



Our Hen House Podcast: Transcript for Episode 657, Interview with Christopher Soul Eubanks

Mariann Sullivan: Welcome to Our Hen House, Christopher.

Christopher Soul Eubanks: Hello, thank you for having me. I am excited to be here.

Mariann: I should say welcome back because you were on not that long ago. And as we were just talking about before we started recording, we really wanted to have you back because you have now formed the organization that you talked about forming in that interview.

But I also highly recommend that people go back to that interview and listen to it because we probably covered a bunch of things there, when you spoke with Jasmin, that we'll skip today. So people should listen to both of them, but we really want to hear about Apex advocacy.

So just tell us about it. First of all, what is the mission?

Christopher: So the mission essentially is to involve more people of color in animal advocacy work. And we have a variety of strategies that we have been using to get that to come about. And essentially I started it just because I didn't feel there was the space and the attention to these issues that I would have liked to have had to be placed an emphasis on, in the animal rights movement.

So I started this organization. like we spoke about the last time, it's finally here and I really want to involve people of color in animal advocacy. So that's the primary focus of our organization. So the three biggest initiatives that we have right now, well, our three main initiatives, our first one is Black Vegan Everything, and we spoke about that the last time I was here, but essentially that's a hub and a space to highlight Black owned vegan businesses. So if you want to learn more about Black owned vegan businesses, you want to shop with them, people that would like to donate or support, buy Black owned, you can go to that website. And we add to the website as often as we can. We're actually

about to add, I would say, about a hundred more businesses to the website. So the goal is to add weekly. And one of the reasons that we want to add in increments is because we really want to go through and research all of the businesses and make sure that they align with our ethical stance, the website isn't only about vegan food or plant-based food. It's about showcasing businesses and companies that are intentionally vegan and carry that throughout the ethics of their company. So we are excited about the next batch of businesses that will be showcasing on that. So that's one of our initiative. That was our first initiative.

The second initiative that we developed is called No Backyard Slaughter. And this is near and dear to my heart because the way it came about was there's a person operating an illegal slaughterhouse, about 10 minutes away from me, in their backyard. And the community has been trying to get this slaughterhouse closed down for about four or five years. And the county sent this person a cease and desist order to no longer conduct business, because they don't have a permit to operate a slaughterhouse in a residential area. That's not something that's allowed in this county. So we decided to collaborate with the community, get to know the community better and see what we can do to help push this issue forward. A lot of the people in the community aren't seasoned in activism and I have significantly more of a larger background and experience than they do. So I am working with them, we're collaborating to create sort of a pressure campaign on the county to force their hand, to make them do something about this illegal slaughterhouse. Like I said, it's been three years and the community has been fighting back against the slaughterhouse.

Mariann: You're in Georgia, right? This is near Atlanta. Is that right?

Christopher: Yes. So this slaughterhouse is right outside of the Metro Atlanta area. And finally, we have gotten to the point where after years of the slaughterhouse owner going through court delays and using his lawyer to create all types of stall tactics, we are finally to the point where the county is actually bringing him to court for the charges around operating an illegal slaughterhouse in his backyard.

So we finally had a court date and this was the first pretrial motion where the county had a court date and the slaughterhouse requested to move the case to another county because of our activism and bringing attention to the situation. And gladly the court denied their appeal. So we're finally making some headway, it's finally getting to the point where it's in court and we'll hopefully see some action sooner than later.

Mariann: I mean, I've heard of like, I am a lawyer, but that's called a change of venue when there's a place that's prejudiced against you for some reason.

But the fact that they would argue that they're entitled to go to another county because the people in this county hate their slaughterhouse. I mean, of course! That's a ridiculous argument and I'm really glad you won it. Obviously the people who are protesting or the people who are offended by it, they're not prejudiced against them for some other reason.

But I know that it's called Bradford's Livestock, but I really don't know... Can you tell us a little bit more what it's like and why there was so much dislike in the community for... I assume many of these people are meat eaters, unless you're working just with vegans, but why were people offended by it and why did they want to close it down? What are these places... I don't know a lot about backyard slaughter, so fill me in.

