

# *URBAN EXODUS*





# *URBAN EXODUS IS...*

- A podcast that shares the stories of people who've made big changes in their lives
- An organically growing international community of listeners & supporters
- A purpose driven creative agency specializing in multi-media storytelling
- A website with hundreds of feature stories & articles
- An online shop selling rurally sourced goods
- A 'how to' book for country dreamers

# *OUR MISSION*

Urban Exodus is reconnection - with nature, community, creativity and self.

Our mission at Urban Exodus is to inspire, educate, uplift and amplify stories of visionary people and businesses working towards manifesting good in the world. Through honest storytelling, we encourage people to reconnect with nature and follow their dreams towards greater self-reliance and joy – no matter where they live.

Together, we create a brighter future and path forward.



# THE PODCAST

*The Urban Exodus Podcast*, launched in November of 2020, offers practical advice to country dreamers, rural folk, and urban-dwellers alike, who want to feel more connected to the natural world and the purpose and choices in their lives.

The Urban Exodus Podcast gives an intimate and authentic glimpse into the lives of those who decided to embark on the road less traveled to pursue their own interpretation of "The Good Life." Urban Exodus shares the stories of those who are crafting creative, sustainable, and self-sufficient lives, both within and outside of the city.

Over 40k downloads

Top 2.5% of podcasts worldwide

Weekly ranking in top 150 Chartable Documentary Podcasts: United States, Canada, Great Britain, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, France, Spain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Ecuador, Germany, Malaysia, Philippines, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Sweden & Portugal





## *UE CREATOR & HOST*



Alissa Hessler, Founder of Urban Exodus

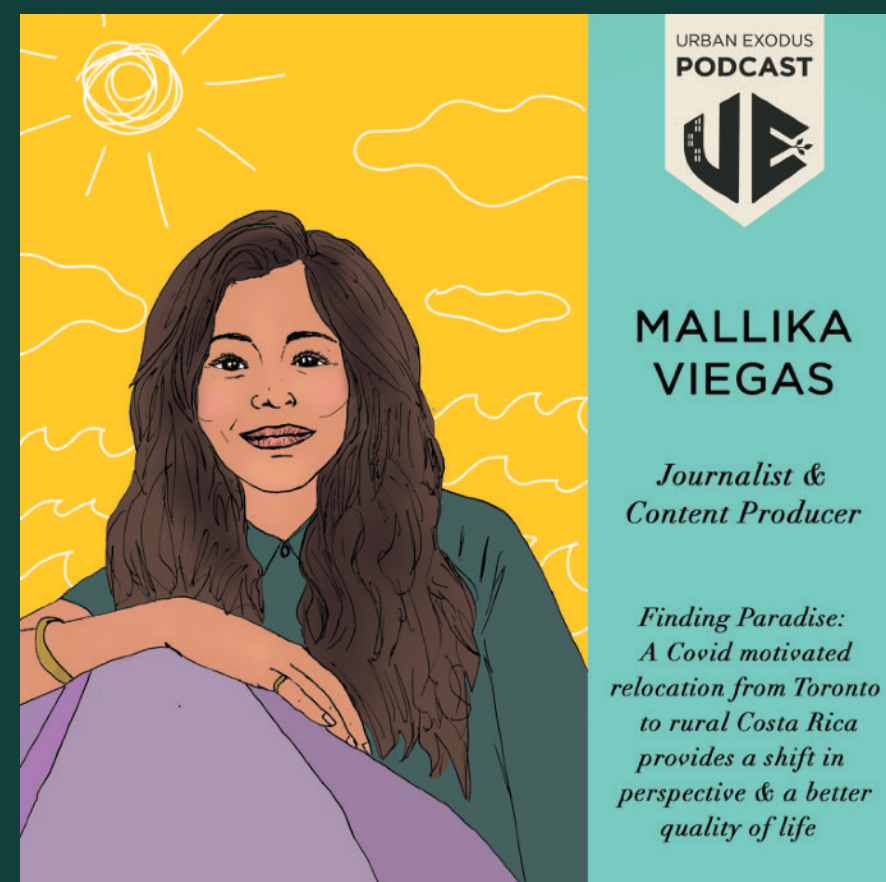
Alissa Hessler has lived and breathed this project for the decade. In 2012, she left the corporate world in Seattle and moved to rural Maine. She scoured the internet to find stories of others who had left city life, but only found picture perfect magazine spreads that didn't offer any honest advice on how to plan for, and make, a successful transition. Alissa decided to build what she was searching for, a place where you could find a myriad of inspiring and informative stories of folks who decided to follow their dreams down the road less traveled.

