Welcome!

Thank you so much for your interest in taking steps to make the world a better place, with less suffering for the animals, a brighter future for the planet, and better health for you!

We have created the Food Chain newsletter as a tool to help you along this path. We know that changing one’s lifestyle can be hard, and we also know that changes that you might have to think about more than once a day can be a challenge. But it’s not impossible! It doesn’t take long to feel that you aren’t missing anything — and more importantly, you’ll realize what you have gained. A vegan diet affords you the ability to look at yourself every morning and know that you are doing your best to make a difference.

We at Food Empowerment Project want to help you with that. Over the next year, you will receive a newsletter — just like this one — filled with recipes, helpful answers to questions, and information on how an animal-based diet adversely impacts the animals, the planet, and your health.

Part of Food Empowerment Project’s mission includes the desire to show people the power they have with their food choices. Whether you love animals, want to protect the environment, or don’t want to contribute to the injustices faced by workers in the agricultural industry, we want to show you how you, as an individual, can have a positive impact.

Food Chain works to help you link a variety of issues that impact animals, people, and the environment. All of these issues are connected, and we hope this information will show that there are no weak links when making a decision to go vegan.

Each issue will remind you why you have chosen to go down this path, and with our monthly reminder, it is a path we hope you will choose to follow.

This issue’s theme is cows raised for “meat” and the assumptions made that if you don’t eat “meat” you won’t get enough protein! Plus, there’s information on how the “beef” industry is having negative impacts on our planet, along with great recipes and web highlights. Don’t know the difference between a vegetarian and vegan? This issue will clarify this often-posed question and more. So, sit back, relax, and again thank you for wanting to learn about how your food choices can change the world!

Life of a “Beef” Cow

Many people see “beef” as an unassailable icon of the legendary Wild West, where ruggedly-handsome “cowboys” on horseback tamed the preternatural frontier by lassoing cows and performing other manly feats. This cultural mythology is certainly one reason that “beef” remains such a popular commodity in this country: though the United States comprises only 5% of the world’s population, we consume nearly one-quarter of its “beef” — a per-capita lifetime average of 7,700 pounds per person. The U.S. also produces about 22% of the world’s “beef” supply by raising and slaughtering approximately 35 million cows a year.

How does the “beef” industry manage to make so many animals into “meat”? By applying modern factory farming techniques that essentially seek to turn living, feeling individuals into “beef”-producing biomachines. As a result, cows are subjected throughout their lives to an ongoing panoply of persecutions and tortures that start with the miracle of birth.
“Mating” Rituals

“Beef” producers specifically select heifers (female cows) and bulls (male cows) for breeding from their “stock” based on their reproductive and genetic attributes as defined by certain physical attributes, whether it’s broadened pelvises (for heifers) or widened scrotal circumference (for bulls). The main goal is to produce calves who are predisposed toward rapid weight gain so they can be bulked up to slaughter weight more quickly and cheaply.

Genetic manipulation of cows and their offspring is often accomplished through artificial insemination, and only the sperm of bulls with the most desirable DNA is used to impregnate female cows. This enables a single “prize” bull to sire literally thousands of calves every year without ever actually mating with any heifers. A “breeding” cow, on the other hand, carries her calf for a gestation period of about nine months (just as human mothers do) and gives birth once a year, meaning that she has just 82 days of rest between pregnancies before being reimpregnated.

“Home” on the Range

Most animals raised for food spend their lives on factory farms, usually confined in constrictive cages or crates, or crowded so tightly together in warehouse-sized sheds that they can barely move. Cows raised for “beef,” on the other hand, are among the few farmed animals who actually get to spend at least part of their lives outdoors, grazing on grasses and perhaps even spending their formative months with their mothers. But that doesn’t mean that cows don’t experience their share of misery and abuse at the hands of humans.

