

# Eating Animals: Addressing Our Most Common Justifications

By Free From Harm Staff Writers

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We've heard them all before — the justifications people give for continuing to consume animal products even when faced with an abundance of plant-based food options. Here are some of the most common justifications for eating animals that vegans encounter from those confronted with the facts about animal farming and the opportunity to make more compassionate choices. Each objection is followed by a counter argument, which may include links to supporting sources.

## If I wasn't meant to eat meat, I wouldn't have these canine teeth!

There are several serious problems with the “canine teeth” argument, the most glaring one being the idea that the presence of canine teeth means we are “meant to eat meat.” The truth is that nearly all mammals have canine teeth. Many herbivores and primary plant-eaters have ferocious canine teeth; in fact, the largest canine teeth of any land animal belong to a true herbivore. Check out our photo gallery and accompanying [nine reasons why your canine teeth don't make you a meat-eater](#).

## Humans were *designed* to eat meat; we are omnivores, after all

The term *omnivorous* doesn't mean *must eat some animal products*. It means *capable of subsisting on both plant and animal matter*. Of the two, we are able to thrive without eating animals; however, if we eat no plants, we die. In fact, decades of [scientific evidence](#) have demonstrated that humans have no biological need to consume flesh, eggs or dairy products. We can get all the nutrients we need from plant foods, without the unhealthy animal protein and cholesterol, and without inflicting needless suffering and death on billions of animals.



## Animals eat other animals, so why shouldn't we?

Many people insist that eating animals is “natural” — and therefore morally neutral — because other animals eat animals. But it's important to realize that, with a few exceptions, when humans kill other animals for food, we're not doing what animals do in nature. Humans have no biological need to consume meat or any animal products. When animals kill other animals for food, they do as they must, in order to survive; they have no choice in the matter. Many humans, on the other hand, do have a choice, and when people with access to plant-based food options choose to consume animal products anyway — because they like the taste — they are harming animals not from necessity, but for pleasure. Yet harming animals for pleasure goes against core values we hold in common — which is why, for example, we oppose practices like dog fighting on principle. But it can't be wrong to harm animals for pleasure in one instance, but not the other.

Furthermore, it makes no sense to selectively model our behavior around other animals. Do we fornicate or copulate in public like other animals do? No. Do we kill our newborn children based on the fact that certain animals have done so under certain circumstances? No. Yet when it is convenient for our argument, we claim that eating animals is normal and natural because some, not all, animals do so. Regardless of what other

animals do, if you are not vegan, you are paying someone to needlessly harm animals in a way that would traumatize you to even witness. More on this subject [here](#). And see author Sherry Colb's article on deconstructing the [natural argument](#).

## **We have been eating meat since the dawn of humankind.**

Prehistoric humans and their ancestors ate some amount of meat. There's no question about that. However, an in-depth analysis by science writer Rob Dunn published in the *Scientific American* reports on recent studies indicating that [Human Ancestors Were Nearly All Vegetarians](#). But, again, is what our ancestors ate really relevant to the very different circumstances we face today regarding our food choices and lifestyles? We are no more compelled to eat like our ancestors than we are to practice cannibalism, rape, slavery, murder, or any of the other violent traditions which are all an unfortunate part of our human legacy.

## **Our brains developed from meat eating.**

Well, one could claim that our brains have also developed to become addicted to smoking, gambling, video games, alcohol, drugs, sex, violence, and harmful fast food. Our brains have evolved to create complex societies where Hitlers and Lenins exist along with great visionaries like Ghandi and Leonardo da Vinci. Fortunately, our brains appear to also be well equipped at making rational and moral judgments about what is good and bad, what is right and wrong — for ourselves and for others directly affected by our decisions.

Often referred to as the expensive tissue hypothesis, the widely-accepted claim that our brain size and complexity are connected to meat eating has been rigorously tested and refuted in a key report published in [Nature](#) (Navarrete, 2011). This comprehensive report evaluates the research into more than 100 mammalian species, including 23 primate species, analyzing brain size and organ mass data. Lead researcher Navarrete concludes that “human encephalization (brain development) was made possible by a combination of stabilization of energy inputs and a redirection of energy from locomotion, growth and reproduction.”

Even if the expensive tissue hypothesis were true, would it really matter? Just as the fact that our country was built by slaves does not justify the continued enslavement of other human beings, neither would the fact that our brain size evolved from eating meat be a justification for continuing to exploit animals for food when we have no need to do so.

Lastly, it's important to recognize that the study of neuroscience and brain function is in its infancy. World-renowned neuroscientist Lesley Rogers just discovered in the mid-1990s the [lateralization of the avian brain of chicks](#). Prior to Rogers' discovery, it was widely accepted that only humans and primates had lateralized brains, which endow us with "multi-tasking" and advanced cognitive states. We still have much to learn about the brains of other animals as well as our own.

## **We are apex predators at the top of the food chain.**

Claiming to be at the *top of the food chain* has become a popular yet shallow affirmation of our ability to violently dominate everything and everyone. Yet justifications for violence that draw on notions of power and supremacy are based on the philosophy that "Might makes right" — the principle behind the worst atrocities and crimes of human history.

Studies confirm that as people become wealthier, they tend to eat more meat and fewer plant foods. Wealth, status and privilege are associated with eating more meat and the belief that we are at the "top of the food chain." This association has led to massive increases in meat consumption in many developing countries, including China, India, Brazil and South Africa, according to [French researchers](#). But for those who believe that there is some biological basis for the claim that humans are at the top of some food chain, consider this. In 2013, for the first time ever, ecologists used a statistical way of calculating a species' trophic level (its level or rank in a food chain) based on its diet. Their findings, published in the [Proceedings of the Natural Academy of Sciences](#), scored humans at 2.21 on a scale of 1 to 5, roughly equal to an anchovy or a pig. On the low end of the scale are primary producers like plants, and on the higher end are pure apex predators (animals that only eat meat and have few or no predators of their own, such as tigers, crocodiles or boa constrictors).

