you know, in all over. So all farms are able to do that.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:28:17]:

Yeah. And I love what you're doing about having kind of a shelf or a stash, for lack of a better word, of stuff that's for free. And, I mean, I give Friends and family and neighbors and people who I come across, I gift a lot of, you know, product here and there. Yes. Come you know, anyone who comes to the farm and, You know, I give them a tour of the garden and they pick some things. I'm like, just take it. Enjoy it. Yeah.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:28:41]:

You know? Things like that. But I'd love to have more of a official Way that I consistently do it.

Laura Robbins [00:28:47]:

Yeah. You would be surprised how many people actually would donate to that effort because When we do Thanksgiving turkeys Mhmm. Talk about how I'm gonna give x number of pounds away or donate, and I the organizations I'm donating the whole birds to, and I've had customers literally buy 2 turkeys. And they'll say, one's for your donation.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:29:06]:

One's for donation. Yeah.

Laura Robbins [00:29:07]:

So it is subsidized in that way, not in an official capacity. But I will also like, when I did the I don't do this market anymore, but I did a market in East Boston. It was through, like, the food access, like, program. And so the city of Boston gave all their low income, families and participants in that area these Coupons. Right? And so they could spend, like it was like monopoly money. Right? But it was value. So I charged what I needed to charge, And these people paid in coupons, and then they got the meat. And so then the city of Boston reimburses

Missy Singer DuMars [00:29:41]:

the farmer's Coupons. Yeah. So that was really cool. A small local version of a snap or something Yeah. Ish. Yeah. And I you know, One of the things I wanted we just dove into it, but one of the things I wanted to have our share with our listeners is the ways in which You build community through food, and that's exactly what we're talking about here. And the other thing I wanted to point out is everything you've been talking about.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:30:08]:

You know, this is called Women in Food. I mean, talking about not just food and passion for food, but business and the feminine. And I really strongly feel like the style of doing business, what you're talking about, about really taking the time to foster relationships over the long term and know All the stakeholders personally and who they are and choosing them out and, not compromising on your values and also creating Ways to provide access for community. Like, all that is a very, to my mind, a very feminine Style, informed style of doing business. But I like to point that out. I don't know if you have a different perspective on how How you do business and the feminine, but that's what I hear in what you've shared.

Laura Robbins [00:30:59]:

Yeah. I think, you know, I think you're right. I don't disagree in any way. I do think, obviously, there are men or people who identify, you know, as as men who may Great. Similarly, but

Missy Singer DuMars [00:31:12]:

Oh, for sure.

Laura Robbins [00:31:13]:

About some of my counterparts, other farmers who are men and we operate very differently. And I tend to, for me personally, lead with a little bit more emotion and, have the you know, this is gonna come across potentially wrong, but I I think I'm emotional first, relationship first, and then money second, Which may also not be a good thing sometimes because I do think I probably left some money on the table or not negotiated things in the best possible way because I'm worried about a relationship, which is also potentially feminine, or something that women can tend to get into. What I've challenged myself to do to compensate for that in 2023 is making sure that I am approaching things in a in a more straightforward matter of fact way while maintaining a relationship, because I have I Tend to worry sometimes that I'm getting walked on or I'm not getting the most I can possibly get, Because I have approached things in a more feminine way. So I'm trying to be cognizant of that, if that makes sense.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:32:28]:

Yeah. And, I mean, I think this is a this is so So great that you bring this up because this is a question I think a lot of, especially, women business owners sit with is like, How do I be true to myself? How do I follow my values? And anyone who really wants a values and relationship based business, How do I stay true to those things and be profitable at the same time? And you seem to be forging and finding a path of both and, and it's a wonderful example for our listeners that both and is absolutely possible. It's not either or. And I wanna point out that when I talk about the feminine, it's not necessarily saying it's a woman owned business or a male owned business. Any of us can and most of us have both feminine and masculine aspects to our ways of being. And what we're exploring is The feminine aspect and how it can support us in business in a different way, because we have a world that is a very masculine built business world these days. Actually, a friend of mine and I were just talking about the tech industry as we look at tech banks collapsing and things like that. And, something I've paid attention to for a long time is how a lot of the tech industry is kind of like college age White boy created, and it's a certain culture.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:33:48]:

And, we're seeing that slowly, hopefully, shift some. But, you You know, when we talk about feminine and masculine in business, it's not necessarily what your body or genetics or Things like that are, but it's a style away and energetic of doing business. And what I love is, like, you're really focused on, I'm a commercial for profit business, and that's important. And honoring relationships and my values, my relationship with myself, is also important and finding a path of all of it.

Laura Robbins [00:34:21]:

Yes. And setting an example, like, I have so I have my husband and I have 3 sons. So I am in predominantly male house, and I watch how they interact with my customers and, are at my farmer's markets helping me sell. Like, my husband and my older son will help me a lot, and they do things so differently. And, like, here's the perfect example. Like, Me and my older son were at a market this past weekend, and someone was, like, hemming and hawing over pricing over 2 of the items. And I was sitting there ready to be, like, just take them. I don't care.

