Our Hen House Podcast: Transcript for Episode 674, Interview with Nirva Patel

Mariann Sullivan: Welcome to Our Hen House, Nirva!

Nirva Patel: Thank you so much, very happy to be here!

Mariann: I'm very happy to have you here. You're really doing such a variety of things and you're kind of like the quintessential activist. You've gotten involved in a bunch of different things, and they're all really interesting and they're all really passionate.

I'm not sure where to start, so I thought maybe we'd start at the beginning because your roots in animal activism and veganism really do start from your childhood, because you have a background in Jainism, which we've talked about before on the podcast but I can never talk about it enough because it's so interesting.

Can you just tell us a little bit about your childhood, where you grew up, attachment to animals, and specifically how Jainism was part of that development?

Nirva: Sure, Mariann. I grew up in Ashland, Massachusetts to a Jain father and a Hindu mom. We grew up vegetarian, my sisters and I, so we did not eat meat, we did not eat chicken, fish, eggs, but we were very aware of the fact that we lived in a society that did consume all of those products. Jainism is one of those religions, probably the only one in the world, that has a strict adherence to a compassionate diet. So Jainism has this philosophy that there is a universal instinct for self preservation, which translates to- every single thing wants to live, every single living being wants to live and thrives to live.

And, if we are to get in that the path of that will to live, we incur bad karma, if you will. So we grew up knowing that whether it's a plant, an animal, a small ant, we should respect that there's this notion that that being wants to live. So I

remember when flies were caught in the house, or mosquitoes were caught, we would open the window, we would conscientiously free that trapped creature. We did not wear leather. There are things that I have learned along the way, but I think that was my fundamental foundation for respecting all living beings, as a member of the Jain Diaspora in America.

Mariann: My understanding is that proselytizing isn't really part of the Jain religion, people are born Jain, and I guess they could become Jain, but you're not trying to make the world Jain, but kind of you have gotten to the point where you want to proselytize. Maybe not Jainism, but certainly animal compassion…maybe proselytized isn't exactly the right word, but it is kind of what we all do.

So can you talk about the difference between practicing respect for animals yourself, as a Jain and as an individual, and taking on the work of persuading others to do so as well. Is there conflict there or is it a natural outgrowth or what?

Nirva: Yes, so that's an incredible question because Jainism is rooted in nonviolence, but within the religion there are different interpretations of what exactly…how to carry that practice out.

So while some Jains will not eat root vegetables, like potatoes and onions and carrots, because when you pluck that root vegetable from the ground, on the one hand, that vegetable can never grow again because you're plucking it from its root, so that's like very violent. And then surrounding that root vegetable, there's an entire microscopic ecosystem of bacteria and worms and insects.

And so a lot of Jains will not even eat root vegetables. But on the other hand, dairy, in the form of ghee and butter and yogurt is accepted for many Jains, both in India and the US. So in the sense that I'm not proselytizing or spreading the the Jain mission, I do want to clear up certain aspects of the concept of ahimsa as the highest duty within the religion.

And while dairy thousands of years ago may have been less harmful than dairy is today it is still a current debate within the Jain community, whether we should continue to consume ghee and yogurt and dairy products, or we should change the way we view dairy, as a harmful, bad, karmic ridden food.

Mariann: Yeah, I think that you have actually done some work here in encouraging Jain Temples to give up dairy, can you talk about that? And I'd be interested to hear about what kind of pushback you get. It's such an interesting

topic because really here is a religion and a philosophy that is rooted in the very concept of compassion and letting others live.

And yet even there, tradition enters into kind of getting in the way of people hearing…you know, people don't want to change. And even in this area where people are almost there if they hear a new thing, and it's kind of a microcosm of the whole world not wanting to change…Anyway, I'm going on and on.

Just tell us about the work you've done in encouraging Jain Temples to give up dairy and what kind of pushback you've gotten, and what kind of encouragement you've gotten as well.

Nirva: Sure. So growing up, every Sunday my sisters and I would go to the Jain Center, which at that time was a rented out church in Norwood.

And we would go there and there would be dignitaries, saints, Jain Saints, who would visit the temple on a particular day. And we were asked, as children, to ask questions about Jainism and what's allowed, what is not allowed, the philosophy can be very strict. And I remember we once asked Amara Singh, one of the Jain Saints, “Is eggs allowed?"

