



COMPASSIONATE EATING

HONORING GOD'S CREATION



Christians agree that we should direct our hearts and minds to serving God, which includes caring for God's Creation. Yet, modern factory farming is inherently cruel to animals, damages the environment, and causes human misery. How can our food choices align with our Christian values?



GOD'S ANIMALS

Jesus said that God feeds the birds of the air (Matt. 6:26) and does not forget sparrows (Luke 12:6). In their own ways, God's creatures demonstrate a full range of feelings – curiosity, pleasure, playfulness, love, joy, fear, anger, pain, and suffering:

- Cows play and enjoy each other's company.¹
- Pigs are intelligent and curious, and they form bonds with one another and other species.²
- Chickens have distinct personalities and can learn their names.³
- In many ways, the animals people eat are just like the animals we love as pets.⁴

And yet, in the United States, nearly all farmed animals live in intensively crowded, dirty, smelly, windowless factory farms, where animals suffer greatly. For example:



Hog Farm Management has advised, "Forget the pig is an animal. Treat him just like a machine in a factory."

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They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain

Isaiah 11:9

- Castration, debeaking, and other painful mutilations are routinely done without pain-relief.
- Egg-laying hens are crammed into cages so small they can't spread their wings.
- Pregnant pigs spend months in cages so small they can't turn around.
- Millions of baby chicks are mailed via the U.S. Postal Service each year. Although injury and death rates are high, producers regard chicks as cheap and not worth the cost of humane transport.⁵
- Mother cows grieve for days or weeks after their calves are taken from them so humans can drink their milk.⁶
- Today's factory farmers show no concern about individual



animals. They embrace any practice that increases profit, regardless of how much animal pain, suffering, and death it inflicts.⁷



“Veal” calves can’t turn around for 18-20 weeks before being slaughtered. ©CIWF

If we eat the products of factory farming, we are, as Fr. John Dear notes, “paying people to be cruel” on our behalf. Indeed, those who consume the products of factory farms are sponsoring violence. What does this say about their faith? Can we profess faith that God is good if we believe that God approves of cruelty to animals? Further, if our society believes that it’s perfectly acceptable to abuse weak and vulnerable animals, does this not put weak and vulnerable humans at greater risk?

What animal agribusiness doesn’t want you to know.

Because the huge animal agribusiness industry understands that most compassionate people,

especially people of faith, recoil when exposed to these facts, they are doing their best to hide the truth from the public. Animal agribusinesses and their friends in many state legislatures have passed “ag-gag” laws. These laws make it a crime to photograph or otherwise expose how God’s animals are routinely abused on factory farms.

What does the Bible say about meat?

The Bible does not prohibit eating meat in all circumstances, but most Christians today have ready access to a wide variety of healthful plant foods. Indeed, the Bible depicts a plant-based diet as God’s ideal. In Eden, all creatures lived peacefully, and God told humans to consume only plant foods (Gen. 1:29–31).



Rescued cow living in a sanctuary.

Blessed are the merciful.

Matthew 5:7



Several prophecies, such as Isaiah 11:6–9, foresee a return to this vegetarian world, where the wolf, lamb, lion, cow, bear, snake, and little child all coexist peacefully. Should we not strive toward the harmonious world Isaiah envisioned, guided by the prayer that Jesus taught us, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10)?

For a discussion of biblical passages related to meat eating, see all-creatures.org/replies.htm.

Why did God create animals?

Genesis 1:21–22 relates that, after God created animals, God blessed them and called them “good.” In Genesis 2:18–19, God made animals as Adam’s helpers and companions. Adam then named the animals, which we believe shows concern and friendship. Farmers don’t name the animals they intensively confine and kill. Pigs, cattle, sheep, and all farmed



Hens in battery cages have about ½ sq. ft. per bird.

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When we consume the products of factory farming, we are sending a clear message to factory farmers:
I approve. Do it again.

Rev. Frank L. Hoffman

animals want to live and thrive, just as we do.

Does God care for animals?

Proverbs 12:10 teaches, “A righteous man has regard for the life of his beast,” and Psalm 145:9 reminds us that “The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.”

The Bible describes God’s concern for animals (Exod. 23:5; Matt. 10:29, 12:11–12, 18:12–14) and forbids cruelty (Deut. 22:10, 25:4). All creatures share in the Sabbath rest (Exod. 20:10; Deut. 5:14). Animals praise God (Ps. 148:7–10, 150:6) and are present in eternity (Isa. 65:25; Rev. 5:13). God preserves animals (Ps. 36:6; Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20), and animals look to God for sustenance (Ps. 104:27–31; Joel 1:20, 2:22; Matt. 6:26; Luke 12:6) and deliverance (Jon. 3:7–9; Rom. 8:18–23).

Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful” (Matt. 5:7), yet no mercy is shown for nearly all farmed animals. Should not the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12) – treat others as you would like others to treat you – guide how we treat animals?



Be merciful, even as your Father
is merciful.

Luke 6:36

Don't laws protect farmed animals?

In the United States and many other countries, humane laws exempt "standard procedures" on farms, regardless of the pain and suffering they cause. Practices such as bodily mutilations, which would warrant felony animal cruelty charges if done to a dog or cat, are perfectly legal when done to a pig or chicken. At the slaughterhouse, "humane slaughter" laws are weak and poorly enforced for pigs, cattle, and sheep; and the laws completely exempt the slaughter of birds. Laws to improve conditions on farms would be desirable, and an even more effective way to prevent animal abuse is to reduce or eliminate the consumption of animal products.