Laura Robbins [00:34:56]:

You know what I mean? Just pay for 1 and sample the other. And my son was, like, I think that if you I both of these things, you'll feel great about it. And I looked at him like, oh my god. I was just about to give them the second one for free because I wanted them to try it. And he was so assured he's 14. He was so assured that, you know, money was not the issue for them and that, you know, I immediately went to well, it's about the price. Sure that they don't wanna do it about the price. It turned out it wasn't about the money.

Laura Robbins [00:35:29]:

It was about they couldn't figure out the flavor. But I, like, I genuinely jumped to it was about money. Like, I almost, like, lost, you know, it's \$15, you know, because I just wanted them to have it. And, like, so it's that type of stuff that I'm trying to be really aware of because Such a feminine approach, and I'm looking at him like, oh, he was just straightforward and matter of fact and, you know, didn't even consider price. You know what I mean? If that makes sense.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:35:54]:

So interesting. I mean, to me, that's like the deep inner work of unwinding our assumptions and our inner stories About other people, I mean, I see that in all kinds of ways all the time, in relationship, in business, like, what assumptions am I making about the other person? And, you know, I, for our listeners and maybe you, I business coach a lot. And that there is an assumption that I can't Forward it is the first thought that our customers all have, or I want a deal. You know? And that's not always true. Like you said, it was just like, I'm not sure of the taste. I don't know if I wanna buy something and then be stuck with it if I don't like it or, you know, whatever the thing is. I just need to be reassured that I'm gonna like this thing, You know? Or to give it a try. And and it is interesting to see our own assumptions that we make, and that's that's one of the things I try and, Pay attention to as much as I can.

Laura Robbins [00:36:52]:

Along the lines of this is I've also tried this year to get Out of my own way in terms of will they like me? And that was something that I Yeah. I struggle I'm at struggle every day. Right? I struggle with it. Do people like me enough to follow me on social media? Do people like me enough to buy my meat? You know? Do people like me when I and I have a boundary and I say I can't do this? Are they still gonna like me? And I have I have had to now that I'm you know, said yes to a lot of boards and organizations and I'm running my business. I've had to start drawing some really firm boundaries and being okay saying no And being okay living with the thought of, well, will they still like me and include me? And it's so tough as a business owner to wrestle with that. The the not the needing to not approval, but, like, maybe it is approval in all of us. I see this in

Missy Singer DuMars [00:37:48]:

so many of my business clients 2, it's like these subtle ways we self sabotage because we wanna be likable or liked. And I think women do it more than men in general, but It's pretty much a human condition thing. And it's interesting because I was just having a conversation with a mentor of mine and Some colleagues this was something I was thinking about kind of from a a different yet similar angle. I feel like we're in an age, at least what I see in the more business and Formative world and and the and the business world in general of in the entrepreneur world of, like, in strong individuation and things like that. One of the things I've been thinking about is how, more and more businesses are like, This is who I am, and this is what I do. Take it or leave it. F you. If you don't like it, go find someone else.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:38:40]:

And I was thinking, like, Especially as a farmer or or anyone who cares about community or is in service to community to a certain degree, we can't be like that in the same way. Like, My business coaching business, I could be like that. This is my style of business. This is how I do it. This is how I show up with you. And if you don't like it, then you're not a match for me. But, You know, when I think about my customers or the collaborators or, like you said, the feed guy, the butcher, the the distributors, all these people, it's like, it can't quite be like that Because we're all part of a web together, not to say I have to let go of who I am. However, there's a different question of how to navigate who all of us are to work with one another.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:39:23]:

You know?

Laura Robbins [00:39:23]:

Right.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:39:24]:

And it goes back to that collaborative art question. Right? Back to the theater.

Laura Robbins [00:39:28]:

Yeah. Yeah. If the ultimate goal is to sell your product and make money, you also have to, like, ride that line of making sure that, you know, you are in service To the customer and the and the end user. And how do you do that without compromising yourself?

Missy Singer DuMars [00:39:41]:

Yourself. Exactly. Exactly. And to me, some of that is, understanding who your unique customer is, because I think people, compromise themselves for their customers when they want everyone to be their customer. So there is a balance too. It's like, I have always known that the people who want soy free, pasture raised eggs that are gonna be \$7 a dozen even 5 years ago our particular customer and understanding who that is and understand where they are. You know? My neighbors don't necessarily my local neighbors don't necessarily buy my eggs. First Well, I'm in a farm community, and everybody has their own eggs.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:40:16]:

But even the people who don't have eggs, there's plenty of people who have eggs for \$2 at the end of their driveway, And that's not ever gonna be me. My customers are in the city where there's customers who are looking for those dietary things and whatnot. And so knowing your

customer And knowing which customers match yourself and your values is part of it, as well as, like, What you're what you and I were talking about before are building a way to create access for others also.