Christopher: So, one of the things about this case that really caught the attention of the neighborhood is that, one, it was very out in the open. It's not like he was hiding what he was doing. So he has about five acres of land and you would just see animals out there, the place wasn't very well kept. He had this big fencing around the home area and it just didn't look appealing. So he was standing out very easily.

He wasn't trying to hide what he was doing and you could hear animals being killed. He was just pretty much unapologetic about this slaughterhouse and it was, like I said, in a regular neighborhood.

So he has neighbors on the left and to the right of him. It's not like this was in a rural area where he has a lot of land to himself. Now he has neighbors left and right to him, there's an elementary school up the street. So he's very out in the open with this and I think that's one of the things that caught the attention of the neighbors. It is such a nuisance and an eyesore for the community that they started to reach out to local politicians and to the news and to the media. And a lot of them, all of the ones that I have come across, well not all but most of them, you know, aren't vegan. Well, none of them are vegans and we have the same position on this situation that this is just bad for the neighborhood all the way around.

They understand how this is impacting the soil in the community, their property value in the community to have this big eyesore. It's a big stain on the community and they want it gone just as much as anybody because it negatively impacts them.

Mariann: It really reminds me of some of the movement against, and you'll have to tell me because I'm not familiar with this neighborhood, but so many factory farms and slaughterhouses and other animal abuse industries are located in communities of color. Places where people don't, you know, haven't had the political clout to keep them out. And this kind of reminds me of that. Did you feel that these people were being taken advantage of, that their neighborhood was being ruined for this outfit?

Christopher: Absolutely. And one of the reasons that crossed my mind or that was startling to me is because initially this person did not have a license from the state.

But he actually contacted the state to get a license. And I don't feel that if this was in a higher income community that he would've been assisted as easily. I think a part of me just feels like, "okay, this is a low income community. We'll just kind of help him go along and we'll give him this special license."

So he has a license from the state, but not a permit from the county. So that's what the big legal back and forth is about. So, yeah, I think...there's a new documentary called *The Smell of Money* that kind of talks about this issue, how communities of color are being specifically targeted by animal agriculture and setting up factory farming in black and brown communities, because these communities typically don't have the resources to stand up to them.

So they're suffering from, like I said, property value decreasing, and also environmental racism. These factory farms are polluting the neighborhoods. They're putting all kind of toxins in the soil and in the air and the wastewater. So, yeah, there's definitely another layer to this conversation aside from the fact that it is about animal abuse also.

Mariann: Yeah, no, I think, I think it's a very powerful issue and I think you're absolutely right that not only are these people...you know, they don't have the same political power often as people in wealthier communities. But as you were saying, their property values are being reduced. So even when, I've seen this in legal cases, even when they're compensated their property isn't worth that much so they don't have to be compensated very much. Even though their property may be their home and everything to them, on the market it's cheaper for these factory farms to disadvantage people whose property doesn't bring in that much money. So there's so many reasons for them to be doing this.

I think your protest is really a microcosm of, of what's going on in so many other areas. Now I know you had people join you, but was the whole

community kind of in favor of getting... Who were they selling to and was the community having mixed reactions or did everybody just wanted them out of there?

Christopher: Yeah. So it's been a very mixed reaction. The thing that I've noticed is that the people directly on the street have a lot of... they are the ones that are being directly impacted. So they feel the pain and the nuisance of the situation. The further you move out, I think the more people try to... I don't even wanna say try, but they're a little bit more detached, so they may not look at it as a dire situation.

They may look at it as a, "oh, this is a situation where you're trying to take a business from a Black man, a business owner." So they don't see it in the same light. But for the people that we've been collaborating with, they are very close to the issue and they're on our side, but yeah, there has been some pushback on the news and people just learning about the situation.

I will say it's mostly positive because we do have the county on our side. The county has literally told this business, "You cannot operate. This is illegal to do so." So there is an immediate sense of, "oh my God, what is going on? How is this even happening?" when we speak to a lot of people. There are some people that don't share the same sentiment, but for the most part we have the community on our side, we have the county on our side. So we know that this is going to come to a resolution that's in our favor. It's just a matter of when.

Mariann: Well, that sounds like a really powerful initial campaign. And I expect many more from Apex, but before we get to the third one, can you just explain the name? Because I was surprised by it.

Christopher: Yeah. So the name Apex, uh, is an acronym.