Alissa has photographing and interviewing people all over the world, she has built an excellent reputation in this space as a multimedia storyteller and has established relationships with people who trust her to authentically tell their story. To date, she has produced 150+ feature stories and 60+ podcast episodes.

Alissa continues to find and tell these stories because this project feeds, educates, humbles, and inspires her. The people she has met through this project give her energy and hope for the future. Alissa's passion for storytelling is fueled by her desire to influence others to work towards a better future for themselves, their community, and our planet.



# SEASON FIVE





*Episode 1*

*JON  
JACKSON*



[@comfortfarms](https://www.comfortfarms.com)

## **Seeds, Sacrifice and Service: A veteran's journey to healing himself and others through the land**

New York City *to* Milledgeville, Georgia

Jon Jackson is a retired combat army Ranger who served for 11 years. A New York City native, Jon enlisted in the army after September 11th. He served multiple tours of duty in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Jon started Comforts Farms and Stag Vets in 2016 - he named the farm after his dear friend, Kyle Comfort, who was killed in combat in 2010. The mission at Comfort Farms is to be a place for combat veterans, like himself, to heal from the traumas of war. Veterans from all over the country have found Comfort Farms to be a safe haven and community that helps them get back on their feet and reintegrate into family, work and civilian life. At Comfort Farms, veterans learn a myriad of farm skills - integrating economic profitability, environmental stewardship, and healing through the use of Agro-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. With the suicide rate for veterans in recent years surmounting the casualties of war, Jon is working tirelessly to bring that number down.

In addition, Jon is passionate about bringing back endangered varieties of African rice and maintaining bio-diversity for heirloom crop varieties through his seed saving ventures on the farm.

**THE BITTER SOUTHERNER**



*Episode 2*  
***LUISA***  
***BATIZ***



[@sexy\\_sustainability](#)

## Ancestral Homecoming: From Corporate Life in NYC to traditional living in Honduras

Brooklyn, New York to rural Honduras

Luisa is a New York native who recently moved to a small homestead in Honduras. Luisa grew up in Brownsville, Brooklyn and is first-generation American - her parents immigrated to the U.S. before she was born. Her parents are Garifuna, the descendants of escaped/shipwrecked Africans from slave ships who were exiled to the Honduran coast in the eighteenth century. Luisa was the first in her family to go to college and built a career in education administration and recruitment. Although she had reached a level of financial success, she didn't feel happy, liberated or fulfilled in the work she was doing.

Luisa started questioning the way she was living and began daydreaming of the summers she spent living off-grid with her relatives in a small seaside village in Honduras. She decided to make a plan to realize her dreams of living in Honduras full time. She started saving money so she could leave her job and build a base of freelance consulting clients. Once she felt secure working remotely, she traveled to Honduras to find a place to call home. She bought a plot of land with ample fruit trees and a shell of an old house in a Garifuna community. Luisa has been working with her local community to bring the homestead back to life. She wants to create a place where people can reconnect, detox from capitalism and embark on their own journey to lead a more intentional and sustainable life.

TRAVEL✦NOIRE



*Episode 3*  
**MELISSA  
HUGHES**



## **Hometown Revival: A woman leaves the LA advertising world and returns to her childhood home to use her skills to help her community thrive**

Los Angeles, California *to* Livingston County, New York

Melissa grew up on a farm in upstate New York, but left her small town after college to pursue a career in advertising on the West Coast. In 2019, she and her partner decided to move their family back to her childhood home to help her mother manage her medicinal herb farm. Through her farm community outreach work, Melissa was offered the role as director of tourism for Livingston County. When Melissa took the position she decided to flip traditional tourism on its head, focusing less on marketing and more on business and economic development - offering grants, consulting, and attracting new businesses to the community.

Melissa is helping create a thriving local ecosystem, bringing more visitor dollars to their area. Melissa feels really blessed in her new life. She previously thought that the only way to make rural living work financially would be to telecommute - but to have a local job that provides for her family as well as enriches her local community has totally subverted her expectations. She hopes to create a template for other small towns to bring back economic opportunity to their regions in a holistic way.



