

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Lee Hennessy

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that [SINGING] makes me curious. Oh so curious, oh so curious... [SINGING STOPS] Anyway, I'm done doing that now. On today's episode, I'm joined by the one, the only Lee Hennessy, where I ask him: What's it like to be a farmer... who happens to be trans? Welcome to Getting Curious. This is Jonathan Van Ness and have we got a special episode for you. We are going to talk about something that I am obsessed with: farming! We have to welcome our guest to the show. The one, the only, the icon, also friend of the show, Lee Hennessey, who is the owner and operator of Moxie Ridge, a small farm and creamery in rural upstate New York, who, by the way, has the most incredible cheese you've ever even thought about having. I've had it myself so we could add cheesemaker to the list. Lee, how are you?

LEE HENNESSY [00:01:05] I'm awesome. I'm so excited to be here. I've never been interviewed by a two-time New York Times bestseller before.

JVN [00:01:11] Ummmm, are you, like, trying to make me blush first thing in the morning? I'm obsessed. Basically today I wanted to talk about you, farming. I feel like coming from inside the gender diverse community myself, it's giving me, like, you know, the word "transform." Then there's "trans farm" and then I was, like, "Honey, you're a trans-far-mer," which is so cool because it's a lot, I would imagine, having a farm anyway. But then you have, like, this gorgeous added intersectionality of being a gorgeous trans person who is also a farmer. You have, like, the most incredible story. I got to meet you in 2021, a long, long time ago. And you are just one of my very favorite people, and I'm so excited that you're here. How are you? What's going on?

LEE HENNESSY [00:02:09] I'm doing good. We're taping this in the end of May and so, like, spring is pretty intense. If you were to, like, walk around, it's nice because, you know, I'm, like, surrounded by lilacs and irises and stuff, but I'm also, like, eyeballs deep in baby goats and there's been a lot of birthing and stuff. So this is the time of year when I'm, like, I look back and I'm like, "How do I do that? Those are long days," or "That was so intense." But, like, there's something about, you know, when the days start getting longer and, like, we get into the real work where it's, like, I get really energized. So it's kind of like a combination right now of me, like, running on fumes and me just being so excited to get up and rolling.

JVN [00:02:52] Ah, that sounds familiar to my life. So basically just to give people, like, a scene: Moxie Ridge is this gorgeous farm, like, north of Manhattan because it's in upstate New York. It's, like, very idyllic. It's giving you, like, mountains and, like, gorgeousness. Like, it's very outdoors. It's really pretty. I got the pleasure of going there myself, honey. How many acres is that? It's, like, so many acres.

LEE HENNESSY [00:03:19] It is 46 acres, which in farming is, like, a pretty small amount.

JVN [00:03:24] Really?

LEE HENNESSY [00:03:25] Yeah, it's wild. I was so happy to have access to this, but yeah, especially for livestock and for grazing animals, you want to be able to move them around. It's healthier for them. If you can say, "Okay, graze here," and then we give that area a rest for the land and everything else and then you can come back to it. So the more land, you know, the easier it is to, to do that. But yeah. 46 acres.

JVN [00:03:51] Wow! Okay. So, and then, springtime is when all the goats have their babies?

LEE HENNESSY [00:03:57] Yes.

JVN [00:03:58] So did you have any triplets?

LEE HENNESSY [00:04:00] We did have triplets.

JVN [00:04:01] Oh, my God! Really? Isn't it kind of rare with goats?

LEE HENNESSY [00:04:05] We have a couple girls that usually have triplets. So Little Sister is one of our previous queens, and, like, she's still in the herd. She just, like, kind of was unseated, and, like, she always has triplets. She had triplets again this year. A couple of the others that usually have triplets, like, didn't. So it was her and one other goat named Abrams that had triplets this year.

JVN [00:04:30] Has there ever been quadruplets?

LEE HENNESSY [00:04:32] I have not had quadruplets from any of my goats. But there are different breeds of goats, like, the smaller breeds. So whether they're pygmies or dwarfs, like, they have what are called, like, multiples. So they'll tend to have, you know, triplets can have quadruplets more often, whereas the standard, standard breeds just mean, like, kind of full size, tend to twin. And so we had mostly twins this year. We had about 40 births and we have about 80, 80 babies.

JVN [00:05:04] Do you, like, sell the babies to other goat farms or something? Or are you just going to keep getting bigger and bigger? This is kind of off-course, I didn't mean to go on this track, but now I got obsessed with goats, so I just have to ask. I can't help it.

LEE HENNESSY [00:05:15] Some of them we'll keep so we can retire some of the milkers out of our herd. So when we decide who to keep, we think about, you know, the mom. We think about the sire, the dad, and, like, who's going to work really well here in that herd. We do sell to individuals and to farms as well. I tend to be really careful about selling to individuals,

especially when they're babies, because, like, everybody loves a baby goat; they're amazing, they're adorable, they're very sweet. But people also think that, like, goats can eat anything. And so they're, like, "Oh, this is going to be easy." And it's like: goats can eat anything, but, like, so can a toddler.

JVN [00:05:58] Because they would, like, fuck up our garden, right? Like, I should not get a goat because they will like all my pumpkins and my eggplants, and they're like my whole yard, and I'll be devastated. Right?

LEE HENNESSY [00:06:07] If you were to get a goat and you let them in the garden, they would find it delicious. I mean, sure, they would thank you afterwards. But yeah, you would be heartbroken.

JVN [00:06:176] Because I do find goats incredibly cute. Like, they're next level, the cutest babies.

LEE HENNESSY [00:06:24] Yes, agree. Hard agree.

JVN [00:06:26] But we just shouldn't be, like, rogue-adopting them if you don't live on a farm is the thing. I need to remind myself. Because I'm also, like, wanting to adopt a pig. I'm battling my inner seven-year-old. I'm really going so off track. I need to come back.

LEE HENNESSY [00:06:40] Animals are great, let's go.

JVN [00:06:42] But from a professional farmer, you can tell me that I should probably not adopt and like, go with what my husband says in not adopting a pig or a goat in our backyard. Right? Or should I?

LEE HENNESSY [00:06:52] I think as long as you are committed to, like, the care that the animal needs, then, you know, then it's up to you and your husband. And your city's zoning!

JVN [00:07:03] Well he says, we have to, like, live in a farm first. And I tend to agree because I don't know anything about, I don't know anything about it.

LEE HENNESSY [00:07:09] I guess you're just going to have to get a farm, Jonathan!

JVN [00:07:12] Someday! Okay, wait. So right now you're, you're elbow deep in goats. We do sell some sometimes, but then sometimes they just stay on the farm and then you just have, like, a bigger, more gorgeous, stronger herd. Is that what happens?

LEE HENNESSY [00:07:24] Yep. And we also raise meat goats as well. So some goats, like, the the goats that we raise for meat are, we decide, "Okay, this is a meat goat," kind of from birth. So, like, our milkers that work for us for years and years and years, they retire, they don't

become meat goats. Some, some of the babies that we have this year will go into our meat herd. And, you know, we'll talk more about this in terms of, like, how I approach farming and how, you know, quote unquote "outsiders" approach farming. But, you know, all of those goats have names. We do frolics. Everybody gets treated the same. So from, from the babies that are born this year, we'll have some that will eventually become meat and will feed other people in our community. Some will be adopted out to farms and some will go into our herd to, to be milking.

JVN [00:08:15] Did I just hear some of your cute goats in the background?

LEE HENNESSY [00:08:19] Yeah.

JVN [00:08:20] I love them. This is such a cool episode. We're obsessed! So because right now we're in May, so we're just giving you, like, the farm is farming, it's giving, like, mini blooming flowers, mini, like, goats, like, we got triplets, we got twins. We also got some, like, single births up in there, we're just getting all the goats. And then not to not talk about goats but do chickens just, like, do they have babies all year round except for winter or do they have, like, a chick season too?

LEE HENNESSY [00:08:46] So for up here in the northeast, we're, like, where you described us, like, straight up for New York City is entirely accurate. We're basically between the Hudson River and Vermont. So the chickens will basically lay eggs, which could potentially become chicks, pretty seasonally. That's based on the amount of sunlight that they get. So, for example, you know, if you had chickens, I don't want to put any ideas in your head to cause marital strife but like if you had chickens—

JVN [00:09:18] We do have three chickens! Yeah.

