

## Vegetarianism in a Nutshell

by Bruce Friedrich, PETA

There are very few choices in our day-to-day lives that make a significant impact on the world around us, but what we choose to eat does. Eating meat supports global poverty and worker abuse, harms the environment, supports cruelty to animals, and is bad for our health. Socrates said that "[t]he unexamined life is not worth living." Basically, veganism and vegetarianism are about leading an examined life—really considering the health, environmental, human, and animal consequences of our food choices, and then opting to make choices that are in keeping with our basic values.

So vegetarianism is the self-empowerment diet; at every meal, we have the opportunity to live our values—to cast our vote against cruelty to animals, environmental degradation, and global poverty—and we do this all while eating a diet that is better for us than one that includes meat.

### Health

Meat, eggs, and dairy products contain absolutely no fiber or complex carbohydrates, and they are packed with saturated fat and cholesterol. In the short term, eating meat, dairy products, and eggs is likely to make a person fat and lethargic. In the long term, eating these products can cause heart disease, high blood pressure, several types of cancer, and an array of other problems. I'd like to make a couple of points about human physiology, and then I'll talk about the link between animal products and a few of the worst health scourges plaguing North Americans.

It's amazing how many seemingly intelligent people, to justify their meat-eating, open their mouths, point at their teeth, and say something about "canines" as a means of defending a habit that is ecologically devastating, cruel to animals, and likely to kill them. Putting aside how different human "canines" are from the canine teeth of carnivores (I really wonder if these people have ever even looked at the long, dagger-like canines of a dog or a tiger), every natural carnivore has an array of other physiological properties that do not mirror ours. For example, unlike humans, all natural meat-eaters manufacture their own vitamin C, whereas we need to consume vitamin C in fruits and vegetables. True carnivores perspire through their tongues rather than through their skin. Natural meat-eaters have sharp, pointy front teeth, sharp and jagged molars, and a tooth-bone density that's many times greater than that of humans, which enables them to crunch through the bones of their prey. Carnivores have no digestive enzymes in their saliva at all, and their digestive acids are many times more acidic than those of humans, so the bacteria from rotting flesh won't kill them. Natural meat-eaters have jaws that move only vertically, instead of in a grinding motion as ours do, and they don't chew their food—they just rip and swallow. Carnivores have claws to rip their prey apart instead of sensitive fingers for plucking. They have intestinal tracts that are only three times their body length, which enables them to eject rotting flesh quickly. No matter how much saturated fat and cholesterol they consume, natural meat-eaters never develop atherosclerosis, the heart disease that consistently kills more human beings in the industrialized world than any other cause of death. And the list of physiological differences between humans and natural meat-eaters goes on and on.

And let's also think about this intuitively. How many of us salivate at the idea of chasing small animals, ripping them limb from limb, and then devouring them, blood and all? I hope that no one listening has that reaction, but every carnivore does. How many of us, if we're walking down the street and see a recently run-over animal carcass on the road, think, "Mmmmmm ... I'd like to eat that"? No. We think, "Oh, how sad" or "Blech." A real carnivore, if hungry, digs in.

Yes, human beings learned, "Hey, if we kill all the bacteria and viruses with fire, this stuff probably won't kill us." And a long time ago, at times when there was little vegetation for us, we started eating meat. But it's still not good for us, and in fact, it's so bad for us that it kills many of us.

People will sometimes tell me that their doctor suggested that they eat meat or that their doctor says there's no link between eating chicken and getting cancer. I suspect they're making it up, since any doctor who said that would be offering advice that is contrary to every nutritional body in the world. There is not a single prominent medical or dietetic group that will tell you eating meat is good for you. On the pro-vegetarian side, we have an array of prominent medical groups and physicians, including Drs. Andrew Weil, Dean Ornish, Caldwell Esselstyn, T. Colin Campbell, Neal Barnard, and the list goes on. On the pro-meat side, there is literally one guy (seriously, just one)—Robert Atkins, who keeled over dead at 260 pounds in 2003, and whose company went bankrupt shortly thereafter.

The American Dietetic Association, the world's largest organization of nutrition professionals, performed an extensive review of all the scientific studies about vegetarian diets. They found that vegetarians have lower rates of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer, and obesity than meat-eaters and wrote a position paper on vegetarian and vegan diets, which concluded that vegetarian and vegan diets are appropriate for all stages, including infancy and pregnancy, and that in fact they have "health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases."

So on the side that says you should eat some meat, we have not one medical or dietetic group in the world, but one guy who dropped dead at more than 260 pounds (and he was less than 6 feet tall, by the way). On the other side, we have some of the most prominent doctors and nutritional researchers in the world and all the scientific and medical bodies that exist. So if your friend says that her doctor told her to eat meat, if it's true, she really needs to find another doctor.

I know that when I adopted a vegetarian diet, I found that I needed less sleep and less coffee, and I suddenly had more energy than I had ever had before; my 10K running time dropped by more than 15 percent, and I'd been running cross country for years. The reason is that I was working with my physiology rather than against it—not forcing my body to expend so much energy digesting foods that it was not designed to digest.

Consider a study from a school for troubled youth in Miami. Dr. Antonia Demas from Cornell University put kids there on a vegan diet, resulting in the Miami Herald headline "Brain Food: Student Vegans See Boost in Grades, Energy." School Principal Mary Louise Cole explained that the students "seem to have a lot more energy—they don't have the down times." One of the students, Gabriel Saintvil, stated, "I used to get tired when I ran laps or lifted weights. Now I get endurance and keep on doing it."

It works for adults too. Carl Lewis, named "Olympian of the Century" by Sports Illustrated, says, "[M]y best year of track competition was the first year I ate a vegan diet. Moreover, by continuing to eat a vegan diet, my weight is under control, I like the way I look."

And Atlanta Hawks guard Salim Stoudamire reports that after becoming vegan, "I'm in better condition. My endurance has gone up, and I haven't gotten tired at all during the whole season."

Vegetarianism is also the ultimate weight-loss diet, since vegetarians are one-third as likely to be obese as meat-eaters are, and vegans are about one-tenth as likely to be obese. You can be an overweight vegan, of course, and you can be a skinny meat-eater. But on average, vegans are 10 to 20 percent lighter than meat-eaters. Anyone who has questions about this might want to read Dr. Neal Barnard's *Food for Life* or Dr. Dean Ornish's *Eat More, Weigh Less*. Of course, we also have more information about vegetarianism and weight loss here on [GoVeg.com](http://GoVeg.com).

Beyond the short-term benefits of vegetarianism and veganism—energy, weight control, and the like—America's two biggest killers, heart disease and cancer, are inextricably linked to meat consumption.