One of the major shortcomings of the study is that it overlooks the distinction between our ability to make choices about what we eat, versus animals in the wild who have no choice but to eat what is available to them. Aside from dietary factors, if we look at the broad spectrum of life forms and the power they have in shaping our destiny, it may be that [viruses are above humans](#) as they possess the potential to wipe out large portions of the human population, as recently reported by *The Guardian*.

Moreover, we are not at the top of anything. We are merely part of an interdependent web of life that forms complex yet fragile ecosystems. We choose to either participate in the protection of these natural systems, or to destroy them, at our own peril. The concept of a "food chain" is a human construct that imposes a rigid hierarchy or competition among species, rather than a good faith understanding of the complexity of the ecosystems to which we belong. Selectively appealing to biological determinism also ignores the fact that we are moral agents. By choosing plant foods, we can get our nutrients through primary sources of nourishment, in the most environmentally friendly and resource efficient way possible, minimizing our harm to other animals, humans and the planet.

## **Meat eating is as instinctual to us as procreation.**

"We live in a society governed by laws that are largely aimed at discouraging those behaviors that persist as our baser instincts: stealing, beating, raping, killing, etc. The fact that these behaviors occur so commonly, even when stigmatized and criminalized, is surely proof that they are instinctual on some level; it is also evidence that a behavior's being instinctual has no bearing on whether or not it is ethical. We have both moral



Lesley Rogers, Emeritus Professor of Neuroscience at University of New England, has made outstanding contributions to understanding brain development and behavior. She discovered lateralization in the chick forebrain, when lateralization was still believed to be a unique feature of the human brain. Later it became known that hemispheric specialization is ubiquitous in the animal kingdom.

and immoral instincts, impulses that are sometimes generous, sometimes violent and cruel. Living an ethical life means we strive to thwart our baser instincts — those that cause harm and injury to others — and to cultivate those behaviors and attitudes that promote the wellbeing of others.” — Ashley Capps

## Eating animals is part of the cycle of life.

The same could be said for rape, slavery, murder, war, genocide and any of the other human vices that are an unfortunate part of our human legacy. All that comes *naturally* to us does not automatically qualify as *ethical*. Free will is also *natural*, and with the choices we freely make comes a responsibility to weigh the negative and positive impacts of those choices. Check out more on why the [natural argument](#) doesn't work to justify forcing animals to suffer for our food choices.

## I only buy cage-free eggs and grass-fed beef!

The very existence of labels like “free range,” “cage-free,” and “humane certified” attests to society’s growing concern for the welfare of animals raised for food. But any time consumers of meat, eggs or dairy advocate for “humane” treatment of farm animals, they confront an unavoidable paradox: the movement to treat farm animals better is based on the idea that it is wrong to subject them to unnecessary harm; yet, killing animals we have no need to eat constitutes the *ultimate* act of unnecessary harm. When we have plentiful access to plant-based foods, and a choice between sparing life or taking it — there is nothing remotely humane about rejecting compassion, and choosing violence and death for others just because we like the taste of their flesh, and because they cannot fight back. Might does not equal right.



Too, many of the worst cruelties inflicted on animals in factory farms are also [routine practices on small, free-range farms](#). These include: [sexual violation](#) and the exploitation of reproductive systems; the destruction of motherhood and families; routine mutilations without anesthetic; denial of important instinctive behaviors and preferences; and brutal transport and slaughter conditions. If you have been seduced by humane marketing claims, check out what so-called humane farming standards [really look like](#), and read more about what can only rightly be called the [Humane Hoax](#). Also check out [Humane Slaughter? 11 Key Reasons Why It's Not](#).

## If farm animals were not treated well, they would not produce for farmers.

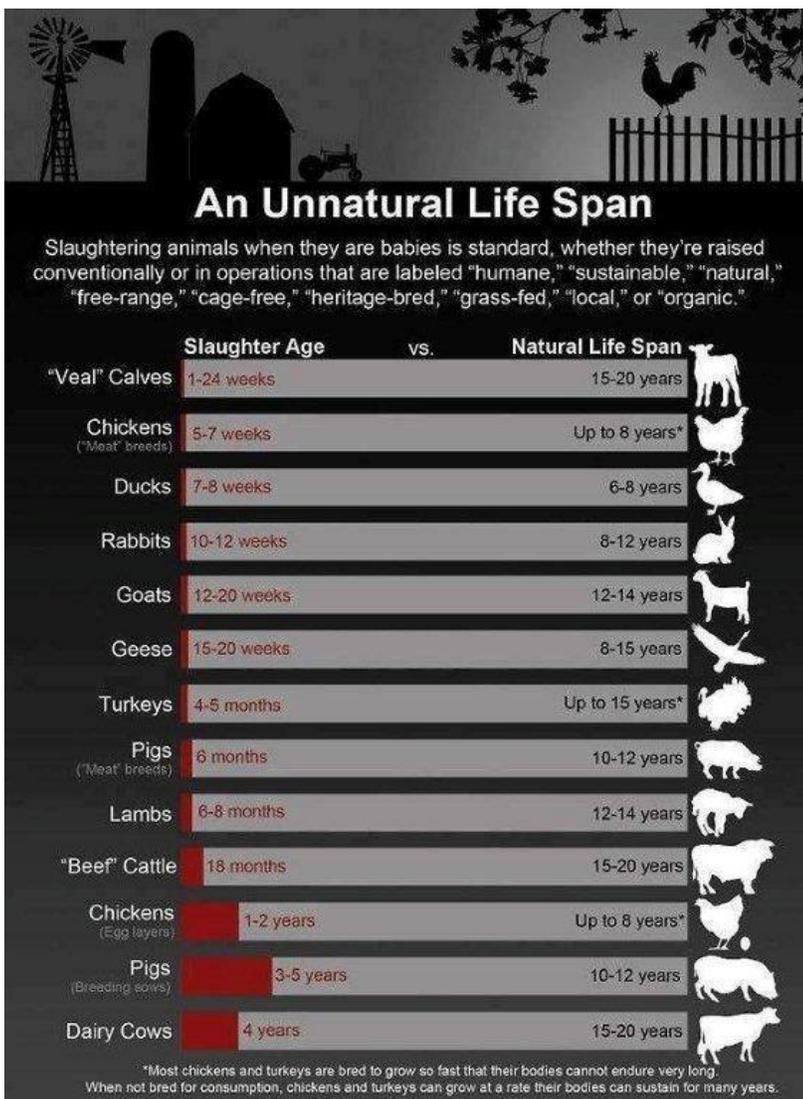
“Farm animals can be profoundly mistreated and still *produce*, in the same way that profoundly mistreated humans can be overweight, sexually active and able to produce offspring. Like humans, farm animals can *adapt*, up to a point, to living in slums and concentration camp conditions. Is this an argument for slums and concentration camps? **Farm animals do not gain weight, lay eggs, and produce milk because they are comfortable, content, or well-cared for, but because they have been manipulated specifically to do these things** through genetics, medications, and management techniques.