LEE HENNESSY [00:09:19] Ok, perfect! So if you want eggs all year round, you would put lights in their coop in the wintertime and they would lay their eggs in the wintertime for you. I am just, like, "Let your bodies do your bodies. It's fine. We're old fashioned here." So they kind of take a break in the wintertime. But then in order to have chicks, not only does the rooster have to have fertilized the egg, which, like, you've been here, we have a million roosters, but they also need to sit on it and incubate it. And so that behavior is also driven seasonally a lot of the time. So usually you see chicks in the spring and summertime.

JVN [00:10:01] We have girl chickens, so they lay eggs a lot. If we had a rooster, do chickens, like, do it and then the chicken sperm swims through, like, in Look Who's Talking now and, like, the little sperm, like, goes into the huge egg and then it is in the egg and then she pushes the egg out and then she has to sit on it? How does that work? How are we fertilizing chicken eggs?

LEE HENNESSY [00:10:22] From what I understand, and I'd recommend talking to an expert about it, because I'm just the farmer that does it. The opening is a cloaca and when they have intercourse it's called the "cloacal kiss" where, like, the two cloacas will, like, connect to each other. And then what needs to go from the rooster to the hen will, like, "Now it's got a superhighway." I like the "Look Who's Talking." Yeah, I'm gonna go with that.

JVN [00:10:42] We've got to do a "Look Who's Talking" for chicks, like, on a different episode with, like, the chicken reproduction. Because it just occurred to me, like, last week I was like, "Mark, can we please have chicken babies?" because our little Dorothea had a heatstroke and dropped dead having an egg, like, a month ago.

LEE HENNESSY [00:10:56] Oh, babe!

JVN [00:10:57] Because there was, like, a 100 degree day, and she just, like, she just got too hot, and Mark was devastated. So I was like, "Should we have two chickens to replace her?" And Mark was like, "I'm not ready." And I was like, "Okay, fine."

LEE HENNESSY [00:11:07] I read the recent memoir, I know the pattern, like, I get it.

JVN [00:11:12] Yeah, it's the, it's my Charlotte's Web rule. It's a thing. [CROSSTALK] So, yes, right now it's May and, you know, it's kind of like it was still kind of chilly in New York, I think a month ago. Like you were still having, like, spring. But this is going to air in June. So like what's the vibe is folks are listening to this in June at Moxie Ridge. Is it, like, hotter? Are we not having the goat babies now? Like, little goat babies milking with mom is that what it is?

LEE HENNESSY [00:11:35] So in June, the births are going to be pretty much done. I love flowers. We don't do flowers as a part of the farm. We just do flowers because I love them. It's kind of like your pumpkins. And so like, June is getting into like peony season and stuff. So like, it calms down a little bit. The babies that we have because we are a dairy and this kind of goes into, you know, the food system and stuff. Because we're a dairy, we utilize the milk from the moms in order to make cheese. And that means that if the babies were on the moms drinking all of their milk, then we wouldn't have cheese, like, that's dairy. And so sometimes you'll keep the babies on the moms until they need to be weaned, and then you'll remove them and then the moms will go and start milking. A lot of times people do that with sheep. For us, we remove the baby is like really early on so that it's less stressful for the babies and for the moms, which means that the babies all grow up, like, with each other in these cohorts and they bond pretty hardcore, like, with their cohorts. And so our job is to feed them. They get milk, if they need, like, special supplements and stuff like that, we can handle it.

JVN [00:12:50] Is it like goat formula?

LEE HENNESSY [00:12:52] Yeah, we can do— we do goat formula sometimes. It's called milk replacer.

JVN [00:12:55] Is there a goat formula shortage?

LEE HENNESSY [00:12:57] There is not a goat formula shortage.

JVN [00:12:59] Okay, good. Just making sure.

LEE HENNESSY [00:13:02] So a lot of times with livestock farming or pretty much the whole thing about livestock farming is, like, caring for your animals and making sure that they're healthy and that means you need to understand what can make them not healthy. So one of the things that is, like, the biggest danger, to especially baby goats, is called coccidiosis, which is a bacterial issue. It'll cause scours, which is, like, how you say diarrhea in, like, farm animals. And it can kill them really, really quickly. And so any time that the babies are stressed, their immune system goes down and this can kind of take over. So we would do a replacer that can protect against coccidiosis in that, in that situation. And yeah that was kind of tough to find. The whole supply chain thing is really wild for operations like this, for sure.

JVN [00:13:57] So I can't imagine, like, the amount of, like, intense paragraphs that you would have to say verbally as, like, a farmer, like, just things that other people would never have to say. Like, "I couldn't find the replacer for the cox-diddle-iosis or whatever for the, for my baby goats," you know, it's just like, yeah, it's like, that's such a paragraph to wrap your head around. So. Since summer's giving, like, warmer, flowers, everyone's kind of in their cohorts at that point.

LEE HENNESSY [00:14:25] Yes, everybody's in their cohorts. They're, like, kind of coming off of their replacer and they're like into, like, full baby goat— baby goats love parkour. Like, parkour is, like, a whole thing. We already have, like, some parkour masters in, in our baby barns right now. That alleviates some of, like, the intensity for us because that's also a really, like, vulnerable time for them. But the other big part about June, that I almost forgot about, is, like, our cheesemaking. Markets are at our highest. We're at the Union Square Market in New York City on Saturdays. Normally we just go down with, like, coolers and coolers and coolers and coolers and coolers full of Bulgarian feta, which is, like, kind of what we're known for.

JVN [00:15:09] Can I tell you?

LEE HENNESSY [00:15:10] Yes!

JVN [00:15:11] I literally my whole life thought that I didn't like feta. Like, I literally thought I hated feta because I thought that it was blue cheese without the blue stuff. So I thought it was a taste I didn't like. But meanwhile, I'm obsessed with goat cheese. So then my husband was like, "How the fuck don't you like feta?" And I was like, "Because it's blue." And he was, like, "Girl, that's not blue cheese." And I was like, "Are you sure?" And so it turns out your feta smacked my fucking nussy, is what I call my non-binary... This is, like, disgusting. But I do, you

know, my nussy, my non-binary, you know, that's my nussy. My nussy was, like, "What the fuck!" Your feta! I actually just got chills on my quad. So if you guys ever find yourself in, like, Union Square on a Saturday run, don't walk. But it really is just— it's that level. So so what's? Bulg—? What kind of feta now, what did you just say?

LEE HENNESSY [00:16:00] Oh, so we make Bulgarian feta, but I have like a little bit of info as to like why our feta could have been a gateway feta for you. Your husbands are from the US. So like he was like, "Oh, this makes no sense Jonathan." So that makes a lot of sense to me because when we make feta here, the food industry here is very based on cows. Cows can produce a lot of milk. You can have, you know, farms with a lot of infrastructure that have a lot of cows. It's easy to get to market. We've got all of our laws and things around cow milk. So they make feta from cow milk because that's what's available. There's feta in so many different countries, there's feta in Bulgaria and Turkey and, you know, Greece, obviously.

JVN [00:16:40] So is feta a technique? It's not a type of cheese from a certain type of animal?

LEE HENNESSY [00:16:45] It is kind of like a combination of those two. It's basically, it's a type of cheese, just like cheddar is a type of cheese, right? If you think about those countries that are around the Mediterranean making feta, they usually are relying on, historically, sheep and goats. So feta is usually made from sheep and goat milk, which is why it makes sense that you like it. But when we make feta in this country, we make it with cow milk. But in order to make it taste a little more like, you know, authentic feta sheep and goat milk, we add an enzyme called lipase. And that's what causes that kind of, like, sharp, back of your mouth, like tanginess like to cow feta that a lot of people don't like. But with you have like a sheep feta, but it doesn't have to be modified. You know, if you have a goat feta, sheep feta, whatever, you have a tanginess kind of in the front of your mouth. And that's kind of what it's meant to emulate.

JVN [00:17:37] Now ever since your feta, now I fuck with—because I can't, I'm, I'm in Austin so, like, I don't, I can't get your feta—but I'm I am, like, a feta girl now, so.

LEE HENNESSY [00:17:46] I love it.

JVN [00:17:47] Thank you.

LEE HENNESSY [00:17:48] You're welcome.

