Is going vegan the best thing for the environment?

Animal agriculture is the second-largest contributor to anthropogenic greenhouse gases, making up 42% of all emissions after fossil fuels. More people than ever before are cutting back on their meat and dairy consumption, advocating for things like “Meatless Monday” and “Veganuary”, while vegan and vegetarian diets are becoming more and more popular.

This begs the question, what would happen if the entire world went vegan? What does that mean not only for the environment but for our health?

The Case For Going Vegan

On average, producing a pound of beef requires upwards of 1,800 gallons of water. Similarly, a gallon of milk requires 2000 gallons of water to produce. However, only around 900 gallons of water are used during the production process for a gallon of almond milk. Studies show that anywhere from 40-50% of the water used in the United States is used for animal agriculture. A vegan diet, on average, requires 300 gallons of water a day compared to a meat-eating diet requiring 4,000 gallons of water a day. In addition to the massive amounts of water, studies show than anywhere between 30 and 50% of Earth’s habitable land is used for animal agriculture (this includes crops grown to feed livestock). Research shows that if everyone went vegan we could reduce global farmland by as much as 75%, and on an individual level, going vegan could reduce your carbon footprint by 73%.

There are several problems with the animal agriculture industry. Animals are commonly packed together in tight spaces without room to move around. Due to their close living

quarters, animals are sick or prone to sickness and are often preemptively pumped full of antibiotics. Antibiotic resistance is an epidemic in our country currently with 80% of all our antibiotics being given to animals. CAFO (concentrated animal feeding operations) Animals are usually injected with animal growth hormones and fed diets designed to increase their size, so they produce as much meat as possible. For years “cage-free” or “free-range” products have been marketed as a better, more humane alternative but in reality, these terms have little to no regulation and oftentimes these animals are still stored in inhumane environments.

Problems With Going Vegan

Many popular vegan foods are not as healthy as advertised. Take the “Impossible burger” for example. The Impossible Burger is a processed “veggie burger” well known for its’s meat-like texture, however, the burger is made with GMO’s and has tested positive for Glyphosate, “…levels of glyphosate were 11x that of the Beyond Meat burger.”

> *Being vegan doesn’t necessarily mean you’re eating healthily. You can chow down on junk food – and miss out on vital nutrients – whether you eat meat or not. For example, vegan diets are naturally low in calcium, vitamin D, iron, vitamin B12, zinc and omega-3 fatty acids.*
>
> *What would happen if everyone went vegan?*

It’s a common misconception that going vegan is healthier than eating meat; there are lots of “junk food vegans.” But a vegan who eats processed foods daily would benefit from switching to a diet of unprocessed foods with locally sourced grass-fed organic beef.

Some studies indicate that we could improve the environment by going vegan, but that human health would suffer. Vegans are

often nutrient deficient in B12’s, Iron, Omega-3’s a and other nutrients found in meat and dairy products.

Fair Trade Issues

You may be surprised to know that many of your favorite vegan foods are leaving behind a larger negative impact than originally thought. Foods such as cashews, avocados, bananas, and chocolate have many fair trade issues associated with them. Additionally, many popular vegan foods leave behind a significant carbon footprint during manufacturing and transit. In fact, in some cases, foods shipped across the world leaves behind a larger carbon footprint than buying meat locally and sustainably.

Avocado imports have doubled over the last decade, with more than 2.2 billion pounds of avocados imported in 2018. The U.S gets 87% of avocado imports from Mexico, however many of the people in Mexico can’t afford to buy avocados because of the high demand in the U.S. Producing one pound of avocados uses 72 gallons of water. Over 20,000 hectares of land are converted into avocado farmland each year, including land which is designated for the Monarch Butterfly biosphere reserve. In addition to all the environmental impacts, criminal gangs have taken to stealing avocados and taking over farms when things slow down in the drug trafficking business.

Cashews are one of the most popular nuts in America and are popular amongst vegans due to their texture, flavor, and protein content. Cashews are commonly made into vegan cheese and other similar vegan dairy alternatives. India produces 60% of the Cashews the world consumes, however in India they are considered a luxury, so much so that workers are often checked to make sure they are not smuggling cashews outside of factories. Factory workers often suffer back and joint pain and have a difficult time-saving money due to low wages and were only recently allowed restroom breaks while working.