Let's touch on heart disease first. Heart disease kills more people in North America than does any other cause

of death. Up until the 1980s, it was assumed that as people get older, their arteries inevitably become clogged. If you didn't get hit by a bus or die of cancer or something else, your arteries would eventually close, causing either your brain or your heart to give out, and that would be it. Enter Dean Ornish and Caldwell Esselstyn, two doctors with 100 percent success in preventing and reversing heart disease, using a vegan diet. If you know someone who has had a heart attack or suffers from heart problems, please stop listening right now and buy him or her Dr. Esselstyn's book, *Prevent & Reverse Heart Disease*, which details his work at the top heart clinic in the world, The Cleveland Clinic. He details both the skepticism of his colleagues and also his 100 percent success in taking people with advanced stages of heart disease, people who were told by their cardiologists that they were going to die, and stopping the disease in its tracks. The book will change his or her life—I promise.

The average vegan cholesterol level is about 133, while the average vegetarian cholesterol level is 161. And the average meat-eater's cholesterol level is 210. Although the medical establishment may say, "Well, you've done your best," at 210, people are still dying in droves. As Dr. Charles Attwood pointed out, this is insane: If people were being run down by trucks at the same rate that they're dying from heart attacks induced by meat, eggs, and dairy products, drastic steps would be taken.

And the same is true of cancer. There is complete scientific unanimity: As many cases of cancer are caused by diet as are caused by smoking. And it is also completely clear how we can prevent cancer. The World Cancer Research Fund, the American Cancer Society, and the Royal Cancer Society in Britain—and essentially, all organizations that study the issue—agree that as many cases of cancer are caused by diet as are caused by smoking, and all of them make the same top two recommendations for preventing cancer: Eat more plant-based foods, and eat fewer animal-based foods. In other words, "Go vegan."

Dr. T. Colin Campbell is one of the world's foremost epidemiological scientists and the director of what The New York Times called "the most comprehensive large study ever undertaken of the relationship between diet and the risk of developing disease." Dr. Campbell's best-selling book, *The China Study*, is a must-read for anyone who is concerned about cancer. To summarize it, Dr. Campbell states that "human studies also support this carcinogenic effect of animal protein, even at usual levels of consumption. ... No chemical carcinogen is nearly so important in causing human cancer as animal protein." Just to be clear, it's not the fat and cholesterol that cause cancer—it's the animal protein. The fat and cholesterol cause heart disease; the animal protein causes cancer.

But what about milk? The fact that the dairy industry has succeeded in selling people on this nonsense—that cow's milk is good for them—is truly remarkable and a tribute to the power of money and advertising. What could be less natural than one species' decision to consume the mammary secretions of another species? It's not as if nature made a mistake—"Let's see, dog mothers' milk for puppies, kangaroo mothers' milk for joeys, rat mothers' milk for baby rats, cow mothers' milk for calves ... oh, hey, wait a minute! Let's feed cow mammary secretions to human beings also, including grown-up ones, who shouldn't be drinking any mothers' milk at their age anyway." Of course not.

Nevertheless, the dairy industry would have us believe that consuming its products will protect and even build your bones. The fact is that clinical and population evidence shows us otherwise. For example, in the areas of the world where people consume the most dairy products, you find the highest rates of osteoporosis. Please check out PETA's Web site [DumpDairy.com](http://DumpDairy.com) to learn about the link between meat and dairy consumption and osteoporosis. What dairy researchers do is lavish money on a handful of researchers and then desperately spin the results of studies in a rather Orwellian manner. In fact, the one time the dairy industry actually did a clinical trial with milk, it found that milk was positively linked with bone deterioration. Population studies have found the same, as detailed on our Web site.

Finally, because many people care more about quality of life than about longevity, let's look at sex. Vegans

tend to be much lighter than ovo-lacto vegetarians and meat-eaters, and they tend to have more energy, need less sleep, and so on. Clearly, these aspects of veganism can be good for a person's sex life. But clogged arteries will block the blood flow to your extremities before they cut off the blood flow to your heart and kill you. This results in poor circulation and, for guys, impotence. And while we're on the subject, it's worth noting that many cholesterol-cutting drugs have, as one of their side effects, reduced sexual desire and potency. So toss out the Viagra, gentlemen; a vegan diet is natural Viagra.

All this analysis applies to fish flesh as well as to other animal products: Fish flesh also has no fiber or complex carbohydrates. Most frighteningly, fish are also frequently laden with heavy metals or other contaminants from the water in which they swim. We've all heard the warnings about high mercury levels in fish and how pregnant women shouldn't consume fish; well, if it's not good for pregnant women, it can't be good for anyone else either. In 2005, The Wall Street Journal ran a front-page story about a kid who went from being an honor student and star athlete to being in remedial classes and unable to catch a ball, purely from eating a can of tuna a day. In 2006, the Chicago Tribune did a three-part front-page story, titled "Mercury Menace," about the fact that eating fish is linked to both short-term health problems, like forgetfulness and vertigo, and more serious problems, like birth defects, cancer, and so on. You can read these stories on our Web site FishingHurts.com. Suffice it to say, fish is probably the most dangerous so-called food you can eat, as we document on the site.

And of course, all this discussion has been about animal products when they're at their best. That is, these are problems inherent in the consumption of meat, including organic meat. But most animal products are also full of antibiotics, dioxin, and foodborne pathogens like E. coli, salmonella, and campylobacter. Millions of people get sick each year from eating contaminated meat, especially the flesh of chickens and sea animals, and thousands die. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), consumers of meat and dairy products are taking in 22 times the acceptable level of dioxin in their food. Ninety-five percent of dioxin exposure comes from consuming meat, eggs, and dairy products. The other 5 percent is environmental; virtually none comes from consuming vegan foods.

Of course, this also all applies for kids, in spades. Kids' bodies are developing, so you really don't want them eating meat, dairy products, and eggs. And check out another benefit of raising your child as a vegetarian. A BBC story in December 2006 reported on a British Medical Journal study that "found [children] who were vegetarian by 30 had recorded five IQ points more on average at the age of 10. Researchers said it could explain why people with higher IQ were healthier as a vegetarian diet was linked to lower heart disease and obesity rates." This study is backed up by the grandfather of child care, Dr. Benjamin Spock, who wrote, "Children who grow up getting their nutrition from plant foods rather than meats have a tremendous health advantage. They are less likely to develop weight problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, and some forms of cancer."

If you care about your health, if you want to live with as much vigor as possible, look as good as possible, and do as much good as possible, it would be wise to move toward adopting a vegetarian diet.