Cows are branded for “ownership” identification purposes with red-hot or (conversely) freezing irons seared into their skin, their horns are burned off or amputated with shears to make them easier to manage, and males are summarily castrated – and all of these mutilations are routinely executed without the administration of painkillers. On the open range, cows are basically left to forage and fend for themselves with virtually no human supervision in an often hostile environment, where they have little or no shelter from the harshest of weather. Many freeze to death in winter snowstorms or die from heat stroke in the scorching summer heat.

They also have no protection from predators like coyotes and other natural carnivores, leading ranchers and government agencies to instigate widespread wildlife eradication efforts.

Feedlot Fattening

After about six to eight months on the range, most cows are rounded up and moved to high-density feedlots so they can be fattened for slaughter as quickly and “efficiently” as possible. Progress toward this profit-driven goal is sped up considerably by feeding cows a protein-rich, grain-based diet that facilitates rapid weight gain and includes garbage like ground-up newspaper and cardboard, sawdust, and even manure from chicken and pig farms, even though their natural diet is composed largely of grasses, and the cheap grains and other “foods” they are fed cause chronic gastrointestinal problems like poor digestion and diarrhea. Poor diet and crowded, unsanitary conditions cause sickness in cows fattened on feedlots, so farmers routinely administer non-therapeutic antibiotics to keep them alive long enough to reach slaughter weight. Crops grown for livestock consumption are also sprayed heavily with toxic herbicides, pesticides, and insecticides, so dangerous residues from these poisons accumulate in “food” animals’ flesh and are ingested by humans who eat “beef” and other “meat” products.

The fattening process is also intensified with the addition of chemical feed additives, as well as the application of growth hormones and even anabolic steroids, which are administered through tiny time-release pellets implanted in cows’ ears. These days, star athletes who abuse steroids to enhance their physical prowess are penalized and stigmatized, and even bulls used in rodeos are screened for these harmful drugs, yet most people don’t seem to mind (or even know) that cows raised for human consumption are being pumped full of these same synthesized compounds. The European Union has banned the use of growth hormones in animal agriculture, but they are still administered to more than two-thirds of the cows in the U.S.

The End of the Line

Cared for properly, cows can live for 20 to 25 years, but because of the physical manipulations perpetrated on factory farms, most now reach their optimum slaughter weight of about 1,200 pounds in just 14 to 16 months. They are then trucked off to slaughterhouses, where they face a painful death and assembly-line dismemberment. Tragically, cows continue to suffer unnecessary tortures because of the profit-driven mass-production methods factory farmers use to make “hamburgers,” “steak,” and other commercial “beef” products, yet the solution to ending this suffering is as simple as choosing to no longer consume the flesh of these animals.
Rescuing Harrison: From Abused Calf to Happy Steer

Courtesy of Farm Sanctuary

Harrison arrived at Farm Sanctuary as an ailing calf who was rescued from certain death at a “beef” ranch when he was only a few days old — and just hours from death — by a compassionate humane officer in Santa Cruz County. After finding Harrison alone and barely breathing in an open field and checking his vital signs, the officer determined that the newborn calf would need immediate medical attention in order to survive and expeditiously seized him from the rancher.

Harrison was rushed from the ranch to an emergency veterinary facility, where doctors determined that he suffered from a potentially lethal infection of the navel which had already started spreading throughout his body. But administering antibiotics and fluids was not enough to keep him alive, so the humane officer who impounded Harrison immediately took custody of the calf’s mother Loretta, whose milk would supply the specific nourishment and antibodies the struggling calf needed to survive. Restoring the loving familial bond between the two was just what each of them needed most, for as soon as they were reunited, Loretta started nurturing Harrison the way that only a mother can, and he began to recover from his terrifying brush with death.

Soon Harrison was well enough to travel, and both mother and son were brought to the shelter in northern California, where they will be able to live into ripe old age together, far from their painful past. They were separated from the other cows for a few months so Harrison could grow and nurse from his mother in peace. A few months later, they adopted another young calf named Cupid, a small, shy orphan who was happy to have a new family. Loretta quickly became Cupid’s devoted surrogate mom, and Harrison his brother and playmate.