# Episode 4

## IVY WALLS



[@ivyleaffarms](https://www.instagram.com/ivyleaffarms)

## Be the Change: From healthcare to farming, a food activist and entrepreneur is born

Ivy Leaf Farms *in* the Sunnyside neighborhood of Houston, Texas

Ivy Walls is an urban farmer, entrepreneur and food justice activist based in Houston, Texas. Before farming, Ivy worked as an epidemiologist for the CDC and later became an infection preventionist at a hospital in Houston where she worked closely with COVID-19 patients. During the pandemic, she became much more aware of the inequities facing her neighborhood of Sunnyside - including higher rates of COVID infections and complications. She saw the correlation of Covid outcomes with diet-related autoimmune diseases and diabetes.

Sunnyside had ample fast food options but no grocery store offering fresh, healthy produce. Ivy rolled up her sleeves to start growing food for her community. She already grew vegetables for herself, but decided to expand and grow produce on her family's property – and so began Ivy Leaf farms. Ivy's farm provides low-cost produce to her community, hosts education events, and offers a CSA. Ivy was able to quit her job after receiving a grant from BeyGOOD, Beyoncé's charitable foundation, which has allowed her to extend her growing fields, build a greenhouse, and build a brick and mortar grocery market in her community. Ivy is working on further expanding her growing operations, facilitating climate-change resistant growing practices, and providing educational programs and resources on the farm. In addition, she is selling vegetable seeds and designing a line of outdoor workwear. She has diversified her income streams so that the produce sales aren't responsible for supporting the costs of operations. Ivy wants her farm to be a model to other aspiring growers who want to build localized resilience in their own communities.

[ivyleaffarms.com](https://www.ivyleaffarms.com)

**CHRON**

**Houstonia.**



*Episode 5*  
**RACHEL  
SEGAL**



[@firsttimefarmers](#)

## Digital Homesteader: Leaving the city and building a digital consultancy business from a remote island

Toronto, Canada to an island in British Columbia, Canada

An accomplished digital strategist, Rachel Segal spent more than a decade working with some of the largest brands in the world on their social media and content marketing programs. In 2012, burnt out with the pace of city life, Rachel and her partner Scott moved to a remote island in British Columbia. Although they felt constantly digitally connected in the city, they felt completely disconnected from nature, joy and purpose. Moving to the country was a revelation - they were instantly lighter, happier and really enjoyed the pace of balancing remote freelance work with raising animals and growing food.

They rented a few places for first couple of years to see if they could hack it and to get a feel for different island communities. When the opportunity presented itself to buy ten acres of raw land in an area they loved, they jumped at the opportunity to plant permanent roots and build their forever home. Finances required a slow building process. The couple and their two young children lived and worked out of a canvas tent for three years before their home was ready to move in. While it wasn't easy or comfortable, they look back at their journey and appreciate how time really added to the overall functionality and consideration of their homestead. In addition to raising goats, chickens and growing food, Rachel has build a thriving mission-driven creative business. With patience, effort and vision - Rachel has been able to realized her homesteading dreams, while maintaining a fulfilling career in the digital strategy.

[rachelsegal.com](#)





*Episode 6*  
**SHALA**  
**MONROQUE**



[@shalamonroque](https://www.instagram.com/shalamonroque)

## **An art and fashion icon battles burnout by returning to the land to heal, grow and build a life on her own terms**

New York City *to* St. Lucia

Shala is a Saint-Lucian native who moved to NYC in the early 2000s to pursue a career in modeling. She was a creative director at Garage, an independent fashion magazine. She also was a consultant for Prada and a freelance art consultant. A verifiable “it-girl” of the early aughts, covergirl, and street-style darling, Shala was by all accounts on top of the world. But in reality, she struggled deeply with burnout, depression, and homesickness.

In 2012, Shala returned to St. Lucia after her brother was in a near-fatal car accident, staying for a few months while he returned to health. However, by 2014 Shala didn’t want to be away from her family any longer, and made the decision to leave her highly sought after career in fashion to move back home to St. Lucia. Since moving, she has established a small organic farm on family property, taken up diving and photography, and has slowly found her way back into the fashion world on her own terms. Along with occasional Fashion Week appearances, Shala is currently working with Haitian designer Sophia Demirtas on a capsule collection. Shala’s determination, and commitment to herself and native land has allowed her to reimagine a future in fashion defined by balance, wellness, and ecological consciousness.