JVN [00:17:49] I really appreciate. So okay, so, so that's summer. And then summer is, like, June, July, August, then like and you don't grow pumpkins, right?

LEE HENNESSY [00:17:48] We don't. We're going to try some winter squash because goat cheese and squash blossoms are like a thing. And also, I just love, like you love pumpkins, I love like weird winter squashes. So we're doing some of this year.

JVN [00:18:1] You could... I'm not advocating for pumpkins and I wasn't meaning to, but you could just throw a few in there. You got a little bit of room, just, like, try one or two, maybe just like one or two, just somewhere on that farm. That's a big ass farm. Maybe just one or two.

LEE HENNESSY [00:18:25] I will do that.

JVN [00:18:26] They're really cute! Anyway, I didn't mean to go there. I always get a little sadikins with our garden. I like to tell Mark that, like, I'm, like, I was like, "Babe, are you a farmer?" Like, when we're working in our garden and then I'm sure, like, the farmers are like, "shut up." But I just feel so farmer-y, like, when I'm out there on our, like five raised vegetable beds, I just feel so in nature. But I get a little sad, honey, because it's, like, August, September, things start to get a little bit like dying and a little bit like, "Oh, I can see the neighbors again," because the leaves are falling off the trees. So like, what's your vibe for fall, on the farm?

LEE HENNESSY [00:18:59] I never was a fall guy ever. My birthday's in the spring, so it's always about spring. Like I love the heat, was all about the summer. But now, like I love fall because the days start getting shorter and so on this farm because we've got, you know, sheep, goats, couple of enormous horses, chickens, you know, we've got all of this stuff, plus pigs. So the days are long and the animals are just active until the day is over. So it's, like, my day doesn't end until 9:00, right? But we got the days getting shorter in the fall and so I get a little bit more of a rest. Things are like starting to calm down a little bit. The babies are kind of, like, full goats. The ones that are going off to new homes are going off to new homes. Like, we're starting to get, like, the, the last of the grasses for grazing, starting to figure out our hay situation for over the winter because that's what the animals are going to eat over the winter is hay. And so that type of thing, like, it's usually a little bit relaxing.

And then, there's, like, the farm side of things which is caring for everything, but then every farmer also has to be a business person, right? And so on the cheese side, it's, like, we're getting ready for, like, the fall holidays, October, November, December. We're getting our hard cheeses ready to go. People want to buy a lot of different types of cheeses: our, like, fancy bloomy rind cheeses and stuff. So our production kind of changes and then we get ready to not have any more goat milk because our girls are seasonal. And so, you know, when they're done milking, they stop and they get a little vacay. So we have to kind of prepare for that. But that's also where "keeping food" comes in, which is, like, what I'm so obsessed about, is kind of, like, our, our older historical, ancestral ways of producing food and then keeping it over the winter. So cheese is a great way to keep food, you know, feta, you take your last goat milk from the season and you'd make it all. You'd put it into a brine and you'd keep it in the brine and you'd have cheese all winter. And the same thing, you know, with any kind of fermentation and cultures all across the world. So that's kind of when we start to get into, that kind of, like, autumn maker, handmade kind of vibe.

JVN [00:21:17] So just so that you guys can, like, imagine. So, like, when you come on this farm, there's, like, this gorgeous house and, like, that's where you live. And then, like, over to the right, there's, like this, like, chicken area with this, like, chicken coop. And then over to the, like, the left, there's these, like, you know, like, different barns. And then, like, kind of behind that, there's, like, these hills. So if you can imagine, like, having to do fucking, like, hill sprints. Like, if you were like, "Oh, I got to go get my dog or whatever," you know, like it's just, it's a lot of work cause like, if you're going to deal with the goats, just so you guys can have an image of this, it's, like, you're walking, like, you know, and there are 46 acres. So even in farm world, if that's smaller, it's still like a long-ass way to, like, walk all over the place all the time and you're like uphill, downhill, chasing goats, getting them to the barn and going. It's just, like, a lot, it's like, a lot of, like, manual, like labor. And then I think when I was there, I think it's. So you have the most goats, then chickens, then sheep, then pigs?

LEE HENNESSY [00:22:11] Yup. Pigs are seasonal, so we'll purchase in pigs right after they have been weaned. So right after they're, like, they don't need to drink milk anymore. And then we raise them in—I don't know if you got to go down and see it—but in, like, a few acres of wooded area that have hickory trees and oak trees and that's where they hang out, is in the woods and they'll root for the nuts at the end of the year. So we do, like, a very special acorn-finished pork and hickory-finished pork, which is, like, again my jam, super traditional, very ancestral. They do it in, you know, the Iberian Peninsula and also, like, in Parma still. And, like, we feed them whey every day, that's, like, their treat. As we're making all this cheese from the creamery of course you get curds and whey from cheese making. And so we take that whey, which is the liquid, and we'll bring it down and we'll feed it to the pigs. And it's a lovely form of protein for them, just like we have our whey protein shakes.

JVN [00:23:13] And so, but then that means that, like, they get the treats and then does that mean in, like, fall they, like, go, they to they got to they just, you know, they [CLICKS TONGUE] like, the piggies and that's probably why I didn't see them because they were, like, not there...

LEE HENNESSY [00:23:25] Yeah so we don't over winter pigs. For the acorn-finished pigs, we've found that, like, if we keep them into the winter time and let them kind of, like, naturally adjust, of course, before the weather gets really gnarly, it, it makes for a much more interesting pork and much more interesting meat. You get different fat marbling, you get different muscle structure. That would be, like, our last group that we do, our butcher is literally right down the road and we, you know, the way that we work with the animals here is kind of the reason why I have the farm. It's all behavioral-based, you know, it's herdsmanhip. It's not, you know, forcing anybody to do anything. It's creating really good choices for them. So we work really hard to try and be able to, you know, whether it's our sheep or goats or whatever, to make it really relaxing for them and not stressful for them to go to the butcher. Butcher was animal welfare approved and the folks that are working there, like, I text them. Like they also own goats, like they, they get it. Which is the type of production that like I really

believe and I think if you're going to be producing meat, you're responsible not just for the lives, but also for their last day.

JVN [00:24:53] So has this is also off track. But I just. Have you ever raised a pig and you're just, like, "Oh, I love you too much, you're too cute. You're going to be my pet!"

LEE HENNESSY [00:25:02] Yup. Her name was Destiny.

JVN [00:25:05] But she just died of old age? And that's why her name was Destiny?

LEE HENNESSY [00:25:08] No, but she did escape.

JVN [00:25:12] She escaped?!

LEE HENNESSY [00:25:13] We were trying to load her to the market and she, like, wouldn't load. And I was just like, "All right, whatever. It's fine. I'll leave the pasture open." Like, you know, "We'll bring these guys. It's obviously going to be horrible if we try and, like, chase her down and stuff," so we just let her go. And I was like, "Alright, we'll see how you make it through the winter if we can get a different butcher date, if it gets too cold for you." She's a Tamworth, which is a heritage breed and they're just, like, hardcore, they're meant for this weather. So we obviously had a little hut for her and stuff. She just wasn't just, like, out there in the weather. Because she was a survivor, we called her "Destiny's Child" or "Destiny." And she was like, she was awesome. She was enormous.

And ultimately, I loved her so much. Destiny was like she was my vibe. She was, like, she wouldn't get up before 11:00 in the morning if it was too hot or too cold. Like, she would just kind of like chill. If she felt like it, she would just get out of wherever she was, but she would always, like, hang out nearby. So I would, like, get back from a grain run and I'd have this like 500 lbs Destiny, just like hanging out by the goat barn. She was awesome. I loved having her. But at the same time, It's like, "Okay, well, if you're going to be, like, our girl and you're going to be the one that's, like, you know, producing piglets or just a pet, it's, like, a 500-lb pet is, like, a lot." And we were trying to figure out, "Are we going to build this house?" or "Are we going to do this or are we going to do that?" And ultimately, I made the choice of being like, you know what? Like we have had a lovely time together. Like, I love Destiny. Like she's had an awesome life and she was meant, you know, to for this path anyway. It was a hard choice to do, but I made the choice to, to butcher her and it was at a time when, like, it was, like, the next month, like, some shit went down and we were in a really tough spot and it was Destiny that actually got us through.

