



Episode 464: Justin Mares on Regenerative Agriculture As the Solution to Climate Issues (and Health Issues)

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Hello and welcome to the "Wellness Mama Podcast." I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and wellnesse.com. That's Wellnesse with an E on the end. And today, it's always a pleasure to chat with Justin Mares, who's a friend of mine, and also the founder and CEO of Kettle & Fire bone broth. But today, we go deep on regenerative agriculture, and as a solution to climate issues and health issues. I enjoy every conversation with Justin, but I really enjoyed this one because we go into why this idea that it's environmentally conscious to be plant-based is a false dichotomy, and the reason that livestock are not the problem. In fact, even conventionally-raised livestock aren't the problem. But the difference between the different ways that animals are raised and how certain ways can actually make them net positive for the planet and for our health, and then, why we actually need cows to benefit the environment. And he made some great points about how we could actually reverse climate change within the span of a few decades if we could convert 25% of agricultural land to regenerative agriculture instead.

On a company level, he talks about how right now there simply isn't even enough supply of regeneratively-raised animals on the market available for the companies who need it, and how we, as consumers, and on the larger scale, people like him, as companies, can start to shift this trend and barely move the needle. So very fascinating episode that delves into the climate side, delves into the health side, and into the consumer side, and what we can all do. And at the end, I also quizzed Justin on his top health tips, and he shares quite a few

that are completely free or very inexpensive, and really, really big game changers. So lots to learn from this episode. Let's jump in.

Katie: Justin, welcome back.

Justin: Thank you, super excited to be here.

Katie: Oh, it's always a pleasure to chat with you. And this topic especially is near and dear to my heart. It's one I've been researching quite a bit lately. And it's become more and more a topic of mainstream conversation as well. And I think it's a really important one to understand, especially for all the parents listening, because there are so many implications here.

And certainly, we've all seen the news stories in the past few years, especially about the problems with livestock and emissions and this big trend toward really pushing different types of plant-based alternatives. And we can go a lot of different directions with that. But I think to start with the cows, can you walk us through some of the misconceptions that are being talked about when it comes to raising livestock?

Justin: Yeah, absolutely. So I'm sure that you and some of the listeners have kind of seen these various, let's call them posts or sort of media baiting things from Epicurious saying, like, "Oh, we're no longer gonna include recipes about beef, or, you know, Eleven Madison is now opening a beef-free restaurant." And sort of the reason that they're giving for a lot of this stuff is the environmental argument or what they claim the environmental argument is. Which basically goes like, there are a massive amount of emissions that are caused by beef, and animal agriculture, specifically beef, that's the biggest offender as the argument goes. And this is causing climate change, which we need to reverse in order to save the planet.

And so they're tying this sort of, like, eat less beef into by doing so you're saving the plant narrative. And what I wanted to do, and I read a long blog post on this recently, but I kind of like have just seen this narrative come up more and more and more. And people are starting to talk about like, "Oh, you know, I'm environmentally conscious, I care about X, Y and Z, you know, I'm gonna start eating less beef." And so, as I kind of dug into the science, things that Epicurious claimed, like 15% of all emissions are as a result of animal agriculture. These things just aren't true, like, if you actually look at the EPA estimates around emissions. EPA estimates that livestock worldwide make up about 3.9% of all GHG emissions, which definitely isn't nothing, but it's nowhere near the 15% number that a lot of these groups are citing for a reason to avoid climate change.

And where that sort of 15% number comes from, if you dig in, it actually comes from a study where they basically the authors redacted that 15% claim and said, "Oh, this is actually an issue." Like they effectively measured all inputs to a cow's life cycle, including tailpipe emissions to transport grain that then eventually

got fed to the cattle. And compare that against a non-holistic view for some of the other comparisons they're doing. And so the author said, "No, this is actually wrong," they retracted it, and got it much closer to the 3.9% number that the EPA has talked about.

And so I mean, I can talk a lot about how I think, at a high level, the beef is bad for the environment narrative is just not true. But even just digging into what's often people's first claim or first introduction to this idea in this story, it's just like, factually incorrect. And so that's kind of where I wanted to start and looked into it. And very quickly, it was like, "Oh, this isn't necessarily right."

Katie: And absolutely, that also seems like a false dichotomy as well. And I think people feel that guilt, a lot of like, "Oh, I care very much about animals and the environment, therefore I should be plant-based." And like you said, this is just one example. But that number is so small compared to cars, compared to big agriculture for one. And I would guess there's also a tremendous difference when you're...if you separate out into separate groups, feedlot, CAFO, farm cows versus the cow. Because, what I've researched, we've had the authors of "Sacred Cow" in here before. Like, there's actually a very strong argument for ethically raised livestock being extremely beneficial to the environment. And that's not getting talked about enough.

Justin: Totally. Yeah, I mean, if you look at the data, it's like, no matter which way you slice it, most of our emissions problems come from, you know, fossil fuels, oil, and gas, like the energy industry. That's just how it is, like if you look at North America, you know, 200 million years ago, there were hundreds of millions of ruminants. So buffalo, deer, you know, the like, kind of roaming the plains in North America, no climate issues. Then we had a little thing called the Industrial Revolution, we start pulling all of this stored energy out of the ground, and, you know, burning it for fuel, releasing those emissions into the air. And all of a sudden, climate change is a big issue.