After a few months, the trio was introduced into the main herd. Like Cupid, Harrison is shy, but also curious and playful, so he will often strike out on his own and then run back to his mom if something makes him nervous. He’s still a kid at heart, even though he’s already gotten so big that he’s almost the same size as Loretta. Harrison and his family also like socializing with another cow named Susie Moo, and though all four are well-integrated with the herd, they often hang out in their own little group away from others.

Cows are particularly social animals who place a high priority on their relationships within the herd and form friendships with one another that last a lifetime. No connection is stronger than the one between a mother and child, and Harrison and Loretta demonstrate this each and every day.

It is a pleasure to witness Loretta devotedly raising her son: watching her teach him proper cow “manners,” groom his fur with her tongue (the way feline friends often do), keep him snug and warm at night in the barn, and graciously perform all the other myriad tasks of motherhood. It is crystal clear that farmed animals treasure their connections with one another just as much as people do with their own family members and friends.
What is the true cost of that sirloin “steak” or the “beef” fajitas served up time and time again in restaurants, homes, and at neighborhood barbecues? The answer is one of the many inconvenient truths that people often sweep under the rug or try to overlook; and in a world that faces a multitude of challenges, these inconvenient truths must be recognized and dealt with sooner, rather than later.

Paying the Price

“Beef” directly impacts the air we breathe and the planet’s climate. Recent reports by the UN’s Food and Agricultural Organization and the Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production concluded that greenhouse gas emissions from the “livestock” sector are more numerous than the emissions released by the entire transportation system on planet Earth. These facts may be hard to believe, but they cannot be ignored.

Another important issue that cannot be overlooked is the effect “beef” has on the supply of water we use and drink. Let’s look at how much water, a valuable and scarce resource, is used to create that pound of “beef.” There’s the water needed to grow the feed for the cows, the water used for consumption by those millions of cows on feedlots, and back in 2000, the United Nations Environment Programme came up with estimates of anywhere from 1,100 to 4,400 gallons of water used per liveweight ton (biological “meat”) of animals being slaughtered. That includes thousands of gallons of water used at the stockyards and slaughterhouses for watering and cleaning the cows, cleaning the killing floors, and washing down the slaughtered carcasses. Breaking it down even further, researchers have estimated that it takes 20 to 30 gallons of water to produce a pound of vegetables such as carrots or potatoes, but it takes close to 440 gallons of water to produce a pound of “beef.” This is obviously not an effective use of such a precious resource. On top of this, open feedlots and manure treatment and storage lagoons taint a variety of water sources and pollute the air we breathe, which in turn affects the health and well being of both humans and animals. “The EPA says these findings, as well as waste spills, excessive runoff, leaking storage lagoons and odor problems, have heightened public awareness of environmental impacts from animal feeding operations (AFOs.).”

Statistics about air and water pollution caused by the “livestock” sector in the U.S. have been made available to the public for the last few years by a variety of sources, such as the United Nations, the media, and non-profit organizations, and certainly concerns have been raised by communities directly affected by these industrial “livestock” operations; but what is rarely discussed among the public at large is the impact of “livestock” grazing on public and private lands in the U.S., especially in the western states. Degradation of land, soil, and water are just a few of the concerns often brought up by environmental groups. The Center for Biological Diversity notes on their website: “The ecological costs of ‘livestock’ grazing exceed that of any other western land use. In the arid Southwest, ‘livestock’ grazing is the most widespread cause of species endangerment. By destroying vegetation, damaging wildlife habitats, and disrupting natural processes, ‘livestock’ grazing wreaks ecological havoc on riparian areas, rivers, deserts, grasslands, and forests alike — causing significant harm to species and the ecosystems on which they depend.”

Adding to the list of environmental concerns caused by “beef” production are activities taking place outside of the U.S., that, while often ignored, affect us all — and need to be addressed by all of us, too. What exactly is happening overseas, how does it affect those in the U.S., and what can be done about these problems?