And the saint said, “Well, eggs are not allowed.” But we were like, “What if they're unfertilized, then you're not actually killing anything?” And the saint said like, “Well, the purpose of that egg has the potential for life or the intention of that egg is to create life and so even though the physical egg does not have a life in it, you are kind of destroying a purpose and so that incurs bad karma as well."

And as we grew up, we all consumed dairy. There was never a question, dairy was one of those things no one really talked about, ghee was so much a part of the Jain Center because ghee was considered, especially amul ghee, which is made from dairy cows versus the water buffalo, the dairy cow ghee is considered pure. And so in the Jain Temple, you're only supposed to use very pure, very expensive items when you're doing a puja or a prayer ceremony. And so I remember just thinking, “Okay, well, we're vegetarian, we would never eat animals, but dairy is fine because it's a byproduct of an animal. We're not killing the animal, we're not incurring any harm.”

And as I later learned what's behind that door, that we probably were avoiding to open, is a terrible, terrible scene of, as you know, mothers being artificially impregnated, babies being taken away, discarded cows in India with no purpose after they’ve…we know that whole story.

I was shocked because when we lived in India, my husband and I lived in India for eight years, and I remember talking to many members of the Jain community. And I said, “How is this even allowed when dairy, the industrial aspects of dairy, has changed so much in India that it is so terrible and it's so harmful and very violent? How can this be accepted within the Jain community?” So the response I got from people was very interesting.

Some people said, “Well, you know, if you look at our old scriptures, we do things the way we have done them for thousands and thousands of years, and we can't make any changes. And if you look at our old scriptures and the old texts, they even have references to Baghwan Mahaveer, our most recent Tirthankar, I can go into that later about what Tirthankars mean, but there are references to Indian, to Jain dignitaries consuming dairy. So if they did it, it should be okay today. It's a byproduct. Yes, it is violent, but we can't change things.”

So, what I said to them was, “But back then I still would've disagreed with taking milk from an animal because it's a taking, you're violating this female animal's body and you're taking something for your own consumption. How do we even know if we got the texts correct? Who wrote these books? I mean, it's not consistent with the Jain philosophy of ahimsa.”

And you know, you just go back and forth in these debates, but ultimately I think it's very hard to change habits. It's hard for the Jain population, the dharmic Indian population to stop consuming chai, to stop consuming all of the sweets and mithai that we eat at Diwali, that we eat around our festivals.

Dairy is so ingrained in the Indian culture. I mean, there are national campaigns around it. There was the white revolution where dairy was considered a sign of strength. It was considered, "You are Indian if you consume milk.” All the Bollywood actors were in advertisements in India. You know, it's deep rooted in our culture, and it's been something that I've been trying really hard to combat.

When we moved back to the US, I wrote letters and I called a lot of the Jain centers in the United States and I presented the question of whether dairy should be a part of our ritual festivals. And there is a time in Jainism, which is called Paryushan, it happens in August, September, it’s like the most holiest of times where you fast for days and cleanse your body and you ask everyone for forgiveness. And it's a very auspicious time.

And so what I asked the Jain Centers to do is to not serve ghee during that time because the presence of ghee in the temple causes almost a shadow to all of the good intentions that people are participating in during that religious period.

So I started a campaign, it was a change.org petition. We got thousands of signatures and a lot of people really understood and they said, “Okay, well we can give it up for this one week.” And it, it was highly successful, a lot of temples did not serve ghee during that week of Peryushan. So I continued to talk about that.

Mariann: Yeah, that seems like a big triumph because it's sort of an acknowledgement that, “Okay, there's something wrong here.” Even if it's only for a week, it’s sort of an acknowledgement that this isn't a wonderful thing.

But I just find it fascinating that people, I guess I already said this, who have embraced a philosophy that is almost there still are so stuck in tradition. It's like a microcosm of the wider world where people are stuck in enormously more harmful traditions, but still the mystery of why people cannot see their way out of this nightmare that we've created. And even in this like almost perfect situation people are still like, “Oh no, we've always done it!” All the same excuses. All the same excuses just for the one product.

Nirva: Yeah.

Mariann: Just fascinating. But you're doing so many things, I don't wanna spend the whole interview talking about Jainism, though I definitely could. But as I mentioned in your bio, you are trained as a lawyer, and right now you're doing work at Harvard Law School as a Global Policy Fellow, and I really, really want to find out what you've been working on there. Can you tell us a bit about that?

