



## Why Vegetarianism Will Not Save the World

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By Dr. Mercola

Many vegans and vegetarians choose not to eat meat and/or animal products because they believe it is the morally superior, environmentally friendly choice. But this theory is being put to the test by the book [The Vegetarian Myth](#), written by ex-vegan Lierre Keith.



In it she argues that saving the planet and ending the suffering found in factory farms can not be achieved by refusing to eat animals, it can only be achieved by boycotting modern agricultural practices, which Keith calls "the most destructive thing that people have done to the planet."

### Have Vegans and Vegetarians Been Led Astray?

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization released a report in 2006 titled [Livestock's Role in Climate Change and Air Pollution](#). In it, they estimated that 18 percent of the world's man-made greenhouse-gas emissions are produced by livestock. This information was heralded by vegetarians and environmentalists alike as proof that eating meat was bad not only for you, but for the entire planet.

But, it's important to realize that this detrimental effect comes from *modern farming practices*, not from cows being raised naturally as they were designed to be. The differences between the two are so vast, you're really talking about two different animals, and two separate industries with entirely different farming practices and environmental impact.

[Keith states:](#)

*"... the first mistake is in assuming that factory farming—a practice that is barely fifty years old—is the only way to raise animals. Their [vegetarians'] calculations on energy used, calories consumed, humans unfed, are all based on the notion that animals eat grain.*

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*You can feed grain to animals, but it is not the diet for which they were designed. Grain didn't exist until humans domesticated annual grasses, at most 12,000 years ago, while aurochs, the wild progenitors of the domestic cow, were around for two million years before that. For most of human history, browsers and grazers haven't been in competition with humans. They ate what we couldn't eat—cellulose—and turned it into what we could—protein and fat. Grain will dramatically increase the growth rate of beef cattle (there's a reason for the expression "cornfed") and the milk production of dairy cows. It will also kill them.*

*The delicate bacterial balance of a cow's rumen will go acid and turn septic. Chickens get fatty liver disease if fed grain exclusively, and they don't need any grain to survive. Sheep and goats, also ruminants, should really never touch the stuff."*

The carbon footprint of conventional farming is mainly due to the unnatural feed that these animals are given, which requires lots of fossil fuels. Many don't think about this, but fossil fuels are used in everything from the fertilizers and pesticides that are sprayed onto the crop to the transportation of the feed.

Grass does not require fossil fuels to grow (rotating pastures does the job instead), and other health-harming practices, such as injecting the livestock with hormones and antibiotics, are also not allowed in organic farming. What it boils down to is this: [it's easy to argue against factory-farms](#) and other products of the corrupted agricultural system, but the argument becomes much more muddled, incorrect even, when you try to apply it to farming in the traditional sense of the word.



### **Is Modern Agriculture the Ultimate Animal Abuse?**

There are those vegetarians and vegans who are morally opposed to killing animals for food, which appears to be one of the more regularly used arguments for adopting this lifestyle. However, Keith makes an interesting point, which is that any food that is the product of modern-day farming -- even a soy burger -- is exacting a toll on life itself, including that of animals.

[Keith writes:](#)

*"Specifically, agriculture is biotic cleansing. It requires taking over entire living communities and clearing them away, then planting the land for just humans. All of that is a long way of saying "extinction." None of us can live without a place to live, without habitat. An activity that has destroyed 98% of most animals' habitat can hardly be claimed to be animal-friendly."*

And as for the environment, modern-day agriculture -- not just the factory farms but also the monocultures of genetically modified corn and soy -- is one of the biggest enemies out there, pilfering the land and its resources. But we sit back and accept it because, after all, it's where we get our food. But there is nothing sustainable about vegetarian foods that come from this agricultural system.

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As Keith expands:

*"You take a piece of land and you clear every living thing off it—and I mean down to the bacteria. That's what agriculture is. ... Besides the mass extinction, it's inherently unsustainable. When you remove the perennial polyculture -- the grassland or the forest -- the soil is exposed and it dies. It turns to desert ultimately.*

*Northern Africa once fed the Roman Empire. Iraq was forests so thick that sunlight never touched the ground—no one in their right mind would call it the "Fertile Crescent" now. The dust storms in China are so bad that the soil is literally blowing across the Pacific Ocean and over the continent until it hits the Rocky Mountains, where it's causing asthma in children in Denver.*

*The planet has been skinned alive. And the only reason we have not hit complete collapse is because we've been eating fossil fuel since 1950. This is not a plan with a future ... The truth is that agriculture is the most destructive thing humans have done to the planet, and more of the same won't save us. The truth is that agriculture requires the wholesale destruction of entire ecosystems."*

## **What about the Health Effects? Is Being Vegan or Vegetarian Healthy?**



Like many, I tried a mostly vegetarian diet in the mid-80's (based on the theories presented in *Fit for Life*) because I thought it would improve my health.