First, there is deforestation, the loss or constant degradation of forest habitat, which is happening in many places around the globe. A prime example of this problem is the clearing of land in the Amazon region of South America in order to raise cows and grow soybeans, used principally as “feed” for “livestock,” in Brazil and around the world. Brazil, having the largest percentage of the Amazon rainforest within its boundaries, is a good place to start looking at the effects of deforestation. According to Michigan State University geography professor and Brazilian Amazon land-use expert Robert Walker, “Probably 80 to 90 percent of all cleared land in the region (the Brazilian Amazon) is attributable to some form of pasture or ranching.”

The consequences of deforestation are dire. It’s been said that the plant life in the Amazon rainforest are the lungs of the world. Using the slash-and-burn method of agriculture
to clear these forests impacts the climate negatively in numerous ways. With fewer trees absorbing carbon dioxide and less oxygen being released into the atmosphere, all life on Earth is affected. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, set up by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme, has noted that deforestation contributes nearly 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions. The loss of massive amounts of rainforest in Brazil, for “beef” or soy production, has global implications.

Even though the Brazilian government has attempted to reduce deforestation rates, the exploitation of the Amazon continues in order to supply foreign markets with a variety of goods, including “beef” and soybeans. On the Meat and Livestock Australia website, it’s noted that the Brazilian cow herd is not only the largest commercial herd in the world, but Brazil is the world’s largest “beef” exporter. Brazil’s JBS S.A. is one of the largest producers and exporters of “beef” and also operates in the United States, Argentina, and Australia, while exporting to many foreign countries, including the U.S. “Brazil is the leading exporter of cooked and processed ‘meats’ to the United States. ‘Beef’ from cows raised on land cleared by slave labor can end up in products such as ConAgra’s Mary Kitchen corned ‘beef.’ Typically, commodities produced with slave labor in Brazil get mixed in with commodities produced by its legal workers. By the time they reach the United States, it’s almost impossible to determine whether a shipment is contaminated.”

Slavery

So, in addition to exploiting the Amazon, corruption and criminal acts — including slavery — are associated directly with deforestation, “beef” ranching, and soybean production, and unfortunately continue today.

In 1888, Brazil abolished slavery, although forced labor in rural areas continued throughout the 20th century. Today, the system remains hugely exploitative and affects anywhere from 25,000 to 100,000 people. Workers, who are often illiterate, are recruited in poor areas where unemployment is high. They are promised a job with good wages to clear land or work on a “beef” or soybean ranch and then, with nothing more than a handshake, are driven hundreds of miles away from their homes and held as captive laborers because of supposed debts they’ve incurred in getting or keeping the job which they’ll never be able to pay off. These captive laborers often have no shelter, little food, no medical care, and work all hours of the day and night — conditions that could be considered a living hell. They aren’t compensated for their work, and those who might consider questioning their captivity know that to do so could result in being beaten or possibly killed. Unfortunately, the judicial system in Brazil tends to favor wealthy landowners who have more political muscle than the uneducated, poverty-stricken workers, making it extremely challenging to even attempt to eradicate this problem in the rural and remote areas of Brazil.

So, what can be done about these environmental and human injustices, not to mention the cruelties suffered by the animals? One solution is to avoid being a part of the problem by choosing not to consume or purchase products that are associated with doing harm. “Beef,” as we know it, is a product with very high costs, associated directly with a variety of environmental and societal ills. Making the choice to no longer buy and serve “beef” at home or order it from a restaurant menu is the best way, as an individual, to be part of the solution, rather than part of the problem.
What does it mean to be a vegetarian or a vegan?

In the past 10 or 20 years, vegetarianism has become more popular and more mainstream. New vegetarian-friendly foods appear on grocery shelves every day, and most people know at least one person who is vegetarian or vegan. But what does being vegetarian or vegan really mean? There are so many reasons to “go vegan” that a single, simple definition is hard to find.

Vegetarians do not eat the flesh of animals, but do consume animal products such as milk and/or eggs.