BAZAAR

The New York Times



*Episode 7*  
**CHLOE  
MAXMIN**



[@chloe.maxmin](https://twitter.com/chloe.maxmin)

## **Dirt Road Revival: A young politician and climate activist aims to rebuild rural politics by tackling polarization**

Boston, Massachusetts to Nobleboro, Maine

At 28, Chloe Maxmin is the youngest woman ever to serve in the Maine State Senate. She was elected in 2020, after unseating a two-term Republican incumbent and (former) Senate Minority Leader. In 2018, Chloe served in the Maine House of Representatives, after beating a Republican incumbent in her traditionally conservative leaning rural district. Chloe grew up on her family's farm in Nobleboro, Maine. From a young age, Chloe has been a community organizer and dedicated climate activist. While attending Harvard, Chloe co-founded Divest Harvard, a campaign calling on Harvard University to divest from fossil fuels. The campaign drew hundreds of thousands of supporters and eventually pressured the university to divest the entirety of their multi-billion dollar endowment from fossil fuel stocks.

Chloe is the recipient of the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes and the Brower Youth Award. She was also named a "Green Hero" by Rolling Stone. Her work has been recognized by the Maine Women's Fund, Washington Post, Rolling Stone, Real Time with Bill Maher, CNN, MPBN and more. This year, Chloe wrote and published Dirt Road Revival, along with her campaign manager, a how-to guide on rebuilding rural politics, and tackling political polarization from the ground up.

**The New York Times**

**The Washington Post**

**THE  
NEW YORKER**



Episode 8  
*MALLIKA  
VIEGAS*



@mviegas

## Finding in Paradise: An "accidental" relocation from Toronto to Costa Rica provides a shift in perspective

Toronto, Canada to Playa Carrillo, Costa Rica

Mallika was born in Goa, India, and moved to Canada with her family at age 11. Her husband was also born in Goa and immigrated to Canada. Serendipitously, the couple met in Toronto after college and connected over their shared friends and upbringing. Mallika built a successful career in storytelling - working as a journalist, writer, content producer and podcast host. She has worked for Vice, Toronto Star, CBC, Fashion and The Cut. Before becoming a mother, Mallika worked 60+ hour work weeks and was very career driven. When Mallika's son Freddie was born in the early days of the pandemic, she realized her desire to make a seismic life shift so that she could work less and spend more quality time with her family.

A decade previous, Mallika's parents moved to Costa Rica. Battling the isolation of being a new mom during a pandemic, Mallika yearned to be closer to her parents.. Throwing caution to the wind, the young family braved a pandemic trip to Costa Rica. It only took a few weeks before they decided to relocate permanently. Since moving to Costa Rica, Mallika's lifestyle and priorities have completely shifted. The lower cost of living has allowed her to be more selective of the freelance work she takes on - giving her much more freedom and free time in her days. Living in a close-knit beach community, with an appreciation of motherhood and children, has also allowed her to let go from elements of materialism and individualism, raising her son in a more holistic and natural environment.

A CUP  OF JO



## Episode 9

# NICOLA HARVEY & PAT LEDDEN



[@slowstreamfarm](https://www.instagram.com/slowstreamfarm)

## A creative couple's unexpected journey into ranching and climate activism in New Zealand

Sydney, Australia to Aotearoa, New Zealand

In 2017, Pat and Nicola relocated from Sydney to takeover her father's cattle ranch land lease in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Before starting Slow Stream Farm, Nicola worked in media production. She freelanced for various media companies and production houses in London and Melbourne, before settling in Sydney. There, she worked her way up the corporate ladder and landed a sought after Managing Editor position at BuzzFeed Australia. Pat worked as a property valuer and played guitar in various bands.

The couple, burnt out at the pace and expense of city life and yearning to be closer to nature, thought it would be a great adventure to takeover Nicola's father's cattle business. There were only a few years remaining on the land lease so they figured that they could always return to their city lives if it didn't feel like a good fit. From inception, their goal was to create a sustainable and regenerative agriculture operation. Rich soil, clean waterways and healthy cattle – all of the elements of their land and farm living harmony with one another. They didn't realize how difficult the transition would be - both from a work and community perspective. Although there have been times where they neared giving up, the pandemic forced their hand to stay the course. Through research and experimentation they have been able to streamline their operations and find greater balance, rewards and joy in the work. This year, Nicola published a book on her farming journey, Farm: The Making of a Climate Activist, documenting her farming journey and struggle with effective industry-wide climate action.