For example, cage layer producers artificially stimulate and extend egg production by keeping the lights burning for 16 or 17 hours a day to force the hen’s pituitary gland to secrete increased quantities of the hormone that activates the ovary. Animals in production agriculture are slaughtered at extremely young ages, before disease and death have decimated them as would otherwise happen even with all the drugs. Even so, many more individual animals suffer and die in intensive farming, but because the volume of animals being used is so big

— in the billions — **the losses are economically negligible, while the volume of flesh, milk and eggs is abnormally increased.**” — Karen Davis, Ph.D. If you’re looking for more evidence, check out our [collection of videos of undercover investigations at farms and slaughterhouses](#).

## Just because I eat meat doesn’t mean I support animal abuse or cruelty

If you buy animal products, you’re paying someone who makes a living off of commodifying animals — artificially breeding them, raising them quickly to “market weight” and violently killing them in their youth, at just a fraction of their natural lifespan. Even “high welfare” labels frequently permit the following: [slashing the throats](#) of stunned yet conscious animals and letting them bleed to death; driving an electrocution rod up the animal’s rectum in order to cause a grand mal seizure; and [poison gas](#) and suffocation, which can send the animal into violent seizures for the last several minutes of his life. If any of these practices were inflicted on human beings, we would consider them — not just cruelty and abuse — but torture and even genocide, if performed on the massive scale of animal agriculture. If any of these practices were inflicted on our companion dogs or cats, the perpetrators could be criminally prosecuted on felony cruelty charges. If it is wrong to abuse humans and companion animals in these ways, then it is equally wrong to inflict these abuses on farmed animals.



**We can honor animals by showing respect and gratitude for their “sacrifice”**

The concept of sacrifice has its roots in the earliest recorded civilizations. And even though we no longer practice the ancient rituals of animal sacrifice (with the exception of traditional societies), many modern day meat-eaters insist on framing the slaughter of farmed animals as a case of animals “sacrificing” their lives for us. **The self-congratulatory (and self-exonerating) rhetoric of “honoring” the animals we needlessly brutalize for food continues to paint animals as “giving” us their flesh, milk and eggs**, as if bestowing upon us a gift, or as if to suggest milk and eggs just fall from trees like fruit. Yet animals do not consent to being commodified, or to being engineered to produce milk and eggs (at a far higher capacity than their bodies were designed for), or to being forced into captivity and confinement, or to being sexually violated to produce offspring, or to having their offspring taken from them, or to being killed against their will while in their youth. The psychology of sacrifice is based on our need to absolve ourselves from the guilt we feel for harming animals by assigning them a human-like ability to selflessly “gift” us their bodies and their lives. It is a disingenuous gesture.



This woman sings to her turkey, whom she claims to “love,” in order to calm her before she slashes her throat open and hangs her upside down to bleed to death while fully conscious. The power of the myth of sacrifice lives on today in the so-called “compassionate carnivore” movement.

## **Plants are alive too. Don't vegans believe plants should not be harmed also?**

There is a reason why we don't hesitate to walk our dogs in the park on the grass, yet if someone were to kick our dog on that walk in the park, we would find this morally objectionable. It would also be within our rights to press criminal charges against the offender. Plants are not sentient beings with thoughts, feelings and a central nervous system, but the animals we exploit for food clearly and regularly demonstrate that they are highly sentient, emotionally complex individuals who are aware of and value their individual lives. Why is [sentience](#) such an important distinction? Here's a more [detailed explanation](#). And, of course, even if plants were sentient, raising animals for food requires vastly more plant feed crops than if we were to eat plant foods directly from the source.

## **Where do you draw the line between what gets harmed for our food choices?**

That's a valid question. Some will argue that insects are harmed and that we kill a lot more insects than animals when we raise and harvest plant foods. The fact is that there is no consensus in the scientific community that insects are sentient, capable of pain and suffering. Some research has concluded that certain insects may be sentient. But the fact that we are not crystal clear on where to draw the line is not a valid reason to inflict suffering on those we know with certainty to be sentient, which includes all of the species we artificially breed and kill for food. But it's also the case that, even if insects are sentient, eating animals, who require an enormous amount of feed crops, ultimately kills far more insects than if we consume plant foods directly. We can and should reduce the suffering we cause, even if we cannot realistically eliminate it entirely.