## **Environment**

The second reason for adopting a vegetarian diet is the environment. This one can be explained intuitively also. For example, a 200-pound man will burn off at least 2,000 calories a day even if he never gets out of bed. He uses most of what he consumes simply to power his body. Similarly, most of what we feed to chickens, pigs, and other farmed animals—most of it is burned off, simply keeping the animals alive until they're slaughtered.

It's bizarre, really: You take a crop like soybeans, oats, corn, or wheat, which are all high in protein, fiber, and complex carbohydrates but devoid of cholesterol and artery-clogging saturated fat. You feed them to an animal and create a product with no fiber or complex carbohydrates at all but with lots of cholesterol and saturated fat.

It makes about as much sense as taking pure water, running it through a sewer system, and then drinking it.

In November 2006, the United Nations released a massive report that details the environmental consequences of eating meat. It's called *Livestock's Long Shadow*, and it concludes that raising chickens, pigs, and other animals for food is "one of the top two or three most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale from local to global." Yes, no matter what environmental issue you're looking at—from resource use to water pollution to air pollution to global warming—funneling crops through animals in order to eat meat is one of the top three causes.

*E*, the respected environmental magazine, noted that more than one-third of all fossil fuels produced in the United States are used to raise animals for food. It takes up to 16 pounds of grain to produce 1 pound of animal flesh. If we have to grow massive amounts of grain and soy—with all the tilling, irrigation, crop dusters, and so on that are required—truck all that grain and soybeans to factory-style farms and feedlots, feed it to the approximately 10 billion land animals who are raised for food in the U.S. each year, truck those animals to automated slaughter facilities, truck the dead animals to processing centers, run the processing and packaging machines, and then truck the packaged meat to grocery stores—well, there's a lot of energy being used up at each one of those stages.

If all this energy is being used, all these fossil fuels are being burned, and all this manure is being produced, of course, we're talking about serious air pollution. Many environmentalists would sooner walk or ride their bikes than drive in order to decrease air pollution in their area but then will happily eat meat, eggs, or dairy products without a second thought about the fact that they are paying for gas-guzzling animal-transport trucks, refrigerated meat trucks, pollution-churning processing plants, and so on.

My wife says that where the environment is concerned, eating meat is like driving a huge SUV or an 18-wheeler. Eating a vegetarian diet is like driving a motorcycle, and eating a vegan diet is like riding a bicycle or walking.

A similar analogy holds for land. According to John Robbins, the average vegan uses about one-sixth of an acre of land to satisfy his or her food requirements for a year; the average vegetarian who consumes dairy products and eggs requires about three times as much, and the average meat-eater requires about 20 times that much land. We can grow a lot more food on a given parcel of land if we're not funneling crops through animals.

And think about water. According to the National Audubon Society, raising animals for food requires about as much water as all other water uses combined, even as many areas are experiencing drought conditions. It requires about 300 gallons of water to feed a vegan for a day. It requires about four times as much water to feed a vegetarian and 14 times as much to feed a meat-eater. Of course, if you have to feed animals, you have to irrigate the crops that you're feeding them. You have to give them water. Factory farms and slaughterhouses have to be hosed down with water. It's a water-intensive operation.

Raising animals for food is also a water-polluting process. One dairy cow produces more than 100 pounds of excrement per day. According to a U.S. Senate report, animals raised for food in the U.S. produce 130 times the excrement of the entire human population of this country. Their excrement is more concentrated than human excrement and is often contaminated with herbicides, pesticides, toxic chemicals, hormones, antibiotics, and so on. These massive farmed-animal factories generally don't have waste-treatment plants. Instead, the manure is poured onto land or into giant lagoons, where it often spills over into local waterways, kills fish, and poisons the drinking water. Streams and rivers all over the middle of our country that once were clear and full of fish are now filthy and lifeless because of manure runoff from factory farms. There's an enormous "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico now, where no fish or other animals live. This is largely because of the enormous amount of animal waste that has flowed from factory farms down rivers and streams and into

the gulf.

Two of the most pressing environmental issues of the day are global warming and the destruction of the rain forest. In 2006, the University of Chicago published a major report stating that adopting a vegan diet is more important in the fight against global warming than switching to a hybrid car. That makes sense when you consider how many more resources are required to grow all those crops for chickens, pigs, and other animals.

As for the rain forest, most people know that the rain forest is being destroyed to create grazing space for cattle. But Greenpeace published a report in 2006 indicating that the new trend is for huge companies to clear rain-forest land to raise crops to feed to farmed animals. It specifically blamed the chicken industry for leading the way in the destruction of the Amazon, and it unveiled a banner in the Amazon that read, "KFC: Amazon Criminal," because that company's chickens were fed soy that had been grown in the rain forest.

Of course, anyone who reads the papers knows what factory-fishing trawlers are doing to our sea beds and ocean floors. One super-trawler is the length of a football field and takes in 800,000 pounds of fish in a single netting. Trawlers scrape along the ocean floor, destroying coral reefs and everything else in their way, and hydraulic dredges scoop up huge chunks of the ocean floor to sift out scallops, clams, and oysters. Most of what the fishing fleets get isn't even eaten by human beings. Half is fed to animals who are raised for food, and about 30 million tons each year are just tossed back into the ocean, dead, which greatly disturbs the natural biological balance. Commercial fishing fleets are destroying sensitive aquatic ecosystems at a rate that is beyond comprehension. A major study found that in just the last 50 years, commercial fishing has reduced the populations of all large fish species by a staggering 90 percent.

Then there is aquaculture, which is increasing at a rate of more than 10 percent annually. Aquaculture is even worse than commercial fishing, because, for starters, it takes up to 5 pounds of wild-caught fish to reap 1 pound of farmed fish. Farmed fish eat fish caught by commercial trawlers that aren't used for human consumption. Farmed fish are often raised in the same water that wild fish swim in, but fish farmers dump antibiotics into the water and use genetic breeding to create unnaturally large fish. The antibiotics contaminate the oceans and seas, and the genetically altered fish sometimes escape and breed with wild fish, throwing delicate aquatic balances out of kilter. Researchers at the University of Stockholm demonstrated that the horrible environmental influence of fish farms can extend to an area 50,000 times larger than the farm itself.

The choice is clear: We can demonstrate our environmental values every time we sit down to eat by eating a vegan meal, or we can trample over the Earth in a Hummer by eating meat, dairy products, and eggs. Really, a true environmentalist doesn't eat animal products.

## **Human Rights**

The third reason for adopting a vegetarian diet is human rights. Right now, 1.3 billion people, more than 20 percent of the world's population, are living in abject poverty. Right now, 800 million people are suffering from what the United Nations calls "nutritional deficiency." That's a euphemism: They're starving. Every year, 40 million people die from starvation-related causes.