It stands for animal protection, equality, intersectionality. And I don't remember if we discussed that last time, but ultimately, like I said, the reason for me forming this organization was because as I was doing activism, I didn't see a lot of the diversity that I would've have liked to see within the mainstream movement.

And I did feel like there was some reasons for that. I think a lot of people that are of color and that are black and brown. When they come into this space of advocacy, they acknowledge and see the ways and the imprints of white supremacy on the animal rights movement. And they don't feel as comfortable navigating through this.

They don't have the...they just don't wanna deal with it. So they would prefer to either not be involved with the movement, it just put their attention elsewhere. And it's not like the movement, in terms of the mainstream movement, has had the best reputation of making advocates of color feel invited. So that's one of the reasons I wanted to create this space because I do feel there are a variety of oppressions that impact not only the animals, but those of us that are fighting for the animals and we can't ignore those systems of oppression that impact both of us. So while we are an animal rights organization, we definitely operate from the lens of, "okay. We have to understand how these systems of oppression impact all of us and work from there."

Mariann: Yeah, I think that's very powerful. And I think that might have something to do with the third leg of your advocacy, am I right? Do you wanna talk about that now?

Christopher: Yes, absolutely. And so this is the newest initiative that we have, and it was actually, I would say gifted to us from the Encompass organization. And for those of you all listening, Encompass has been an organization and a nonprofit that's been involved in bringing about racial equity within the animal rights movement.

And recently they decided to dissolve the organization and they were looking for a space to have one of their campaigns, The Global Majority Caucus, relocate. And they contacted us about adopting The Global Majority Caucus.

And now The Global Majority Caucus is at Apex. And essentially this is a space where advocates of color can come talk, share community, network, and just learn from each other, vent to each other, connect with each other. And we have a lot of plans for the future of the caucus, but that's our third campaign and it really ties into what we're doing with trying to bring more advocates of color within the animal rights space. So now that we have this collection of advocates, we are going to think about how we can create more space for them and help them become more involved in the movement.

So it was a real organic thing to have with our organization.

Mariann: Yeah. And I'm so glad you were there to pick up that work because I think people were very upset to hear that Encompass was no longer. And yet you were there to pick up this very important work.

It sounds to me, but I might be wrong, that this is still somewhat in the planning stage. The details of how you're...whether you're gonna be doing trainings or

workshops or how you're gonna be facilitating this communication and working together. Am I right? Or, or are there specific plans in the works already?

Christopher: We're still doing everything in terms of the, on the monthly basis, the monthly community check-ins, we're still doing that at the beginning of the month.

We're still doing the book clubs at the beginning of every month. So those things aren't changing, what we are really deciding on are the bigger initiatives, the initiatives like pitch day and the executive training. We wanna decide what we can keep, what we can alter, what we can improve, and what's possible with this transition happening. Because obviously we're an upstart organization so we don't have the resources that an organization like Encompass that have been around for around five years has, so we are just getting our footing. So some of the things that we want to do, we just don't have the capacity to do on the same scale of what Encompass was able to do. So we're still trying to navigate and see, "okay, what can we keep at a consistent level of what was already happening and what maybe we have to scale back on or wait to develop further in the future."

So it's still a lot of internal discussions about how we're going to navigate that, but I believe it's coming together pretty well.

Mariann: I know it all happened quite recently, but I just really wanted to hear what the plans are.

And I actually want to take a step back and ask you, can you tell me what pitch day is or will be?

Christopher: Yeah. So pitch day is, and was, an opportunity for advocates of color to present their ideas around new initiatives and animal advocacy and present them to donors and funders. And there would be, I believe I wasn't at the original pitch day, but I believe there was about eight funders involved and it was a Zoom setup.

So the advocates would come in, they would talk about the ideas to the funders and it would just put them directly in front of the donors. So they could hear directly from the advocate's mouth what they were trying to do, what was important to them, and really just give them that opportunity that they may not have had before.

So that's what pitch day was, and that's what it is right now. And what we are trying to decide is, we're trying to continue those relationships with the donors, to bring advocates back again, to expand it, to bring more funders in. We're still working through all of that, but essentially that's what pitch day was.