## **The Bible says we have dominion over animals.**

The Bible has historically been used to justify rape, incest, infanticide, murder, war, racism, sexism, homophobia, and many other acts of violence, oppression and persecution. Does a Biblical precedent make any of those actions less immoral? Of course not. Instead of citing what Jesus was said to have eaten in Biblical times, it would be more relevant to ask, *What would Jesus do today* if he lived in the age of industrialized agriculture where billions of animals are bred through artificial insemination, treated like mere commodities and processed like worthless pieces of meat — not from necessity — but just to satisfy our tastebuds and to line the pockets of wealthy industrialists? Would he praise humankind for respecting his creations? Or would he instead invoke The Golden Rule? Would he not insist that, when given a choice between mercy and cruelty, a Christian is compelled to choose compassion over violence?



In the Book of Judith, Judith, a daring and beautiful widow, who is upset with her Jewish countrymen for not trusting God to deliver them from their foreign conquerors, goes with her loyal maid to the camp of the enemy general, Holofernes. She gains his trust only to deceive him by decapitating him in his sleep.

The scriptures of most world religions describe a *golden age* in which humans lived peaceably on earth without bloodshed. In Genesis 1:29, God gives to humans “every herb bearing seed . . . and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed.” God says that, for us, **these seeds and fruits “shall be meat.”** “The Biblical image of the Garden of Eden is paralleled by the Classical image of the Golden Age and by ancient Indian depictions of a peaceable kingdom on earth.” — [Karen Davis, Ph.D.](#)

## Everyone eats animal products. It’s just the way things are. You’re never going to change that.

Whenever we base an argument on an appeal to the *mob mentality*, we commit a logical fallacy that concludes something is true simply because a critical mass of people believe it to be true. But what happens when we think critically for ourselves and see through what we’re told is *normal*? Social psychologist Melanie Joy perhaps says it best:

*“It’s just the way things are.* Take a moment to consider this statement. Really think about it. We send one species to the butcher and give our love and kindness to another apparently for no other reason than because it’s the way things are. When our attitudes and behaviors towards animals are so inconsistent, and this inconsistency is so unexamined, we can safely say we

have been fed absurdities. It is absurd that we eat pigs and love dogs and don’t even know why. Many of us spend long minutes in the aisle of the drugstore mulling over what toothpaste to buy. Yet most of don’t spend any time at all thinking about what species of animal we eat and why. Our choices as consumers drive an industry that kills ten billion animals per year in the United States alone. If we choose to support this industry and the best reason we can come up with is because it’s the way things are, clearly something is amiss.”



To explore Joy’s work more in depth, check out her excellent [presentation on carnism](#).

Finally, keep in mind that every social justice movement has been met with the same resistance, particularly in the beginning phases, with naysayers claiming “people will never change.” For example, the abolitionists were often ridiculed and even threatened with violence and death by their critics, who claimed they would never succeed at abolishing slavery. But indeed they did.

## **Vitamin B12 is absent from a vegan diet, which means it is not the diet intended for us.**

An objection to veganism is often made based on the need for vegans to supplement their diets with vitamin B12. Vitamin B12 is essential to normal brain and nervous system function, and to the formation of healthy blood cells. It also plays a crucial role in DNA synthesis and cell metabolism. It is sometimes argued that because B12 is not produced by plants, vegan diets are unnatural and that ethical appeals to veganism are therefore misguided.

There are several flaws with this objection. While it is true that plants do not produce vitamin B12, neither do animals inherently produce it. B12 is produced by bacteria that live in the soil and in the intestines of animals, including humans; however, in humans and other animals, it is generally manufactured too far down the intestinal tract (in the colon, in our case) to be absorbed, and is instead excreted in feces, where it is abundant.

In natural environments, cattle, sheep and other ruminants get B12 and B12 producing bacteria from dirt and fecal matter consumed with the grass and forage they ingest. Chickens and other birds take in B12 when they peck through soil for worms and insects. B12 is stored in the livers and muscles of these animals, and some passes into their milk and eggs. In the wild, carnivorous and omnivorous animals can thus get B12 by eating the flesh, livers and secretions of other animals. Modern farmed animals, however, do not consume a natural diet; most farmed animals are not free-roaming, and they receive supplemental B12 or cobalt (the element necessary for ruminant B12 synthesis) in their feed. (1, 2) In fact, most of the world’s synthetic B12 is consumed by farmed animals. (3) Even organic and pastured animals receive supplemental B12 or cobalt. This means that in industrialized societies, meat, eggs and dairy are not any more “natural” as sources of B12 than the fortified foods or supplements vegans consume. In both cases, the B12 derives from a synthetic supplement.

More importantly, though, the question of whether or not supplemental B12 is “natural” seems to be the wrong question. Is taking aspirin for a headache natural? Is medicine natural? If supplementing with B12 helps us to easily eliminate harming and killing billions of animals for food, then why *not* go vegan and take a B12 supplement? But for those who feel they can’t go vegan without proof that B12 can be acquired “naturally,” here’s good news: studies show that humans can get all the B12 they need by eating their own poop — as rabbits, guinea pigs, and possums do for precisely this reason. And if other animals do it...