Laura Robbins [00:40:46]:

It it's so, so, so true because, You know, it's so easy to start spreading yourself too thin trying to please too many people. But I think the minute you get super laser focused on who your actual customer is, The the actual it's actually easier.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:41:00]:

It is. It is. And this is, like, such a base business concept that we're talking about here For our listeners of niche and going deep rather than wide. Right? Going deep, knowing knowing who your ideal customer or client where people are, versus trying to serve everybody. Yeah. So in a moment, I wanna talk more about What you're actually raising on the farm and what you love to cook and eat. But before we do that, wanna take a quick break and share a bit more about how Women in Food is supported. As my listeners know, I care a lot about food and land, and this includes the of food and land based businesses.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:41:41]:

I believe that sustainability goes beyond the land to how we grow ourselves and our business at the same time. And I've noticed that many folks in the food and land space have fantastic concepts and strong passion and deep care, but still struggle to market and run their business in ways that can make the impact they envision while also providing for themselves at the same time. I've always said that most farmers I know are great farmers, but dread or avoid the sales and marketing and business aspects. I'm the other way around. Farming is my learning curve, but I know business really well. Besides hosting this podcast and running my farm, I'm a business coach having coached hundreds of entrepreneurs from across the world in a range of industries to mindfully grow their business. So if you're listening to this podcast as a food or land based entrepreneur who's looking to what the next phase of growth for your business is, This kind of coaching could be for you. If you'd like support in this way, you can go to my website to have a 90 minute session with me.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:42:41]:

The website is women in food .netforward/workwithmissy. And I'll put the link in the show notes as well. I really want every listener to thrive and Particularly land and food businesses to thrive because, honestly, I believe that the success of a land and for food based business is the is our future completely. So once again, if that is your kind of business and you're looking for Support around growth or change or anything with your business. The link is women in food.netforward/workwithmissy, and I would love to support that kind of business to grow and serve more people just like Laura and I have been talking about today. So, Laura, Tell us exactly

I mean, we kind of loosely refer to eggs and meat and things like that, but what are what are you farming?

Laura Robbins [00:43:34]:

Good question. Yes. So we raise, laying hens, specifically red sex linked Chickens for eggs. We raise Cornish cross, meat birds for meat. We do a broad breasted white Turkey for the Thanksgiving season. We start in the summer and then harvest, right around Thanksgiving. And then we do a heritage breed pork. And, we sort of got into Lam, I'm saying, in big air quotes here.

Laura Robbins [00:44:06]:

We have, like, a Passion project of mine, which is like these sheep who I love dearly, they're not really part of the business because they're just not at a scale where it really does much for us financially, they bring me joy. So we have a small flock of Icelandic Sheep and some thin sheep here on the farm. And, yes, we do harvest some of their babies, but we do a lot of selling of those babies to other farms for breeders.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:44:36]:

Sometimes you just have to have I mean, I I when I choose animals or new things to add to the farm, it's like it has to have a purpose, which is why there's certain animals I Don't have, but once in a while, like, my the my first 2 geese, and I have 4 geese now, they were purely for joy, and that is a purpose, you know Yeah. To a degree. And, you know, a couple of geese is low impact as far as investment, so it's not Not big of a deal to feed 2 more poultry mouths, but, or 4 more poultry mouths, but I love the geese. And then they popped out eggs. I'm like, oh my god. These are the best eggs Ever. And so there is value, and they are amazing guardians for the waterfowl flocks as well. So, you know, there's There's things that that came about, but sometimes it is good to have a a joy or passion project.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:45:23]:

I do that with vegetables. Usually, I have 1 or 2 seasons where I'll grow a vegetable mostly for myself for a passion project and or an experiment, and then, because I like to do, like, a lot of weird vegetables. And then If it does really well and I give it to a couple chef friends and they're like, wow, this is so cool, then I'll grow enough of it to to sell it or give it to my CSA or something. So I totally get that passion

Laura Robbins [00:45:45]:

for you. A lot of trial trial and error too. Like, when we first started the farm, we had a her or, like, yeah, a herd of goats. And I was like, oh, this is great. This is great. And then I was like, we're milking them and like they're clearing land. And then I was like, well, I don't personally

eat goat meat. And though that's a hugely popular meat, especially outside of America, and there's a bunch of my customers around here who were asking if they could get goat meat, I didn't find that it was gonna be the right fit for us, because I don't personally eat it and I wasn't just gonna have this, you know, herd of goats, You know, out here for no purpose, and so we ended up finding them a great home down the road and they're living their days.

Laura Robbins [00:46:26]:

And it was the same thing for us with ducks. Turned out that ducks were not a good fit for us for multiple reasons. They are.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:46:32]:

I love them, and they're so messy.

Laura Robbins [00:46:35]:

They're so messy,

Missy Singer DuMars [00:46:36]:

and, like, I So messy and disgusting, and I love them.

Laura Robbins [00:46:40]:

The 1st winter with ducks, I was like, I cannot Do this. Goodbye. We're like, you know, it's gonna be cutthroat. And I just, you know so the only thing that really is the are are the sheep, and they bring me so much joy, and I love them.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:46:55]:

I know. I love my sheep too. The funny thing with ducks, like, I kinda fell into ducks. My stepsister called me in New Jersey. It's a long story, but she knew of 4 farm domestic ducks that got rescued by a wild bird rescue, and they needed to find a you know, they can't release them in the wild. And she's like, my stepsister has a farm. And so I drove all the way to New Jersey to pick up these 4 ducks. And let me tell you and that was my 1st duck.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:47:22]:

Let me tell you, a 6 hour drive with 4 ducks in the trunk of the car is the stingiest, Loudest drive I've ever had. Yeah. I feel like it's the equivalent of having babies pooping, or, silly in the car or throwing up or whatever. It was It was so smelly, and there were, like, feathers flying even though they were in crates and, you know, the whole time. 6 hour drive. But that was my 1st

ducks, and I kinda fell in love with it. And then what was and then the eggs, I discovered duck eggs. I'm like, wow.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:47:50]:

Those are amazing. And this goes what I'm gonna say next goes to what we've been talking about about finding the balance because I started selling the duck eggs, And I got a few more ducks because they needed friends, and then duck eggs started to get in demand, and I couldn't you know, I didn't have enough ducks to generate as many as were wanted. So then the next season, I got more ducks. And then since I added the more ducks, the duck eggs haven't been in demand until this year. And it's like Like, that's the thing about farm cycles. I was actually gonna say this earlier because you come from a more you have some more corporate business y background as do I. And one of the things I know I've learned on the farm is that the planning cycle you know, like a lot of tech industries and other Modern businesses, they their planning cycles like, the longest might be a month for a launch of something. And then if it fails, it's like you iterate and you do it again the next month or a couple some some iterations are only a week or 2.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:48:48]:

And, like, on a farm, it's like you got one try for the season, and you gotta wait Whole year to try again, but in the course of the year, like, the customer's desires completely have changed or the cultural interest in duck eggs has a 100% Rotate it, and now by the time I actually have more duck eggs a year and a half later, you know, nobody wants them anymore. It's like,

Laura Robbins [00:49:07]:

Yeah. That's a really interesting point, and I think about this all the time. So, like, for example, like, lay laying hens, you know that there's always gonna be a market for eggs. Right? And, like where I am, I could sell them you know, I sell them with my eyes closed without even trying. They're almost sort of like, you know, a loss leader. Right? Like, they're priced I still make money, but, like, Those are, without a doubt, always going. The next less risky thing on the farm is actually a meat Right. Because, you know, within 60 days, something goes wrong, the next 60 days, you get another one.

Laura Robbins [00:49:39]:

Right? So it's like, yeah, there's risk, but, You know, you also know that everyone loves chicken, so you're gonna always sell chicken. Mhmm. You know, pork on the other end, we're we don't farrow here. We buy, I, you know, feeder pigs from a breeder. And, you know, it we grow them out once we get them weaned about 6 months. So, You know, every 6 months, I'll have, like, a new batch or, you know, whatnot. So it's only like a real 6 month sort of investment. The thing that scares me that has been the hardest thing is the turkey because they're incredibly difficult to raise.

Laura Robbins [00:50:14]:

And the 1st time we did it, we got a whole bunch of, like, day olds. And, you know, turkeys follow each other into corners and die. You know, they're they just got

Missy Singer DuMars [00:50:23]:

babies are, like, the most delicate. That's why I haven't I mean, I've wanted to just raise turkey for myself. Like, I would love to have my Thanksgiving turkey be from my own farm. But I am so intimidated because I have a lot of chickens, and there's a lot of, like, disease issues between chickens and turkeys and stuff like that that I and they like you said, they're delicate. They they're dumb. They kill themselves by accident a lot. Yeah. And so I haven't raised a turkey yet for that reason.

Laura Robbins [00:50:48]:

Well, it's 20 weeks. Right? So if something goes wrong 15 weeks in, you can't just get another one in time for Thanksgiving. So it's so terrifying. So what we did to sort of mitigate some of the risk is, you know, we worked with, a local company and we ended up getting four week

Missy Singer DuMars [00:51:07]:

olds.

Laura Robbins [00:51:07]:

So that out. So, of course, they're more expensive, but, not that much that it sort of does mitigate the risk.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:51:16]:

Well, it probably balances out. They're more expensive per bird, but that's also 4 weeks of feed that you weren't feeding.

Laura Robbins [00:51:22]:

Exactly. So, yeah, you pay a little bit more, you're still making money in the end if you do it right. So in so we mitigated the first part of the risk by getting the 4 week old. So you get them and they're they're feathered out as you can put them right on pasture. So you're skipping that whole brooder step, which is unbelievable. Right. So then, you know, it's still risky though because, again, turkeys can be dumb, love them dearly, but, you know, it it it that is the

Missy Singer DuMars [00:51:46]:

most smartest. Yeah.

Laura Robbins [00:51:47]:

Yeah. It's the most risky thing we do. And, you know, that has the longest grow out. You can't if something goes wrong and you've presold them, You know, you can't go get another one. So there's a balancing act of like, okay, I have x number of turkeys I'm raising for Thanksgiving. How many do I sell Knowing that some will die, you know, how do you, you know, still make enough money so that you're feeding everyone, your costs are covered, but you don't oversell because Something happens then, you know, you you again, you can't quickly replace it like 60 days later like a meat bird. So it's it's terrifying. And then I think about, Like, I'm raising the centerpiece of somebody's dinner.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:52:26]:

Holiday dinner. I know. Big family dinner that they work all year. Know. Yeah. No pressure. I know. No pressure at all.