[slowstreamfarm.com](https://www.slowstreamfarm.com)

The Sydney Morning Herald



*Episode 10*

*RENALDO  
HOLMES*



*@holmesfindsfreedom*

## **The Spirit of Freedom: Art, Urban Farming & Nomadic Living**

Miami, Florida *to* Van Life (U.S. & rural Mexico)

Renaldo Holmes, “Holmes,” is a farmer, nomad, poet, and garden-educator. After working as a power-plant technician for 11 years, Holmes had a paradigm shift. He realized his dream of achieving freedom by going back to the land and learning to provide for himself and others. Before leaving his job, he was able to save enough money to buy property in Georgia. There, he began experimenting with urban farming. It was in Georgia where Holmes realized his passion of empowering and teaching people how to grow food. He hopes this work can help eradicate food deserts through community action and self-sufficiency.

When Covid hit, Holmes decided to downsize and sell his property. He fixed up a van to travel in and headed out on the road - spending a year in rural Mexico. In Mexico he apprenticed on a farm and found an incredible and accepting community to be a part of. In order to plant more permanent roots, Holmes recently returned to the United States to save money and build some passive income streams so that he can buy a little plot of land in the Mexico. Holmes is currently living out of his van in Connecticut while working for a power plant and growing food in neighbor’s yards. Spreading seeds and love wherever he goes, Holmes has found freedom.



*Episode 11*  
*MARA*  
*TIEKEN*



*Why Rural Schools Matter*

## **Rural Schools Matter: Nurturing cultural diversity, local economies, and community**

Professor of Education at Bates Colleges *in* Lewiston, Maine

Mara's research and writing focuses on educational and racial equity in rural America. Her book, Why Rural Schools Matter, is an ethnographic study of two rural Arkansas communities that examines the roles that schools play in rural towns. Mara's interest in rural education began while working for a small school in Tennessee. She witnessed first-hand the struggles that rural public schools face when it comes to funding and enrollment and saw how integral the school was to local economic prosperity.

Mara realized the unique issues facing rural schools are often overlooked in political reform, and educational studies and research. She decided to focus her studies on rural education - studying threats of closure, consolidation, and the lasting ramifications of segregation and other inequalities. Mara is currently working on two new research projects - one that examines the college experiences of rural, first-generation students, and another that examines the impacts of school closures on predominantly Black rural communities. Mara also studies the effects of community organizing for education reform. Additional work of hers has been published in Review of Educational Research, Harvard Educational Review, American Educational Research Journal, Peabody Journal of Education, and Sociological Focus.

**The Washington Post**



## Episode 12

# KT & MARCO BENEVENTO



@marcobenevento22

## Making a Creative Sanctuary: A traveling musician and artist build a home and recording studio in the country

New York City *to* Woodstock, NY

Marco Benevento is a pianist, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, and record producer. He was a fixture of the New York experimental music rock and jazz scene for two decades. Marco is a member of the rock groups Benevento/Russo Duo and Joe Russo's Almost Dead. In NYC, Marco gigged and toured constantly, while his wife KT worked as a jewelry designer and held down the fort with the couple's two young girls.

Busy schedules and too much time apart made the young family decide to call NYC quits and build a life where they could have more connection to the outdoors, to one another and more creative space/time. Since moving to Woodstock, the Benevento's have woven themselves into their new community. KT started volunteering at her daughter's school, which turned into a full-time position. During Covid KT started making jewelry again and designing t-shirts. Marco converted their garage into a his Fred Short studios, where he produces his own music and the music of other artists. Marco now balances the life of a recording artist, studio engineer/producer and touring musician.

**FLOOD**  
MAGAZINE

*Aquarium  
Drunkard*

**dope**  
MAGAZINE



# PODCAST SPONSORSHIP RATES

There are 12 episodes in season five, with a new episode releasing every Friday. Season five runs November 11th, 2022 - January 20th, 2023.

**SEASON SPONSOR** (only 1 offered per season) - \$7,500

The season sponsor will be announced in a 20 second spot at the beginning of all 12 episodes and named/tagged in all podcast social media posts.