Additionally, during the deshelling process workers suffer chemical burns to the skin and often are not provided with proper supplies to protect their skin and often times cannot afford to buy supplies themselves.

The Case For Omnivores Eating

Instead of getting rid of meat altogether, studies show that alternative practices such as regenerative agriculture may actually be the key to fixing the problem. The goal of regenerative agriculture is achieving a carbon negative footprint, through carbon sequestration by a variety of different methods such as no-tilling, or minimum tillage, cover crops, crop rotation, composting, and providing their pasture-raised animals with healthy and diverse diets. In some studies, regenerative agriculture is shown to leave less of a carbon footprint than meatless alternatives such as the impossible burger.

> *Regenerative Agriculture is a system of farming principles and practices that increases biodiversity, enriches soils, improves watersheds, and enhances ecosystem services.*
>
> *Regenerative Agriculture – The Definition of Regenerative Agriculture*

What if farming was done right?

Studies show that cows can help with carbon sequestration through proper grazing. Plants absorb CO2, and then CO2 is pushed through the roots into the ground and stored there. When animals (mainly cows) are able to graze on the land enough to promote healthy plant growth but not so much that they kill the plants, more carbon is sequestered through the earth thus making cattle that are raised in regenerative

agriculture settings, carbon-neutral and in some cases carbon negative.

Look for meat that is “Pastured” or “pasture-raised”, this is meat that has been raised in a pasture, and best emulates natural behaviors. Pasture-raised animals can also help contribute to healthy soil, through animal waste and regenerative agriculture. When buying meat look for antibiotic-free meat labeled Organic, or raised without antibiotics. These are the only labels promising antibiotic-free meat. Shop for beef that is grass-fed and avoid beef that is grass-fed grain-finished. Grain finished beef is beef that is fed a lot of grain in a short amount of time to fatten them up. Animals that are fed proper diets are better for your health. Buy meat that is sourced locally from smaller-scale farms. You’ll find that the animals are generally treated better promoting natural habits and behaviors in the animals, your carbon footprint will be lessened, and you’ll have the opportunity to support small and local businesses.

> *Just like in humans, grain-fed animals have an extremely high amount of inflammation. This inflammation leads to a high amount of inflammatory omega-6 fats in the tissues of the animals, and these fats are transferred to us when we eat them. When animals eat the things they are supposed to, like grass, clovers, shrubs, and other colorful things, (how many colorful grains can you think of?) they end up with a much higher level and density of nutrients.*
>
> *Source Matters: A Guide to Buying Healthy Meats*

How to eat green

Can going vegan help reduce your carbon footprint? The simple answer is, yes, it can. To do it right, eat unprocessed whole foods, and reap the biggest benefit both for your health and for the climate. On a global scale, many studies show that the

best thing we can do right now is to grow our own food if possible, shop for local food, radically reduce meat intake, and eat sustainable meat.

Recommended:

- *Detox Cheap and Easy Without Fasting – Recipes Included*
- *Stop Eating Like That and Start Eating Like This – Your Guide to Homeostasis Through Diet*
- *How to Make the Healthiest Smoothies – 4 Recipes*
- *How to Avoid GMOs in 2018 – And Everything Else You Should Know About Genetic Engineering*
- *Foods Most Likely to Contain Glyphosate*
- *Best Cooking Oils – Health benefits, Smoke Point, Which to Use and Avoid*
- *Homemade Vegan Nut Milk Recipes*
- *Does Meat Cause Cancer? Yes and no…*

Sources:

- *Hungry for land: small farmers feed the world with less than a quarter of all farmland*
- *You don't have to go plant-based to save the world*
- *What is Regenerative Agriculture?*
- *Pasture Cropping Archives*
- *Carbon Farming*
- *Regenerative Agriculture – The Definition of Regenerative Agriculture*
- *Why "regenerative agriculture" is the new thing in sustainable farming*
- *Impossible Burger vs. beef: Which is better for the environment?*
- *Meat and Animal Feed*
- *Impossible Burger boasts much smaller carbon footprint than beef*
- *Quantification of the environmental impact of different dietary protein choices*
- *Source Matters: A Guide to Buying Healthy Meats*

- *What would happen if everyone went vegan?*
- *U.S. avocado import volume up by 15% in 2018*
- *Veganism & The Environment: by the numbers*
- *Why veganism isn’t as environmentally friendly as you might think*