Laura Robbins [00:52:35]:

I think sometimes, like, if anything were to go, that would be turkey. I love doing it. I love donating them. I love seeing people's face and getting the pictures, but it it's terrifying. And that's why you'll see Turkey only farms a lot of time.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:52:49]:

Yeah. And this is great. I love this, like, our listeners are kinda getting insider look into what it Takes for all these things, and this is why I don't do meat birds myself. I I decided to raise meat birds 1 year, mostly for myself. I was like, if I'm gonna eat meat, I wanna be part of the entire process at least once myself. And so I raised some mee birds, but I'm very committed to heritage breeds, which means that instead of what was it? 60?

Laura Robbins [00:53:19]:

20, 12, 60 days. Yeah. Yeah. 20 the turkey. And so the Cornish cross, you can harvest anywhere between, like, 48 60 days.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:53:28]:

Right. So that's a really that's like a 2 month. Yeah. 8 to 10 weeks is usually your kind of modern chicken. Yep. But heritage free chickens, We didn't butcher until 28 weeks. So very expensive if I was gonna sell them, and they were still on the small side. Right.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:53:46]:

Not only is it heritage breeds that are slower growing, but I'm on pasture, and I use soy free feed, which is also slower growing meat. They were delicious and amazing, but what I also realized with heritage breed chickens is, like, the average consumer Doesn't have the culinary know how to know how to cook it because a pasture raised heritage breed meat chicken, has almost no breast meat, very little breast meat. It's like a 2 ounce breast, and it's all dark meat, and so you have to kinda know how to cook it Well and so then, you know, just for listeners to hear the thought process we saw behind these decision making, so I'm like, alright. So if I'm gonna raise heritage meat birds, I'm I'm only gonna be able to do 1 batch per season. They're gonna be expensive, and most likely, I need to sell them to restaurants and chefs who know how to really feature The delicious qualities of them, because they are super delicious if you know how to cook them well and correctly. And then it's like, okay, if I'm gonna Wholesale to a restaurant, meat, then they need to be processed USDA processor. I can't do on farm processing. I can do on farm processing for They're at consumer sales.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:54:51]:

So then it's like, okay. Where do I find a USDA chicken processor locally? That is not an easy thing to find these days. And I was like, alright. Forget it. We're not gonna do that. I may butcher a chicken here or there for myself, you know, if I get an extra rooster by accident or whatever, but not gonna Not gonna get into me birds as a business path, but that like, that's the thinking and the amount of work that goes into any of these foods. And, know, when you go to the grocery store, you don't it's easy to forget that.

Laura Robbins [00:55:20]:

Yeah. And I feel like I've been drinking, like, from a fire hose because, yeah, I do have a business background. I have MBA, I have work in sort of business settings in terms of, like, marketing or whatever Under my belt, what I did didn't have when I started was years years and generations and generations and communities of people in agriculture. And so I have that has been a big learning curve to sort of stick to my belief, finding the people and the resources. You know, I talk about Community. It's also community to help me, you know, figure out what I'm doing because, you know, starting a farm from scratch as a woman in her forties in a Suburb of Boston is not common. There's nobody else doing that like me. There's not one

Missy Singer DuMars [00:56:07]:

That's very accurate.

Laura Robbins [00:56:09]:

Like, how do you find someone who wants to be a mentor, who has the capacity to sort of, like, help teach you, you know? And thank goodness, like, I'm really good at asking questions and

just Being humble and being like, I don't know what I'm doing, you know, and people tend to help me. But, You know, if I was also trying to learn the business, oh my goodness, I couldn't do all of that at one time. So

Missy Singer DuMars [00:56:31]:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I I mean, I hang out in kitchens because, like, I haven't I still and and ask Chefs a lot of questions because I still haven't gotten my head around like the quantities a restaurant of of a vegetable a restaurant would use in a week. Right? Or 2 weeks. You know? And from the beginning, I was like, I don't know what quantities I'm gonna have. So if you're gonna buy my vegetables, it's gonna be for like a weekly special. Don't plan on Week in, week out, all season long of lettuce because that's not I don't have the skills or the know how to grow that kind of quantity or those kinds of successions.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:57:01]:

Even 6 years in, I don't feel confident doing that. It's like my stuff is specialty. And once again, this goes back to our conversation of know yourself and your capacity and know and then know what customer matches that.

Laura Robbins [00:57:14]:

Absolutely. Yes. And then factoring all of that in and still being able to make some money. You know?

Missy Singer DuMars [00:57:22]:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Well so speaking of chickens, you have a Chicken recipe. And I love this short discussion we have about we just had about how you choose what To grow or what animals to raise. It's like there's joy, and there's what's profitable, and there's what we'll sell and what people want. All these things go into this, and chicken almost always will sell well.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:57:47]:

And you're gonna share it's so funny. When you sent me this recipe, I'm like, how perfect? Because live in Buffalo, but you're gonna share with us a wings recipe. And I'm curious, why did you choose wings? Why are we talking about wings?

Laura Robbins [00:57:59]:

Yes. So because we raise chicken, you know, I eat chicken all the time. I love chicken. And having Easy recipes as a mom of 3 growing boys is also really important to me. You know, I don't have Hours to spend in the kitchen. I I genuinely don't. As much as I would like to provide these amazing, you know, multilayer meals for my family, I can't. And so I had met a friend at a

farmer's market a while back, who we were talking about, like, what recipes are, you know, the easiest that they use.