**MULTI - EPISODE** (Three episodes of your choosing)

Pre-Roll Per Episode: \$800 (20 second spot in three episodes)

**ONE EPISODE**

Pre-Roll Per Episode: \$300 (20 second spot)

Mid-Roll Per Episode: \$275 (20 second spot)

Post-Roll Per Episode: \$250 (20 second spot)





# *NEW APPLE PREMIUM MINI-PODCAST*



*Ditch the City* is our new subscriber-only arm of the Urban Exodus podcast. Alissa has interviewed hundreds of folks who have made the transition from city to country and she embarked on her own journey from Seattle to the Maine countryside a decade ago. In this short form mini-pod, Alissa gives her expert advice on a myriad of topics related to rural living - growing food, raising animals, house hunting, finding a community that feels right for you, embracing the seasons, making friends, building a business, prepping for natural disasters, bridging political/ideological divides with neighbors, and so much more! This is a must listen for people dreaming of country living and for anyone who has already made their move.

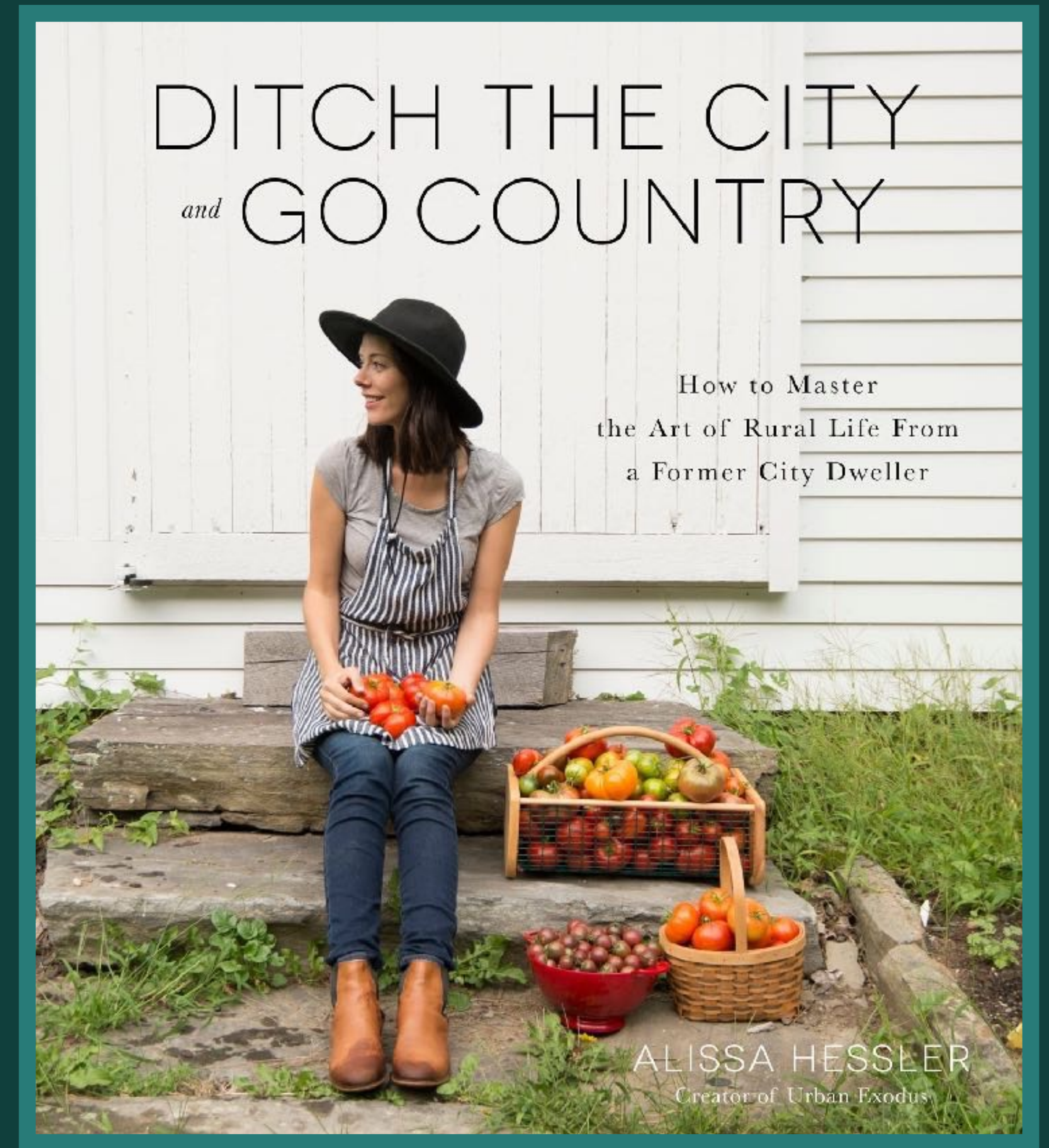
Ditch the City launched in November of 2022. A new episode launches every over Friday for Patreon and Apple podcast premium subscribers.