Individuals who avoid consuming anything which comes from an animal, including not only “meat,” eggs and dairy, but also leather, wool, silk, and honey, are called vegans. Because leather, wool, silk, honey, and other products depend on the same kind of exploitation and cruelty that animals farmed for food suffer and have similarly negative consequences for the environment, vegans avoid these as well. While vegetarianism is usually regarded as a dietary choice, veganism goes beyond diet to encompass an entire lifestyle focused on the reduction of suffering. Vegans abstain from consuming or wearing animals and from using products or engaging in activities that involve their suffering.

Many people choose to eat vegan for health reasons. Studies have shown that a diet high in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains is very healthy. The Standard Diet in the U.S., heavy on animal products, sugars, and fats, is not. Going vegan is an excellent way to improve one’s health. Some studies suggest that dairy products, especially mass-produced, pasteurized, and artificially preserved dairy products, have negative health effects, especially for the millions of people (particularly people of color) with lactose intolerance. Asthma, arthritis, and other diseases often improve when dairy is no longer consumed.

But for many people, going vegan is about more than just health benefits: it is about making choices that make the world a better place. Many people who choose to go vegan are committed to making choices that are better for the environment and the other creatures with whom we share the Earth. Farmed animals suffer enormously in factory farms, especially in dairy and egg farms. Each person who ceases to eat “meat” and who gives up dairy and eggs helps reduce this suffering.

Factory farming also damages soil and uses water and energy resources that could be put to better use. Eating a plant-based diet can help reduce soil damage and uses less water and energy. Equally important is that factory farming negatively affects not only low-income communities and communities of color, but any and all communities located in areas of industrial animal factories. Low wages and high stress create communities often incapable of offering much-needed social services, while pollution from farms and meatpacking plants reduces air and water quality. Choosing to go vegan can have enormous health benefits for individuals, but more importantly can have benefits for the health of the animals, the environment, and the communities in which we live.

Going vegan is less about saying “no” to “meat,” and more about saying “yes” to healthy, ethical, sustainable, and delicious foods. Many of our food choices are made for us. We have little control over what goes into packaged meals, or how our food is produced. One way we can make our desire for healthy food, healthy communities, and a healthy planet known is through choosing foods that represent our beliefs. As long as we continue to buy foods that we know are unhealthy, unethical, wasteful, and polluting, the food industry will continue to produce them. Choosing to buy plant-based foods can help send a message to the food industry to change its practices because you are in fact voting with your dollars. It’s one thing that we can all do every single day to make our voices heard. So, whether you choose a mostly plant-based diet or choose to go vegan, both of these choices are active and empowering ways to demand healthier, more ethical, and more sustainable foods.

*A point of some confusion: People who choose to go vegetarian for their health are not always consistent in their eating habits. Some people claim to be “vegetarians” but sometimes eat “seafood,” fish, or even chicken. While any move toward eating a plant-based diet is an admirable choice, vegetarians do not eat animals, not even occasionally.
Where will I get my protein?

Proteins are made out of chains of amino acids. Some amino acids can be made by the body (generally from other amino acids), but some cannot. The ones that cannot are known as “essential” or “indispensable.” Proteins in the human body tend to have a consistent percentage of the essential amino acids. The percentages of essential amino acids in both animal products and soy products closely mimic those found in human proteins. Non-soy plant proteins have a lower percentage of at least one amino acid (in particular, beans are lower in methionine and grains are lower in lysine).

Because of this, when Frances Moore Lappe wrote her book *Diet for a Small Planet* in the early 1970s, she popularized the idea of vegetarians combining proteins at each meal. By mixing beans and grains, you can make sure that you are getting both methionine and lysine at each meal. We now know that the liver can store the various essential amino acids and so it’s not critical to combine different protein sources at each meal.

In their Position Paper on Vegetarian Diets, The American Dietetic Association states:

> “Plant protein can meet requirements when a variety of plant foods is consumed and energy needs are met. Research indicates that an assortment of plant foods eaten over the course of a day can provide all essential amino acids and ensure adequate nitrogen retention and use in healthy adults, thus complementary proteins do not need to be consumed at the same meal.”

