

Sunday, May 4, 2008

How to reduce hunger and eating costs, and slash methane and fecal pollution?

For food-producing animals, life is no picnic, and usually is incredibly short. (Image from USDA's website.) The global food price crisis is real and worsening. Many factors certainly contribute to the crisis, including rising energy costs (if only the globe's runaway appetite for fossil fuels could be tamed dramatically). What would happen to global food prices if everyone stopped eating land animals and their milk and egg products? Instead, the inefficient livestock-producing system will be cut out of the nutrition-providing process. Instead, humans will get their nutrition in an incredibly more efficient and inexpensive process, straight from plants, and not just from roots and berries but from an endless list of delicious exotic and ordinary fruits, nuts, seeds, vegetables, beans, tubers, and their countless simple recipes. An acre of land used to grow grain for livestock provides dramatically less human nutrition than using the acre to grow food plants for humans. What will happen to the environment if everyone stops eating land animals and their milk and egg products? Gone will be the tons of fecal pollution and choking methane produced by the legions of factory-farmed animals, the vast majority of whom are bred to deliver lunch and dinner to people's plates. Gone will be the enormous waste of water to irrigate land used to feed non-human animals, rather than using the water to irrigate fields for plants to be eaten directly by humans. Gone will be the wasted fossil fuels used to raise farm animals. What does all of this have to do with my law practice? A critical focus of my law practice is on social justice. Slaughtering animals for people's unnecessary flesh cravings is not justice for animals. The constant slaughtering and eating of animals numbs too many people about violence, and makes too many people more able and willing to perpetrate violence against other humans; it becomes a matter of cross-species violence. Eating meat contributes to world hunger by increasing the demand for land for livestock, rather than keeping food prices lower -- through supply and demand -- by eliminating the huge money and pollution expense of raising cattle, pigs and poultry. How hard is it to become a vegetarian? For me it took three years of concerted effort eating lower and lower on the food chain, until one day at an Italian restaurant, as a pescovegetarian (a misnomer), I resolved that I could not, after all, order pasta with marinara and shrimp, after having spent time with so many amazing and feeling fish at the aquarium a mile away. I became a vegan thirteen years later, to do my share in reducing the number of mistreated and captive animals who often find themselves slaughtered for human food, pet food, and leather after they stop producing enough milk and eggs, let alone the male chickens who are not spared their lives to produce eggs, because nobody yet has found a way for males to produce eggs. I no longer wear leather. Even if most people are unable or unwilling to become vegetarian, world hunger and food prices still will dramatically fall if people will drastically reduce their consumption of meat, fowl, milk, milk products and eggs. There has never been an easier, more healthful, or more delicious time to live vegetarian; even supermarket aisles have infinitely more vegetarian choices than even five years ago. Restaurants have more vegetarian options than ever before. See how you feel about your health, your annual physical exam, the environment, and world hunger after making such a change in your eating choices. You may never turn back. Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in Jon's news & views at 00:00

Right on, Jon!

Just one point I'd emphasize: Anyone who is concerned about the needless suffering of animals, but is unsure about their ability to handle a commitment to vegetarianism, shouldn't feel as though the only two alternatives are (1) immediate elimination of all animal products from their life, or (2) doing nothing.

Not everyone can handle such a drastic, immediate change, but that doesn't mean you can't do anything to reduce animal suffering! Try cutting your meat consumption in half, or by a third, or limit the types of animal products you consume, or only eat meat when out at friends' homes or at a restaurant while keeping your home meatless.

You stand a better chance of successfully following through on a more modest reduction than on a full-scale, immediate withdrawal; plus, taking limited action will reduce needless animal suffering more so than no action at all. Eventually, you can make further cuts in your meat consumption, towards total elimination. Ethical vegetarianism is about reducing needless suffering, not about holier-than-thou perfectionism - so slipping up from time to time can be forgiven, too.

Anonymous on May 4 2008, 08:22

Thanks, Steve, for your message, and for supporting reducing the eating of meat. Jon
Anonymous on May 4 2008, 21:28