Mariann: Well, that sounds like a really exciting project. I love that. And you know, obviously you are focusing on campaigns through this initiative, but also just through the Apex campaigns, like the one we just talked about with the local slaughterhouse, that have this intersectional impact.

It's not just impacting animals, it's also impacting people. I assume that you intend to, you probably already have, come into contact with working with people from other social justice movements. Maybe some of them are not particularly interested in animal rights, maybe some of them are very sympathetic. I'm just wondering what those experiences have been like. I know some people have bad experiences with that, people from the environmental movement who just really don't wanna work with animal rights. Have you had any experiences like that?

Christopher: Not really. I will say one of the things about the nonprofit is that, well, one we're fairly new, so we haven't had the chance to collaborate much with people, but we are also cautious how we collaborate with people. I don't wanna rush the organization into something where our name is attached to another organization and it just may not be best for the organization long term, but for the most part, we haven't had any of those types of experiences, but those can be a challenge to navigate though.

Mariann: They sure can. Nobody who advocates for animals is lacking experience in how difficult that...how important it is and how difficult it can be.

Christopher: Absolutely. I will add to that, one of the things that I am excited about is that during this No Backyard Slaughter campaign...one of the things that is important to me with Apex is that we work with community members.

We work with people that's actually in the community. And what that means is a lot of the people that we collaborate with and do actions with and activism with won't necessarily be vegan. And we've had people at the protest that weren't vegan and I've been making it a point at the protest to not make it about veganism although we share the same stance that these protests. Although this is an abolitionist action and abolitionist initiative with this No Backyard Slaughter campaign, we're not highlighting that it is about the animals at these events. We're making sure that the community feels invited and we can fight for the

same thing without having to talk about all of the details around this issue with people that may not be vegan.

So that's one of the things that I'm excited about.

Mariann: Yeah, absolutely. And it sounds like whether you have formulated it or not, you really are thinking in these directions of how...because it's an opportunity to...I mean, I'm sure a lot of people who get involved in this slaughterhouse campaign, or at least some of them, it's not the animals that are motivating them.

It's the filth and that just it's a horrible place. And it probably smells and it's full of disease. You know, there are many other reasons for neighbors to be opposed to this, whether they...and this way, by bringing in the animals, that gives you an opportunity to introduce people to thinking about the animals without just saying, "no, you have to be totally on board with that." It sounds like you're already thinking about how to work with others in other movements, even if you're not articulating it exactly in that way. And it does seem so important because I'm sure just...you're legitimizing also caring about the animals.

Christopher: Absolutely. Yeah. And like you said, you know, we haven't necessarily made it a point to specifically reach out to other social justice movements as of yet and collaborate with them but that is a part of the thinking of how we want to collaborate with people that aren't vegan or aren't animal rights.

We definitely want to extend the actions and the ideas that we do to not just operate within the animal rights bubble. I think it's very important that we reach out to the global majority of the world and that is people of color. So we're gonna have to interact...if we want to normalize being opposed to speciesism then we're going to have to reach people that don't have that viewpoint yet and still navigate how do we remain true to ourselves and remain true to what we believe in, but still collaborate with others who may not share that same sentiment yet?

Mariann: Exactly. It's the great challenge that everybody who advocates for animals faces and that's where their work is.

And I'm really glad you brought up, the international aspect, because that was actually going to be my next question. That...considering animal advocacy obviously is an international movement, do you see leadership coming from countries other than the US, particularly countries of the global south?

Christopher: Yeah. I've been coming across tons of people that are doing things in other parts of the world.

I met this person online recently that is...it is very funny because she is doing something similar in Africa that I'm doing with the Black Vegan Everything campaign. She's getting a collection of Black owned vegan businesses in Africa and helping to support them. I think she said she has a database of about 300 Black owned vegan businesses in Africa, and she's trying to help get them funding and resources.

And I'm gonna send you the information so maybe you can add it in the liner notes or anything like that.

Mariann: Please do. Speaking of African leadership. I don't know whether you caught it, but if you haven't, you have to hear my interview with Dash Meizler, who is a Ugandan animal activist. It was just a month or two ago. It was such a great interview.

Christopher: I know Dash but I didn't hear it.

Mariann: Oh, then you have to listen to it.

Christopher: I absolutely do.

Mariann: It was such a great interview, I just loved it.

