



VIP TRANSCRIPT SERIES

INTERVIEW WITH REP. DENNIS AND ELIZABETH KUCINICH



Rep. Dennis Kucinich and Elizabeth Kucinich, A Member of Congress from 1997-2013, Dennis Kucinich is best known as a staunch advocate for peace and social justice and as the only vegan to serve in Congress. Dennis's wife, Elizabeth Kucinich, is a vegan and environmentalist who is the Director of Policy at the Center for Food Safety (CFS).

<http://www.veganpalooza.com/>

VEGANISM, PUBLIC POLICY, AND HEALTH FOR ALL

STEVE PRUSSACK: Hello and welcome. Welcome to Veganpalooza 2013. I'm your co-host and co-producer Steve Prussack. Thank you for being with us.

DR. WILL TUTTLE: We are deeply honored to have with us on Veganpalooza 2013 two people who have been working hard, not just privately but really publicly, to bring more peace and compassion into our world. I'm talking about the Honorable Dennis Kucinich and his spouse Elizabeth Kucinich. I think everyone has heard about both Dennis and Elizabeth. Dennis, as everyone knows I'm sure, was a member of Congress from 1997 to 2013 from Ohio. I think he's best known as a staunch and really relentless advocate for peace, social justice, environmental sanity, compassion for human beings, compassion for animals, and he is also, I believe, the only vegan to actually serve in Congress. His wife Elizabeth is also a vegan and an environmentalist from England. She is now the Director for Policy at the Center for Food Safety for quite a few years. She also served as the Director of Public Affairs for the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. I'm sure everyone is aware of both of these organizations. So Elizabeth has been working with helping to promote compassion for animals, and we'll find out more, I'm sure, as we go along. It's really an enormous advantage, I think, for us as human beings here really to be able to spend some time to talk about our society, where we are in our culture right now, where the vegan movement is, how we can perhaps live veganism in a more wise and effective way. So I'd like to invite to Veganpalooza Dennis and Elizabeth. Great to have you with us.

ELIZABETH KUCINICH: Thank you. Great to be with you, Will.

DENNIS KUCINICH: it's great to join you, Will, and I'm looking forward to our discussion. There's one other thing Elizabeth has done that more people will be hearing about. She's produced a couple films, but one that's immediately accessible called *GMO OMG*. It's about the development of genetically modified organisms and their impact on the quality of food and on human health. I'm very proud of the work that she's done, but she keeps expanding her horizons into film now.

DR. TUTTLE: I don't know how you have time to do all these things. You're working full-time as the Director for Policy at the Center for Food Safety and so forth, and I did hear of that. Thank you for reminding me that you've created a film – I've heard it's fantastic – on the devastating effects of GMOs, and we'd love to hear more about that as well. Thanks so much for sharing that. Maybe we could hear in the beginning here just a little bit, I know, Dennis, I've heard you speak in the past about your own journey to veganism and to greater understanding of compassion for animals. I know all of us born into the United States, or into England, in this culture are pretty much taught from the time we're little kids that certain animals are just meat and their interests don't matter. Could you just tell us a little bit about how you began to change in your understanding?

DENNIS: Sure, Will. I turned to veganism in 1995. I just came to the Ohio State Senate, and I met someone named Joanna Boxer who was a vegan. Through our friendship, I began to just be curious about how can you have food without eating meat and without the kind of diet that I had traditionally been accustomed to. Once I moved toward a vegan diet, I started to experience dramatically improved health in a number of ways that I never even knew was possible. So my immediate incentive was feedback that showed me that a change in diet for me, particularly a vegan diet, could produce effects that would improve the quality of life and make my health better. So that was immediate. I had Crohn's disease as a child and a young adult and even as a good part of my adult life. I was told, "There's nothing you can do about this. There's no cure for it. You're stuck." So I was on all kinds of medications. Finally, through beginning a vegan diet, I started to learn that the effects of Crohn's started to dissipate, and that,

with some Chinese herbs, Crohn's disappeared. It was extraordinary. There are doctors who say, "That can't be." But it is. From there, of course, once you become a vegan, you become aware of the manifest ways in which you're making it a better world in terms of respect for the environment, for animals, and compassion for all living things.

DR. TUTTLE: It's very interesting to hear you say that because another of the people we're interviewing here on Veganpalooza is the very famous actor James Cromwell. He also went vegan in 1995, so you must have been on the same wavelength there.

DENNIS: He's a good man.

DR. TUTTLE: Yeah, he's a wonderful, just a very, very wonderful person. I'm glad you're a fan of him.

DENNIS: And a good friend. I think that what we're finding, oh yes, and Jamie Cromwell and Elizabeth and I have had opportunities to spend time together. Of course, we share a passion for veganism, and it's good to know that you're involved with Veganpalooza and getting people of Jamie Cromwell's caliber into this because he's such an extraordinary person.