I don't think that beef is at all the core of that big flip from, "Climate is not a big deal to oh, wow, we have a ton of CO2 emissions in our atmosphere." Like to me just from a first-principles standpoint, it just doesn't make sense. And so that's why I want to dig in and why like we've started to talk about this, both as a company, and also how I've started to talk about it as an individual. Because I think that this narrative is, like, really harmful to consumers. It's harmful to society in many ways, like to the extent that people believe that going vegan is gonna be good for the planet. Like that impacts policy decisions and impacts how people decide to raise their kids.

It impacts a whole host of decisions, which I think could really lead to people more and more taking meat out of the sort of food supply system. And the extent that people do that, like, that's a really bad thing from human nutrition and welfare standpoint, like I think that meat is the most nutrient-dense, or one of the most nutrient-dense foods out there. You know, and I think that to take that away from kids, to take that out of cafeterias, to take that out of kids lunches, you know, parents, how they're cooking for their families, I think is just a tremendously bad thing.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And the irony here is that the marketing and the confusion around this has actually led to an increase in big agriculture. And I used to live in an area where corn, wheat, and soybeans were grown regularly. And I saw firsthand the environmental impact of those foods and how they depleted the soil and all the chemicals that got sprayed on them. And so this shift away from traditional foods, like meat has increased that, and we're seeing this like, kind of now a huge boom of fake meat, and all that comes with that. And what I don't see being adequately contrasted is the environmental impact of that, and the emissions and all of the things related to that. And it's just talked about and assumed that it's a better alternative. But that has a huge impact as well, right?

Justin: Yeah, no, it's horrible. I mean, in so many ways, like, an over-reliance on chemical agriculture and industrial agriculture has led to a lot of the issues that we're seeing today. Like you basically didn't see so many of the chronic conditions that you see in today's Americans, you know, 80, 90 years ago. I think that so much of the chronic diseases, illnesses, things that we're seeing today is a result of the chemical agriculture system...chemically-based agriculture system, and industrial AG that creates super cheap, highly processed, highly chemicalized products that just cause a lot of problems for people's health.

And I think that's the piece that is often missing in this debate narrative is like, it's not like you're removing, let's say, in this narrative is true. It's not like you're taking beef out of someone's diet and replacing it with nothing. Like in many cases, these companies are saying, "Well, let's replace it with super cheap, you know, glyphosate sprayed industrial MANA crops, corn, soy, wheat. Let's replace it with processed foods. Let's replace it with like, Beyond Burgers, and Lightlife," and some of these other brands that are selling plant-based meats where if you look in the ingredients, you're just like, this is just processed foods 2.0 with an environmental spin.

Like, you know, in the 1980s, the whole idea was like, you know, switch out your ghee, butter, all of this for lard, or...sorry for margarine, and other things that add a bunch of trans fats, because it has low saturated fat, which would be better for you. That was sort of the narrative is like, "Improve your health, switch to our highly processed, you know, crappy kind of food products."

Now, I think the narrative is, like, much more tied to environmentalism. Where it says, you know, "Save the planet, switch from a nutritionally complete ancestrally appropriate food source like meat, and go for a Beyond Burger, an impossible burger a, you know, Lightlife," or whatever it is, that has a ton of inflammatory vegetable oils, has highly processed ingredients, soy, peas, wheat. Like all this sort of stuff that, you know, candidly, if you were to say, let's just replace 30% or 40% of someone's calories with the sort of plant-based meat alternatives, you're just gonna have a much less healthy human.

If someone said, replace meat with cereal, people would be like, "No, that's clearly a bad idea." But if you say, "Oh, replace it with plant-based meat," which is similarly high in carbohydrates, high in vegetable oils, lacks a

lot of key nutrients and functional ingredients, it's like, all of a sudden, that's okay in this narrative that I think a lot of people are hearing today, which is crazy to me.

Katie: That's a great correlation because you're talking about replacing a single-ingredient food with something that has in some of these cases, 40 plus ingredients. And so it'd be similar to like if you were gonna replace all vegetables in your diet with some kind of processed chip made out of vegetables, like we would recognize that and go, "Obviously, that's not a great idea, we shouldn't do that."

And I think we don't also like, to your point, we don't talk enough about that negative consequence of glyphosate and these chemicals that are putting in the environment. I know a common friend of ours, Todd from Dry Farm, they lab test all of their wines. And they're unable to buy U.S. wines, because there are none that are not contaminated with glyphosate, even ones that have never been sprayed. And it's because it is so...our soils are so contaminated now that even the groundwater has enough trace glyphosate that it's ending up in our wines, which means it's also ending up in our food. And which means our kids are exposed to this constantly.

And so there's this like we set up this false dichotomy that glorifies these foods that are also that are now creating detrimental secondary effects. And the irony being as well as like the answer to some of these problems, like when you said we go back to first principles is that regenerative agriculture very much could solve these problems if we tackle it correctly. So can you talk about like, the CO2 thing, and when it comes to the regenerative side, and how this can actually be part of the solution?