It is depressing to consider that throughout the last big famine in Ethiopia, that country was exporting desperately needed soy and linseed to Europe to feed to farmed animals. The same relationship held true throughout the famine in Somalia in the early 1990s.

And the same relationship holds true between Latin America and the United States today. For example, two-thirds of the agriculturally productive land in Central America is devoted to raising farmed animals, almost all of whom are exported or eaten by the wealthy few in these countries.

The U.N. Commission on Nutritional Challenges for the 21st century said that unless we make major changes,

1 billion children will be permanently handicapped over the next 20 years as a result of inadequate caloric intake. The first step toward averting this tragedy, according to the commission, is to encourage human consumption of traditional plant foods, like beans, nuts, grains, fruits, and vegetables. So the question is: Why are we funneling huge amounts of grain, soybeans, and corn through all the animals we use for food, even as so many people on the planet starve? Why do we eat animal products that make us fat when we could choose a vegetarian diet instead and help feed the world's hungry?

On the domestic front, a book called *Fast Food Nation* came out a few years ago. In the book, investigative journalist Eric Schlosser details the human abuse in slaughterhouses and includes the information that slaughterhouse workers have nine times the injury rate of coal miners in Appalachia, that some slaughterhouses have 300 percent turnover rates, and that many slaughterhouses reserve the worst jobs for people who are in this country illegally and thus can't defend their own rights.

And in 2005, the organization Human Rights Watch issued a report that found that "[m]eatpacking is the most dangerous factory job in America. . . . Nearly every worker interviewed for this report bore physical signs of a serious injury suffered from working in a meat or poultry plant. . . . Every country has its horrors, and this industry is one of the horrors in the United States." Workers in slaughterhouses are constantly exposed to knives, kicking by large animals as they hang upside-down on conveyor belts, extreme temperatures, and animals' bodily fluids.

The truth is that eating meat, eggs, and dairy products supports an industry that abuses both workers and animals and wastes enormous amounts of food that should be fed to the world's starving people.

## **Animal Welfare**

The fourth reason for adopting a vegetarian diet is that eating animal products supports cruelty to animals. If we don't want to pay people to inflict gratuitous abuse on animals, a vegan diet is the only diet that makes sense.

Twenty years ago, some scientists were still telling us that other animals don't feel pain in the same way that humans do. Now, no reputable scientist believes that. Everyone now understands that cattle, pigs, chickens, and fish feel pain in the same way, and to the same degree, as humans. We also know that they have emotions, and even though we don't tend to know chickens in the same way that we know cats and dogs, the science is clear: Chickens, fish, pigs, and cattle are individuals, just like the animals we know a bit better.

In fact, both pigs and chickens do better on cognition tests than dogs or cats, and pigs perform better than 3-year-old human children. When Cameron Diaz learned that pigs are more intelligent than 3-year-old children, she decided to stop eating them, exclaiming, "Oh, my God, it's like eating my niece."

Scientists at the University of Guelph have learned that pigs and chickens can figure out how to turn on the heat in a cold barn if given the chance and turn it off again when they are too warm. University of Bristol researchers have observed that chickens will complete a difficult maze to reach a nest instead of laying their eggs on the barn floor. In Pennsylvania, a farm welfare researcher has shown that sows like to play video games and that they play the games better than some primates. And a researcher in Saskatchewan is studying the complex social lives of cattle, finding that they interact in ways that are very similar to how we interact. And don't even get me started on fish—fish can use tools, learn from each other, and recognize one another, and they have long-term memories. These scientists join sanctuary owners and many small farmers in recognizing that animals are individuals, with feelings just like our own. You can watch videos of pigs playing video games and chickens navigating mazes in the education section of [PETATV.com](http://PETATV.com), and read more about all these amazing animals in the "Amazing Animals" section of [GoVeg.com](http://GoVeg.com).

Science and understanding may have progressed, but the treatment of animals in factory farms has gotten

worse. As Sen. Robert Byrd told the U.S. Senate, "Our inhumane treatment of livestock is becoming widespread and more and more barbaric." He went on to detail the suffering of pigs in tiny stalls, hens in cages, calves in crates, and the inhumane—and inhuman—slaughter of all these animals. Sen. Byrd stated, "These creatures feel; they know pain. They suffer pain just as we humans suffer pain."

PETA's short "Meat Your Meat" video, which you can watch at [Meat.org](http://Meat.org), shows you what you're supporting if you consume meat, eggs, and dairy products. Every practice shown on the video is standard across the animal agriculture industry. Please download the video, make more copies for everyone who you think might do well to watch it, and encourage them to do likewise.

Factory farms are abusing animals—they are treating animals in ways that would warrant felony cruelty charges if the animals were dogs or cats. Animals are deprived of everything that is natural and important to them; their entire lives, from birth to death, are characterized by unmitigated misery. Alice Walker has a phrase for eating animal products: She calls it "eating misery."

In the rush for profits, abnormal breeding practices are used so that animals will grow far more quickly than they would naturally, and their organs and limbs simply can't keep up. For example, chickens' upper bodies grow seven times as quickly as they did just 30 years ago, and their lungs, hearts, and limbs can't keep up, so these factory-farmed animals who live for fewer than two months still suffer from very high rates of lung collapse, heart failure, and crippling leg deformities.

Chickens and turkeys are naturally inquisitive and would normally spend their lives actively dust- and sun-bathing, digging in the underbrush, building nests, playing with their chicks, and so on. Walk into a factory shed today, containing tens of thousands of chickens, and you'll find that after just a month, the animals have become so debilitated that they can barely move.

Michael Specter, a longtime staff writer for *The New Yorker* magazine, visited a chicken farm and wrote, "I was almost knocked to the ground by the overpowering smell of feces and ammonia. My eyes burned and so did my lungs, and I could neither see nor breathe.... There must have been 30,000 chickens sitting silently on the floor in front of me. They didn't move, didn't cluck. They were almost like statues of chickens, living in nearly total darkness, and they would spend every minute of their six-week lives that way."

Similar conditions exist for all animals raised for food: Cattle and pigs have their testicles ripped out without any painkillers. Cattle have their horns cut off and have third-degree burns—also known as branding—inflicted on them, often three or four times during their short lives. Pigs have their ears, tails, and teeth mutilated. Laying hens' sensitive beaks are seared off with a hot blade. The animals are dosed with hormones or antibiotics, both to make them grow more quickly and to keep them alive through the horrible conditions that would kill them from stress and disease if they were not drugged. Mother pigs, or "breeding sows," as the industry calls them, are kept in metal and cement "gestation crates," cages so small that they can't take a single step forward or backward. They are confined to cages like this continually for four to five years before being killed. One pig-flesh industry journal summed it up: "Crowding Pigs Pays."