Nirva: Sure. As you know, Harvard Law School has an incredible program dedicated to improving the lives of animals. We have an academic component and we also have a hands on bold clinic that serves as a little law firm within the law school, and it's all dedicated to animal protection.

I have really enjoyed my time there. It's an incredible team. Most recently, one of the projects that I worked on is an assessment and study of live markets and their potential for zoonotic disease. So the project that I worked on was studying two specific markets in India, one is a live poultry market and the other is just a general market in Mumbai, which I have visited many, many, many times. What we looked at was- okay, India seems to have all of these great

laws. I mean, we have laws that protect the quality of slaughterhouses. We have a prevention of cruelty to animals. We even have in our constitution that it is the fundamental duty of every Indian citizen to protect or show compassion towards animals. But the enforcement of such laws are not always as strong as the laws themselves.

So in the wake of the pandemic, Harvard Law School embarked on this 14 country deep dive of live markets and their potential for zoonotic disease. And what we found was that many people visit these markets, whether you're shopping for a mango or a puppy, everyone goes to these markets and whether you see it or not, there are animals being slaughtered live.

Their blood is being drained on the floors, people are stepping on the blood there's a lot of contamination. Then you have this whole wild bird population that comes in and further contaminates the food, the whatever is being sold at the markets. And it's like this perfect storm of creating this almost reservoir for potential zoonotic disease.

So I worked on that project and it's almost complete.

Mariann: What will the project be when you're done? Is it a white paper to present to governments in countries where live markets exist?

Nirva: Yes. So we present policy suggestions on how to improve the implementation of otherwise sound and strong laws.

So it's about, I think 30 to 40 pages for each country, and we outlined what's going on in India and then we look at the laws, we look at the regulatory schemes, and then we advise on where we think India can partner up with local vendors and these markets to provide a better situation that would keep people safe.

Mariann: Do you see the public health implications as one of the real ends for legal policy change? When animal welfare can be linked to public health implications, as it is in the live markets?

Nirva: Absolutely. I think India and, of course, everyone around the world focuses on what's the human health component of animal welfare, and this is something that I think the world is now paying attention to, in the wake of the Covid pandemic.

So, India is one of those countries where we're prone to epidemics, they become endemic. You know, they never really leave the country. So we are uniquely positioned to have a greater sensitivity to disease.

Mariann: You mentioned that India has a lot of great laws, and we do tend to hear about them in some really fascinating cases that have gone through the courts.

Elephants and other animals, but as always is the case, no matter where you are with animal law, people talk a good game, but it doesn't always happen on the ground. But what do you see, having looked at all these different countries, what do you see as the most significant differences between the approaches that legal systems take to animals? Or do you see any as standing out? Do you see them all as very similar?

Nirva: That's a tough question to answer. I think there has been some success in Indian courts to recognizing animals as an essential component of nature, and I think that's where we will find some sort of movement when we look at nature.

In this One Health philosophy, right? Where you look at nature, yeah, it makes sense to protect nature, but our animals are critical component of nature. Our plants are, you know plants are, but how much can we separate animals from our food systems and into this ecosystem that we must protect? And the Indian Constitution has some language around that, but it's whether we're able to enforce those laws, enforce that level of compassion. I'm hopeful. I'm definitely hopeful. It's gonna take time. But, you know, I'm hopeful.

Mariann: So rights of nature is an area that you think has promise?

Nirva: I think so, yeah.

Mariann: I think we all have to face, as lawyers, that law can solidify change, but we don't often create it. It's a conservative enterprise and it doesn't impose, unfortunately, in this particular instance though I guess fortunately in most instances, it doesn't impose new things on people. It just kind of comes up with ways, at its best, to make changes solid and enforce them, but change still has to come from the ground. Speaking of on the ground, I understand that you also worked with the clinic on the Tule Elk case, is that right?

We have had speakers on to talk about that, can you tell us a little bit about that work? Sounds like you did a lot of different things at Harvard.