Justin: Totally, yeah. So, you know, we kind of were talking a little about how beef actually isn't bad for the environment, not only from an emissions standpoint, that's overstated. But all of the studies that have been done have been done on animals that are raised in concentrated animal feedlots that are feeding operations that are just frankly, kind of disgusting. Like, if you look at bundling a bunch of cows into a very small, you know, area, making them eat non-ancestral appropriate diets, i.e., a bunch of soy, corn, wheat, things like that. Of course, there's going to be issues with like their digestive tract and the like. I mean, if you just gave a human no room to move, couldn't let them outside, and then just force them to have only beans, like, I guarantee that you're gonna have a gassy or less healthy human than you are at.

And so I think that it is important to look a lot at how these animals are raised. And one of the things that's exciting to me, is, as I see the trend and the interest and the conversation, you know, more and more turning towards environmentalism and talking about climate change and how beef is a cause of that, I very much disagree with that. But I do think that the meat industry and sort of our industry in the food world has an answer, which is like regenerative agriculture. And I mean, I think that regenerative from the studies that I've seen is actually a pretty incredible technology if you wanna call it that. It's basically a way of raising, you know, animals and crops in a way that tries to build soil health and pull carbon out of the atmosphere and into the ground where it was, you know, 250 years ago or so.

And so the studies that I've seen this is specifically a Quantis study. You should know that I think for every pound of regenerative beef that was produced on this one farm, where they ran the study called White Oak Pastures, they basically were sequestering about four pounds of carbon or CO2 for every pound of beef.

And so I think that figuring out how we can move more ranchers, farmers, and the like to a regenerative system is actually how we're gonna make progress from a climate standpoint. Not only does it mean there's healthier animals, not only do healthier animals mean, you know, a healthier end product for you and I for human consumers. But it also can actually sequester carbon, which builds soil health, means the soils are more resilient, and also just like, creates a much, much healthier, better ecosystem.

Like I saw one estimate after looking at the Quantis study pointed to there probably with about 20% to 25% conversion of agricultural lands, we could pretty much reverse climate change. Like if we instead moved away from industrial agriculture, and, you know, a system of agriculture crop that relies really heavily on chemical and other inputs. And we shifted that to a fully regenerative system, we could literally offset and reverse all of the issues that we've had with climate change, you know, assuming we do that, over the next decade or so or less.

And so I'm, like, incredibly bullish on this trend, both from an environmental standpoint. And also from the standpoint of like, "Hey, you consumer, if regenerative and if environmental issues are something that you care about, you should lean in. And your dollars can actually help make a difference by buying products that are regenerative, supporting regenerative ranchers, and sort of being at the forefront of the regenerative movement." Which, to me, I think we're in like Indian one of the regenerative movement. And that 30 years from now, 50 years from now, it's gonna look a lot like organic was, you know, has over the last couple of decades. Where it's just gonna be something that people are aware of, it's something they believe in, and it's something that they actually like, care quite a lot about.

Katie: I'm really hopeful for that as well. And I think to your point, we can all agree, whether we're talking about people who choose to eat vegan, whether we're talking about people who care about the environment, we can all agree that feedlot farms are not good for animals or for the planet. I don't hear anyone arguing for those conditions at all, of course. And I've always thought that for change to happen at a large scale, you need multiple pieces, two of them being us all making choices on a grassroots level in our own families. And that's the part I speak to quite often.

But also, companies choosing that at a larger scale, because that's a much bigger exponential change at one time because of the purchasing power of large companies. And I know that this is really top of mind for you guys, as well. And while running a food company where, of course, you have to take into account profit and everything else. You guys are so dedicated to making choices that are good for the environment and good for

the consumer. So can you talk a little bit about your dedication on the large scale at a company level to that, and how you're implementing kind of this dedication to regenerative farming in the company?

Justin: Totally. Yeah, so we've been working for a very long time on setting up a regenerative product line. At first, you know, I started reading and going down the regenerative rabbit hole. Started getting really into the environmental impact of beef and you know, specifically how our food system and our, you know, the world that I operate in, which is the world of food brands, the impact that we make on the environment, and what that means for our food system and people's health.

And as I was digging in, I was like, "Oh, man, Kettle & Fire really needs to be a part of this regenerative movement." Like, we actually have the ability to make an impact, you know, we are selling millions of dollars of product every year, we're in about 12,000 stores. Like maybe we actually could take a swing and sort of try and establish ourselves as a leader in the regenerative movement.

And so what we kind of saw is regenerative is the new standard for human health and like planet benefits, and we wanted to get involved. And so we decided that we were gonna look at potentially transitioning our entire supply chain to using bones that were made from regeneratively raised animals. And as we kind of dug in, what we realized very quickly was, there's not enough supply, like even if a company at our size, and we're not Campbell's, we're not General Mills, we're not any of these massive food companies. Even a company our size, like just physically, cannot buy enough regeneratively raised bones so that our entire product line is made from animals raised using regenerative agriculture.

And so what we kind of saw after digging in and learning about this, talking to ranchers, talking to suppliers, talking to a bunch of groups, you know, we just realized that it was gonna be impossible for us to transition everything over. And so what we decided to do instead is we are now launching a line of regenerative bone broths. And so, you know, we're launching a beef and a chicken bone broth that are made with bones from farmers and ranchers that are using regenerative agriculture. We're paying a premium to buy these bones. You know, we're making them in the exact same product that many of our consumers know and love.