Animals are shipped to slaughter without any food or water, often through severe weather extremes. Conditions are so bad that some animals arrive at the slaughterhouse crippled or dead. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), more than 200,000 cattle per year—mostly dairy cows—arrive at slaughterhouses unable to walk off the backs of transport trucks. According to the National Pork Board, more than 1 million pigs arrive dead or crippled from the harsh traveling conditions. Imagine how bad the conditions must be for so many animals to become injured and killed. But the meat industry accepts that some animals won't make it to slaughter if it means that it can make a higher profit. It's cheaper to let some pigs die in transport than to buy more trucks and give animals more space and better conditions. One industry expert explained the coldhearted calculation used by the egg industry when it crams so many hens into tiny wire cages—causing many to die—by stating that "chickens are cheap, cages are expensive."

Gail Eisnitz wrote an excellent book called *Slaughterhouse*, and you can read extensive excerpts on the Web by doing a Google search for "slaughterhouse excerpts." Eisnitz interviewed USDA slaughterhouse veterinarians, slaughter workers, and truck drivers as well as others who are intimately familiar with conditions in U.S. slaughterhouses. These experts testified that animals routinely arrive for slaughter frozen to the sides of transport trucks, frozen to truck bottoms amid their own feces and urine, crippled from the journey, and so on. Near-dead, they are simply hooked to chains and dragged off the backs of the trucks.

The animals who survive transport invariably suffer an awful death. Slaughterhouse workers and veterinarians testify that animals are routinely conscious through the entire slaughter process—while they are still conscious, their throats are slit, their limbs are hacked off, and their skin is torn from their bodies. Pigs are routinely forced into tanks of scalding-hot water for hair removal while they are still conscious. Chickens are often scalded to death in defeathering tanks.

This is an inevitable result of the fact that slaughter lines move at a pace that is too rushed for slaughterhouse workers to keep up with. Pig slaughter lines in the U.S. move at a rate of 1,100 animals per hour. Cow slaughter lines move at a rate of 400 animals per hour. In the European Union, the maximum rate is 300 for pigs and 75 for cows. U.S. lines move three to six times as quickly as European lines. Obviously, many animals will still be conscious as their throats are slit and their limbs are hacked off.

In PETA's "Meet Your Meat" video, we show slaughter at its "best"—cows and pigs slaughtered in a small slaughterhouse in Massachusetts by a trained worker who is in no hurry at all. Yet you can clearly see that the animals are still conscious as their throats are slit. With lines moving at breakneck speeds and workers making little money and having little training, one can assume that gratuitous abuse is the norm rather than the exception. And that is exactly what investigative journalists have found.

Sometimes people ask about dairy products, since the animal abuse in the dairy industry isn't as obvious. It may surprise you to hear that animal abuse in dairy production is worse than that in most other animal-product industries. Cows give milk for the same reason that all animals do—to feed their babies. But their babies are taken away from them within 24 hours of birth, and the female babies are added to the dairy herds. Many of the males are raised for veal. You might say that there is a hunk of veal in every glass of milk.

But that's not all: Not only do people who consume dairy products support the veal industry, they also support the abuse of dairy cows. Most dairy cows spend their entire lives on concrete or standing in muddy feedlots, and they often become lame as a result. And dairy cows now give about four times as much milk as they did just 25 years ago. Imagine if a human mother gave four times her normal milk output. The animals' udders are so overloaded that they sometimes drag on the ground, and one-half of all dairy cows suffer from mastitis, a painful udder infection.

The worst industry regarding animal welfare is the egg industry. Hens are crammed into tiny cages that are stacked on top of each other. The birds can't even spread a single wing in these cages for their entire lives. To keep the birds from pecking at each other in the cages, the egg industry cuts off the tips of birds' sensitive beaks. After two horrific years, the birds who have survived are yanked out of the crates, trucked to a slaughterhouse, and slammed upside-down into shackles to have their throats slit. Their bodies are too beaten up to be sold as regular chicken flesh; they are turned into pet food or chicken soup instead. And have you ever wondered what happens to male chicks on egg factory farms? They don't lay eggs, and they are too small to be used for meat, so they are generally tossed into a high-speed grinder while still conscious.

One of the most incredible facts about the animal abuse that I've just discussed is that it's all routine. It's inspired by profit, and it's standard agricultural practice. The industry will tell us that only happy animals gain weight and produce, but that's nonsense that can't be backed up by science: The science proves that stressed animals eat more and thus grow faster. Animals unable to move grow more quickly than animals who can

move around. Mutilating animals and dosing them with hormones and antibiotics allows them to live through conditions that would otherwise cause them to kill each other from stress or get sick and die. And cramming animals into transport trucks, even though it kills a lot of them, is more economically viable than using more trucks and giving animals more space. Once the animals are at the slaughterhouse, the low-wage, high-turnover workers are forced to kill at such a rapid pace that animal welfare is entirely out of the question. Profit is king; animal welfare is not a concern.

What about fish? As we discussed earlier, fish may not scream out in pain, but they feel pain every bit as much as mammals and birds do. This is a physiological fact, and it's not disputed in scientific circles. Although we may have trouble empathizing with fish, their method of sonic communication, their sense of smell, and their ability to navigate all put human beings to shame. A few years back, an article in the scientific journal *Fish and Fisheries* cited more than 500 research papers on fish intelligence, proving that fish are smart, that they can use tools, and that they have impressive long-term memories and sophisticated social structures. Dr. Sylvia Earle, one of the world's leading marine biologists, said, "I would never eat anyone I know personally. I wouldn't deliberately eat a grouper any more than I'd eat a cocker spaniel. They're so good-natured, so curious. You know, fish are sensitive, they have personalities, they hurt when they're wounded."

Regardless of who's bringing in the catch, the methods of raising and killing fish are undeniably abusive. Commercial fishing trawlers, as I've mentioned, can net 800,000 pounds of fish; the fish are killed by crushing or by decompression as they are dragged from the ocean. Think about death by decompression or crushing. Have you ever felt claustrophobic in a crowd of people on a subway train or at a concert? Imagine how it would feel to be killed by being crushed. Or decompression—it's like stepping on the moon without a spacesuit. When fish experience decompression, their swim bladders often rupture and their eyes pop out of their heads.

Aquaculture is even worse, and it accounts for almost half the fish consumed by human beings. Aquaculture involves cramming thousands of fish into tubs or confining them to enclosed areas of the sea or ocean surrounded by nets, giving each animal just a bit more room than the space taken up by his or her body. An aquaculture tank looks somewhat like a massive tin of writhing anchovies; you can't believe that there are fish in there, and you have to wonder how a single animal could survive. The answer is that they're drugged with antibiotics, but the death toll is still massive. And as I mentioned, producing 1 pound of farmed fish requires up to 5 pounds of wild-caught fish.