I totally agree with you that there's so much leadership coming from other parts of the world. I think it's very exciting. You know, of course, sometimes doing a podcast we have language barriers, but not always. And I love interviewing people from other parts of the world. It's just so inspiring.

Christopher: Absolutely.

Mariann: So, yeah, I'll be looking for more of that. And I think that there could be many connect...do you plan to have some interactions with people from other areas of the globe?

Christopher: Absolutely. Actually one of the people that's on our team at Apex is based in India right now. So we are open to people from all over the world, because like you said, obviously this is an international movement. It is something, you know, speciesism happens around the world. It's just not

delegated to one part of the world. But that means there are also people fighting against it all around the world.

And I was recently at the LEAD conference in March, a few months ago where I had the opportunity to meet so many people that are doing things in different parts of the world. Even last year at the Animal Liberation Conference, I ran into people from all over the world. So yeah, I am open to either collaborating or spreading light or having people from different parts of the world work directly with Apex, indirectly with Apex, because, like I said earlier, the global majority are people of color.

That's what we're trying to reach. That's who we want to be involved in animal advocacy, because we're going to need these different perspectives to speak to these communities to have an impact in these communities. But it's certain things that just doesn't translate. Apex advocacy may not translate the same way in Asia.

It would be best if I can communicate with someone in Asia or in India and ask them, how can I be of use to you? How can I collaborate with you in a way that's organic instead of just thinking I can share my ideas in another part of the world, I would like to collaborate with people.

Mariann: I love that idea and it reminds me of something I used to say...not to like, I'm talking about my interview and something I used to say, but still I'm gonna mention. I just feel, I've always felt like in some ways, animal advocates are kind of like a nation unto ourselves. That it's actually all over the world and we may be very different and there may be problems or whatever, but we all have this thing very much in common and we're all passionate about it.

And I love the feeling that I'm linked to people all over the world because of how much I care about animals.

Christopher: Absolutely.

Mariann: And no matter where you are, there are people who care about animals, always.

But bringing us back to the United States. I just wanted to talk to you about Black veganism for a moment, because it's such a hugely important force.

Not that there isn't Black veganism in other places, but I'm familiar with it in the US, and it's just one kind of the most important piece of the vegan movement

right now. It's the fastest growing, the most powerful, the most enthusiastic, really. So I'm just curious to know, what would you identify as some of the most important trends within Black veganism?

Christopher: I would say a lot of the times, the ethics of veganism isn't as associated with Black people as I would like it to be. So I think one of the things is essentially the reason we developed the Black Vegan Everything website was to showcase that the true essence and the ethics of veganism is why it spread throughout Black communities.

And I will say, I think most people tend to highly associate it with food around Black veganism. And that is a very integral part of it because our culture, our lineage, does have a lot of plant-based nutrition and foods that are heavily plant-based. So that's something that definitely is seen and shared often, but yeah, I think veganism is displayed in a variety of ways throughout Black communities. And food is one, clothing and culture is another way, it's just so many things. The body products that we use are often natural and free of any animal products and toxins and chemicals. So it's displayed in a variety of ways within Black culture.

Mariann: Yeah. And as you talk about it, correct me if I'm wrong, but this kind of confirms the way I think about it as well. So usually for white vegans it starts with caring about animals and you have to kind of drag people into the idea that no, you can actually not eat them, like, it's actually possible. You can live well. But it starts with this kind of intellectual process of, "oh, actually I care about animals" and you know, that's how it started for me and this is great. I'm not criticizing it at all.

But what you're saying about Black veganism and now it's striking me that it feels true, there's almost...it starts in the other direction. Like the culture almost encourages, as you said, more natural, more lighter, like better foods, like there's this whole cultural movement towards that, that then can open up people to understanding the animal argument. And that's part of your mission.

Am I saying that right?

Christopher: I believe so, yeah. I think both exist. So obviously there are people that are just more focused on eating a plant-based diet and they may not necessarily feel comfortable with the word vegan or feel they want to be associated with it. And the ethics of it may not resonate with them, but you'll also have, like we were just talking about, people that adopt it as a lifestyle and are making sure that they aren't supporting any form of animal abuse through

the clothes they wear or the food they eat or the accessories they wear, both of those exist.