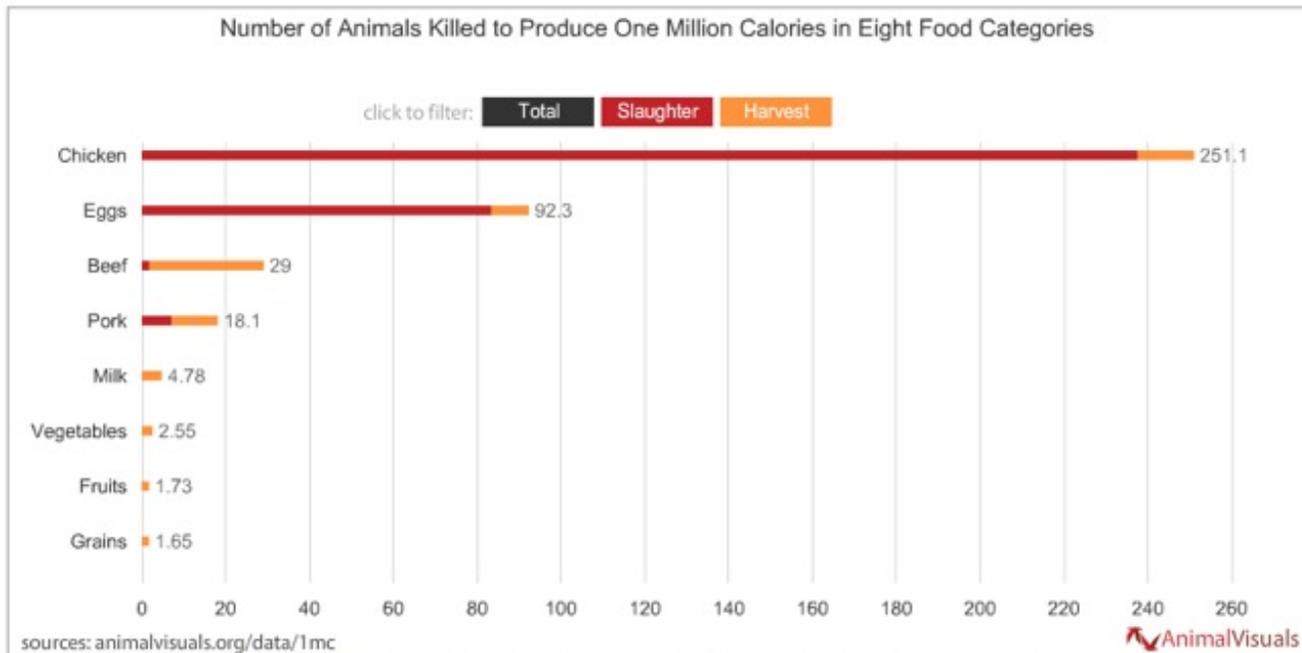
## **Some people fail to thrive, or become ill, when they don’t eat animal products.**

Build your plant-based diet on a firm foundation, on *real* nutrition information from board certified plant-based dietitians like [Virginia Messina](#), who cite only the best peer-reviewed scientific sources available. And check out what [leading health authorities](#) around the world are saying about the suitability of a healthy, plant-based diet for all individuals.

[Dr. Michael Klaper](#) also offers some valuable insights into biological mechanisms within our bodies that *addict* us to animal products, with tips on how to overcome the withdrawal symptoms.

## **Vegans kill more animals than meat eaters.**

In the last several years, a number of [scholarly](#) and [non scholarly arguments](#) have gained traction by claiming that if vegans factor in the amount of animals killed in the harvesting of plant crops, they would find that vegan and vegetarian diets result in a greater number of animals killed than diets based on pasture-raised animals. And they conclude that if vegans seek to minimize harm, then a vegan diet is not the way to go. Many [counter arguments](#) have emerged to refute this claim. One of the best among them is AnimalVisuals' comprehensive and well-researched study, [Number of Animals Killed to Produce One Million Calories in Eight Food Categories](#). See chart below for a snapshot of the results of this study.



**Figure 1:** A diet of plants causes the fewest animals to be killed. Leaving chickens and eggs out of our diets will have the greatest effect on reducing the suffering and death caused by what we eat.

It's important to note that aside from the actual numbers of animals killed, intention is a critical factor in assessing the moral weight of an action. The unintentional killing of field mice and other animals during the process of harvesting essential food crops is a vastly different intention from that of deliberately and artificially breeding billions of sentient individuals into existence for the sole purpose of exploiting and killing them, for flesh and secretions we have no need to consume. **If killing certain animals in the process of raising necessary food crops is morally objectionable, then how can our ethical accountability for their deaths be rectified by breeding even more animals into existence in order to intentionally exploit and slaughter them at a fraction of their natural lifespans?**

Professor Gary Francione points out that this claim that eating pasture-raised animals is more ethical than unintentionally killing animals in the harvesting of crops is "a version of the argument that if we cannot avoid unintentional death, we might as well as engage in intentional killing. Think about that. We cannot avoid accidental or unintended death in manufacturing anything, including the most innocuous and beneficial of products. So it's okay to kill humans intentionally? Surely not." "If we all went vegan because we cared morally about nonhumans, that would necessarily translate into methods of crop production that would be more mindful of incidental and unintended deaths," argues Francione.

## That's what animals are here for!

This is nothing more than a prejudicial, unreflective judgement that has no basis in any serious understanding of who farmed animals are and what their complex social and emotional lives tell us. The same kind of prejudicial judgments are made against all oppressed groups, including African slaves by slaveholders. Such

judgments only help the oppressor while reinforcing the subjugation of the victim.

## Animals don't know what's happening to them when they are raised and slaughtered.

If you were unaware of your murderer's premeditated intention to kill you before he shot you point blank in the head, and you felt little or no pain or suffering before the life was snuffed out of you, would this make the murderer's act any less immoral?

Farmed animals are highly aware and sentient. They clearly demonstrate their interests, likes, dislikes, needs and desires. Indeed, animals will fight for their lives — and for the lives of their offspring — and even for the lives of members of their extended social group, as vociferously as we would fight for our own lives.

Our cats and dogs yearn for our attention and affection and bond with us. Farm animals who have learned to trust us will often similarly bond with us. Also like cats and dogs, cows, pigs, turkeys and chickens clearly display depression, frustration, anger, hostility, fear and despair when we deny them the conditions that allow them to freely express themselves, as is the case on farms. Even under the highest welfare standards, most or all of an animal's fundamental interests are denied. And a violent and undignified end to his abbreviated life is the inevitable outcome. For a visceral example of how dearly animals wish to live, check out this video of a [cow in line at a slaughterhouse](#) who tries to escape the kill chute.