But we're just deciding to pay a little bit more to our suppliers and use regenerative bones. Hopefully, with the aim to sort of create a profit and a financial incentive for more and more ranchers and farmers to switch more of their supply chains from, you know, either conventional to regenerative. Or even like organic to regenerative or grass-fed grass-finished to regenerative.

And we wanted to sort of, provide the...be one of the first companies in the space. Not only so that there's a financial incentive like, okay, if you switch over, Kettle & Fire will buy bones from you if you're transitioning from a grass-fed to regenerative operation. But we also wanted to get the product out there, just to do a little bit of education with our consumer base around what is regenerative. Why does it matter? What's this impact

on the planet? What does it mean from a nutritional standpoint? All of these kinds of things. So I'm super excited, it's been wildly challenging in a lot of ways to work on launching a fully regenerative product line. But I'm super excited that we got it done.

Katie: Well, I'm super excited that it exists on a national scale now. And I know that you also would be the first to join me in encouraging people on a smaller scale too, like each of us in our own homes as we buy meat to find local farmers, regenerative farmers and support the ecosystem in that way. Because like you said as there's demand increases, and as all of us are asking for this. Like, the more awareness there is on a small scale too, that also, over time helps create a larger supply. Which, to your point, I'm really hopeful that over the next 10, 20 years, we're gonna see this become as important as organic and non-GMO have become as part of the conversation. And I think that requires all of us, including everybody listening, becoming aware of this, and making those micro choices day-to-day. And then it's also super convenient that we now have national options, as well. But huge kudos to you guys for choosing that on a company-wide level, because I can only imagine all the complexity that went along with that.

Justin: Yeah, it's not easy. I think our operations team wanted to kill me at a couple of different points. But we got it done. And I'm super proud of the whole team. And everyone is now really excited about regenerative, especially as we've learned more about it. I'm thrilled. I mean, I'm hopeful that, you know, 10 years from now, not only is regenerative something that bigger brands and national brands like us are talking about and bought into. But exactly like you said, if consumers have a relationship with their farmer and they're talking to their farmer saying like, "Hey, I'm hearing about regenerative, are you doing this, are you not?"

That is like how change happens, is that the, you know, ground roots kind of level where consumers are just building a relationship with the products that they're eating, the food they're consuming, and really, I think starting to make change at that level. So I'm hugely in support of that, and hugely in support, in general, of more local kind of food system where farmers are using the right practices. And consumers understand the ways that their farmer is raising, feeding, and you know, processing the sort of animals and crops.

Katie: And to go a little deeper on one of your earlier points as well is like I think it's important to understand when we talk about climate-related issues, like there's some pretty grim predictions if we don't turn things around pretty quickly. And the two biggest areas that we need to concentrate and do that are ocean health and soil health because those are the ones that directly impact the climate changes that are occurring on a wide scale. So it's great that we all, for instance, recycle, and that we're all hopefully making some of these climate-conscious choices.

But when you rank these things against each other, the things that we do to support the soil, or the ability of the ocean to stay healthy and continue creating oxygen, those are the ones that literally are vital for human survival, especially over the next few decades.

Are there other ways that we as consumers can get more educated or help to work toward that movement? Because I know you've done so much research on this and written about it, I'll make sure I include your articles about it. But any other suggestions on a consumer level that we can all do to help move that forward?

Justin: Yeah, it's a great question. I think buying regenerative products and supporting brands that are following regenerative practices, I think it's a great one. You know, if you're someone that is investing in the stock market, or like looking at potentially putting your money in an area that you care about, there's some really cool platforms cropping up that allow you to do so. Like there's a company called Go Steward, I think it's gosteward.com. Where I can go there, I can find a small regenerative rancher in Austin, say, outside Austin where I live. And if that guy needs 50 grand, 75 grand to buy some equipment and transition his small, you know, plot of farm over to regenerative agriculture, I can actually lend him that money and get a, you know, 6% to 8% return. I think that's kind of a cool thing that if you're someone that wants to put your money to work in an area or a cause you believe in is really kind of neat.

You know, so buying, I think buying products, buying locally is a big thing, supporting your local restaurants and farmers and like talking to them about ingredients that you're sourcing. And then also, I think a big piece of this is just educating people. Like for so many people, when I start to talk to them, about why meat is actually not bad for the environment, and about the benefits of regenerative agriculture, both from an environmental standpoint and a nutritional standpoint, that's I think, where change, you know, people are like, "Whoa, that's surprising. That's not something I've heard, that goes against the narrative that I've read about, and, you know, the "Washington Post," or whatever, and it really changes people's minds.

And so I think, the more that you can get informed and just have friendly conversations with your other well-meaning friends that are trying to do well in the world, and do the right thing, both for themselves and for the planet, I think that these like, you know, 10 million of these micro conversations and people being more willing to talk about these sorts of things, really, really makes a difference.

And so I wish there was like, a better way that consumers could do this across the board. But I do think it just comes down to like, what choices are you making as an individual? What are you doing to kind of spread the word and talk about this stuff with other people that might care about these issues? And that's about all you can do, which is both, you know, may not feel like a lot, but also multiplied by 10, 30 million people, that's how real change happens.