DR. TUTTLE: Right, I know, he's so articulate and deep-feeling about the issues and passionate, really, helping to raise awareness in lots of different ways about this. I wanted to just underline what you've said about Crohn's disease. I've actually heard that from a variety of places, that especially dairy can really be something that causes all kinds of havoc to our physical bodies. Watching you over the years, Dennis, especially all those years where you were running for president, and it seemed that you had boundless reserves of energy. You would be speaking in one city after another, and doing radio interviews and TV interviews in between, and doing newspaper interviews in between those, and just going and going. I think people thought, "How can one person do so much?" I just loved watching what you were doing, not only because I was absolutely cheering you on every step of the way, but that you had so much energy. To hear that you did that all as a vegan to me isn't surprising because I've been a vegan for 33 years and have noticed similar things, but it's just so great to see that it was going to such good use.

DENNIS: See, I discovered vegan cupcakes, vegan brownies. There was a woman in Iowa who made vegan brownies. There wasn't anything special in them other than the fact that they were vegan, by the way, and I will tell you that it was so extraordinary, I could have spent the entire 2004 campaign living on vegan brownies.

DR. TUTTLE: High energy, high octane fuel.

ELIZABETH: It's probably not something he should share with the PCRM physicians. And something I would like to say as well is that in '07, when I was then on the trail, we had an amazing support from the vegan community in the very real form of wonderful food. Anybody who's on there who helped us in the campaign, thank you. We labeled these amazing miraculous people who just sprang up everywhere as the Vegan Underground Network because wherever we were, whatever city we were in, people had got to hear about it, and we would always have beautiful, fresh, vegan food in little hampers that people would just provide. They would miraculously make their way into a car or into our bags so that we could be riding on a plane. I remember one time I was in Oregon, and very sadly I had this very delicious-looking vegan chocolate mousse that was given to me by a wonderful lady called Gail, and it was so delicious, and it was confiscated by the security people. But nevertheless, it's wonderful how the vegan community is such a community and really pulls together. It makes such a difference, particularly when there are people like us trying to forge ahead. That support is always there, and it's so tremendous.

DR. TUTTLE: That's so interesting to hear that, that you were getting this kind of support from the vegan community. I really wasn't aware of that. It's very heartwarming to hear it because, as I say in *The World Peace Diet*, I think we all know as vegans, "As you sow, so shall you reap." I think you were definitely sowing seeds of compassion for others, and I'm glad to hear some of that came back.

DENNIS: What Veganpalooza does, and what you do with your work, is you're bringing together this huge network, catalyzing this huge network of people, who are among the most socially active, environmentally conscious people in the world. When you have the privilege, as I've had and as Elizabeth's had, of traveling the country and meeting people from all over, you see what it unites people in their concerns. For vegans, it's a dedication to the world in many ways, and to each other and to themselves and to their families. We're proud to participate in this call and in your wider call to the world to start considering the consequences of one's diet.

DR. TUTTLE: Exactly, it's amazing that the consequences of our food choices are so enormous. Most people aren't aware of that, and I think that's really what we're trying to do here with Veganpalooza, is help people realize that. Of course, veganism isn't only about diet, but 98%, as we know, of the animals that are killed are in the food system. That's by humans. It's really the main place that the average person is taking up their wallet and paying for the imprisonment and killing of so many animals, and the huge effects that has on the environment and on our culture. I know you've been working, Dennis, so hard to create a Department of Peace, and I would love to talk a little bit more about the effects of our eating and world peace. But maybe before we get into that, I'd just love to hear a little bit from Elizabeth. Could you talk with us a little bit about not only how you came over to this country, but how you got involved with veganism and with working together with Dennis and so forth? That would be so interesting to hear, I think.

ELIZABETH: I'd be happy to, thank you. Actually, when I was about, I think, five years old, my mother almost died herself from Crohn's disease, where she would eat and eat and her body was just not taking in the nutrients. The doctors were advising radical surgery, and she just said, "No. I think there's got to be another way. I don't know what it is, but I'm going to go and research." She started to look into whole grain plant-based diets. She changed her diet. She changed all of our diets. And I'm very happy to say that my mother is an enormously wonderful strong woman who now runs a healing and teaching center in the U.K. and has really taken the lesson of the power of nutrition and the power of actually taking responsibility for your own health. It's wonderful to have qualified guides around you in the form of doctors, but it's also sometimes good to explore unknown territory. Back in the early 80s, that's what a nutritional approach was. It was something very new. So that's how I first became aware of the power of plant-based nutrition. During my childhood, we would eat a little bit of meat, but now and again, but it wasn't a large part of our diet.