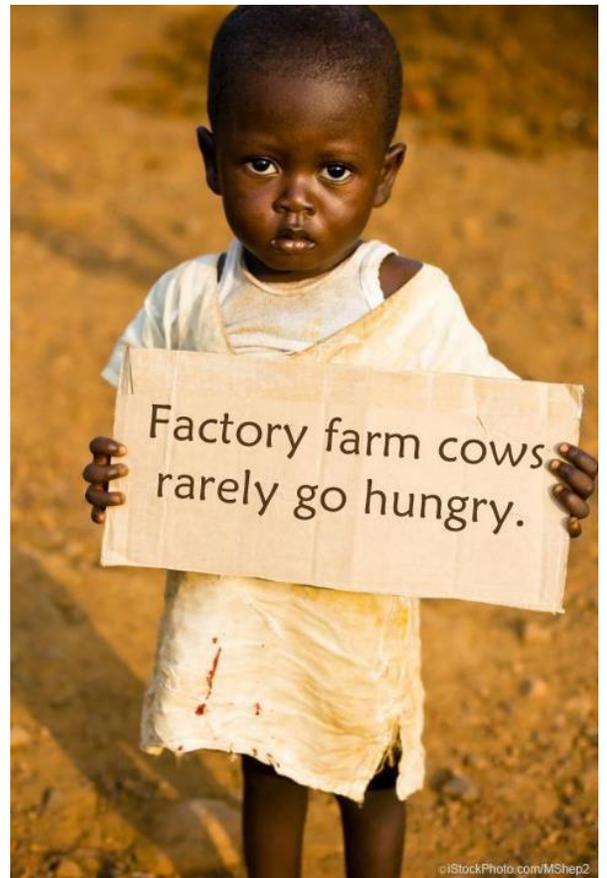
A small rabbit slaughterhouse in Spain  
(photo: Jo-Anne McArthur, weanimals.org)

## Humans are more important than animals.

Whether humans are more subjectively important to us than other animals is not relevant to our unnecessary exploitation of billions of animals for food. The fact is, we force animals to suffer unnecessarily for no other reason than our palate pleasure. At the same time, we say that we believe, as a general principle, that it is wrong to cause unnecessary harm and suffering to animals. We oppose such things as dog fighting and whale hunting. We are outraged by the story of a teenager who tortured and killed his cat for kicks. But opposing one case of needless animal suffering means opposing all cases of needless animal suffering. Opposing violence, slavery, murder and exploitation of human victims means opposing the same, unequivocally, for non human victims who have the same capacity for suffering. To act consistently on this belief means to adopt a vegan lifestyle. Read more on why the claim of [human superiority](#) doesn't justify doing whatever we want to animals.

## If we didn't raise and eat farm animals, they would go extinct.

"On the one hand we're afraid that farm animals will overrun the earth. On the other hand we worry that they'll become



extinct... People who think it is all right to imprison animals in genetically-impaired bodies, and who then get testy about their becoming extinct, are indulging in cynicism and sentimentality.” — Karen Davis, Ph.D.

Those species of farmed animals that we have genetically manipulated to be used as agricultural commodities did not exist in the natural world. Animals who never existed in the natural world, who have been artificially bred into existence and selectively engineered for total domination, cannot be said to go “extinct.” But for those who insist on the importance of conserving domesticated animals, consider the incredible irony in the fact that each generation of farm animals artificially bred into this world goes “extinct” as soon as they reach market weight and are slaughtered. An entire generation of billions of animals is killed, only to be replaced by yet another generation, thanks to total human control of farm animal reproduction.

Animal agriculture is not a conservation effort. It’s a business of making money on the slaughtered bodies of other animals. What could be the benefit to any human or non human to be brought into this world under such circumstances? If you knew your life would be defined by enslavement, mutilations, sexual violation, reproductive control, the theft of your offspring, and a violent slaughterhouse end in your youth, what would be the advantage of being born? Knowing the horrors of human tyranny?

## **If the world went vegan, farmed animals would overrun the earth, starve, and wreak havoc.**

Globally, nearly all animals eaten by humans are bred into existence. What would happen to all the animals if the world went vegan? It’s fairly straightforward: if we stop eating them, we stop breeding them. The most likely scenario for a vegan world is not one in which everyone stops eating animals overnight, but one in which demand for animal products gradually continues to decline, and fewer and fewer animals are bred as a result. At some point along the way, as more people become persuaded of the immorality of exploiting animals, we will hope to see the needless killing of animals for food recognized not only as a moral wrong, but as a legal wrong as well. Indeed, the abolition of animal exploitation, and of the property status of animals, is what most vegans are working for. However, legislation to this end would most likely happen in phases, beginning with a ban on the breeding of farmed animals. If a ban on breeding farmed animals were enacted, those animals already on farms would still legally be considered the property of their owners, and could still be slaughtered. While regrettable and wrong, this outcome is no different from the animals’ original fate and thus the question of what would happen to all the animals if the world went vegan is not a valid argument against veganism.

## **Animals are ferocious and would think nothing of attacking us.**

“Compassion is a betrayal of nature,” Hitler exclaimed days before his suicide. “Nature itself is brutal, cruel,” people often tell us, which then becomes a justification for harming animals for any reason we wish, framing our relentless violence toward them as part of some primal, predatory, tooth-and-nail fight to the finish. Painted this way, our treatment of farm animals is practically self defense. Yet, bred into a state of total domination and learned helplessness, farm animals are among the most docile, submissive and passive creatures on earth. They have given up out of the gate. None of the domesticated animals raised for food have the *kill instinct* of carnivores, nor is human flesh a natural or desired part of their diet. But, even if farm animals posed a serious threat to us, they exist only because we forcibly breed them into existence.