Make no mistake: If someone eats meat, eggs, or dairy products, that person is contributing to serious cruelty to animals, no matter how good of a person he or she is otherwise. And it's cruelty to animals that, if done to a dog or a cat, would warrant felony animal abuse charges against everyone involved. This isn't a comfortable thing to deal with, I know, but it is the truth. And how can we turn our backs on it once we know this?

## **Animal Rights**

The final reason I hear for adopting a vegetarian diet—and this may be the most important reason for teenagers and college students—is the growing understanding that other animals are more like us than they are unlike us, that they are our "cousins," to quote Richard Dawkins. The Rev. Dr. Andrew Linzey, a theologian at Oxford University, points out that animals were designed with certain needs, desires, natural behaviors, and inclinations, just as human beings were, and that animals have the capacity for pain and suffering, just as human beings do.

Of course other animals are made of flesh, blood, and bone, like we are. And of course a dead animal is, like a dead human, a corpse. So in my opinion, it makes a lot more sense to ask a person why he or she eats animals' corpses than to ask a person why he or she doesn't. Since "Why are you a vegetarian?" is the same question as "Why don't you eat rotting animals' corpses?" wouldn't it make more sense to ask someone why he or she does?

Other animals have the same five physiological senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. Their experiences are similar. Any difference between a human and another animal is a difference of degree, not kind. From The Rev. Linzey's perspective, denying animals the things that they were designed to do and inflicting pain on them for reasons of convenience is categorically unethical. Linzey argues that causing pain to an animal is the moral equivalent of causing pain to a human being, because from the vantage point of the one harmed, the pain is the same.

Basically, Linzey's view is the animal rights perspective. The animal rights perspective holds that animals have a right, just as human beings do, to be free from pain and suffering. Back in the 18th century, Jeremy Bentham, the father of the Utilitarian movement, stated that if we're talking about a being's right to be free from pain and suffering, then the morally relevant variable is not whether that being can think or talk or how we relate to that being's life, but rather his or her capacity to feel pain and to suffer. Of course, any introductory physiology course will teach you that birds, mammals, and fish all have the same basic capacity to suffer. We share this capacity with all animals.

The animal rights movement is a movement for justice, just like the abolition of slavery, suffrage, civil rights, and women's rights. Most people today understand that bias on the basis of race, gender, religion, or nationality—any bias against other human beings—is wrong. Species bias—the idea that just because certain beings are not human, we can do whatever we wish with them—has yet to become widely accepted. Dr. Albert Schweitzer put it well when he stated that "compassion, in which ethics takes root, does not assume its true proportions until it embraces not only man but every living being."

Again, prejudice is prejudice, whether it is based on race or gender or religion—or on species. In each case, a line is drawn, separating those in the group above the line from those in the group below the line. Nobel laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer, who fled Nazi-occupied Poland, compared species bias to the "most extreme racist theories" and thought that animal rights was the purest form of justice advocacy, because animals are the most vulnerable of all the downtrodden. He felt that mistreating animals was the epitome of the "might makes right" moral paradigm—a moral paradigm that is ethically bankrupt.

Interestingly, the animal rights perspective has been embraced by a wide range of brilliant thinkers and humanitarians that includes, in addition to those I've already mentioned, Pythagoras, Leonardo da Vinci, Albert Einstein, Harriet Beecher Stowe, C.S. Lewis, Susan B. Anthony, Leo Tolstoy, and Mahatma Gandhi.

More recently, we have moral heavyweights on our side that include Carl Sagan, Peter Singer, Richard Dawkins, and John Rawls—three of the foremost thinkers of the past 100 years, including the foremost Darwin scholar, Dawkins, and the man The New York Times called the most influential philosopher alive, Singer.

## **Conclusion**

I'm convinced, on the basis of the evidence, that a vegetarian diet is—without a doubt—the very best choice for our health, the only sustainable choice for the environment, and the only choice that expresses in a positive manner who we are in the world—compassionate people, compassionate toward both humans and other animals.

The best musician of the past 100 years in my opinion, Sir Paul McCartney, summed it up, saying, "If anyone wants to save the planet, all they have to do is just stop eating meat. That's the single most important thing you could do. It's staggering when you think about it. Vegetarianism takes care of so many things in one shot: ecology, famine, cruelty."

Thank you for listening, and happy eating.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

Please, as you listen to the following questions and answers, note that none of these questions addresses the fact that meat-eating is the worst thing you can do for the environment, supports human injustices both in the U. S. and globally, and harms your own health. Nor do any of these questions address the gratuitous animal abuse in factory farms and slaughterhouses. I often think that eating meat must be an addiction, because defending it causes normally rational people to come up with questions that have nothing to do with the essential arguments and then to pose them as though they justify continuing to eat meat. If you are a vegetarian and someone asks you a question, before you answer ask yourself, "Does this question challenge my fundamental opposition to causing animals to suffer needlessly?" In 99 percent of cases, the answer will be "No," and you may wish to explain that to the person who asked it.

OK, here we go:

### **Animals eat one another in nature, so why shouldn't we eat animals?**

Variations on this question include "Aren't humans at the top of the food chain?" and "Aren't humans omnivores?" Please really think about what we do to animals in factory farms and slaughterhouses, denying animals everything that is natural and important to them and then killing them in gruesome ways, and try to tell me that this is moral. Nature's law is, without a doubt, Darwin's "survival of the fittest." But some animals may procreate by rape and other animals may fight territorial battles to the death. But the fact that those things occur in nature does not mean we say they're acceptable for humans. We hold ourselves to a higher standard in our interactions with one another. We even hold ourselves to a higher standard with regard to animals we often form special bonds with, such as dogs and cats—readily granting them some basic protections. What animal welfare advocates suggest is that we should be compassionate toward all animals, not just those we know a bit better.

### **Do you care more about animals than humans?**

Variations on this question include "With so much human suffering, why don't you focus on human issues?" The interesting thing to me about this question is that none of my friends who run shelters or soup kitchens or who work on famine relief ever asks it. The people who ask this question invariably have not dedicated their lives to alleviating suffering—human or animal. And, of course, a vegan diet is the only environmentally responsible diet, it's the healthiest diet, and it's the diet that is the best for U.S. workers and the global poor. So a vegan diet is good for both animal and humans. Regardless, shouldn't all suffering be addressed? Princeton bioethicist Dr. Peter Singer said: "When nonvegetarians say that 'human problems come first,' I cannot help wondering what exactly it is that they are doing for human beings that compels them to continue to support the wasteful, ruthless exploitation of farmed animals." One great thing about veganism is that it allows you to take a stand against suffering without doing anything that requires any real time or effort.