Legumes tend to be highest in protein of any plant foods. They include beans, peas, lentils, peanuts, and soyfoods such as tofu, tempeh, soymilk, and texturized vegetable protein products. Seitan and other products made of wheat gluten are also very high in protein. Finally, there are numerous vegan protein powders on the market. Two servings of any of these foods each day should provide the average person with enough protein. As long as someone is eating enough calories to meet their energy requirements, they normally will be getting enough protein (unless they are eating mostly low-protein junk foods or are on a diet that excludes legumes).

*Courtesy of Jack Norris, RD
www.VeganHealth.org*

Snobby Joes

Recipe Courtesy of Isa Chandra Moskowitz, Post Punk Kitchen Blog

(Serves 4 to 6)

*Those sloppy joes we loved as a child but made with lentils. Snobby Joe thinks he’s better than all the other Joes because he doesn’t have any “meat.”*

**Ingredients:**

- 1 cup uncooked lentils
- 4 cups water
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, diced small
- 1 green pepper, diced small
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 tablespoons chili powder
- 2 teaspoons oregano
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 8 oz can tomato sauce
- ¼ cup tomato paste
- 3 tablespoons maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon yellow mustard (wet mustard)
- 4 to 6 Kaiser rolls or sesame buns

**Directions:**

Put the lentils in a small sauce pot and pour in 4 cups water. Cover and bring to a boil. Once boiling, lower heat and simmer for about 20 minutes, until lentils are soft. Drain and set aside.

About 10 minutes before the lentils are done boiling, preheat a medium soup pot over medium heat. Saute the onion and pepper in the oil for about 7 minutes, until softened. Add the garlic and saute a minute more.

Add the cooked lentils, the chili powder, oregano, and salt and mix. Add the tomato sauce and tomato paste. Cook for about 10 minutes. Add the maple syrup and mustard and heat through.

Turn the heat off and let sit for about 10 minutes, so that the flavors can meld, or go ahead and eat immediately if you can’t wait. I like to serve these open faced, with a scoop of snobby joe on each slice of the bun.
Web Highlights: Where to Shop

Since you are just getting started, we want to make sure you know some of the places to go get some of these yummy, healthy foods!

Many grocery stores have aisles or even refrigerated sections called “Healthy Foods” or “Natural Foods” where they carry items such as vegetarian beans, a variety of soy and nut milks, mock “meats,” and even delicious vegan ice cream. Sometimes you can find items such as tofu (pronounced “toe foo”) and mock “sausage” in the same area where fresh vegetables are kept. Do ask store employees if you can’t find these items as you can help create the demand.

In other stores like Coops (these are worker-owned stores), Whole Foods Market, and Trader Joe’s, you can easily find great vegan foods, including items you might not even imagine — vegan ribs, vegan whipped cream, and vegan cheese that melts! Although these stores can be expensive, look at their own brands for cheaper options. You can also prioritize what foods you will rely on buying from these types of stores.

Food Suggestions

There’s no “beef”! Here are some vegan products that you might choose to use to replace the “red meat” in your diet. There are loads of veggie burgers out there — don’t give up if you don’t find one you like right away as the textures do vary: some are more “meaty,” others more veggie, and even others more like grains! There are also products that are crumbled like “beef,” good for tacos, vegan chillis, and pasta sauces. Vegan “meatballs” can be found at many health food stores and supermarkets that happen to cater to vegetarians and vegans, and you can find vegan “chorizo” too! Vegan “beef” strips are also popular for stir fries and vegan fajitas.

Some of these products might be pricey, but you can always buy some Textured Vegetable Protein (TVP), stir in some tomato sauce and spices, and make your own sloppy joe mix! You can also buy it in a box! Whatever you choose to do, just remember that there’s no need for “beef”!

*For a more detailed list of vegan food products, go to: www.foodispower.org

Key to finding your local:

Coop - www.coopdirectory.org
Whole Foods Market - www.wholefoodsmarket.com
Trader Joe’s - www.traderjoes.com

More ideas to come in the next issue!