Then obviously when I came over to America and I met Dennis, and literally, I was in his company for eight minutes talking about monetary policy, which is why I came to the United States, to really change the economic system and change the way we think about money, and that's a whole different conversation. But I was in his presence for just a few minutes, and I found out that he was vegan, and I immediately decided to become vegan. I said, "I want to be married to someone like that," and the second time we met, we got engaged. Three months later we got married. I'll cut that story very far down.

But it's tremendous to be with somebody, you can imagine, who really understands, as you've said, not only that we are killing about a million animals an hour in the United States to satisfy our hunger for meat, but also the devastation that that is causing to our own physical health. I have the privilege of being married to Dennis and seeing the energy that he had, just to be able to constantly be on the go and just push for the good things that we care about, but really seeing that it truly is the food that is energizing that

and providing that very raw opportunity to get out there. I don't think it would really be possible on any other dietary approach.

So being inspired personally but also I understand the facts behind this, and having worked for the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine in Washington, D.C., which, may I say, is like being in heaven in Washington. There's like 70-odd people that work in the office, and it's a vegan office. It's really wonderful to be in that environment and to understand that all of these major diseases that our society is suffering from, looking from heart disease, high blood pressure, cholesterol, all the way through to Type II diabetes, most of which is preventable and reversible through plant-based diets. To be around physicians and researchers who are really looking into the true scientific nutritional value of a plant-based diet is also extremely empowering, and I've really enjoyed taking that message to Capitol Hill and helping to educate members of Congress that there is another way that we can go. We really look at reforming the health system. We can really help populations. We can reduce the cost of health care as well as reduce all of the environmental devastation that comes from such a broken food system.

DR. TUTTLE: Wow. Exactly, I can imagine being at PCRM. Last year on Veganpalooza we were able to interview Dr. Neal Barnard, the founder of PCRM, and he's such a light, really I think, not only of compassion for animals but of sanity in what is in many ways, I think you would probably agree, a relatively insane medical system that seems to profit pharmaceutical industries at the expense, really, of the health not only of human beings but of ecosystems and animals. Maybe both of you, I don't know if you can respond to this, but what kind of response have you gotten in your efforts to bring change on Capitol Hill to the food system? I think that would be very interesting to hear. I know it's probably kind of a dismal subject, perhaps.

DENNIS: Actually, it's interesting, and every person who's listening has their own experience about when they became vegan and how it affected others, sometimes in a humorous way. I remember when I first came to Congress in 1997, I was going to a reception for the Texas delegation, and it was a steer roast reception. I'm walking around this huge buffet, couldn't eat anything, and then I noticed a garnish of celery and carrots, and I started picking at that. One of my colleagues says, "Have some steak," and I said, "I don't eat meat. I'm a vegan." He looked at me with a squint, and he said, "What are you, one of them there Communists?" It was a joke, but the truth of the matter is when you're committed to another way of life, there are people who may not particularly understand.

And in Washington, not just as a Congressman but as a presidential candidate, when I went out on the road, inevitably this issue came up. "How are you going to protect farmers if you're a vegan? How can you make sure that people get their price for their product? You're going to subvert all of conventional American agriculture." These are questions people had because when you have someone who's a leader who takes a different position, takes a different stand with themselves, particularly in the area of diet, it challenges the sensibilities of a lot of people. But I've never done it in a way that suggests to people, "This is what you have to do," and I don't think there are any vegans out there who proselytize in that way. You simply live your life in a way that demonstrates compassion and the capacity for understanding how your choices affect the world and sharing that philosophy with others.

I just want to say one other thing here, and that is we all accept that we are what we eat. But we don't always think about the fact that if we are what we eat, then how we think is affected by what we eat. How we act is affected by what we eat. Those forces that flow through us have an impact on our diet. Our quality of spirit can be affected by that. So once you explore this extraordinary world of a vegan diet, you begin to understand the multidimensional effects that it has on your own life and on the life of the people and of the planet.

DR. TUTTLE: Right, sounds like what you're talking about is not only does physical health improve, which you found dramatically, but it sounds like what you're saying is not only your mind but your actual connection with the spiritual dimension of life begins to come alive again. I think we get re-sensitized to our deep feelings and to our purpose, don't we, in a sense. Did you find that?

ELIZABETH: As you discuss in your book, society has really rationalized destruction and pain in order to suggest that that is how we have to live in order to survive. But what organizations like PCRM under the leadership of Dr. Barnard and your work and the work of so many people within the community shows is that actually the healthier way to live is not to consume meat. So when you start to actually embrace that and try that and allow yourself to re-sensitize, when you do change your diet, then when you eat, you don't necessarily feel that you have to be suppressing all of those unconscious feelings of guilt where my survival is beholden to the death and suffering of something else. When you do that, then you can actually start to raise your consciousness and start looking at other different levels of connection that maybe you had cut yourself off from.