## *THE 'HOW TO' BOOK*

*Ditch the City and Go Country* is a no nonsense guide for anyone dreaming of moving to the country but not sure what to prepare for or how to plan their escape from city life. After interviewing hundreds of people for this project it became impossible to ignore the reoccurring stumbling blocks people encounter. This is a soup to nuts 'how to' guide - covering everything from selecting a location, becoming a member of your community, growing/raising your own food, finding work, house hunting, making friends, and more.

Published in 2017 by Page Street Publishing  
Over 4,500 copies sold worldwide





# URBAN EXODUS: COMMUNITY + WEBSITE

The Urban Exodus website launched in March of 2015. It began as a photojournalism project featuring people who moved from city life to country life. In the last five years Urban Exodus has built a dedicated and engaged community and has evolved into a website overflowing with over 150 honest, inspiring and realistic stories of people who are reconnecting with the natural world, growing their own food, crafting their own livelihoods, and living more intentional, purposeful, and sustainable lives - both inside and outside the city.

Instagram, @theurbanexodus 9.3k

Facebook, @theurbanexodus 2.2k

Monthly website visits 5k

Newsletter list 15k

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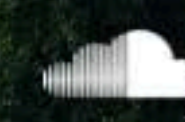
## NEW FEATURE

RURAL TEEN  
ENTREPRENEURS

*Meet the sisters behind  
Notes from the North*

[LEARN MORE](#)

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[SUBSCRIBE NOW](#)

## URBAN EXODUS

PODCAST

*Practical advice for country dreamers, rural folk, and urban-dwellers alike, who want to feel more connected to the natural world and the purpose and choices in their lives.*





*OUR TEAM*



## *HOST & EXECUTIVE PRODUCER*

*Alissa Hessler* is a photographer, filmmaker, storyteller, artist and educator. She has led creative teams in the photography, film and design worlds, working as a photo editor, photographer, art director, design and executive producer. Hessler started her career as film producer at Pravda Studios in Seattle. Following Pravda, she was a project manager and photography art director at the award-winning Turnstyle Studio in Seattle. She then joined the Global PR team for the Taiwanese tech company HTC, where she managed the creative execution for all product launches, bringing over twenty devices to market at couture press events around the world.

In 2012, Alissa left Seattle and the corporate world for a small community in Midcoast Maine. Leaving city life inspired Alissa to start Urban Exodus and build her own creative agency and destination photography workshop business. She teaches at institutions all over the U.S., including Maine Media Workshops and Santa Fe Photographic Workshops.

Urban Exodus started as a photojournalism project and has evolved into a rurally-based, mission-driven multimedia storytelling platform, supported by an international community of people who appreciate the stories we tell and the work we do.





## *WRITER + PRODUCER*

**Simone Leon** Simone comes to Urban Exodus after years of experience in the Los Angeles entertainment industry. She worked for Whitaker Entertainment, a production company based at Walt Disney Studios where she assisted producer Jim Whitaker (Friday Night Lights, 8 Mile, American Gangster, Pete's Dragon) on one of the first feature films to be premiered on the Disney+ streaming service in early 2020.

Prior to that she was at Paradigm Talent Agency, where she worked with screenwriters and directors in both film and television. She fell in love with Midcoast Maine and moved there from Los Angeles in 2019 in order to pursue a dream of living closer to the land. After stumbling across Alissa's book and the Urban Exodus website, Simone connected with Alissa on their shared desire to tell stories of those living more creative, sustainable, and self-directed lives in order to inspire others to do the same.