Katie: Absolutely. And I wanted to make sure we concentrated on the environmental piece first because that's so top of mind in the media right now. But I think we also have to talk about the health impact of these foods because there's also a misconception that meat is bad for you now, and that these other foods might be a healthier alternative. And I think that's another really important one to kind of take head-on because you've already touched on this a little bit.

But I wanna go deeper on this because I know your entry into this world came from the health side as well that you've studied this side a lot of. There's a missing piece of the conversation about, for instance, the nutrient availability per calorie when you're talking about animal-based foods, versus these plant-based foods that don't have the same nutrient composition. And it's so important for me for all the parents listening, because we know from the data, that so many of the compounds in these regeneratively raised foods are vital for our kids for proper development. But I'd love to hear your take on the health impact as well because I feel like it's very much a twofold issue. And this part isn't being properly talked about either.

Justin: Yeah, completely. I mean, from what I've seen, and what we talked about earlier, the thing that is really concerning to me is that people are talking about just entirely removing a super nutrient-dense food like meat and replacing it with plant-based alternatives. I think that that especially if you take off the environmental arguments, you know, ignore some of the moral arguments that someone from the vegan community would make. I think that just from a nutritional standpoint, there's basically no argument. Like meat from a nutrient density, amino acids, proteins, all of these sorts of standpoints is just so much better for human consumption than, you know, four ounces of kidney beans or one of these, like fake meats or substitute products.

And so I think that from studies that I've seen, you know, nutrient density across the board in meat, whether it's like complete proteins nutrients, amino acids, collagen, things like this, they just practically don't exist in plant-based products, and not nearly to the degree that they do in meats and other animal products.

And so I think to the extent that, that you're sort of looking at, you know, how do I give my kids the foods that they need to thrive to build a functioning immune system, to build gut health, to build joint health, to build skin health. Like, in so many ways, you just need the full spectrum amino acids, the collagens other things that you can pretty much only get from meat and animal products. That if you're just feeding them, baby food, or other things, you're just not gonna get.

And then I think also that when you're looking at like, okay, let's say that I buy that there's much more nutrient density in meats versus plant proteins, what do I do from a meat quality standpoint? This is where I think regenerative really shines. Like if you look at, you know, antibiotic use and conventional versus regenerative products, like, basically conventional products, you're getting trace antibiotics in a lot of the meats that you're eating. You're often getting worse omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acid ratios than you are in grass-fed, grass-finished and regenerative products.

You know, I think that like these are nutrient densities and differences that actually can change the trajectory of like a kid's immune system, gut health, you know, all of their development in those senses, which I think is also an important piece to talk about. It's like, you're not just making a better decision for the planet, but you're also making a better decision for you, the consumer, and your family, from a health and nutrition standpoint.

Katie: Yeah, and you don't have to choose between those things, because to this point there are options that support all of those ideals. And I know even Kettle & Fire, in general, was from the very beginning kind of a health and wellness pursuit for you guys, as well, on a family level, right? Can you share a little of your story and your brother's story?

Justin: Yeah, for sure. So I started Kettle & Fire with my brother in 2015. Basically, I was doing a lot of crossfit at the time and was looking for foods that would help me recover and heal. At the same time, my younger brother, Nick, who I started the company with, he was playing soccer and basically tore everything you can tear in your knee.

And so he got surgery, he was bedridden for eight weeks, and was kind of like, asking me, you know, "Justin, like, what foods can I consume that will actually help with my recovery?" And that's when we started looking at and talking about bone broth. I went deep reading about, you know, the benefits of the amino acids that are uniquely found in bone broth and in connective tissue, collagens, you know, the like.

He kind of was like, looking around for foods that were the bone broth, companies that were near him, and we couldn't find anything. We're like, "Oh, we should probably start a bone broth company like, this is something that people care about. This is something that has a huge impact on gut health, skin health, joint health, and the like." And to our minds, no one was doing it right. Like no one at the time was sourcing from organic farms using organic ingredients, using bones that were only from 100% grass-fed, grass-finished animals.

And so it took us a lot of work. But you know, after about a year of prep and looking into things, we launched Kettle & Fire in late 2015. Yeah, so I kind of like got here from the health standpoint on my own, just because I really wanted a product that I thought was made with high-quality ingredients that checks the health boxes.

And then just as we've been getting more into the food system and getting a better understanding of, you know, what do our foods actually do from a health standpoint? What do they mean for our nutrition? What do they mean for like, how we feel? And then what do they mean to the planet? That's kind of gotten me further and further down this like food wellness rabbit hole, which has eventually led to us doing this regenerative bone broth line.

Katie: And I know on my side, I've been writing about the benefits of bone broth for over a decade ever since one of my children actually got issues at birth. And it was hugely helpful in him recovering from those, in my own research into these kinds of ancestral foods that our grandmothers ironically knew about that we sort of ignored for a while and then now we're all starting to understand again. But I was so glad to now finally have an option that was nationwide when you guys launched because that was the biggest pain point for people I

talked to and for me is bone broth is amazing and it's delicious and it takes a long time to make. And I'm also grateful that exists on a large scale.

And I know from being friends with you that this has led to a continued health and wellness pursuit. And so I love to ask if kind of what your own personal 80/20 is, or what are your most consistent health routines that you find are the biggest needle movers for you?