What about "humane meat"?

Even though farmed animals do not always suffer equally, it is

never humane to kill a young, healthy animal. People should know that terms like "farm fresh" have no meaning, and "organic" and "local" do not mean "humane." "Free range" can and usually does involve intensive confinement and painful mutilations. And, small farmers have generally embraced the same or very similar practices of large corporate animal factories.

...and what does the Lord
require of you but to do justice,
and to love kindness, and to
walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:8

Why do people eat meat?

For many, it is the taste, texture, or convenience of flesh. However, as Christians, we must ask whether such desires reflect Christian values. Is eating meat the right thing to do, or does it reflect a lack of compassion?

THE BENEFITS OF A PLANT-BASED DIET

Your Health – Treating Your Body as God's Temple

The apostle Paul wrote that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), and it follows that we should care for our bodies as gifts from God. The largest organization of food and nutrition



professionals in the United States, the American Dietetic Association, notes that people with well-planned vegetarian and vegan diets have reduced risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, cancer, and other conditions.⁸ The Mayo Clinic Health Letter similarly promotes a plant-based diet.⁹

Be sure to supplement vitamin B12 on a plant-based diet. For other important plant-based nutrition information, see christianveg.org/nutrition.

Our Planet – Being the Best Steward You Can Be

In Genesis 2:15, God instructed Adam to “till” and “keep” the Garden of Eden, and by analogy we may see caring for God’s Creation as our sacred task. The typical meat eater’s diet requires up to 14 times more water and 20 times more energy than that of a vegetarian. Indeed, current use of land, water, and energy is not



Cattle ranching and feed crops for farmed animals are largely responsible for deforestation in the Amazon.



Vegan, ultramarathon champion Scott Jurek and many other top athletes credit their plant-based diets. See ScottJurek.com.

sustainable, and resource depletion threatens to cause great hardships for humankind this century.

A recent report concluded that worldwide livestock production contributes 51% of humanity’s greenhouse gasses.¹⁰ The most important thing people can do to reduce their contribution to global warming is to reduce their use of animal products.

Poor People – Living Simply so Others May Simply Live

Jesus preached, “For I was hungry and you gave me food.... [A]s you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:35, 40 RSV). Yet, while tens of millions of people die



Inefficient conversion of grains into animal flesh contributes to world hunger.

annually from starvation-related causes and close to a billion suffer from malnutrition, 37% of the world's harvested grain is fed to animals being raised for slaughter; in the United States, the figure is 66%.

Only a fraction of what chickens, pigs, and other animals eat makes them grow edible flesh – most is needed to simply keep them alive or to grow body parts that people don't eat. Consequently, farmed animals consume much more food than they produce. Converting plant foods to meat wastes 67–90% of the protein, up to 96% of the calories, and all of the fiber. Because land, water, and other resources are limited, the world can support many more vegetarians than meat eaters. As worldwide demand for meat has grown, the net effect is that the world's poor have become increasingly unable to afford food of any kind.

How Can I Take the First Step?

If you're thinking of moving toward a plant-based diet, good for

you! Nearly everyone opposes cruelty, but factory farmers have lied to us. As you move toward a plant-based diet, you can spare up to 30 land animals per year, and you can significantly help your health, other people, and the environment.

And, doing this is actually a lot easier than most people think. There are many tasty, convenient, and nutritious non-animal foods. You will feel better as you gain energy and shed unwanted pounds. Meetup and other vegetarian groups are everywhere offering social events, encouragement, support, and advice. Many vegetarian groups will gladly answer your questions.¹¹



And God said,
"Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed...and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food."

Genesis 1:29

Footnotes

Go to christianveg.org/footnotes/htm.



WHAT TO EAT?



When changing your diet, it may take time to explore new foods and develop healthier habits. There are many different products that are tasty, convenient, and nutritious – keep experimenting to find your personal favorites.

Nearly all grocery stores have vegan and vegetarian main course options, particularly Trader Joe's and Whole Foods. Similarly, restaurants of all types routinely offer plant-based meals – just ask!

Substitution Guide

You can continue to prepare your favorite dishes and avoid animal products by making simple substitutions:

Dairy–Use milks, cheeses, creams, yogurts, and frozen desserts made from soy, rice, coconut, or nuts. Nutritional yeast adds a cheesy flavor to foods. Replace butter with olive oil or trans-fat-free margarine.

Eggs–In baking recipes, use powdered egg substitutes, such as Ener-G Egg Replacer or Beyond Eggs, or replace each egg with half a banana or with 1 Tbsp. of ground flaxseed plus 3 Tbsp. water.

Meat–There are many options, such as tempeh, tofu, or vegetarian meats, such as Beyond Meat, Tofurkey, Gardein, and Boca in the frozen food section.



Resources

Christian Vegetarian Association:
ChristianVeg.org

List serve:
christianveg@yahoogroups.com

Nutrition guide:
christianveg.org/nutrition.htm

Recipes:
all-creatures.org/recipes.html

Simple meal ideas:
christianveg.org/simplemeals.htm

Restaurant guide:
HappyCow.net/browse.html

Web sites, books, videos:
christianveg.org/resources.htm

CVA Advisory Board:
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