Nirva: Yes, so the Tule Elk case was one of my first projects that I helped out with. And the situation in that case is that we have this amazing National Park Service and there is an area in California called Point Reyes National Park where we have a population of elk that have, they're actually native to the area, which means that we have to protect them, in Point Reyes

But the problem is that area in Point Reyes is inhabited by cattle ranchers. And it has been inhabited for many years by cattle ranchers who have created fences to prevent the elk from eating the vegetation that they have designed for their own cows. And so you have this conflict where you have the interests of this Native Elk population, and then you have the interests of the cattle ranchers who've been there, landowners on public land, grandfathered in, our tax dollars pay for that land, but they're being inhabited by these cattle ranchers. And so because of the drought in California and the lack of vegetation due to the drought, and water sources, the Tule elk population started dying.

So they had massive die-offs and the park service said, "Well, this is all natural and this is what happens when there's a drought and it has nothing to do with these cattle ranchers being there." They're activists in the area. This has brought a lot of like public attention. And it even brought the attention to Harvard Law School where we tried our best. We petitioned the National Park Service to take care of these elk and you can't ship in water to them, you can't really take down those fences, but is there a duty to protect this dying population of elk? And unfortunately we didn't win on those grounds because the National Park Service said that they are doing the best that they can in that situation, and it's just sad. Because these elk are just going to suffer, they're going to starve. They're going to start eating poisonous plants… I mean, who knows what's gonna happen? They're gonna become desperate in that area. And it was really hard to know and to learn about that because I didn't know that there were this entire population of cattle ranchers who have their cows, they're selling beef, they're selling cheese, their ice cream is famous in that area. And it continues to be a sad situation.

Mariann: Yeah, it's a terrible situation. I'm sorry to hear that none of the legal work has been successful. I didn't really realize that. Are you going to be continuing at Harvard in the coming year? Are you taking on more projects or is that program done?

Nirva: I'm continuing at Harvard, for the time period, I do not have other plans to move on, but there is a ton of work and it's been a great experience and we will see what the future holds.

Mariann: All right. I'll be looking forward to hearing that.

I know that before you worked at Harvard, you received a Master's in Animal Law & Policy from the Tufts program, and I know of a few people, particularly very smart people with academic backgrounds, who come to a point in their life where they wanna do this and they're looking for a way in, and of course an academic route is natural to them.

It strikes me that you're one of those people. Is that true? And can you tell us a little bit about that program and how it helped you kind of…I ask this because I think there are so many people, and probably a lot of people listening, who want to devote their life to this and just don't know "how would I even start?" And it seems like you found a way to start.

Nirva: So my background is biomedical engineering. I went to law school. I became a patent attorney, but my passion was always animal protection, and I didn't understand that there was a career path to animal protection. In fact, I thought I would become a patent lawyer and invent all these things, or protect inventions, to end animal testing.

So I had a creative plan for myself. But, you know, life moved me to Bombay and then it took a lot of twists and turns. But when I came back to The States after living in India and I said to myself, "Now I'm gonna really, really dedicate my time to protecting animals because that is what I could do day and night without ever getting bored, without ever losing interest."

And it's just something that is so part of my core being. I looked at ways to get educated. I mean, so much has changed in this space, and one of the things that I do do is listen to this podcast because the speakers you have on this podcast… it's like you're thinking about something on a particular day.

And the next podcast, I don't know if you have like some intelligent software that can read minds, but it just happens to be exactly what's on the podcast the next day. *laughing*

Mariann: That comment made me happier than anything that's happened in a very long time. *both laughing*

Nirva: Well, it's true! So I looked up animal careers…how can you educate yourself on, you know, if you could go to a program at Lewis and Clark, you could get your LLM, but like if you just wanna have like this 30,000 foot aerial view of all of these issues that face animals without going super, super deep and getting a PhD or an LLM on something, how would you do it?

So this program at Tufts is Animal Law and Policy, and it is fantastic. They divide the program up into four different groups. One is companion animals, and you look at, you know, behavioral studies. There's a lot of research there, and then you look at wild animals. And then farm animals, and then animals in research.

It's incredible. The professors are wonderful. I strongly recommend that as a path to anyone who wants to go into this space because you will learn things that you had never known existed. You will have points of articulation that you have never been able to work out before in your mind, and it's fascinating.

I loved the science also. There was a whole research class that we had to take where we looked at studies of whether animal models in biomedical research is actually warranted. And we really, really had to defend those or argue against them. We studied aspects of social justice in this movement.

And, you know, one of my papers on policy was about what's happening in the hog farms in North Carolina, and the policy monopolies that exist there that make it almost impossible for anyone to stand up against them. So, it's just an incredible program and I highly recommend it.