Laura Robbins [00:58:36]:

And, we sort of went back and forth and figured out that, The the easiest way to get wings crispy, was to sort of go through these steps, which I'll go through which, you know, there's a 100 ways to do it. I'm not a chef. I'm not a cook, but this is what worked for me and yields something that my kids eat in 5 seconds. So basically what you do is you take these chicken wings and you put them with baking powder, not baking soda, but baking powder in a bag and shake it all around. That's it. That's all I do. And then I preheat the oven and I put the wings with that baking powder mixture On a rack over a cookie sheet. And I don't do any salt or pepper or anything, not one thing besides the baking powder.

Laura Robbins [00:59:23]:

And so the sheet acts as a pan. So the cookie sheet is under the rack. And the rack that you're putting your wings on acts as a way to catch the grease. Basically, what you're doing is you're rendering sort of the the fat out of the chicken as you're cooking it, getting it really crispy.

Missy Singer DuMars [00:59:43]:

So you put the oven

Laura Robbins [00:59:44]:

on to 425 or sorry. You bake it first at 250 degrees for 45 minutes, then you crank that oven up To, you know, 425, you can flip the wings. I found that if you flip them a couple times, they'll they'll crisp up even more evenly. And then after The 45 minutes at 2:50 and the 45 minutes at 4:25, you are ready to take them out, And that's when you put your sauce on. Whatever your sauce may be, whatever your passion may be. And, you know, for us and our family, we like Three different kinds. You know, we do, like, a buffalo, and we'll do, like, a blue cheese and or we'll do a, Barbecue and a honey mustard. So that's

Missy Singer DuMars [01:00:25]:

a honey mustard. Yeah.

Laura Robbins [01:00:27]:

And so it just for us, that has helped Sort of not burn them too much in the oven, I found. I'm sure chefs are probably sitting here like, well, that's not how I do it, but it's worked And I love it.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:00:41]:

Baking powder is, so the reason why baking pat there's a few things baking powder does in terms of science that I happen to know. One is it draws moisture to the surface so it evaporates. That way, you know, what makes your skin not be crunchy is the moisture stays under the skin or in the skin. So it does that. And also because there is some, acidity in baking powder specifically, it, It starts the process of breaking down the proteins before it's in the oven, and so then you get more Browning. So that that's kind of what baking powder does, and it's a very common Sheperley technique to do is to include baking powder or mix it in, to whatever coating or to do a layer of baking powder and then your batter. There's another Way. So, one of the things I know is if you unpack your wings and rinse them off if you have time and you remember ahead of time To unpack your wings, rinse them off, dry them really well, and leave them open air in the fridge because the fridge will dry out draw out moisture as well.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:01:46]:

And that's kind of the concept in general, whether you use baking powder or you air dry or you just pat them really, really well is that the drier the skin is, the more it's gonna crisp in the oven. Right.

Laura Robbins [01:01:58]:

That makes sense.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:01:59]:

Yeah. So that's kind of what I know of the of the science. It kinda just draws the moisture. You know, it's funny. I mean, first of all, I live in Buffalo. Wings are a thing here, so I make a lot of wings. I never made wings or really ate them before I lived here. And I don't use, like first of all, I don't deep fry things, and I don't because of the oils, and I don't use a lot of Premade sauces and seasonings, I do everything from scratch.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:02:27]:

So I had a housemate, and she was the same way. And she came home one day from somewhere with her family in the area and was like, Can we make a home from scratch buffalo wings? I'm like, I'll figure it out. And so that's when I got first started into making Wings and the technique in the oven is very, very similar to what you share. And for our listeners, Laura's, recipe will be In the show notes, a link to it, and on on our website so you can download it, in the oven. And, yeah, putting it up on the rack Above the pan helps air the hot air circulate all the way around, which also helps moisture evaporate. Obviously, if you, have it On the surface of the pan, then the part touching the pan doesn't have a wafer or moisture to evaporate so it doesn't get as crispy. And if you have an oven That has a convection cycle, especially since I just learned about ways that heat energy transfers, and convection is one of those ways. And I learned more about In teaching kids about greenhouses, how convection actually works, if you

have a convection oven, that will make it even crispier, which a convection oven is essentially the same as an air fryer.

Laura Robbins [01:03:33]:

Alright. Yep.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:03:34]:

So doing convection, you'll get a more even and crispier because it's using air. So it's also moving more air, so it's also drying it out. I often do a dry rub on the wings, and I do a homemade, like, barbecue dry rub. And I'll include that recipe. It's from someone else's website, in the show notes. And then 1 and then I have a homemade version of buffalo ish sauce that I that I make and I and I toss in, at the end. So we do wet wings, same style. But I like doing the dry rub because if I don't want messy wet wings with That's they're saucy.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:04:09]:

There's still, like, a lot of flavor from the dry rub, which I just, have a recipe for, like, a barbecue style dry rub with all kinds of good stuff in it.