### **Didn't God give us dominion over animals?**

As a Roman Catholic, this is the one question that unsettles me most, because it is such an obscene rationalization. Dominion doesn't mean domination and exploitation. All the world's prominent religions teach the importance of compassion, the importance of mercy. But the choice to eat meat, dairy products, or eggs is a violent one; it supports cruelty. Even if their religious beliefs allowed people to eat these products, they would certainly not be required to do so. Leaving aside the environmental and human consequences, which should be anathema to any kind or ethical human being, God created animals with needs, wants, desires, and species-specific behaviors, and all these things are denied the animals who are turned into food by the farmed-animal industries. God created animals with a well-developed capacity for pain. Chickens, pigs, cattle, fish, and other farmed animals—they are individuals. If you get to know chickens or other farmed animals, you find that

they have personalities, intelligence, and social structures. They love their families. The Bible talks repeatedly about a hen's love for her children, and that's the metaphor Jesus uses to describe his love for humanity. Anyone who has ever seen a hen with her children or protecting her nest knows this to be true. Farmed-animal industries abuse animals and deny them the expression of each and every natural behavior that God created for them. For more information on this topic, please check out [JesusVeg.com](http://JesusVeg.com).

### **Why are you imposing your will on me?**

This is sometimes put as "You choose to be a vegan. I choose to be a meat-eater. Live and let live." The problem here is that meat and dairy consumers are supporting the gratuitous abuse of an animal who had no choice in the matter. They are not putting into practice a "live and let live" philosophy. Just as child abuse involves the child who has no choice, eating meat, dairy, or egg products involves an animal, or many animals, who have had no choice. And just as you can choose to beat your child, you can choose to eat meat. But if you do, you're hurting someone who is powerless to stop you.

### **Don't plants feel pain?**

Pain requires a brain, a central nervous system, pain receptors, and so on. All mammals, birds, and fish have these things. No plants do. Really though, we all know this to be true: We all understand that there is a fundamental difference between cutting your lawn and lighting a cat's tail on fire and between breaking up a head of lettuce and bashing in a dog's head. Birds, mammals, and fish are made of flesh, bones, and fat, just as we are. They feel pain, just as we do. I may not know quite where to draw the line. For example, I'm not sure what a roach or an ant experiences. But I do know, with 100 percent certainty, that intentionally inflicting suffering because of tradition, custom, convenience, or a palate preference is unethical. And if we're eating meat, dairy products, or eggs, we're intentionally causing suffering, for no good reason.

### **Aren't vegans deficient in protein, calcium, or other nutrients?**

The American Dietetic Association and the World Health Organization, among other groups, point out that vegan diets provide everything we need and that, in fact, they cut out a lot of the stuff that's horrible for us, making vegans healthier. The diseases that are killing us are not deficiency diseases. We're dying from heart disease, cancer, and strokes. We're plagued with diabetes and obesity. You can be an unhealthful vegan, but it's a heck of a lot easier to be an unhealthful consumer of meat, dairy products, and/or eggs. Dr. T. Colin Campbell argues that animal products are like tobacco—a little bit probably won't hurt you, but why risk it? They're bad for you. Of course, you can be a vegan, technically, and do nothing but drink soda and eat French fries. It's important to make an effort to eat a variety of foods and be as healthful as possible.

### **Wasn't Hitler a vegetarian?**

No. People who ask this have fallen victim to the very effective Nazi propaganda machine that wanted to frame Hitler as an ascetic, focused only on the needs of the German people. There is ample documentation of his meat-eating. If you want more information on this, do a Google search for "Hitler vegetarian," and you'll find an article by historian Rynn Berry. Even if he had been a vegetarian, though, this would be an absurd argument against ethical vegetarianism, because even had he been a vegetarian, it would clearly not have been for ethical reasons. Joseph Stalin and Saddam Hussein were meat-eaters, but so what?

### **What do you think is the strongest argument for veganism? How do you convince someone who does not want to be convinced?**

I would like to suggest that anyone who is interested in being an activist or convincing a friend or loved one to become a vegetarian read an essay that I wrote called "Effective Advocacy." You can find it online by Googling "Effective Advocacy Bruce," and it should be the first thing to come up.

Everyone opposes cruelty to animals, so it's important to remember that people who eat meat are doing something that conflicts with one of their basic values. It helps tremendously to have a conversation with meat-eaters, rather than ramming your views down their throats, so you can help them convince themselves that this is a problem.

So if you can ask meat-eaters, "Why do you eat meat?" and then really listen to the answer, that will probably help you have a conversation with them. And then I suggest moving into a discussion of some basic points about being a person with integrity.

I suppose that it boils down to Socrates' adage from 2,600 years ago: "The unexamined life is not worth living." It seems to me that what it means to be a person of integrity is that I try to ask questions, that I try not to support things that I oppose, and that I try to make my life mean something. So for example, I could take part in every aspect of getting vegan foods to the table—picking them, trucking them to the plant to turn them into bread or whatever, and so on.

But I wouldn't want to take part in any aspect of getting meat to the table—castrating pigs without pain relief, cutting birds' beaks off, trucking animals through all weather extremes to slaughter, slitting their throats, etc. There are moral qualms involved in all aspects of getting animal flesh, as well as dairy products and eggs, to the table.

I like what Whole Foods CEO John Mackey says about his veganism. It's very simple, he says: I don't need meat to survive. I know that eating meat causes animals to suffer, so I'm not going to eat them.

So challenge yourself, or your friends and family, to really grapple with these questions: Would you want to work in a factory farm, cutting the sensitive beaks off chickens or castrating pigs and cows without any painkillers? Would you want to work on a factory-fishing trawler? Of course the answer is no. So why pay others to do these things for you?

Are there other areas of your life where you participate in practices that would repulse you if you had to watch them happening? Most of us could watch the tilling of grains or even spend an afternoon shucking corn or picking beans, fruits, or vegetables. But how many of us would want to spend an afternoon slitting open animals' throats?

I think that ethics must include living a life that is, as much as possible, in keeping with our basic values. We can't be perfect, but we really should all do as much as we can.

