Peter Baumann will not go hungry if the local supermarket shuts down tomorrow. In fact, if all food production in the United States ground to a halt, he would probably be just fine.

Baumann is an HHMI early career scientist at the Stowers Institute for Medical Research in Kansas City, Missouri. In his spare time he hunts, grows, raises, and gathers almost 80 percent of the food that he and his wife, Diana, and their two dogs consume.

The couple lives on 5 acres of land scattered with fruit trees, berry bushes, a large vegetable garden, and a pond stocked with bass and catfish. They have three freezers crammed with venison and chicken; a cellar overflowing with squash, potatoes, jams, and canned vegetables; and a coop of egg-laying chickens.

“It sort of happened gradually,” says Baumann of his family’s foray into sustainable living.

Baumann was lured by the memory of the taste of fresh vegetables grown in his mother’s extensive garden at their home in Germany. Diana’s childhood gardening memories, on the other hand, are limited to the few radishes her brother managed to coax from the ground in England. When the couple moved to a house in the countryside six years ago, they planted a few tomato seeds in pots on the patio. Unfortunately, raccoons got to the harvest before they could.

The next year the Baumanns planted a small garden in their yard and adopted a dog to keep the raccoons away. It worked, and a year later they expanded: the garden got bigger and a second dog joined the family. “It really took off,” Baumann says. Today, the garden occupies a little more than half an acre and is home to a variety of beans, tomatoes, peppers, greens, squash, and herbs.

What Baumann doesn’t grow he gathers, which he learned to do during weeks-long hikes in Europe and America. He’s been known to supplement his diet with unconventional items, such as the inner bark of a birch tree, which makes a tasty pasta substitute. His current foraging, however, is limited to mushrooms, cattails, pawpaws, and berries. “The inner shoots of the cattails are very similar to bamboo shoots, so you can put them in stir-fries or salads,” he says.

For meat, Baumann kills about five deer each fall, which he and Diana butcher together. They use all the meat, keeping the good cuts for roasts and stews and grinding up the rest for the dogs, who also get the hoofs for chew toys.

Chickens were a late addition to Baumann’s small-scale farm. It took some time for Diana to agree, but she came around and they mail-ordered 27 chicks in February 2011. This year, they added 47 more chicks and 16 ducks, which roam around a half-acre enclosure. Some of the chickens end up on the dinner table and the rest produce about 40 to 50 eggs per week.

Baumann is ready to add goat meat and milk to the family’s diet. “We have the space and the ideal habitat for them,” he explains. Since Diana is now a pro at butchering deer and plucking chickens, he expects that something as innocuous as a few goats wandering the property won’t faze her at all.

—Nicole Kresge

**WEB EXTRA:** View a slideshow of Peter Baumann’s small-scale farm at www.hhmi.org/bulletin/Fall2012.