Laura Robbins [01:04:20]:

Yum.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:04:20]:

Yeah. Super fun. So we'll share Laura's technique and recipe, and I'll also put links to the recipes I use for wings. And can you tell can you give us, like, a little I feel like there's there's gotta be under I mean, being a meat farmer yourself, There's gotta be things we should know about wings. Like, when I look at the the I don't know. There's times where wings are really expensive and then times where wings are really, really cheap and, sometimes they're accessible, sometimes they're not. It's it's a I don't understand what it is about wings, but maybe you can tell us a little more.

Laura Robbins [01:04:55]:

I can tell you from, like, my butcher standpoint, there's no difference in the cost that it would take to have them butchered and packaged. You know, there's labor. Right? So, like, there's 1 is for, like, The whole bird being processed, and there's always another additional cost for having them be, like, cut up and or packaged. And I typically get them packaged, you know, in in 6 wings, in 1 package. You know, if there's a shortage of Chicken, then there would be a shortage of wings, but I, there's nothing that I know specifically that would impact The availability unless there's a problem in the distribution system with chicken in general.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:05:38]:

Well, I feel like historically, wings were kind of considered a waist cut.

Laura Robbins [01:05:43]:

Yeah. Yeah. I do think the more sort of common they become like, for me, when I sell things, you know, to be completely honest, what doesn't sell for me very well is drumsticks, believe it or not. It's like my wings fly, my breast flies, the thighs fly, but, like, I'm sitting here scratching my head being like, why aren't my drumsticks selling? So, you know, like, you're talking earlier about, like, what do customers want. I don't know. If I you can crack that code for me, like, that would be great. Because who knew that?

Missy Singer DuMars [01:06:13]:

Know with drumsticks recently, I ended up with some drumsticks somehow or maybe it was, like, whatever farmer I was buying from, that's all they had left or something. I'm like, heck. I'll get drumsticks. I'm not a big drumstick fan myself, but I'll get drumsticks. And I did them the same technique as the wings, just little longer because it's meatier meat, and it came out so good because you get the crispy outside and the nice juicy inside. And so I feel like part of it's knowing what to do with drumsticks or how to prepare them, is part of it. Now also, I've learned, and this is good for our listeners, like one time I got wings from a farm, and it was like the whole wing, which the wings that we think of with, like, buffalo wings is not actually the whole wing. Right?

Laura Robbins [01:06:56]:

Correct. Yeah. There's the wing tip on the end. So a lot of times your processor will cut that off, and, you know, you can use it for stock or whatnot because of the bone in it. But, it sort of depends on how the processor, decides to, you know, do your cuts. And so for us, we they from our processor, we'll do the entire wing including the tip. So, that's how they come.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:07:19]:

That's how they come. And then, you know, like, when people think about buffalo things that they get out at a restaurant, even the wing without the tip is then split into the drum and the flat. So there's a lot of extra work that goes into that, but you can actually do that. If you get a whole drumstick, it's actually quite if you have a sharp knife or a good kitchen shears. It's pretty easy to cut that up yourself. And I just saw a video someone was posting about how much more expensive it is to buy de-boned, boneless, thighs and how easy it is. And, like, while she was tuck talking, she cut an entire bone out of a thigh. It was super straightforward.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:07:55]:

And I was like

Laura Robbins [01:07:56]:

offer that as a choice to our customers because it is that much more expensive for me. We would have to charge an exorbitant amount extra because of the labor

Missy Singer DuMars [01:08:04]:

At the boneless yeah. Exactly. And that's why it was like, here's a lesson so you don't have to pay a fortune for boneless thighs to cut the bone out yourself. And, I've appreciated over the years being on a farm and having more chef friends, learning how to break down Poultry both raw before I cook it as well as how to curve a poultry really well. Yeah. Break it down, you know, it's like, oh, And and in general, for our listeners, I'd say find the joint. You know, the joint there's a gap in the joint, and that's the place to cut it. So if you're ever unsure, try and cut out a joint And cut the 2 bones from each other.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:08:43]:

And that's that's a good rule of thumb if you're not sure where to where to do a cut. Yeah.

Laura Robbins [01:08:48]:

I think what you're hitting on is the other sort of unspoken or spoken aspect of all of this is the educational component. So Educating people of, like, where to get your meat is one thing. Right? And then you put that aside and you're like, okay. Once you're in front of this meat or these options, Like, there's so much that people don't know. I mean, I I kid you not when I tell you that people didn't understand you didn't need a rooster to have an egg From a hen. Do you know what I mean? So, like, just simple education I've been realizing has been

Missy Singer DuMars [01:09:18]:

Oh, so much. I mean, I can't tell. I still run it. I mean, I'm in a farm country, and people Still think that brown eggs indicate that it's farmed fresh. And I

Laura Robbins [01:09:27]:

want to know

Missy Singer DuMars [01:09:28]:

that's The beauty of the chicken has nothing to do with where it comes from. You can get brown eggs from the store also.

Laura Robbins [01:09:36]:

I started writing down The questions I was asked at farmers markets just because I realized that there was these common threads, and so then I started doing

Missy Singer DuMars [01:09:45]:

Doing videos. Yeah.