If we did not artificially breed farmed animals in the first place, they would not exist and therefore would pose no threat to us. We create our own



problems with animals and then blame the animal victims for those problems. We are by far the most violent perpetrators of any species on this planet. It is the height of irony that we should then characterize other species who kill, if they do, only from necessity, as ferocious and merciless.



## Raw milk is very nutritious!

All of the nutrients found in cows' milk originate in the soil and in the plants that grow out of that soil. We have no biological requirement for animal products. We can get all of [the nutrients we need](#), and in great abundance, from plant foods.

## What I eat is a personal choice! Don't judge me and I won't judge you!

In the time it took you to utter that short statement, some 800–900 chickens were slaughtered just in the U.S. based on the misguided belief that we have the right to do whatever we want to animals, with zero accountability for our actions. Imagine now if, instead, the slaughter victims were 800–900 human beings. Would we then be so cavalier about asserting our right to harm others on the basis of personal choice? Absolutely not. Whenever and wherever a choice forces suffering and death on someone else, it ceases to be “personal” or morally neutral.

The billions of farmed animals who are unnecessarily forced to suffer and die for our palate pleasure expose a grave injustice against which more and more people feel compelled to speak out. Any injustice demands a paradigm shift that can only be achieved through public discourse, spurring a shift in public attitudes about that injustice.

Instead of engaging in knee-jerk defenses of our own participation in needless violence and death, we would do better to examine our reasons for participating in this violence, and whether the decision to do so is compatible with our values. For a more in-depth exploration of this concept, see our article, [Why Eating Animals Cannot Be Considered a Personal Choice](#).

## Why should we care about animals when there is so much human suffering in the world?

This is a false dilemma. There is nothing to prevent those fighting human oppressions from simultaneously rejecting the exploitation of nonhumans by abstaining from the consumption of animal products. Indeed, those concerned about the fate of our planet and of future generations of humans should go vegan for those reasons alone. As the WorldWatch Institute recently concluded: **“The human appetite for animal flesh is a driving force behind virtually every major category of environmental damage now threatening the human future — deforestation, erosion, fresh water scarcity, air and water pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, social injustice, the destabilization of communities, and the spread of disease.”**

Helping animals does NOT require the highly complex solutions that are required to address most of our worst social ills. All we need to do is make some straightforward, daily choices not to buy animal products, and we've just eliminated 99% of the unnecessary suffering we cause to animals. As demand for animal products declines, artificial breeding declines as well and the industries that profit from exploiting billions of animals annually shift to other non-animal based resources. While we may still have some detrimental impact on animals, we will have effectively ended the gratuitous and deliberate exploitation of animals for food as we know it today.

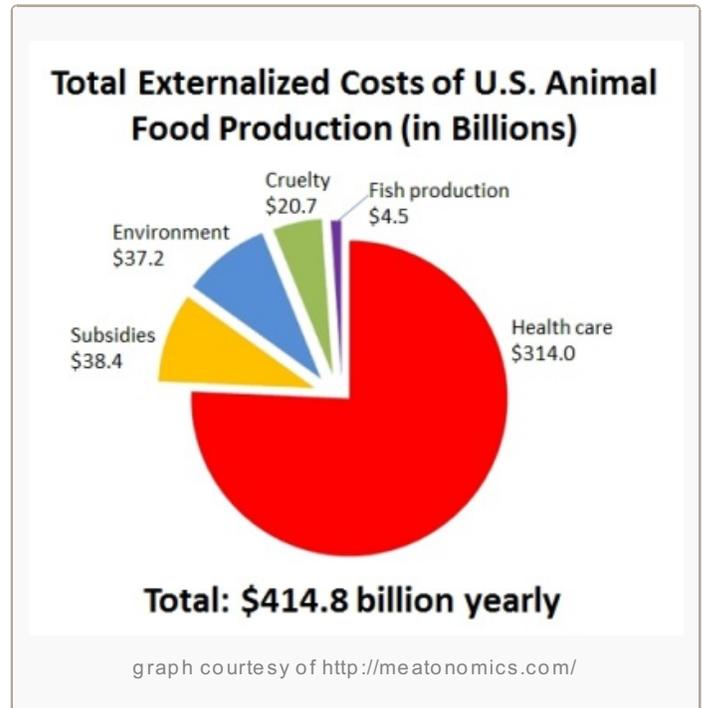
As activist Bruce Friedrich writes: “Every time I sit down to eat, I cast my lot: for mercy, against misery; for the oppressed, against the oppressor; and for compassion, against cruelty. **There is a lot of suffering in the**

**world, but how much suffering can be addressed with literally no time or effort on our part? We can just stop supporting it, by making different choices.”**

We should care about other animals because they have the same capacity for suffering as we do, because we already believe that it is wrong to harm animals unnecessarily, and because the choices we make to protect animals also protect vulnerable and poor people, as well as the environment. Here's [more on the subject](#).

## **A vegan diet is elitist, a luxury that only some can afford.**

Check out the book, [Eat Vegan on \\$4 a Day](#), to learn how easy it is to eat vegan on a restricted budget. Grains and legumes have served as the staple crops of civilizations around the world since the domestication of agriculture around [10,000 B.C.](#) Up until very recently, animal products such as meat, cheese, milk and eggs were cost prohibitive, a “luxury” only the more affluent could afford. With the industrial revolution, the production of animal products began to escalate as a result of new mass feeding, transport and slaughter technologies. Increased efficiency combined with heavy government subsidies to animal agriculture pushed the price of animal products down to unprecedented lows that almost anyone could afford.



Today, American taxpayers currently pay \$38 billion annually to fund the government's corporate welfare programs (subsidies) to the highly-profitable meat and dairy industries, according to the book [Meatonomics](#). Author Dave Simon points out that “animal food producers impose almost \$2 in hidden costs on Americans for every \$1 of product they sell at retail.” In his analysis, “A \$5 Big Mac would cost \$13 if the retail price included hidden expenses that meat producers offload onto society.” (See pie chart above for further details.)