JVN [00:26:52] Ah! Lee, that is hardcore, queen! That's, like, a—, whoo! Yes, honey. Yeah, that's. That's why you get the big bucks, honey. Okay, so but now let's talk about, like, the ways, because this is really cool. So because, like, you're talking about like the ancestral ways

of, like, running the farm. So what does it mean to have, like, a pre-industrial approach to farming?

LEE HENNESSY [00:27:16] I'll give you a little bit of background of what I mean by industrial. Right now our food system makes food for grocery stores, right? And so when you are, whether you're, you know, making something by hand or you're making cereal or something, you're doing it all so that it can be in a grocery store and that you can make the most profits in order for it to go through like that system. So, you know, a lot of farmers and a lot of farmers that are included in data in the U.S. are like farmers that are like monocropping, which means raising one big thing or maybe swapping out with two. I'm sure you saw a lot of that in and around Quincy.

JVN [00:27:58] Corn and soy! Corn and soy.

LEE HENNESSY [00:27:59] Yeah, yeah, exactly. And so those people are, you know, they're creating like one thing that is either sold to a commodity market or is sold to, a cereal maker or something. Blah blah blah. So, because that is an industry because it's industrialized when you bring in animals to it, whether it's dairy or it's meat, you've kind of decoupled them from being able to be animals a lot of the time. So we're not talking about small farms here, we're talking about enormous farms, right?

JVN [00:28:36] The ones you, like, drive past by in the summer on a road trip when you live in the Midwest. It's just, like, corn as far as the eye can see, then it's wheat as far as the eye can see. Or just like those really big fields with one plant. Right?

LEE HENNESSY [00:28:49] Yeah, exactly. They're a part of— they make their living, it doesn't mean that they're bad people, but they make their living by being a part of this larger industry. So, “You specialize in this one thing, you specialize in this one thing and we all make the most food possible to make us the most money possible in the grocery store.” And that basically prioritizes making money. You know, it's capitalism, it's essentially colonialism. It's all of these things that I don't believe in and I don't like. And I'm trying to educate myself more about it to step farther and farther away, while still, like, claiming it as a part of, you know, my collective past as a white person. When we talk about pre-industrial farming, it's talking about how we as people used to farm before industry. It's, like, before our grocery stores, before it was, like, “I'm the pig guy and I raise, you know, 1700 pigs.” It's, like, how did we farm when we are trying to feed our families? How did we farm when we're trying to feed our communities?

JVN [00:29:52] It was almost more, like, if you were to put, like, 2022 verbiage on that, it's giving me, like, more boutique vibes.

LEE HENNESSY [00:30:00] Before we needed to be, like, “No, no. We're, we're small and we're special because we're small,” you know, which is, like, how surely our farm is seen. But the way that you raise animals and the way that you approach farming is totally different. We

don't have like a ton of infrastructure here, as you saw. But we work with animal behavior and we do a lot of, of herdsmanship type of, like, educating and training.

JVN [00:30:26] Your infrastructure is kind of chic, though. I mean!

LEE HENNESSY [00:30:31] I love, I love you. Thank you.

JVN [00:30:33] It was giving me infrastructure! It was infrastructuring everywhere there was, like, barns and ramps and fucking and all sorts. It was, it was giving me bona fide farm.

LEE HENNESSY [00:30:42] It's more about, like, the values that you're focusing on, right? So, like, industrial farming, you're like, you know, "How can I make this the most profitable?" With pre-industrial type farming, whether it's my type of farming or someone else's, it's, you know, "What is most aligned with my, you know, my values?" which is, like, caring for animals, caring for humans, caring for the land, and, like, being small on purpose.

JVN [00:31:06] I, I love that. I think that one thing I've been spending so much time thinking about, especially lately, is, like, as a non-binary person, like, trying to get away from these, like, binary choices where it's, like, you can do multiple things at once. Like, if it's an industrial farm, it's, like, if that is, like, all capitalism and, like, all the bottom line and it's okay for you to still, like, want to make money because we're in this capitalistic system. But, like, how can you meld that with, like, you know, transparency, integrity, authenticity, I think that that makes it so much richer of an experience and it just makes, like, your product even better too, which is amazing. So when we first met, you had said that you were "a farmer doing farmer things, living the farmer life who happens to be trans." I love that line. It's, like, again, like, speaking of, like, paragraphs that you don't often hear in, like, everyday life, like, a grouping of sentences. Can you explain that phrasing to us?

LEE HENNESSY [00:32:01] Yeah, I think that it's, that's kind of, like, my attempt at or way of, like, injecting nuance into a space where a lot of people are, like, "This is Lee. He's a trans farmer," you know, who know nothing about the trans experience. And it's like it's a way for me to say, like, "I am a farmer, I do all of the same things that other farmers do. I am different because I am trans and that's a huge part of my identity." It's not me saying like, "Oh, it doesn't matter that I'm trans, I'm a farmer first." It's a way for me to kind of, like, jump and get ahead of like, "How do you do trans farming? You know, like, what makes you different as a, as a trans farmer?" Which is a lot of questions that I get from people who aren't trans. And I don't think that that's the right question.

JVN [00:32:53] It's not! And I do think that you should tell them that there is a fun play on words there, but it's only for queer people to use.

LEE HENNESSY [00:33:58] Right? Yeah, exactly. A million percent, yes.

JVN [00:33:04] It's just the whole life "form" versus "farm." Like, you know, you could transform a plant from a seed to it. It's like it is just the "o" to the "a". She loves a vowel. So basically it's your way of saying that, like "This is an important part of who I am. But like there is so many other parts of me that dictate and inform my daily experience, like outside of my identity as a trans person that like I also would like to talk about and be known as!" Because it's like, yes, yeah, that was my cat in the background. We got our, like, dueling animals. She's outside the door, scream-meowing because I won't let her in. So what does it mean for you to hold that identity? I also think that one thing about New York that's interesting is that like, oftentimes it's like the same as Illinois. Like people are, like, "Oh, Chicago is super liberal. Oh, New York, New York City, super liberal." But, like, once you leave that dense urban center, it gets conservative, fast.

LEE HENNESSY [00:33:57] For me, I kind of had to work through a lot. I came out later in life, actually came out when I was here on the farm and, and transitioned out here and everything. I was so excited to, like, you know, embrace this part of myself. And I would see, like, other people marching or going to Pride parades or, you know, doing, like, fun potluck things, like, within the community. And, like, I couldn't do them because I was milking, you know, like, I was literally milking goats or, like, you know, I couldn't leave the farm because I was waiting for, you know, someone to give birth or, like, I had to, you know, do chores or shut the goats in or whatever. And so, in, in looking at all of that and feeling like, you know, I was like outside of this community and at the same time not doing enough for us, really what that became for me is understanding that, like, "I hold space for that. And I'm a radical person for, for just existing out here. And it's enough for me to do that, to hold space for my trans identity and to be doing what I'm doing out here and that, like, that's moving us forward." Right? As long as people see me doing what I'm doing, I'm, I'm helping, I'm moving us forward. So the internally, I think like, you know, speaking to the queer community, I think a lot of us will understand that that kind of that tension. That's been a big thing.

And then just generally. It's been important for me to just be a part of the community, not just because I'm like, "Hello, I'm your trans ambassador," which nobody likes being, but because I need my community. I'm a member of it and they need me. And so, you know, being an active part of that community but also, you know, being visible and being trans and being myself and being authentic, not in a "live your truth way," but in a, you know, "I am between, you know, two milking shifts and I'm showing up to, like, the Stewart's, which is, like, the little bodega up here, you know, covered in mud," like, that type of thing. That's been what's really important. And I think that there's a big distinction between assimilation, which is why in our queer history we had like the Mattachine Society and a lot of what we did in order to gain gay marriage had a lot to do with, like, white gay men showing that they could, like, assimilate into society and be just the same as everyone else. Versus normalization, which is for, in my case, making it a normal thing that there's a transgender guy in a rural community. And so the more that we do, especially as rural members of the queer community, to to just, you know, exist and be out here, you know, that normalization, I think, really does move the needle and we can hold space there, like for more radical things in the future, which is exciting.