Justin: Yeah, it's a great question. I think the first one is that, you know, where I started on this journey is starting to get...by getting exposed to paleo. And I think that that was a big paradigm shift for me, you know, the whole like, eat what your ancestors ate thing just at the time blew my mind, now feels much more obvious, but it's gotten out there a little bit more. But for me, I think it all starts with like, eating a primarily paleo diet, I tried to stay very low carb, I tried to be, you know, eat very, very few processed foods. And then from there, I've sort of layered in other health routines. I don't think that I'm like, I'm not the guy who's like gonna inject stem cells into his blood or anything like that, I'm not like, kind of out there on the biohacking spectrum.

But some things that have worked really well for me, I think it like functional movement and understanding like, range of motion in your joints. Understanding how your body should and could be moving, having like a daily practice a very intentional stretching and movement. That's been pretty transformative for me. I used to have a lot of, like, upper neck and mid back pain. And just working on a daily basis, just doing a couple of minutes of very targeted exercises and stretches. And also, funny enough, just like hanging from a pull-up bar for three to five minutes a day seems to have almost entirely gotten rid of, like, the pain and other stuff that I had going on in my back and neck. So that's cool. And then that's been great.

Sleep, I know people talk a lot about it is like, not a crazy thing. I found that taking magnesium supplements and trying to do like a wind down kind of meditation breathwork thing before bed, just again, a couple of minutes has been pretty transformational. I also recently read, I guess a year ago, actually read "Breath" by James Nestor, which highly recommend ,started taping my mouth as weird as that sounds at night. And not only has my girlfriend, well, fiance now been hugely supportive of it from a, you know, snoring and kind of night noise standpoint. But I noticed on my Oura ring, my HRV actually went up quite a bit. So went up about 25% since I started mouth taping, which is pretty cool.

And then on the Nelly is cool, but like I also feel better and more energized when I wake up. And then outside of that, so like diet, sleep, movement. The only other thing I think that I've been really intentional about is over the last couple of years, I've really tried to notice when I feel stressed and try and use that as like, a trigger to sort of go deeper on why am I stressed? So not just like, "Oh, I'm feeling stressed, I'm about to talk to this person." Usually, if I'm about to have a hard conversation, then I'm feeling stressed, like, that's more of a signal that there's something deeper there that I like me to work through on my own. Whether that's like, I don't feel great, and how I'm relating to this person, or I feel like this person has wronged me and I haven't communicated that or whatever it is.

I've sort of been trying this thing which seems to have been really helpful from a stress standpoint, where I've used stress as a unit of information that there's like something I need to work through in my life. And when I feel stressed, I try and actually hone in on that and use that as a key to sort of do some thinking and feeling through like, why am I feeling stressed when it comes to thinking about a conversation with this person or telling this person X, Y or Z? Because that's usually, at least in my life, I've found a signpost for like, "Hey, there's something here that you've been kind of ignoring, and trying to put off." So I would say those are some big things. Oh, and then honestly, drinking a lot less alcohol over the last couple of years has been one that's had a big impact on my health and my life, does a lot.

Katie: I love that you brought up this stress piece because that's actually been a recurring theme in my personal life and also in a few podcasts recently. And I think when you can reframe, and view anything in life like that, as instead of this is bad. And I think our tendency is to categorize things like oh, stress is bad, sadness is bad, this emotion is bad. And when you can pull back from that and reframe as what is this trying to teach me and approach it with curiosity, it's, you're able to not just learn from it, but benefit from it. And it doesn't have to have a negative connotation, it can become a great teacher.

This episode is sponsored by Wellnesse... that's Wellness with an "e" on the end... my all-natural personal care line. Our whitening toothpaste is a mineralizing blend of natural ingredients that supports oral health naturally. It's based on the original recipe I developed over a decade ago when I was struggling through some oral health problems and has been through almost a hundred iterations to create the best natural toothpaste available. Many types of toothpaste contain ingredients you might find in paint and that you certainly don't want in your mouth, but ours is enamel friendly and oral biome friendly to keep your teeth and gums happy all day long! Check out the whitening toothpaste and all of our products, including our natural "hair food" haircare at Wellnesse.com.

This podcast is brought to you by Just Thrive, a company near and dear to my heart (and my gut). Gut health really is connected to everything, and in today's world, we encounter a lot of things that try to mess with our gut bacteria, from food to stress and even environmental toxins. The gut has been called the second brain and we learn more each day about it's vital role in all aspects of health. Just Thrive probiotic is the first one I've seen and felt a noticeable difference from almost immediately, with their patented *Bacillus Indicus* HU36 strain that helps turn your gut into an antioxidant factory. Since focusing on my gut and making these a regular part of my life, I've seen digestive and skin changes. Just Thrive probiotic is vegan, dairy free, histamine free, non-GMO, and is made without soy, sugar, salt, corn, nuts or gluten, so it's safe for practically everyone. I even sprinkle it in my kids' food and bake it into products since it can survive at up to 450 degrees! I actually love all of their products and have been especially enjoying their prebiotic drink, which is absolutely delicious too! Check them out at justthrivehealth.com/wellnessmama and use the code `wellnessmama15` to save 15% at checkout.