So, yeah, it's just like any other. It's a variety

Mariann: Looking back on it, I realize I was grossly generalizing, but it did strike me as sort of trends.

And you know, I've always thought like, it's very hard to talk anybody into caring about animals until they, as I always say, "get the meat out of their ears." Like you can't talk to them about animals.

Veganism, I think, rather than thinking of people who go vegan without thinking of the animals as stopping there, I think it might be the first step. You know, getting them off your plate is the first step to actually hearing what's happening, even though I am grossly generalizing.

Christopher: No, I agree with that mainly because unfortunately that is the largest way that animals are exploited in our current system is through food, is through dietary consumption. So I think most of us, even when we are born as children, that's one of the first forms of discrimination that's pretty much normalized. We're given cows milk as infants and it continues from there.

So yeah, I think that's fair to say. And I think that's true for most people in general that if you can get people to connect and understand that, then you can create that bridge to fighting through a collective liberation lens.

Mariann: So why is it so hard, Christopher? Why is it so hard? Like, so many people do care about animals. It's not like most people don't care, most people except for the real psychopaths, kind of care about animals, wouldn't hurt them, at least to some extent.

Why is it so hard to get people to make change?

Christopher: Oh, that is cultural conditioning. That is white supremacy. I think a lot of the issues that are in a lot of the systems in place you're not undoing just actions, you're undoing conditioning. I mean, think about how long it took us to evolve into the individuals that we are.

It's hard to break those habits quickly. You know, we go to therapy for trying to unlearn behavior that's damaging to us and to become better versions of ourselves and the same thing rings true with how we exploit animals.

It is a process for some people, some people can go to training...I mean go to therapy and maybe one or two sessions they're a much better version of themselves. Some people it may take years and I think the same thing plays out with the way we exploit and contribute to animal abuse.

Mariann: That is a great analogy. I love that answer and it reminds us all to not give up too. Just because people don't listen to you instantly doesn't mean they're not in a process of change.

Christopher: Absolutely.

Mariann: So before I let you go, I just wanna talk a little bit about the times that we're living in, which are a little fraught. I think we all know, whether we're talking about the politics, the climate, institutions, police, like you name it...

We are living in interesting times. Is there any positive to be seen? I mean, these aren't positive things, obviously, but do you think that there's a possibility of the kind of huge social change it's going to require to achieve what we want to achieve for animals?

Christopher: I am optimistic every day. I am more and more optimistic every day. Now, that doesn't mean that I'm happy and just bubbling and full of joy and shooting to the moon every day. It just means that I do believe, on average, every day life gets better. We absolutely suffer setbacks. We absolutely go through times in years where things don't go our way and society feels like it's being pushed back.

But I do believe if you were to trade places with a person from 50 years ago, you would see how much better our current lives are, on average, around the globe for us, for animals, for all beings now. Obviously, you know, like I said, there are things that are more and more prevalent every day, but I also feel like a lot of these things weren't as discussed. As you know, maybe 50 years ago, maybe the climate wasn't as discussed 50 years ago in terms of helping to eradicate bad policy and bad everyday actions towards climate change. So I am optimistic. I have a lot of hope for this generation to fight because I don't know how long I'll be here, but I do know I am optimistic about how aware this current generation is to make change for themselves and beyond.

And I'll say also The Earth is one of the things that I guess this gives me optimism, but I guess depending on how you look at it, it could be bad too. The Earth will be fine. The Earth will go on. The Earth isn't dying. What's dying is the ability for humans and species to live on earth as fully as we have. The

Earth goes through mass extinctions and after those mass extinctions a new form of existence or the life that survived goes on.

So ultimately I believe that humans are still very small in their evolutionary process. We're still like toddlers, in my opinion, we still haven't evolved to where we are going to be. And I think every day and every year we're getting closer. I just hope that we evolve before we make this Earth uninhabitable for us. So that's the million dollar question. I don't know when that'll happen, or if that'll happen, but I am optimistic.

Mariann: Well that is a perfect place to leave this interview. I don't often get a statement of optimism that strong and I'm really inspired by it. So thank you for that and thank you for joining us. Best and really, really best of luck with Apex. It's very exciting development.

Christopher: Thank you for having me again. I am always excited to be a part of the Our Hen House family. So thank you again.