JVN [00:37:12] Yeah, a couple things stick out to me with that. Like, one of the whole, like, thing that I think so many queer people have like "Am I doing enough? Am I doing enough?" And I think that like, be, like, living your truth, like, being who you are and then doing what you have to do to be who you are, which is like going to the doctor, going fucking—, going wherever you got to go. Like, because I know, like, for me when I grew up like the couple of times and I tried to like one to explore my gender identity and wait till, like, you know, be who I was, like, I got, like, chased off the fucking street. Like as soon as I tried, I was like, "Don't do it." But that is a huge act of bravery. So it's, like, and I think that it has moved a little bit. I think maybe not, you know, in certain spaces. But doing that is so much. There's a million ways that you can, that you can move that needle. And I think that we need to, like, be more compassionate with ourselves as queer people, like, because it's a lot just anyway. So like just, you know, taking a little off the fast ball at ourselves, being more compassionate with ourselves. That came out for me. Another thing that came out for me was, like, where are you from again?

LEE HENNESSY [00:38:18] I'm from around Albany, I'm from just south of Albany. In Upstate New York.

JVN [00:38:21] Because you said "potlucking" and potlucking was giving me some hardcore Midwestern vibes. I was, like, "Are you from Indiana, like, at some point?" But you're, like, "I want to go to the potluck. And I couldn't because I was, like, working!" It's, like, I feel like I would be, like, "I wanted to go to the club," but you're, like, "Fuck the club. I want to go to the potluck. Like, who is bringing the treats? I want to see who's got these fucking treats from around here." I just really love that you said that. You came out while on the farm, which is really cool. So what was that experience like?

LEE HENNESSY [00:38:53] The second I started kind of showing my gender in middle school in the 90s, it did not go well. I got pretty hardcore bullied and stuff. The people that loved me, you know, as a way to try and help, basically just were, like, "You'll be safe if you're just, like, hyper-, hyper-feminine." And so while I could never really pull off, like, the hyper feminine, like, I did sexualize my body and, like, you know, it was the time of DeLiA's catalogs and, like, crop tops and JNCOs and, you know, all of that stuff.

JVN [00:39:24] It was a terrible time. For so many reasons outside of, outside of, like, the confines of, like, gender identity. But, like, we were forced to wear JNCOs. And if there is young people listening to this, I don't know if you know what that was fucking, like, but these jeans were not cute and everyone forced them down our throat and said they were cute and they weren't, okay, and they're about to come back. So just raise your fucking selves. Jesus Christ!

LEE HENNESSY [00:39:48] With, like, the wallets, with the chains on them.

JVN [00:39:49] Oh, the wallets! I'm getting the chills. These young people don't even know anything about it these days! But anyway! So you, so you were kind of dealing with that. So you were kind of like trying to figure out, like, how to conform or, like, assimilate into this rigid gender norm.

LEE HENNESSY [00:40:04] Oooh. That, that was very important to pull that out because yeah, that's, like, I never actually put it into those words. But yeah, it's one of the reasons why I hate assimilation because I tried so hard to do it for my whole life. And that was really how I kind of got by and felt safe. Because also what was happening in the nineties, as you remember, was Matthew Shepard, the movie Boys Don't Cry, which is literally just like trauma porn on a trans man. Like, I mean, everything was really scary. And so I just, you know, tried to assimilate and pass as this woman, you know, for so long that like when I finally got up here and I was alone, I did this, you know, I don't have a partner. I don't have you know, I didn't open the phone with anybody. It's just me, and I have staff members, which is awesome. But, like, I spent enough time alone that, like, I made a little bit of space for myself. And then once I was like, "Oh my gosh, this is happening. Like, I've been a man the whole time." I also carried a lot of internalized stuff with me. The feeling for me was...was a lot of fear. And eventually, you know, I was like, "I could either, you know, be accepted by other people, but like, you know, hate who I am internally or," you know, in my head. This is not the way it is, folks. But, like, in my head, "be hated by all of these other people, you know, have them think I'm disgusting, but I'll be happy and content with who I am." And ultimately, you know, I chose to come out.

You know, I was like, "I don't know, self-defense. I have to learn self-defense before I, before I get-". Here's my ass, like, moving 800 lbs round bales by myself up hills and it's, like "I need to learn self-defense." It was a lot of internalized fear and a lot of internalized nonsense. But once I actually did, you know, I just kind of went about my business. I did start medically transitioning with the HRT, you know, but I waited until there were, you know, there were physical changes and where, where, where I was, you know, felt comfortable enough talking about it. So, you know, when somebody would say, like, "Oh, you know, you sound like you have a cold." You know, that's when I would be, like, "No, I'm trans, I'm on testosterone. It's fine." But I had months to live with it. And because I was comfortable with the way that I wanted to move through the world, it actually made other people very comfortable with it as well. And I was thinking, like, "Oh, this is going to be horrible. I'm going to be dead named all the time. I'm going to be misgendered. People aren't going to respect, you know, where I'm at." And like, let me tell you, Jonathan, that was not the case at all.

I had, you know, 80-year-old men that I was buying grain from at the time who was, like, "Oh, it's 'he'? Okay." You know, and just, like, switched it. Like if Bill can get on board, like, really anybody can. I was worried about, you know, my, my hay. We don't do hay here, we have to buy it in. I was worried about, you know, was I going to lose access to this hay? This was during the Trump era when I came out and one of the guys was like a really big Trump fan. And I- there were, like, two guys that kind of ran the business. I mentioned to one, "Oh, hey, by the way." And then the next time when the other guy came around and I was so worried

about it, he literally did a pronoun check. He was, like, "I just want to make sure. So I just say, 'Lee' and I say and I say 'him?'" And I said, "Yeah." And he was like, "Okay, that's great." So I think that I'm probably a little notorious in that, like, you know, people talk about, like, somebody new in town, you know, I'm not new anymore, but, like, "the trans guy in town," I'm also not the only trans person in town.

JVN [00:43:52] You mentioned earlier, like, as a white person, that's, like, a thing. And then there's also, like, the transmasculine thing versus, like, transfeminine in a rural community [CROSSTALK], like, there are so there are differences. But one thing that I think is really important and really cool is you came out like whilst living on Moxie Ridge, like the same place where you live now. So you came out and, like, did not leave your rural community. In fact, you only became, like, more integrated and had a better experience. Like, things have only been better since. So that whole like, you know, false evidence appearing real, like, fear that you had about like, "Oh, I could either live my authentic life, but everyone's going to reject me." That wasn't true. You were able to live your authentic life, and you've been on the most part, embraced by the community and felt, you know, respected in your experience.

LEE HENNESSY [00:44:38] Correct. Yeah, absolutely.

JVN [00:44:40] And I just think it's cool, it's, like, so often, you know, in even part of my story is I felt like I had to, like, leave where I was in order to find my truth. And I just think that like a lot of times we do not hear stories of queer people in rural spaces thriving where they are. And I think that we do need to hear more of that for a few reasons. Not exactly in your—, well, actually, in in your case, too, because I was thinking, like, you know, swing states, we got to like reach out to our people in swing states that are going through it but also—

LEE HENNESSY [00:45:08] This is Elise Stefanik.

JVN [00:45:10] And I, I sometimes when I feel, like, really friendly with someone, I want to be like "biiiiitch" then I'm, like, I'm not, like, it's, like, the third time we've got together. But I also want to be like, yeah, that fucking lady. She's a nightmare! That replacement theory nightmare. I'm excited for the primary, though. Whatever Democrat wins, we got to, like, [SMACKS HANDS] Bhad Babie that Elise out of there, honey. She's a nightmare. So but yeah, that was, that was, like, a voting Bhad Babie. Not a literal smacking Bhad Babie, just, like, a voting smacking out of there. First of all, thank you so much for sharing that experience with us. I really appreciate it. I also saw on the 'gram because obviously we follow, we love, there is this story about crowdfunding for a security system. Do you need me to come up there and, like, dress up in all black and, like, do what the squash borer vine moths, but to the people, which means that I have my needle full of BT. And I'll, like, stab them with, like, BT pesticide in the neck?

LEE HENNESSY [00:46:06] I mean, I would be fine if you just, like, came back in that amazing spearmint one-piece ski suit sometime because that was, like, that was a vision. Especially surrounded by goats.

JVN [00:46:16] I wore a fluorescent green ski suit to Lee's farm. And it was epic. Our outfits were epic.