I also love that it seems like this is a recurring theme as well is, you know, it's tempting, we all wanna find like the cool bio hacky thing that is going to be the silver bullet. But consistently, the top cheating people I know

and the healthiest people I know, it's often those either free or very inexpensive things that are simple and foundational that seem to actually have the biggest impact.

And so I love that we now have the technology in the health world to explore some of these more fringe things whether it be stem cells or whatever when the case requires them. But I'm with you at the end of the day, it's the things that we all need to do anyway that we can optimize like movement and sleep and drinking enough water instead of alcohol, or whatever it may be that really do have the biggest impact long-term. And I'm a little blown away, you saw a 25% increase in HRV from taping your mouth. That's incredible.

Justin: Yeah. Yeah, I was pretty surprised as well.

Katie: Was there a big adjustment with that but just getting used to not be able to breathe through your mouth?

Justin: I was surprised there actually wasn't I think once you're out your body just adjusts. I mean, I think that, you know, breathing through your nose is sort of what you're probably supposed to be doing anyway. You know, I'm fortunate I don't have like, any weird sinus issues or other things, this may be different for different people. But as soon as I started doing it, I kind of transitioned over pretty much with no problem.

Katie: Well, I'll make sure that the book is linked in the show notes as well because it is fascinating and would encourage especially...

Justin: It's a good one.

Katie: ...yeah, from the sleep perspective. I'm curious if you have any crazy weird more fringe health hacks that you do beyond the foundational?

Justin: I have some, so I've kind of recently gone somewhat deep down the rabbit hole of like, environmental contaminants, and endocrine-disrupting hormones and chemicals and things like this. So I got these egregiously challenging and complex water filtration systems installed in my house. You know, it's like, 25-foot high water filter thing with 19 steps that filters every bit of water that comes in the house. Like, that's something that I recently started doing.

The other thing I started doing, which again, I think it's more basic than anything, but I'm trying to be very intentional about spending at least two to three hours outside in the sun a day. I set up my workstation. So like, even when I'm on the computer, I'm working outside, even if it's under shade, not in direct sunlight, whatever. But I found that doing even just that really has helped me from a feels like an energy standpoint, you know, my skin feels healthier, my stress levels feel lower. So I feel really good about that one.

And then honestly, this is probably still pretty fringe, but I'm happy to talk about it. But I have found legal psychedelic therapy like using ketamine-assisted therapy and the like, actually super, super transformative and helpful in my own life. Like doing ketamine-assisted therapy, now, it's totally legal. You can do it via...even online like something like mindblown.com, where you can basically get them to send you, you know, something in the mail. They give you through a guided meditation system, give you a bunch of prompts and ways to reflect and think.

And I've found that ketamine is a really useful tool when it comes to, like, actually reflecting on things going on in my life, my own well-being. You know, and sort of do some of the reflection that I mentioned earlier around what's causing stress in my life? What do I need to change? And how can I like, show up just as a better, more fully present, happier version of myself.

Katie: I'm glad you brought that up, as well. I've had a couple of guests recently who have talked about the assisted psychotherapy with different types of psychedelics. And I think this is another conversation that's becoming more mainstream, and that has some profound possible effects. And we've got other substances in clinical trials that will hopefully be available for even things like PTSD and more severe things soon. But it's exciting that so many of these things are becoming part of the forefront of the conversation.

And sunshine, that's another one that's been unfairly villainized for a long time. And unlike you, I noticed a huge difference when I get outside natural light and a lot of it. So I think that's an important conversation to keep having as well. When people ask for health advice, that's when I give often it's just go outside as soon as possible after waking up and get natural light, like I promise it's more effective than any supplement you can take.

Justin: Totally, yeah, I mean, this is one of those areas that I think, you know, a lot of people would point to. "Oh, you must wear sunscreen every time you outside, because like, it's going to give you cancer or other issues." From the studies I've looked at, and also my own experience, like a lot of this stuff, you know, a lot of the like, must wear sunscreen every time you go outside, I think that that applies to people that may be already in a pretty like, highly inflamed state, or someone who doesn't have, you know, their diet and a bunch of other things kind of already dialed in. For someone who's in good health, like, just based on how I feel, and some of the lab results and biomarkers that I test on a regular basis, I don't think that sunlight is doing anything bad to my body, and certainly not at this stage.

I think it's actually way worse if you're avoiding the sun at all times, wearing sunscreen all the time when you get exposed to it. And then maybe a couple of times a year when you go to the beach, you know, applying sunscreen and laying outside the sun for 8, 10 hours a day, like that seems way less ancestrally appropriate and sort of like a normal behavior pattern than getting outside for a couple of hours a day and getting real kind of sun on your skin.

You know, there's actually a bunch of in my newsletter a couple of months ago, I mentioned and did kind of a review of a bunch of the studies that point towards the benefits of just making sure that you're getting enough light exposure. And from a mitochondrial function, happiness, you know, energy, mood, the way that your body operates standpoint, it does feel to me like getting enough sun is just a key input that not enough people are talking about today. And if I look at things through like a sort of paleo lens, you know, paleo from a diet standpoint was basically like our ancestors used to eat these foods, now we don't and we are sick.

Today, I think a similar thing or you can make a similar argument of like, our ancestors used to be outside 24/7, there was not even, you know, it's just, it wasn't an inside. Now we are inside most of the time and that is causing some issues. Like I think that that sort of thought pattern applies. And so I'm pretty, I would expect that we're gonna see a lot of studies over the coming decades around the impact from a positive health standpoint on just getting enough sun and getting outside a decent amount, and what that does for like, health, longevity, energy, and the like.

