

Misconception about Vegetarianism / Veganism

“Vegetarians (people who choose not to eat meat) and vegans (those who also avoid milk and eggs) are concerned about bodily purity or rebellion against society. Therefore, their choices are merely lifestyle habits that don’t apply to me if I am not interested in those ways of living.”

Vegetarianism is about reducing suffering. To quote Karen Davis: “The decision that has led millions of people to stop eating other animals is not rooted in arid adherence to diet or dogma, but in the desire to eliminate the kinds of experiences that using animals for food confers upon beings with feelings.” Virtually all of the nearly ten billion farm animals raised in the US each year live their short lives on “factory farms,” where they are confined to small, overcrowded cages without access to the outdoors or natural light for their entire lives. These cramped, stressful conditions produce rampant disease, which is why farm animals are routinely given antibiotics to maintain growth. Procedures like castration, branding, debeaking, and tail docking are routinely performed without anesthetic. Finally, slaughter is often brutally painful. In the fast-paced atmosphere of the cattle slaughterhouse, it is not possible to successfully stun all of the animals on the production line, meaning that some cows are cut apart, piece by piece, while fully conscious. Similarly, some pigs and chickens are submerged in scalding tanks while still alive.

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“We have to raise meat because it represents the most efficient method of food production. A plant-based diet alone would not be able to meet the needs of the world’s growing population.”

According to David Pimentel, professor of ecology in Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the production of a gram of animal protein requires six grams of plant protein, because most livestock are raised on cultivated grain. In fact, more than half of grain grown in the US and forty percent worldwide is fed to livestock, on land that could be devoted to feeding humans. As for efficiency, production of a kilocalorie of animal protein in the US requires an average of 28 kilocalories of fossil fuel, while the corresponding ratio for grain protein is 3:1. It is thus no wonder that the Worldwatch Institute, a well-respected environmental organization, concluded the following: “[T]he human appetite for animal flesh is a driving force behind virtually every major category of environmental damage now threatening the human future—deforestation, erosion, fresh-water scarcity, air and water pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, social injustice, the destabilization of communities, and the spread of disease.”

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“I could never go completely vegetarian / vegan, so this information doesn’t apply to me.”

Vegetarianism is about reducing suffering, not meeting the constraints of an arbitrary label. Every bit by which you reduce your consumption of animal products is one bit by which you reduce suffering and help the environment. Cutting your meat consumption in half would be half as good as going completely vegetarian.

“In fact, if one person is unkind to an animal it is considered to be cruelty, but where a lot of people are unkind to animals, especially in the name of commerce, the cruelty is condoned and, once large sums of money are at stake, will be defended to the last by otherwise intelligent people.”
—Ruth Harrison, author of Animal Machines (1964)