LEE HENNESSY [00:46:26] So we talked about how I'm, like, "Okay, being me, being visible as a trans person and farming." Like, that's actually a part of the farm's mission at this point because I feel like that's how I can kind of, like, make, make my change as a queer person. And also we're in this timeline of, like, 2022 and, like, Jonathan, why are they obsessed with us? Like, people are obsessed with trans bodies. Like, people are obsessed with hating trans bodies. They're obsessed with controlling trans bodies. Like they are obsessed with *us*. And so as I'm, like, having my healing and being, like, "It's safe to be seen!" Like at the same time, everybody's, like, "Ah!" So that has been really interesting. We had the opportunity to get a marketing grant through a dairy business innovation center here in the Northeast. And as a part of that grant to support the farm and our cheese, we were able to get a PR company. And so I'm, like, very excited because I'm excited. I'm like, "I'm ready to be fancy." But I found myself really freaking out. I would wake up in the morning and I would be so, so, so stressed thinking about, you know, what's going to happen when our podcast comes out? You know what's going to happen if I get, you know, press in a magazine or something?

And my community, as I've talked about, has been amazing and very welcoming. And it is a true community. If I need something I can ask. If people need something, they can ask me. Like, it's amazing. I'm not, I don't need a security system for my neighbors. What I'm concerned about is, like, keyboard warriors. And, you know, it's, it's the law that, like, on all of my cheeses, they have to put my address and, and it's a farmstead. So that's my house. You know, I have 700 feet of road frontage. And as things get weirder and weirder and as the hate gets hotter and hotter, you know, all it takes is one person making a comment, you know, on a Facebook article that I have no control over, you know, tagging a nasty politician or tagging a nasty influencer or putting it up on, you know, a bad Reddit thread. And then all of a sudden, you know, not only am I doxxed but my animals could be in danger. I could be in danger. You know, it's like it should be every person's right in the country to, like, live with your doors unlocked. And let me tell you, I don't. You know? So as I'm like, "Okay, this is my journey. Like, I want people to see a trans person just like being okay and thriving and seeing trans joy and doing this very specialized type of work, which I'm very good at." At the same time, I was literally, like, "I could get really hurt." So I needed the help of my therapist. But eventually I was, like, when I was, like, freaking out. And I'm like, "I don't feel safe. I don't," you know? "This, that, the other thing," she was like, "Can you just ask people for help?" And I was, like, "I can't-. Oh. I mean, I guess that I could." And so because I don't like to tokenize my transness, but I felt like this was an appropriate way for me to do it and feel good.

So we did put up a GoFundMe. And, you know, the, the, the main thing that we needed was, you know, a fence and some cameras and some lights, new locks, and then, you know, moving the driveway a little bit farther away. Then once that stuff is all there, which turns out is way more expensive than I thought, you know, we're hoping to be able to, like, welcome visitors to the farm because right now we don't have visitors on the farm. So now we're at a point where like, if we can make this less of a survival thing and more of a thriving thing, then we can get to a point where we can, like, welcome people, educate people, have retreats for queer kids that want to live out here so we can get our education up and going. It's been a really lovely surprise with everything that's been going on, the support that's just come in from not just people that know me and love the business or love the cheese or love the goats, but from just strangers who want to see a trans business, you know, do well and, like, just exist.

JVN [00:50:47] Y'all! You've heard it. We got to support, we're obsessed. So also we love queer joy. And I just heard you mention queer joy, we're obsessed with queer joy. We got to talk to Eliot Schrefer and Patty Kaishian about finding queer joy in nature, which, like, queer mushrooms. So fierce. When you think about nature, like, what joys does it hold for you? Like, what's your pumpkins?

LEE HENNESSY [00:51:07] That's such a lovely way to ask it. I think there are a couple of different things that really lock in for me. In nature-nature, which, like, you know, is not a farm. The farm is surrounded by nature. Farm has nature elements in it to me. But when I'm out in nature, like, I like to just sit. I like to be still, like, I hate hiking, I hate trying to do things I hate, like, the hustle vibe in nature.

JVN [00:51:36] I hate a hike. I've never hated anything worse than I hate to go hiking.

LEE HENNESSY [00:51:40] Yes, same, so big. It makes it very difficult to date up here.

JVN [00:51:44] I'll go sit in nature. I'll go, like, sit there and, like, eat food or whatever or, like, maybe look for like look for something like, you know. And I want to go just like a walk. I'd go on a fucking treadmill. It's, like, closer. I'll knock it out in 20 minutes, I hate—, and I also I've realized too, as a 35 year old, like anything that takes more than, like, 45 minutes, that isn't, like, me performing or entertaining, like so basically like if it's, like, sex, food, working out, sex, food working out. Yeah. I don't want any of that shit to take more than 45 minutes. Like, 45 minutes. Like, that's what I can give you. And hiking. These fuckers are going on hikes for fucking hours, like, just going to walk for hours. I would rather eat shit and die! Antoni and his gorgeous boyfriend just went to Peru.

LEE HENNESSY [00:52:34] Oh, wow!

JVN [00:52:35] You—, the country of Peru would have to pay me. You know what I'm saying? Like I you have to pay me to go hike in Peru, like, nothing against Peru. I just don't want to go fucking walk that long. Okay? I'm sorry you triggered me. You said "hike." I freaked out.

[CROSSTALK] Going back to queer joy on, on farms. [CROSSTALK] What are your hobbies? I feel like if I had to guess, I feel like you just, like, love those goats. It's, like, you really love goats.

LEE HENNESSY [00:53:00] Yeah, I would say my pumpkins are, like, absolutely my goats. Everybody has a name. I love being able to, like, you know, to be out with them. One of my heroes and one of the reasons why I kind of empowered myself to try doing this is Temple Grandin. And she writes a lot about animal behavior. And she as an autistic person was able to identify a lot of things that, like, neurotypical people that have been working with livestock historically, like if you never saw or at least on a larger scale. And so it's really beautiful to just, like, go out, walk. You know, not working, not doing anything. You know, if I need a moment to myself to just go and walk with the goats. You know, it's, it's an incredible experience to have, you know, to go on a walk with 42 creatures that you love dearly and who love you dearly, you know, like, and just to exist. I learn from my goats constantly and I'm obsessed with goats. I could talk about goats forever, but I promise you I won't today. One of the things that I've learned is, like, they— I have anxiety, I have a bunch of different stuff, but, like, anxiety is one of the things and that means that, like, I'm constantly processing things either forward in time or backward in time because I'm concerned. But when I'm with the girl, it's like their brains work the same way, but it's lateral. So I'm still processing the same amount of stuff, but it's all happening like at the same time. And I feel really relaxed and at home because I don't have to change who I am. It actually makes me better at working with goats and herdsmanship because my brain works this way. So close to me are incredibly, incredibly important and they give me back alive. But yeah, I'm also just obsessed with them.

JVN [00:54:53] I mean, they're so cute. I can understand how it could happen. So, like earlier this year, we got to interview Professor Gabe Rosenberg, who you also know who he loves so much, all about gender, sexuality and farming. You're an expert on this topic from a different angle. What do you think sex and gender have to do with farming?

LEE HENNESSY [00:55:14] So for me, I mean, I like, I'm alone up here a lot. So, like, I think about this stuff. And I think that in our Western culture, in, you know, our colonized culture that grew up with livestock, I mean, it's how we were able to, like, evolve. It was very important for us to say this animal can make a baby but will not carry it. And this animal can carry a baby but cannot make it with somebody else. And in order to appropriately and responsibly manage animals that you're working with, you can't just constantly have an animal pregnant all the time. It's not good for them. You can't have an animal that's pregnant, too young or too small. It's, it's hurtful to them. So we needed to separate the animals that could be pregnant and the animals that can make other animals pregnant. Right. And that was very, very, very important. It was important for our well-being. It was important for us. It was important for everything. Plus, when we're talking about, you know, goats are the longest domesticated livestock animal, like, goats are an incredibly big part of cultures historically around the world. And one of the things that we get from goats is milk and like the, there's only some goats that are going to milk, right? The male goats are not going to milk. And so

we need to separate them for those reasons. And so when we have a culture that literally over thousands and thousands of years grows up with this, it's not surprising that we then take a binary that we put onto our animals for these very specific reasons, on to people.