Unfortunately it didn't.

After a few weeks of eating fruit for breakfast, as the book advised, I was stunned to discover my fasting triglycerides had skyrocketed from below 100 to nearly 3,000! Clearly this diet was NOT right for me and was rapidly causing damage to my body. So, I had to reevaluate.

From a clinical standpoint, I believe virtually everyone benefits from some animal protein. This doesn't have to be meat, necessarily, as there are other healthy animal proteins like raw organic dairy and organic free-range eggs. The evidence suggests that raw organic milk is actually one of the healthiest options as it has the highest biologic value and utilization of any protein.

Many who hold strict vegetarian views still hold up [\*The China Study as the authoritative "proof"\*](#) that eating meat is harmful. In case you're not familiar with it, this book makes a radical case against eating animal protein at all, by linking it to all manner of ill health, including cancer.

However, it's important to realize two things:

1. The China study was an observational study. Correlations deduced from an observational study do not -- in fact, cannot -- prove causation. All you can really do with data from an

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observational study is from a hypothesis, which must then be tested in randomized, controlled trials, to ferret out the truth about whether or not x actually causes y.

2. In many cases, the data (presented in arduous detail in the book *Diet, Life-Style and Mortality in China*) do not show statistically significant correlations between animal protein consumption and disease such as cancer at all. On the contrary, it would seem that sugar and carbohydrates are correlated with cancer -- not animal protein. In addition, the data indicates that fat is negatively correlated with cancer mortality, which again contradicts the claim that meat is harmful.

Another interesting take on whether or not people are *meant* to eat meat is [the Paelo Diet](#), which is based upon scientific research examining the types and quantities of foods our hunter-gatherer ancestors ate. During the Paleolithic period, which spans to 12,000 years ago, people ate primarily vegetables, fruit, nuts, roots and meat, so the foundation of the Paleo Diet is lean meat, including ostrich and bison as well as organ meats, seafood, fresh fruit and non-starchy vegetables -- from as close to naturally raised sources as possible.

If you are sincerely objective and honest in seeking to understand what diet is best for you it will be important to trust your body to guide you. It is my recommendation to abandon any previously held convictions you might have about food and instead carefully listen to your body as you experiment with different food ratios and including or excluding animal foods.



### **If Modern-Day Agriculture Doesn't Work, What Does?**

All of the "advances" that modern agriculture has given us have essentially created a food system that is completely unsustainable and dependent on monoculture, or growing very large fields of the same crop. The [U.S. government has encouraged this system](#) by subsidizing only certain crops like corn, wheat, rice and soy, while making it much less desirable for farmers to grow vegetables like broccoli or Swiss chard.

While monoculture is efficient and excellent for increasing production, it also depletes the soil and is extremely vulnerable to pests. The only way that monoculture can be successful, in fact, is with the application of large amounts of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

The end result is cheap calories, and lots of them, but largely in the form of genetically modified corn and soy, and loaded with chemical residues. This, in turn, is fueling a growing number of health epidemics, from obesity and type 2 diabetes to cancer and heart disease. Quite simply, producing food on a massive scale at the lowest price possible has taken precedence over obeying natural laws.

So, in terms of sustainability and saving the world, the *real* "battle" that needs to be fought is not one of meat-eaters vs. vegetarians, it's one of agriculture as an industry vs. agriculture the way nature intended.

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Please understand that industrial agriculture lobbyists wield incredible power in Congress; however they cannot dictate which food you choose to buy for your family. So please do your health and the environment a favor and support the small family farms in your area who are embracing the environment, not destroying it.

If you can, look for farms that use [permaculture](#).

The word itself comes from "permanent agriculture" and "permanent culture," and at its foundation is developing agricultural and other systems that are interconnected and dependent on one another. In other words, they mimic the natural ecologies found in nature. The focus is not on any one element of the system, rather the focus is on the relationships between animals, plants, insects, soil, water and habitat -- and how to use these relationships to create synergistic, self-supporting ecosystems.

On a small-scale version, if you compost your food waste and use it to fertilize your own vegetable patch, you are engaging in permaculture. On a wide scale, small farmers are increasingly allowing animals to live in their natural habitats, eating their natural diets, thereby raising healthier foods and dramatically reducing their footprint on the environment.

So, whenever possible, support your own health and the livelihood of the farmers out there who are trying to do things the right way. Here are two excellent resources you can use to find them:



- [Local Harvest](http://www.localharvest.org/) <http://www.localharvest.org/>
- [USDA listing of Farmers Markets](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/farmersmarkets) <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/farmersmarkets>