

We are not vegetarians. We do eat a lot of plant based foods, for sure, starting with potatoes, a staple food that appears on our table almost every day in some form or another. Other garden vegetables also provide a substantial part of our diet.

But, we do eat meat. We seldom eat meat, though, that did not grow here on the farm. So, we consume animals that we have cared for.

Butchering animals or sending them to a slaughterhouse ofis not a particularly pleasant procedure, but it is necessary if one is going to try to sustain oneself on home-grown animal protein.

This past week, we butchered our meat chickens. We had cared for them since early May, kept them in a secure coop at night, but with plenty of room outside during the day. They received grain, but they also had grass and weeds as a substantial part of their diet. They were, as much as one could tell from outside the confines of that species, happy chickens.

The killing was quick and hopefully, pain free. Runo did this never pleasant job, and when the chickens had hung upside down on the fence and bled, we began the rest of the process.

We had a large kettle of almost boiling water, and each chicken was dipped two or three times in the water until feathers easily pulled out. Then, we “picked” them, pulling off the feathers and exposing the skin.

Runo is much handier with the butcher knife than I am, although I am not a bit squeamish about this work. But, instead, he did the cutting, and I took care of removing pinfeathers, washing and chilling the pieces—we do not freeze the chickens whole, since we don’t need a whole chicken for a meal—and packing pieces of the cold chicken.

And last, we cook the “bony pieces” of wings, backs, and necks for broth. There are now a dozen jars of chicken broth, pale yellow with bright gold fat on top, filling a box in the freezer. From the eleven chickens we butchered this week, we will have almost fifty “main dishes” during the coming year. These pastured chickens lived seemingly satisfied and happy lives, died quickly, and will provide us with food for the winter ahead. Unless one is vegan, the same process applies in one form or another to all of us—whether that meat, fish, or poultry comes in a plastic-wrapped package from a supermarket cooler or from the barn or chicken yard. To pretend otherwise is pure self-delusion.