## **Certain populations and regions rely on animal products since they can't grow food crops.**

Thanks in large part to the dominionist paradigm and pro-meat biases of hunger relief organizations like Heifer International, there is a common misconception that impoverished communities in arid climates are more suited to farming animals than to growing crops to feed themselves. In fact, dependence on animal farming frequently imperils malnourished communities and families. As Dr. Richard Oppenlander writes in *Food Choice and Sustainability*:

“In Ethiopia, over 40 percent of the population is considered hungry or starving, yet the country has 50 million cattle (one of the largest herds in the world), as well as almost 50 million sheep and goats, and 35 million chickens, unnecessarily consuming the food, land and water... [P]oorly managed cattle grazing has caused severe overgrazing, deforestation, and then subsequent erosion and eventual desertification. Much of their resource use must be focused on these cattle. Instead of using their food, water, topsoil, and massive amounts of land and energy to raise livestock, Ethiopia, for instance, could grow teff, an ancient and quite nutritious grain grown in that country for the past 20,000 to 30,000 years.

Teff...is high in protein, with an excellent amino acid profile, is high in fiber and calcium, (1 cup of teff provides more calcium than a cup of milk), and is a rich source of boron, copper, phosphorus, zinc, and iron. Seventy

percent of all Ethiopia's cattle are raised pastorally in the highlands of their country, where less than 100 pounds of meat and a few gallons of milk are produced per acre of land used. Researchers have found that teff can be grown in those same areas by the same farmers at a yield of 2,000 to 3,000 pounds per acre, with more sustainable growing techniques employed and no water irrigation — teff has been shown to grow well in water-stressed areas and it is pest resistant.”

Many other challenged regions of the world are already forced to import food staples. According to some leading climate scientists, climate change will soon make these regions inhospitable to both raising livestock and cultivating food crops, forcing their populations to obtain food from outside sources. Two examples are [Mongolians](#) and [Inuits](#). Like Mongolians, the Inuits' practice of hunting on ice has been decimated by climate change. Unlike Mongolians, Inuits don't have fields suitable to grow food for all their meals. Yet that just makes them the same as most urban and suburban dwellers. In fact, Inuits today generally no longer live in igloos, but rather in modern communities with modern building structures and municipalities such as this [Nunavut Legislature Building](#). Inuits can and already do in fact buy food grown elsewhere. In any case, the focus of this article is on the vast majority of us who have plentiful plant-based food options available to us, not the exceptional cases.

## Vegans push their beliefs on others and turn others off.

It is interesting that those who advocate for human victims of violent practices, such as child slave labor or sex trafficking, are rarely if ever accused of *pushing* their beliefs on others. Why is it then that when we switch out humans and make animal victims our cause, we suddenly get accused of unfair and unjust pushiness? When billions of lives are at stake and unprecedented suffering and death are happening at an incomparable rate, what level of pushiness would be considered appropriate? It's disheartening to even be asking these questions.

According to professor and philosopher Mylan Engel, vegans are not even pushing *their* beliefs on non vegans. On the contrary: “*Your* beliefs and values already commit you to the immorality of eating animals,” claims Engel, who goes on to explain how beliefs that the majority of us already hold compel us to extend equal moral consideration to all animals, not just some of them we arbitrarily choose. For full details, watch [Mylan Engel's live presentation](#).



## Vegans are hypocrites; it's impossible to be 100% vegan.

Even non vegans already believe that the world would be a better place with less suffering. People don't go around saying, “if we could just have a little more suffering on this planet, things would be a lot better!” It is not hypocritical to hold a belief in veganism and yet be unable to avoid all products and by-products of animal

exploitation because of circumstances well outside of our control, just as it is impossible for someone who opposes slavery to avoid all of the products and outcomes derived from the institution of slavery, like the roads we still drive on or the battles that were fought with slave soldiers.

The perfect is the enemy of the good, as has been often noted. Perfection is not the goal of veganism. Vegans seek to abolish the enslavement and exploitation of nonhuman animals. Human exploitation of animals is the most widespread, gratuitous and needless form of animal suffering and death on the planet, and we can end it simply by making a few adjustments to our diet and lifestyle. Vegans simply stop buying meat, dairy and eggs, foods containing animal-derived ingredients, and animal-based fabrics and accessories. Everything else — all the secondary by-products and ingredients that can be found in such things as adhesives and cosmetics — exists only because of the slaughterhouse industry, which exists only because of consumer demand for meat, dairy and eggs.

The notion that *it's impossible to be 100% vegan, so why try?* implies that if we cannot raise food without harming anyone, then we might as well raise and kill whatever we want. So if perfection is not obtainable, then let's throw out ethics (including intention) all together. This just becomes a reductive, "all or nothing" justification for doing whatever we want, and it negates what we say we already believe, that less suffering is better even if we can't eliminate it completely. By going vegan, you will not become perfect or even cruelty-free. But you'll have reduced an enormous amount of suffering to innocent beings who have done nothing to you, just by making some simple dietary and lifestyle changes.

**But aren't animals harmed in the harvesting of food crops that vegans eat?** Yes, but the detrimental impact to animals from a vegan diet is astronomically less compared to raising and killing animals for food. Veganic agriculture employs no till harvesting that reduces harm to rodents and other small animals. And while millions of animals are legally killed every year to protect conventional agriculture via traps, poisons, pesticides, and other licensed forms of extermination, veganic farming practices can help to restore biodiversity of plants and animals by creating wildlife habitats. Encouraging diverse plant, animal and insect species makes it less likely that any single species will dominate an area and cause serious crop damage. As discussed in the video below, techniques such as companion planting, beetle banks and hedge cultivation can be used to maintain the balance of potentially competing animals.