Mariann: Yeah, it really does sound incredible and so valuable because so often, most of us who care about this issue, we didn't grow up on farms or we didn't grow up in any animal use industry or know anybody in animal use industries, and they always use that against us, especially on the farm level. Like as if, just because you've eaten animals your whole life, you are not allowed to say anything. And you're not supposed to know anything about what's really going on. And so having this kind of credentials to say, "yeah, I have this degree and I've learned a lot and I probably know more than you do."

Just because you're in the industry, that mostly means that you're biased. It doesn't mean that you know a lot. So I think it's incredibly valuable, especially for very smart people who really…you know, some people can just jump into anything, but I think smart people feel a lot better if they have a lot of knowledge. If they actually have the credentials and the knowledge so that they can make a valid argument.

Nirva: Right, and there's the textual knowledge, but also what you see visually. Like Tufts University has an agricultural… I mean, it's a veterinarian school. So I remember witnessing, probably one of the most horrific things in my life, which was when… it's a mixed group of students, also. Some are very pro animal exploitation in the sense that- we can be really kind to animals and then

we can eat them. And I remember being in those debates in my classroom, but having a respectful discussion. But we also witnessed the artificial insemination of a cow.

And it was so horrifying, so awful. But it makes you…you know, I remember just looking at the poor cow, you know, she was…You know, the technician that did it was very kind of macho and was showing us this magazine of bull semen and what it goes for and the cost of it. And then he took out his big kind of rod and he was just so proud of what he was doing.

And it was just an awful, awful scene. And what they do is they line up all the cows and they tie their heads into this contraption. And I remember everyone in the class was in the back watching what was happening. And I ran to the front and I was looking at her and seeing how she looked differently from all of the other cows.

They all knew what was happening. It's like it had happened before many, many times, I'm sure. And her head was so low, and everyone else's head was higher, and you can just tell, you know, like she was…it was just a terrible scene. But when you see something like that, you're watching your classmates observe that. After that session, I had three classmates come up to me and they were like, "Tell us what do we eat? How do we go vegan? There's no way we can eat meat after seeing what we just saw."

Mariann: Two just incredibly important things about that. The fact that you were there made them formulate that question and if you hadn't been there, kind of even silently bearing witness to the fact that this is wrong, might not have occurred to them.

So that's so important. And also the fact that you have seen that, as painful as it was, it's like having seen footage of terrible things happening to animals. You know, we all hate to do it, but you even so because you've seen it in life, if anybody ever starts to talk to you about it, you can tell this and you have seen it.

And so few of us have, so it's incredibly valuable even though incredibly painful. So education, like forcing ourselves to learn what's really happening to animals really can be very useful, even though it's pretty hard, even though I've only done it on film because there's no way they would let me in to see that.

And you know, I'm kind of grateful for that, but also I just think it gives you so much credibility. All right. So, it seems like that was a great way to start your activist- can I call it your activist career?- because you're doing so many

different things. And one of them that I want to talk about, though we're recording this ahead of time and this might have already happened or be about to happen, but I'm talking generally about filmmaking, but specifically about the International Vegan Film Festival, which is, as I said it, coming up soon or it has already happened in Ottawa. So just tell us, at this point, why you think film is important, because you have done a lot of work promoting film and maybe if you can reveal anything about what's going to happen at that film festival, I'd love to hear it.

Nirva: Sure. I sit on the board of the International Vegan Film Festival and what they do is they bring documentaries and films about animals, whether they're a couple of minutes or an hour or two long, to the world. And although their film festivals tend to be in Canada, they are an international organization, but it's a small group of people.

We have a cookbook contest and it's just generally built around awareness of documentary filmmaking, and I think films are extremely powerful. The first one that I had a chance to get involved with was the *Game Changers*. You know, my sister was at a Sundance Film Festival and she called me up and she was like, "There are all these vegans here talking about this movie and it's like athletes."

And I was like, "oh my goodness!" And we had heard about this film through the grapevine, I'm sure every plant-based person had by that point, but I got the number of the nutritionist, the scientist behind the film, and I had a really long conversation with him. And we talked about the film and we talked about the impact that the film could potentially have.