Laura Robbins [01:09:47]:

In my about it. And I realized that a lot of time people get embarrassed, but then I have to tell them, like, I didn't know this stuff 5 years ago either. You You don't have to know it all. And, like, I try to break down that barrier because a lot of times people don't I've had people feel comfortable enough to say, I would buy a whole chicken, but I don't know how to cook it. I've I've never done it. I don't wanna, like, you know, make myself sick or, you know, I don't my mom never taught me. And, again, a lot of this is, like, Creating a safe space for people to try things or feel confident to, you know, ask that farmer Because they love sharing. People love sharing what they know.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:10:26]:

Yeah. Exactly. I do so much education like that. And then in my CSA, Folks get at least 3 recipes every week in our email because Yeah. I have learned so many I've learned so many egg recipes because, of as an egg farmer, I always have eggs, and I get tired of, like, over easy or scrambled. And so I started looking for new ways to make eggs, and I'm like, wow, that's Cool method, and, oh, that's an interesting technique. And, you know, oh, and so, you know, I have at least enough different egg Supposed to send a different one every week to my CSA all season, which is a lot of egg recipes. And then we have a mushroom option, so I've learned a lot of mushroom Recipes and, and then, of course, my vegetables.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:11:08]:

And I always try and give people recipes for the most unusual or least common vegetable in the pack, and, like, how to prepare it or how to care for it, how I grow it, whatever, so they really get to know things. But that is part of it. And and I get same thing with vegetables. I get people like, oh, I've been afraid of a CSA because I don't want, like, every week to have kohlrabi. I don't even know what that is, but it's always around pictures or People talk about it in CSAs, and I don't know what to do with it. And I'm like, well, first of all, you're not gonna get kohlrabi every week. It's not in season all summer long necessarily, and, I'm gonna tell you how to use it and give you a great recipe for it. Like, oh Yeah.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:11:45]:

Okay. Cool. So I have 2 last questions for you. The first one I'm gonna do them in the reverse order. I usually do it, because you started to allude to it, and that is If there's one last thing you'd like to leave our less listeners with around particularly around, you know, Building community through food and around food, a last piece of wisdom or thoughts or experience, what What would you like to say that you haven't said so far?

Laura Robbins [01:12:17]:

I think that, you know, if you can Find a farmer's market and start going. Don't don't feel like you have to buy something every time, but start figuring out what's out there, what is in your community and find out what people are doing. You know, buying food direct from a farm, doesn't necessarily have To be something that you that that is all you do. Like, for example, I'll go to Costco. I'm not only buying from farms. There's a great way to To do both things, and if you can find a farmer's market in your community, I think that that is a great way to start. Just doing some exploration about what's out there and finding out if there's options for you to buy directly from a farm. And I guarantee you'll learn something, you'll meet people, and, You know, you'll expand your network.

Laura Robbins [01:13:08]:

That is

Missy Singer DuMars [01:13:08]:

And like what we're talking about, part of knowing your farmer is, it's not just The food you get, but it's the education and the tips, and here's a great recipe. And you know what you can do with this piece that usually you throw out? Like, you could do this with it, or here's a new thing I just grew. Give it a try. Like, that's part of knowing your farmer is also, You know, expanding your comfort level in the kitchen, your curiosity in the kitchen, your your courage in the kitchen, those kinds of things with your food.

Laura Robbins [01:13:43]:

Yes. And I also feel like people are like, oh, well, I I bought meat from another farm too. And I'm like, great. Buy from all farmers. Don't just buy from me. You know, if you can support a farm that's supporting all that we do, so I'm excited for that.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:13:56]:

Cool. And then my very last question, This is Women in Food, and I always like to ask if there's a woman that has been an influence or is currently an to you. Who would that be?

Laura Robbins [01:14:12]:

That's a really good question. So I think it would be Everyone who I've worked for on, you know, in a restaurant or in food has been a man, which is hysterical. But there was a 6th grade teacher of mine in this Montessori school, and she was my teacher, but she also lived on the farm we worked at. And I remember looking at her feeling like, oh my gosh. She has the best of both worlds. She's, you know, around kids and working in education, but she's also getting to see these animals all day every day. And, I always thought about her sort of daring to live and what I thought back in my middle school suburban Eyes was a unconventional way of living, and she was an inspiration to me. And I kinda feel like I need to look her up and see if I can find her again To be honest, look, I'm I'm doing it too.

Laura Robbins [01:15:11]:

And that, daring yourself to do something that's sort of out of the norm or or or the The way that you were, quote, raised, can be a little tough. And, I think that if you can surround yourself with people who inspire you and and live in a way that you aspire to, it is amazing. And, I the other person is an the really good friend of mine in Missouri who, you know, had this big corporate job, and she left it and is now a full time, you know, farmer and traveler, and people who dare to do something that's outside the norm And and be okay, sort of taking those risks are inspirations to me.

Missy Singer DuMars [01:15:57]:

Well, that is a beautiful note to complete on. Thank you so much. I love completing on a note of of daring. And thank you for everything, Laura, sharing your stories, your recipe, your passion, your history with us today. To all of our listeners, I hope you enjoyed this episode of Women in Food and got a bit of inspiration for your next meal. A last request, if you could go to Itunes or whatever app you're using to listen and give us a rating and review, it's a simple act that helps us a ton. Once again, thank you for accompanying me on this Delicious adventure. Join me around the table for our next episode, and get ready to eat.