Katie: I agree. And to circle back to the kind of like media misconceptions when it comes to climate change, or agricultural or meat consumption, I think there's a lot of these when it comes to sun exposure as well. And we've latched on to these sound bites about sunlight and skin cancer, which you could certainly make a really solid argument against just on that level. But when you actually go back to your point earlier to first principles and also look at the data, it is much more risky to avoid the sun than to get too much sun exposure. And even like, people who end up getting skin cancer still get more benefits from the sun than if they had avoided the sun. And we know that vitamin D deficiency among other sunlight-related deficiencies are connected to potentially a lot of different types of cancers.

I had the same firsthand experience as well, coming from an Irish Scottish background, my skin was not very tolerant to the sun when I was in an inflamed state. And when I adjusted my diet and got rid of inflammation, I now can be in the sun all day without getting sunburned at all. And my vitamin D levels have adapted, and I feel so much better. So I always encourage people to like, question when there's a belief like that the sun is bad, to really go back and question and look at the data because I don't think that there is a strong case for the sun being harmful at all.

Justin: Yep, I totally agree. And I think that, you know, one thing that I struggle with just, in general with a lot of the "studies" that are done today is that you're sampling from a population that, by and large, is just not healthy. And so when you're running some of these studies, like correlation, and all sorts of things can just run

rampant because, you know, we're at a point where I think almost half of the population is, you know, unhealthy from an obesity overweight standpoint.

But not to mention, gut dysfunction and dysregulation or hormonal dysregulation. You know, there's just so few like, healthy pockets of people, where I think that you could look at something like sun exposure. And to one person that's dealing with a lot of inflammation, who has been eating a super inflammatory diet for decades, putting them in the sun all day versus putting, you know, someone who's been paleo, exercising, getting enough sunlight every day in the sun for the same amount of time. Like those people are just gonna have completely different responses, which I think makes it really hard to generalize, nutrition and some of these other health recommendations from a small sampling to the broader population.

Katie: Such an important point. Yeah, I completely agree with that. Another question I love to ask at the end of interviews. And I'm curious if you have any update or recommendations is if there's a book or a number of books that have had a profound impact on your life? And if so, what they are and why?

Justin: Yeah, so I think that you always find the...I've always found in my life, different books resonate at various times. And when I was 17, I think, I read "The Alchemist" for the first time, which at the time was the first book that made me really be like, "Whoa, I can actually like chart my own path." And, you know, I can, I can do something different, I don't have to stay in the suburbs where I grew up, I don't have to, like, you know, become an accountant or anything like that. Like, I can actually figure out my own path.

And so that really resonated with me at that time. I would say more recently, one of the books that had kind of a big impact on me was, I finished this sci-fi series called "The Three-Body Problem" which is phenomenal, in my opinion. But just makes you think, then kind of get out of the day-to-day of what are the problems in the world in society? What's going on in the U.S? What's going on in my community? And sort of broadened my horizons a little bit to think more on a, like, you know, 100,000, 10,000-year timescale, which was kind of a fun exercise.

And so I think that "The Alchemist" was sort of like the first book that really changed my perspective and made me think, "Wow, I could probably do something and I'm sort of up to me to author the life story that I wanna live." And then that book most recently, sort of helped put some things in perspective, where, you know, some of the problems that we have today, I'm like, "Well, you know, these are problems, but also on a 10,000 or 100,000-year timescale, like, what do these matter, I still need to refocus and, you know, do what I'm doing in the present."

And then most recently too, I highly recommend...I've recommended and bought this book for like 10 friends. But a book called "The Surrender Experiment" has really been helpful with me being, you know, kind of working on my own spiritual practice and establishing a sense of presence. And some of those things that I

think are really important to get by in a stress minimal way in today's society. So yeah, that's it. Those are three.

Katie: Those are a couple of new ones, too. I'll put those links in the show notes you guys at wellnessmama.fm so you can find them. And I'll put links, of course, as well to you guys. But where can people find out more about the regenerative work you guys are doing and about Kettle & Fire, in general?

Justin: Absolutely, yeah. So if you just Google Kettle & Fire regenerative, they can learn a lot more about the work that we're doing with our regenerative bone broth line. We're making some donations to support people that are trying to get regenerative farms off the ground or transitioning their farms to regenerative agriculture. They can learn more about the practices that we go through when we source our bones when we...you know, the partners that we work with, how we evaluate someone for how they're following regenerative practices, all of that. So just google Kettle & Fire regenerative, it should be the first landing page that comes up, I believe it's kettleandfire.com/regenerative.

Katie: And I'll make sure that's linked as well. Justin, it's always a pleasure. Thank you so much for your time, and for what you guys are doing on a large scale, and what all of us are hopefully gonna be doing on a small scale to reverse some of these issues we have going on.

Justin: Absolutely. Thanks so much for having me on. This is great.

Katie: And thanks as always to you guys for listening and sharing your most valuable resources, your time, and your energy with both of us today. We're so grateful that you did and I hope that you will join me again on the next episode, "The Wellness Mama Podcast."

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