And I remember thinking, "wow, like I thought this whole vegan, vegetarian thing was such an Indian thing, such a thing that like I could never really talk to people about." But here we are on the cusp of this great movie, which I didn't know it was going to be great at that point, but they're basically unapologetically talking about the plant-based diet and how it increases performance for all of these athletes like Serena Williams and Jackie Chan, and Louis Hamilton and Djokovic and Chris Paul.

And I just couldn't believe it. So I managed to get a cut of the film and I remember sitting with my dad who was one of the biggest inspirations to me as a child, in terms of teaching me about animals and sentience, and we were watching it and at the end we just looked at each other and we just started crying.

And it was so incredible because you saw that this would resonate, you know, it wasn't that preachy veganism. It was backed by science. You know, it was screen after screen of just power, motivational messages. So the *Game Changers* was one of my first experiences in documentary filmmaking in the vegan space.

And then, I have supported other films. There's another film called *The End of Medicine*, which is a film that tracks the story of a veterinarian who goes into the field thinking, "I'm gonna help animals and I'm gonna do something great for animals." And then she ends up cutting off…plucking off pig's teeth and cutting off their toenails and making it easier for people in the animal agricultural industry to do their jobs.

And she realizes that, "this is not what I wanted to do, this was not my intention." And she had no kind of emotional support. And then, you realize that the AVMA says that, I think it's, one out of six vets have contemplated suicide. And vets are 2.7 times more likely than the general public to die by suicide.

And you think about all these things, right? Like this conflict in an industry. And the end of the movie, you're like, "well, so what is the solution, right?" Like if you have this skill, you love animals, you have this profession, you can't just like give up your job. So what is it? So, I mean, and this solution may not be there for everyone, but work as a vet at a sanctuary, work as a vet at the MSPCA. There are options, whether they're practical or not, there are options. I like focusing on films that really talk about this conflict, where you go into this thinking you're going to save the world, you're going to save the animals, you're gonna do all this stuff, and then the commercialization of the food industry makes it impossible to do that. And then what are the creative solutions that can tackle this terrible conflict?

Mariann: Yeah, I think that's a great approach because I just think people like stories about people. Yeah, there are some of us who like stories about animals. I'm not even a huge fan of stories about animals.

I love animals. We're humans, we're primates. We're interested in each other and I'm interested in people who care about animals and I'm interested in their story. And that I think really moves people. And it's really hard also to make movies about what's happening to animals because it's too heartbreaking.

But to take it that once removed and make a story about a person who cares about animals just as you do, I think really resonates with people. So I think that's one of the powerful things that movies can do. Highlight those people.

Nirva: Absolutely. There's another film. My favorite one is *My Octopus Teacher*, and it's amazing.

I'm sure everyone who's listening to this podcast has watched the film. I don't need to go into those details, but there was a scene in that film where I just, it's haunting to me and this is about the animal herself, where there's like a pool of fish and the filmmaker, the narrator, is watching her and he's like…Well, you know, we often look at animals and all of their behavior and we think, "Well, there's always a purpose. They're either hunting or they're protecting their young, or there's a survival skill associated with that action."

But this is one scene in the film where this school of fish passes by the octopus and she's just like waving her tentacles at those fish but she'd already eaten. She wasn't protecting herself. She was safe, there was no survival purpose associated with that action. She was just playing.

She was actually just playing. She was showing a joyful action. And I think that it is important for people to talk about people and why they're motivated, but also there are incredible stories of animals doing incredible things where we can relate to them as human beings too.

Mariann: I totally agree. I mean, I want the animals to be in there, but I do think one of the powers of *My Octopus Teacher* had to do with that guy's story.

That the octopus's story came to you through a human lens. So yeah, this isn't a hard and fast rule and I don't know anything about filmmaking, but I always do think that human stories reach people.

We haven't even gotten to the thing that I first wanted to interview you about and I've kept you for a long time already. But you also are the President of the Board of Farm Sanctuary, and I really want to hear about that work, that board work and and what it entails, and also what you're excited about that's going on at Farm Sanctuary, which of course has always been one of the leadership organizations, I think, for everybody in this movement. The granddaddy of all the sanctuaries.

Nirva: Yes, thank you. So I am the Board Chair at Farm Sanctuary. As you know, it's, I think, the largest and possibly oldest sanctuary in the United States.

It's a powerhouse of talented people. We have over a hundred employees, close to a thousand rescued animals. So many acres in upstate New York. I think it's like 275.