### **What about so-called "humane" meat?**

I suppose I'd give in on road kill—if you want to eat an animal who died naturally or got hit by a car, I suppose there's not any strong moral objection. And there is certainly no question that some animal products are less cruel than others. But it's worth noting that the industry is taking over these labels. All the worst abuses in these factory farms are now called things like "Swine Welfare Assurance" and "United Egg Producers Certified," trying to con consumers into thinking that the worst abuses of factory farms are actually kindnesses. We look at all the labels and what they mean in the "Vegetarian 101" section of GoVeg.com. Of course, in every circumstance, eating meat will be bad for our health, bad for the environment, and a vast waste of resources. And in every instance, you're eating an animal's corpse if you're eating meat, or you're eating a baby calf's food if you're eating dairy products. If you're thinking about eating so-called humane meat, please check out the dirty reality behind organic and free-range animal products.

### **How can you compare animal abuse to the Holocaust, slavery, etc.?**

Many great thinkers—from Tolstoy to Harriet Beecher Stowe to Gandhi to Albert Schweitzer to Alice Walker to Dick Gregory to Holocaust victim and Nobel laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer—have made the point that the same justification is used to support both animal and human exploitation—the moral paradigm of "might makes right": I can do this to animals or people, so I'm going to.

It's worth considering: Why do people eat animal products? It's for some inconsequential reason, such as convenience, tradition, or taste, and because they can—because the animals can't defend themselves. No one argues that the animals want to be raised this way, transported this way, killed this way. Most people understand how gruesomely violent slaughterhouses are. But they don't want to bother making the change, even though it's easier than ever. They eat animals because they can. Well, that moral paradigm is no more justifiable when applied to animals than when applied to people. In fact, Isaac Bashevis Singer held that speciesism—bias on the basis of species—is the epitome of this "might makes right" moral paradigm, because animals are the weakest and least able to speak up for themselves.

Although it's easy to see how this is a challenging notion, since no one wants to think that he or she might be contributing to a moral wrong on the level of slavery by something as basic as eating, some historical memory is a good idea. The Rev. Dr. Andrew Linzey explains in his groundbreaking book *Animal Theology*, "[G]o back about two hundred or more years, we will find intelligent, respectable and conscientious Christians supporting almost without question the trade in slaves as inseparable from Christian civilization and human progress."

And Dr. Richard Dawkins, the foremost Darwin scholar alive, has consistently challenged the human "speciesist arrogance," suggesting that our horror at the justification 150 years ago by most people of slavery is similar to the justification today of speciesism. Both Dawkins and linguist and political scientist Noam Chomsky have suggested that concern for animals is likely to be the next great moral battle.

So we have the intellectual heavyweights of our generation and previous generations in agreement that bias against animals on the basis of species is similar to bias on the basis of race, gender, and so on.

It's interesting to consider that women were not given the right to vote in the U.S. until 1920, with the passage of the 19th Amendment. Many people reading this probably have close relatives who were alive when there was a spirited debate in Congress about whether the Union would dissolve if these "irrational creatures," women, were given a say in governance. One hundred years ago, there wasn't a single law against child abuse in this country. Not one. Your child was your property.

One hundred years ago, there was not a single country on the planet that guaranteed the right to vote to all adults. It's remarkable to recall that just 350 years ago, the pope sentenced Galileo to the torture chamber until he would recant the "heresy" that the Earth is not the center of the physical universe.

For a bit of historical perspective here, let's recall that Socrates was teaching 2,600 years ago, Plato and Aristotle were philosophizing 2,500 years ago, Jesus was preaching 2,000 years ago, and Shakespeare was writing 500 years ago. But it was less than 150 years ago that we got around to saying, "Hey, maybe people shouldn't hold slaves, and maybe people shouldn't be allowed to beat their children, and maybe women are rational enough to be given a say in governance."

I mention all this only to point out how quickly things change. Not so long ago, society believed—with complete certainty—the diametrical opposite of what we believe to be true about many things today.

Look how far the animal rights movement has come in, historically, the blink of an eye. In just the past 20 years, science has shown that a vegetarian diet is the healthiest diet and environmental researchers have proved that eating meat, dairy products, and eggs is not sustainable. Even more importantly, the scientific view that animals don't feel emotion has been replaced by a new, belated understanding that, of course, they do. In just the past few years, the issue of animal treatment in factory farms has taken center stage, with members of

the U.S. Congress decrying slaughterhouse treatment of animals and fast-food giants and requiring improvements for animals.

Note that just 20 years ago, the vegetarian stereotype was of hippies in communes, finding good vegetarian food in a restaurant was rare, and most people didn't know anyone who was a vegetarian. Now, the ranks of vegetarians include everyone from uber-celebrities Sir Paul McCartney and Pamela Anderson to Apple and Ford CEOs Steve Jobs and Bill Ford. Many of the leading national restaurant chains—like Johnny Rockets, Burger King, Chili's, and Ruby Tuesday—sell great-tasting veggie burgers, and The Washington Post and The New York Times regularly run front-page stories about factory-farming abuses.

Every grocery store now has a section of frozen mock meats and other vegetarian convenience foods, such as Boca's Chik'n patties, Gardenburger Riblets, and Morningstar Farms' Chik'n and Steak strips, and a recent poll by food-service giant Aramark found that nearly one-quarter of college students want vegan options available at every meal. Millions and millions of people are learning that moral integrity requires that when we sit down to eat, we make conscious choices, rather than unconscious ones, and that the only diet for environmentalists, animal lovers, and people who care about their health is a vegetarian one. The animal rights movement is making rapid progress, but we have a long way to go, and we need your help. The best ways that you can help are by taking a moral stand and adopting a vegetarian diet and by encouraging your friends and family members to do the same.

The 18th century saw the beginnings of our democratic system, which was the first to hold that "all men are created equal" and which established, under the law, basic freedoms such as the rights to assemble peacefully, practice one's chosen religion, say what one likes, and print what one likes. The 19th century abolished slavery in the developed world. The 20th century abolished child labor, criminalized child abuse, and gave women the vote and blacks wider rights. If we all do as much as we can, the 21st century can be the one in which animal rights take hold.

I have no doubt that in 100 years, human beings will look back on humans' mistreatment of other animals with the same horror that we presently reserve for historical injustices such as slavery and other moral transgressions against human beings.

Animals suffer and die just as we do. Animals are made of the same stuff that we are. Eating them is an act of gluttony and disregard for our own health, for the environment, for the global poor, and, most of all, for our fellow animals. If you are not a vegetarian, please work toward becoming one. If you are a vegetarian, thank you so much for caring, and please become more active in encouraging others to adopt a vegetarian diet also.

One of the exciting things about helping animals, the Earth, and your own health is that you don't have to fill out a form or make a call. You can start today, by choosing a healthy, humane vegan meal when you sit down to eat.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said that one of the great tragedies of history is that so many people fail to remain awake through great periods of social change. I'm convinced that we're in one of those periods.

Thanks very much for remaining awake.