And then when we have a society where it's very important for, you know, wealthy men, especially wealthy white men to stay in control. That like I think a lot of misogyny comes from our livestock routes. It doesn't make livestock bad, but absolutely when we talk about like good breeding, you know, when we talk about like, oh, like, you know, this woman is acting out, she shouldn't do that. Or like you need to get a good husband. You know, it's you're treating women like, like literal livestock, you know, and I don't mean in, in the, like "You're treating me like an animal." I mean, you're literally treating and categorizing and marrying women off like you are, are treating your livestock. And so that is something that I think about really deeply in terms of misogyny, how different genders are treated, how there's no space made for genders other than men and women because we're so focused on, "Can this livestock procreate and what is its role," right? So that if you don't, then, you know, then you kind of, like, don't know what to do with the animal. If you're, you know, if you're a small family living in, you know, wherever England or Sweden, you're, like, "I don't know what this is going to do." I guess. I guess, well, just, like, aim for a better idea. And so it's interesting to think about that, like we're literally just treating ourselves like more animals, or at least the people that have historically been in control have been treating the rest of us like livestock and not the way that I treat my livestock and not the way that livestock is treated well. You know, and so I think that there's a lot of compassion to be had either way for that. But I also think it's so important that we recognize that, like, so much of this misogyny comes from this type of control and management.

JVN [00:59:06] Wow. Why do you think that farming is so compelling to queer people?

LEE HENNESSY [00:59:10] I think that, I think that we've always been farming. I think we've always been out here. I think that we have not necessarily been able to, to safely live or tell our stories or document ourselves, but I think we've always been doing it. And so, you know, in this way, it kind of goes back to your question about, like, why do I say like I'm a farmer doing farmer, things like that. People who are, like, called to a certain way of life, whether it's farming, working with animals, whatever. Like, that's you no matter what. It doesn't matter if you're queer or not. Your experience will be totally different as you move through the world. Because you're different. But, you know, I don't necessarily think that, like, it's, like, "Oh, all of these, you know, new farmers are queer." I think we've been doing it forever. I think that in our society, in the United States, we've been totally disassociated from our food because of this industrialized food system. And so we haven't thought that farming is viable.

So we're getting to a point where with queer people and non-queer people, we're realizing, like, "Oh, you don't have to have a legacy to be a farmer. You can just go out and farm." I think specifically for queer people, we are more we're more used to operating on the outside of things. We're more used to having to take risks or being forced to take risks or being having

to figure out our own philosophies sooner in life or, you know, in a more structured way. And that that is what drives us to say, well, "I don't believe in eating this kind of meat, like I want to be able to raise it in this way." Or "I don't believe in treating the land in this way, I want to be able to do this" or "I don't believe in working for this huge corporation. I want to be able to feed my community." And so I think we come to these ideas in a different way. We're certainly not the only ones that do. But I also think the more visible we are as queer people in rural areas, and the more that that people like you lift us up, the more we're going to see these farmers. And I think it's really important. We don't farm differently, you know, because we're queer. We don't carry a bucket differently because we're queer. We're not, like, "Oh shit, I got to get home and like, do my gay farming," you know? But we, we move through the world.

JVN [01:01:42] If I was a farmer, I probably would. I feel like I would carry my bucket like this. Like I feel like I would have like one hand to the left. Like I feel like I'd be breaking wrist with the left. And I would be like—, and I probably have heels and they'd be ruined and I'd be pissed. And I was a farmer. I feel like those stereotypical things that apply.

LEE HENNESSY [01:01:57] We'll make that happen.

JVN [01:01:58] I I could be like a femme farmer in like a teeny tiny farm. But I feel like what you're saying is, like, 100% true. It's just that, like, I probably would carry the bucket different because I'm just really fem and I can't help it. But it's it's whatever. Not the point. So what would you say to people that, like, people that are least, like, like, "Ah, meat, I feel sad, but I eat it, you know, like, I feel sad but I eat it," which is like I do that like I was vegan for four years and now I, you know, just really compartmentalize it with this other part of my brain and I'm, like, "Bacon!" So what advice would you give to people that are trying to make more ethical meat and dairy consumption choices?

LEE HENNESSY [01:02:30] I would say that the really short CliffsNotes version to, like, empower people to start off on this journey is, you know, to step back from, like, meat that you get in a grocery store, you know, like, step back from meat that you get from just larger companies. Because there's no way to know for sure that that meat was treated well. You generally don't even know where it comes from. If you want to be consuming meat in a more ethical way, think about what you deeply care about. And then look at people that are out there raising meat in that way. If you're, like, "I don't do it because, like, I, you know, I think that they have terrible lives." You know, there's tons of farmers like me out here that it's, like, we literally, like, we're out here like frolicking with the goats, making sure that they have, like, an awesome time. And so to we, you know, everybody gets head scratchers, everybody gets names. The, there are people that are doing this. And, and by you listening to yourself, listening to your gut, listening to your truth, and stepping forward and saying, like, "I don't like this." And finding those people to support. You're actually making a change. You're supporting these people. You're making these people, you know, take up maybe a little bit bigger corner of the market, not because they're going to get huge and become corporations, but because there's going to be more people that are inspired to do it and there will be space

for them. So that's, like, I would say, if you want to get into ethical meat, you don't have to watch horrible videos all the time, think about what you deeply care about and then find someone that's making that food in the way that you're doing it and prioritize that.

JVN [01:04:12] Which would maybe be, like, farmer's markets vibes, like, go to far more farmer's markets, like, locally and, like, that can be a way to find more of those like ethical sources. So now because we're, like, starting to approach that and I need to so here's one thing we have to do a second episode about cheesemaking because I didn't even get there because we had to talk about like all these other, like, you know, you know, more important things, like, identity and, like, all these are important, but, like, arguably, like, so is cheese-fucking-making? Okay, like, I'm, like, curiosity. Like, I need to know that it's been, like, feta and all these other kinds and, like, and then or like cheddar. But then I was, like, "Is there sheep cheddar?" but I didn't even get to ask! That's going to be part two. Like, we're just there's no time for us to do that. But now I do have a quick lightning round for goats because like, I can't, I need to know more about goats and to like, I just, I can't leave without knowing about this. Okay. You said that, that one queen who had triplets got dethroned. And so, like, queens really do exist. But then can a queen get the throne and then, like, will they turn on her and kill her? And she has to, like, just get lonely or neither? She's still a part of the group. There's just, like, a bigger bitch in town?

LEE HENNESSY [01:05:08] There's a bigger bitch in town, basically. Like there's a super, super, super, like, complicated social hierarchy. Everybody has a role in it. If you want to move up, you need to, like, bump some other girl down.

JVN [01:05:20] And what does that look like? Is it, like, headbutts? Is it a fight?

LEE HENNESSY [01:05:23] It looks, like, honestly, like unicorn fights, like they go up on their hind legs and they bring their heads together and they go down like they don't run and ram like sheep. They go like this and they go like that.

JVN [01:05:32] And this one get knocked unconscious and that's who loses?

LEE HENNESSY [01:05:35] Nope. That's just, like, you know, when you watch nature documentaries and it's like, "The gazelle are fighting for dominance." Like, that's what it is. They're like they're working it out, right? They're working it out.

JVN [01:05:43] How do you know who wins?

LEE HENNESSY [01:05:45] You know who wins because one will just like, walk away and the other one will be like "biiiiitch." And so they'll just, like, move up. And so they'll find, like. Like, "Oh, you're not feeling well today? Oh, I would like your spot. Like, we're going to do it." And you just have to be like, "Okay, I respect your hierarchy."

JVN [01:06:00] Does that former queen ever come back and challenge the one that took her spot when she wasn't feeling good?

LEE HENNESSY [01:06:04] Yep, queens usually don't change that much. Like with Little Sister, we had a queen called Tinkerbelle. Like, they just kind of, like, got older and retired and are, like, "I'm really not into, like, all of this drama right now." And, like, the younger girls are, like, "Fantastic, I'm ready." So now we have Benny, now we have Kathy.

JVN [01:06:21] So there can be multiple queens at once?

LEE HENNESSY [01:06:23] In my herd, we always have more than one queen, which is interesting. And then we also have, like, lieutenants, like, the girls that will, like, look after the queens and are, like, "Don't mess with me. Like I get special treatment."

JVN [01:06:35] "Because I'm friends with the queen."

LEE HENNESSY [01:06:36] Right, "But I'm not interested in the responsibility."

JVN [01:06:39] Like what are the other titles?

