

Why Go Meatless for Lent?: Reasons and Resources

Prepared by Dr. John Sniegocki, Xavier Theology Department and Bellarmine Healthy Earth Team

There are many excellent reasons to consider giving up or significantly reducing your consumption of meat and other animal products this Lent. Maybe one or more of these will resonate with you:

World Hunger – The world produces far more food than is needed to adequately nourish everyone alive, yet nearly 1 billion people are chronically hungry/malnourished. Where does all the extra food go? Much of it is fed to livestock. The production of meat using modern factory-farm methods is very wasteful. It takes, for example, an average of 6 pounds of grain/bean protein fed to animals to produce one pound of animal protein. The remaining 5/6 of the protein and large percentages of other nutrients are simply lost to human consumption. The world can feed many more people when meat consumption is reduced or eliminated.

Ecology – According to the United Nations, the livestock industry is “one of the top two or three most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale from the local to the global.” These include global climate change, deforestation, air pollution, loss of biodiversity, land degradation, water scarcity, and water pollution. Did you know that the livestock industry is actually responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than the direct emissions of all forms of transportation combined? (source: UN Food and Agriculture Organization, *Livestock’s Long Shadow*) “There is no question, says Christopher Flavin of the WorldWatch Institute, “that the choice to become a vegetarian or lower meat consumption is one of the most positive lifestyle changes a person could make in terms of reducing one’s personal impact on the environment.”

Workers in the Meat Industry – Workers in meat processing plants have the highest injury rate and highest turnover rate of any occupation in the United States. (See the Human Rights Watch report, “Blood, Sweat, and Fear: Workers’ Rights in U.S. Meat and Poultry Plants.”) Workers in factory farms also have high rates of illness, caused in part by exposure to toxins in the huge quantities of animal manure and urine that these animal factories produce.

Treatment of Animals –The vast majority of meat, dairy, and egg products in the U.S. are produced in huge factory farms. In these ‘animal factories’ the animals are treated in ways that violate any semblance of humane care. For example, the animals are tightly confined in cages (e.g. six or more egg-laying chickens in a space smaller than a sheet of newspaper, unable to even open their wings), denied exposure to the outdoors, subject to numerous painful procedures without anaesthesia, and roughly transported and slaughtered at the end of their short, painful lives.

Human Health – Vegetarians have significantly lower rates of heart disease, various types of cancer, obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, and numerous other health problems than do nonvegetarians. (Source: American Dietetic Association, “Position Paper on Vegetarian Diets”) What is best for the animals, for the hungry, and for the earth is also best for our own health.

Nonviolence – Adopting a vegetarian diet is a powerful way to put into practice a commitment to nonviolence. Mahatma Gandhi viewed vegetarianism as essential to a nonviolent life. In the Bible, humans are portrayed as being created vegetarian (Genesis 1:29) and the fullness of God’s reign is described as a ‘peaceable kingdom’ in which all violence, including interspecies violence, will cease. (Isaiah 11:6-9)

Ceasing to eat meat and other animal products is an affirmation of life and an expression of a strong desire for greater compassion and justice in our world, so that God’s intent for our world is more fully realized. As the Christian Vegetarian Association states, “Modern animal-based diets tend to significantly harm our health, the environment, the world’s poor and hungry, and animals. Since a plant-based diet helps to address these concerns, we see it as an opportunity to honor God.”

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

Pope Francis: “Together with our obligation to use the earth’s goods responsibly, we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes.”

Albert Einstein: “Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty....Nothing will benefit human health and increase chances of survival for life on earth as much as the evolution to a vegetarian diet.”

Walden Bello (author of numerous books on global justice issues): “The American fast food diet and the meat eating habits of the wealthy around the world support a world food system that diverts food resources from the hungry. A diet higher in whole grains and legumes and lower in beef and other meat is not just healthier for ourselves but also contributes to changing the world system that feeds some people and leaves others hungry.”

John Robbins: “A reduction in beef and other meat consumption is the most potent single act you can take to halt the destruction of our environment and preserve our natural resources. Our choices do matter. What's healthiest for each of us personally is also healthiest for the life support system of our precious, but wounded planet.”

Rajendra Pachauri (former chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - the world’s leading scientific body on climate change issues): “Please eat less meat...In terms of immediacy of action and the feasibility of bringing about reductions [of greenhouse gases] in a short period of time, it [reduced meat consumption] clearly is the most attractive opportunity.”

RESOURCES

Stephen Kaufman and Nathan Braun, *Good News for All Creation: Vegetarianism as Christian Stewardship* (available at <https://christianveg.org/goodnewslink.htm>)

Sally Kneidel and Sara Kate Kneidel, *Veggie Revolution: Smart Choices for a Healthy Body and a Healthy Planet*

John Robbins, *The Food Revolution: How Your Diet Can Help Save Your Life and the World*

Peter Singer and Jim Mason, *The Ethics of What We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter*

Christian Vegetarian Association www.christianveg.org

Society of Ethical and Religious Vegetarians www.serv-online.org

Compassion Over Killing www.cok.net

Factory Farming information <https://www.farmsanctuary.org/learn/factory-farming/>

Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine www.pcrm.org

A Life Connected – excellent 11-minute video on veganism – www.veganvideo.org

Peaceable Kingdom: The Journey Home – very moving documentary featuring former livestock farmers who have adopted a meat-free diet and transformed their lives - http://www.tribeofheart.org/sr/pkj_english.htm

Eating Mercifully - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-Va6F3iQFc>

Also see videos such as Forks Over Knives, Cowspiracy, Planeat, Vegucated, and The Game Changers

Cookbooks:

Nava Atlas, *Vegan Express, Vegan Soups and Hearty Stews for All Seasons*, and other books

Robin Robertson, *Vegan on the Cheap, 1,000 Vegan Recipes*, and other books

Lindsay Nixon, *Happy Herbivore* books

Tanya Barnard and Sarah Kramer, *The Garden of Vegan and How It all Vegan*

Free online recipes: www.vegkitchen.com, www.vegrecipes.org, www.vegfamily.com, www.vegan-food.net, www.ivu.org/recipes

Leaflet distributed by Animals, People, and the Earth at Xavier (APEX). For more information, contact sniegocj@xavier.edu