We have 26 acres in Acton just outside of LA. The animals, the residents, their stories are incredible. We have cows that have run away, to save their lives, from slaughterhouses. We have rescued pigs who've saved themselves from overcrowded hot trucks, sheep who've escaped ranches and hid in neighborhoods and areas, staying calm, avoiding attention, and then being rescued and brought over to Farm Sanctuary. We have animals who required an extensive amount of veterinarian care. Animals born with deformed features like one of our animals has a cross beak and there's ducks that have been abandoned from dumpsters. Farmed animals' protection in the United States is an interesting thing, because farm animals are not protected. If there wasn't Farm Sanctuary, and all of the sanctuaries in the United States, who would protect them, right? I mean the Animal Welfare Act does not, they're excluded from that. And their purpose in our society is only for food consumption, which is really sad because, as I was mentioning with *My Octopus Teacher* and talking about joy, farm animals also have an incredible capacity for joy.

And when you see them on the farm, running and playing, they have best friends like you'll often see a pair of two cows and they never leave each other and they're always seen together. Or you have cross species best friends. You'll have like a cow and and a sheep that are always together and it's incredible, incredible to see that.

We're actually embarking on something very fascinating right now at Farm Sanctuary, which is called Sanctuary Based Research where we are…and it sounds bad, right? Like research on animals is something I would never, ever, ever support. But this is not, this is not animal research. This is sanctuary based observational research. So the animals are not forced to do any of these things. We're watching them, we're observing them, we're trying to find ways to link their emotions with human emotion, the way we have done with cats and dogs. You know, we've attributed so many human-like emotions to cats and dogs, but we have not done that with farm animals, and that is kind of a necessary step to then advocating for them in our public environment. There is this concept that, again, animals are only there for survival, for food, for consumption, their commodities, they belong in cages, but what we have observed is something very different and you'll be seeing quite a bit of research coming out from this program.

Mariann: I'm really excited about that and I actually am really excited about sanctuaries in general at the moment. I just feel like, though they've been an

enormous part of the movement for a long time, and very important part, creating those connections between people and these animals, I just feel like they're starting even more so to come into their own and find new activism opportunities and different ways to use their experience with these animals, which nobody else has, as you pointed out, like we didn't know pigs growing up or know cows growing up, and they know these animals and they have so much to offer, in different ways.

So I love the idea of observational research. Where else could you possibly do that? And the industry puts out its own observational research about whether, you know, they give an animal two terrible choices and see which one it chooses. That's not research. You know, and they tell you that this is the good one because it's better than the bad one. You know, crazy stuff.

So I think there are enormous opportunities and I love that sanctuaries are even more so coming into their own. I think they were put down for a while as you know, “Well, we spend too much money and they're not…" by the effective altruists. But not at all. I think they're a very powerful part of the movement.

I wish we could talk longer, but I have kept you very long. Perhaps I can… because I wanna ask you about your family, because in the middle of all of this, you also have four young children. So I don't know how you pulled this off, but maybe we'll save that for the bonus segment. And unless there's something you want to add here, we will say goodbye for now.

Nirva: I think that's fine. I mean, there's so much more I could say, but I think I've captured it all. You did a great job.

I was just gonna say at Farm Sanctuary animals are allowed to grow old. You know, I mean, if you think about the animals in our food systems, they only live to like two years old. They're babies. You know, they're young. It's just a sad thing. But at Farm Sanctuary, they get to grow old, and you really get to know them and throughout their entire lifespan versus just this short, commoditized time.

Mariann: Yeah, absolutely. Nobody in the industry can tell you what an older animal is like.

As a matter of fact, I know that Gene Baur has talked about the fact that they bring animals, when there's a strong need, to the Cornell Veterinary, which is an excellent veterinary school, and they get good care. But Cornell, the people at

Cornell have had to learn from the animals at Farm Sanctuary because they didn't know how to treat older pigs or older chickens.

They've never seen them before. So yeah, it's a real educational experience for everybody. It's so moving and, you know, farm Sanctuary holds a very, very dear place in my heart because it was really the first place, years and years ago, that I visited all by myself. I remember driving up that dirt road, there was nobody around, checking into one of those cabins and it was such an incredibly meaningful experience for me, so it's very dear to my heart. Thank you so much for sharing all that you're doing. It's really been fascinating.

Nirva: You're welcome. Thank you so much, Mariann. It was an honor to be here.