LEE HENNESSY [01:06:40] So we've got the queens, we've got lieutenants. Interestingly, this is also the case in the buck herds, buck is the male goat. So like there's – we have, like, Buck City over here and, like, Timmy's the queen, Timmy's my boy. He's, like, my first pet goat. Within, like, that hierarchy. You know, it's, it's literally, you have some girls that are like, "Okay, I'm kind of mid or I'm going to be playing lookout today," but we don't necessarily have, like "This is you, you're the lookout." Right?

JVN [01:07:10] I was thinking, like, Jack, Queen, King. Like there's, like, a top and a bottom, but there's like a whole spectrum between.

LEE HENNESSY [01:07:16] You could look at it like a deck of cards because like, yeah, there's no moving, you know, if you're, if you're, you know, a two of spades, like, there's not a day where you're going to be the four, like, nope, that's it. That's you. And if you want to move up, then you need to, then you have to–

JVN [01:07:28] Knock the three down. [CROSSTALK] Have you ever seen, like a lowly one, like, a three or whatever go, like, knock the queen and be like, "Bitch, I'm the queen! I've had it!"

LEE HENNESSY [01:07:37] Yes. They don't– it doesn't often work out. But like that is a way to be like, "Oh, you want to just, like, like, skip the grind?" and just, like, go, like, you could try.

JVN [01:07:46] So it's possible! And then are the ones who are more, like, lowly, like, the threes worse because you said, look, how do they have to, like, look out? Is that, like, the, like, the biggest loser position is like having to be a look out like no one wants to do that?

LEE HENNESSY [01:07:58] No, that's something that like everybody does and depending on where you're at, so like, you know, goats have the pupil that's really long?

JVN [01:08:04] Yes.

LEE HENNESSY [01:08:05] Which like, by the way, also horses have, also sheep have. But, like, because goats look us in the eye, we're like, "Oh, goats' eyes are so weird." That's like a panoramic pupil. And so they can see, like, side-to-side really well. They can't see up and, like, above themselves really well. That's because when they're out grazing, they want to be able to, like, keep an eye on everything. So when you're out grazing and you're at the outside, it's now your role, no matter where you're at in the herd to like, keep a lookout.

JVN [01:08:31] Oh, okay. So maybe when we talk about cheesemaking, we're going to talk about a goat fucking a little more? Cause I am curious, just like how they decide to fuck and stuff and like when you bring them together, like, not to be so crude about fucking, but like, we are interested in sex around here. Like, we're humans. It's like, rate us R, like, give us your worst, whatever. I just am obsessed with you so much. I feel like I learned so much, Lee Hennessy, I can't stand it. So what's next for you and Moxie Ridge Farm and Creamery? And how can people support you and the farm?

LEE HENNESSY [01:09:02] Awesome! As a part of our, our very fancy marketing grant. We've got a new website that'll be up in June. So the best way that the people can support us is to sign up for the newsletter on our website, and then we can keep in touch with everything that we're doing. We're starting a mutual aid project that I would love some community help on and you can help us with our GoFundMe

JVN [01:09:28] Can you send cheese through the mail? Or do people have to come to Union Square right now?

LEE HENNESSY [01:09:34] We are not shipping cheese right now, but will be shipping cheese, like, around the holidays but will be also making a bunch of other stuff that we can ship. We do soaps from our goat, from our goat milk. We do, you know, wool, we do all sorts of stuff. So we're, like, opening, like, this really fancy little shop for, like, not just our own handmade stuff, but like a bunch of other people's handmade stuff across the world. So like, yeah, definitely like check in, you can follow us on Instagram like that would be all of those ways can really help support us and you know if you see something that we're doing that's really interesting, you know, feel free to share it to to another queer that is like that has country dreams because you can do it.

JVN [01:10:17] And like help out because the GoFundMe is still going for the security system, right?

LEE HENNESSY [01:10:23] Correct. Yeah. Yeah. So we're about, hopefully about to start, like, the construction on the fence. And yeah, we're, we're getting, like, electricity into the barns and stuff like that. So yeah, everybody is like, "Oh my gosh, I can't wait to come and visit." I'm like, "Well, you're going to have to." So, yeah, that would be a big help as well. I have a little thank you present for you, though, really quick.

JVN [01:10:43] Yes! Lee Hennessy, thank you so much for your time and for, like, kindly sharing your knowledge with us! Do I get some cheese coming my way? What's my prez?

LEE HENNESSY [01:10:53] No, no, hang on a second. Do you remember? Remember when you were here and you had, like, a couple of goats choose you as their person there. [CROSSTALK] Really? Yeah, I got there. So I went, okay, so hang on.

JVN [01:11:04] Oh my gosh, what is it?

LEE HENNESSY [01:11:05] So this little baby boo is the daughter of the girl named Sully, who is obsessed with you. And look, she is, like, so extra, she has, like, these super extra markings on her face. And so my, my gift to you is you get to name her. You don't have to do it today. Think about it. Names are important.

JVN [01:11:28] Can we request that she's not a meat goat? Can she be a dairy goat? [CROSSTALK] Hi, little girl. And Sully's her mom?

LEE HENNESSY [01:11:37] Sully is actually named after my mom.

JVN [01:11:39] Oh! My cousin's name is Sullivan. So, like, I love the name Sully.

LEE HENNESSY [01:11:43] That's amazing.

JVN [01:11:46] Jane.

LEE HENNESSY [01:11:48] You're Jane, honey.

JVN [01:11:50] She's named after Jane Birkin and really the Birkin bag. But she's never going to be a bag because she's a dairy girl.

LEE HENNESSY [01:11:56] No, but she can accessorize because look at this. Like, she's really pulling it off.

JVN [01:12:01] She's so cute. And you said you don't have pygmy goats because would a pygmy goat be better for me in my backyard? Like a mini goat.

LEE HENNESSY [01:12:09] Yeah, you could take pygmy goats and Nigerian dwarf goats, but I will tell you, like, they are all the chaos of a full goat, just, like, packed in, like, a half size body, and then, like, maybe more chaos. They're amazing. We have some dwarves here. They're lovely.

JVN [01:12:24] I just want a cute, fucking farm animal that doesn't fuck shit up. Why? Whose dick do I gotta suck to get a goddamn fucking little farm animal that won't fuck up—, that's not too much. I mean, you can't have everything, you know, it's another thing because I'm nonbinary, like, why do I have to choose? But alas, the human experience involves choice. Lee Hennessy, we love you, we love Jane! Miss Birkin, you're everything. I'm so excited. Your nose is to die for, that nose, I want to give her the biggest goat nose kiss. Did she get her feed to prevent the crocs-son-a-sonosis or whatever?

LEE HENNESSY [01:12:59] Yes.

JVN [01:13:00] She *cannot* get diarrhea.

LEE HENNESSY [01:13:01] She's doing great. Yeah, but she's, like, she was just born. Like, Sully was, like, "Oh, you're going on the podcast? Like, "Let me just birth my babies for you." She was just born a couple of days ago, so she's still on milk.

JVN [01:13:12] Her blowdry is everything.

LEE HENNESSY [01:13:14] Yeah, she's gorgeous.

JVN [01:13:15] We love you, Jane. I looked up and I was, like, "It's Jane." I can't help it. I'm trying to bully my husband into letting us adopt another dog right now. And he thought of a really cute name for her, which is Brenda. And I'm, like, "You named the fucking puppy. It's like, now we have to."

LEE HENNESSY [01:13:31] Oh, my God, yes.

JVN [01:13:33] Brenda's the best puppy name of all time. I love a human name for any animal. It's, like, my favorite.

LEE HENNESSY [01:13:37] Oh, we have Kathys, we have Brians.

JVN [01:13:39] I love that. Brian's a great goat name. Lee, we love you so much. I love you so much. You're the best. And thank you so much for coming on Getting Curious.

LEE HENNESSY [01:13:45] Love you! Thank you so much, Jonathan.

JVN [01:13:49] You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. Our guest this week was Lee Hennessy. You'll find links to his work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Our theme music- oh, Matilda, stop it! Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thanks to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend - show them how to subscribe. [SINGING] That is how we grow, and everybody wants to grow! [SINGING STOPS] You can follow us on Instagram & Twitter @CuriousWithJVN. Our socials are run and curated by Middle Seat Digital. Our editor is Andrew Carson. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, and Zahra Crim.