It's a very subconscious process, but you find that through food and through food consciousness, people really find different politics. They find different relationships with their community. They behave differently in society. So it's an extremely exciting place for advocates to actually work. Something that I love about really sharing and spreading the word to people who want to listen is that when we eat, we really are determining the direction of society. If we as advocates, as so many of us are in different areas where we're fighting for something or trying to push back against something and it's always such a struggle, when you're actually looking at what you as an individual eat and how you engage in your own life, you immediately are able to change circumstances and drive markets in different ways. It's very empowering area of advocacy.

DENNIS: And it's not an abstraction. It's quite concrete and physical when you start to change your relationship to the world based on changing your consumption patterns. And then the deeper question here, it's a deep philosophical question: what does it mean to be human? Are we really moving at the highest expression of what it means to be human, or have we the potential for quickening an evolutionary ascent that could take us to a place that we didn't even believe was possible? Where we're not ill, where we're essentially ageless, where the suffering that goes on in the world does not happen, where we don't think in terms of war? Where the fear that at some point on a vibrational level has to come from an animal, and that if somebody's consuming meat, you bring that into yourself, you bring the fear, you bring the agony that animal feels into yourself. There's no light there. There's only darkness. So I think that when we consider the multidimensional nature of human beings and emerge into a world of deeper potential, we then catalyze humanity, and each one of us does that.

DR. TUTTLE: Do you want to say more about that? It's very interesting, what you're saying. I feel you're just touching on something like where we can go to potentially, sounds like what you're talking about.

DENNIS: Absolutely. The idea that somehow the way the world is, with its suffering, with its fear, with its war – that that's the way it is, but that's not the way it has to be. There are certain assumptions about what it means to be human that we need to constantly challenge in terms of bursting all the dichotomies that exist around our lives. Diet is a very profound path towards that, whatever choices we make, but when we choose for a plant-based diet, just think about the light, the process of photosynthesis that fills up a plant with light. We consume, then, light-based matter. It changes our vibration. It changes the way we think. It helps us move into a world that has all the potential of a beam of light. Yet we sell ourselves short as human beings. We just think, "We're here on this dark, bleak plane, and we can't do anything about anything." Baloney. I see that just through a simple yet profound change of diet, in my own life,

how it has enabled me to have a desire to be of greater service, to be in the health condition where I can, and to share my own understanding as I've evolved as a human being.

DR. TUTTLE: Yes, that's very profound because animal agriculture requires slavery, requires workers to desensitize themselves and stab animals. It requires pain and suffering and terror and killing, and instead of bringing, like you say, literally the light, the sun, the wind, and the stars, and the moon, and the rhythms of the Earth all go to creating plants in celebration of life, really. A garden is such a beautiful place to be. No one wants to eat their lunch in a slaughterhouse. It's the worst place we can imagine being, where there's just terror and blood and so forth. Yet in a sense we're forced through that growing up as little kids, aren't we? So we go along with our habits. You've worked so hard, both of you really, to not only in changing your own lives but to bring this message to other people. I'd love to hear a little bit more from both of you. Do you think that we can bring this message not only through education but through public policy changes? Are public policy changes really an important part of this whole movement as well as what we're doing here, which is basically networking and educating at the grassroots level?

ELIZABETH: There's a multipronged approach to everything. We as active citizens have to engage with the political process. We do not have a democracy unless we do that. So yes, of course, there is absolutely a place for public policy. Members of Congress and agencies need to hear from people, need to hear if there's really good research out there, all the different experiences that people have, different ideas, as I said, to bring down the cost of health care and different things in a more compassionate way. Washington, D.C., does run on money, as people I'm sure have heard in so many different capacities, but if we can talk economics, and if we can translate our experiences into an economic paradigm and communicate them in that way, then we have open ears. It's something that is very exciting that I feel Dennis was on the forefront of pushing for so many different things for so many years. And now, particularly within the food movement, we've sort of reached a level of consciousness within the community at large that food issues, really, are coming to the top. And GMO is one, and looking at how do we eat and what do we eat are very big questions in Congress.

Some months ago, I read in a local newspaper, in a Capitol Hill newspaper, that six congressional staffers had got together. They were vegetarian and they had formed what they had loosely termed "The Veggie Caucus," and they were trying to get more vegetarian options to the cafeterias on Capitol Hill. I read this story, and I emailed all of them, and I said, "Okay. Let's have a meeting. Tell me what you need. Let's put on a great event, and let's see how many members we can really draw to your staff organization." So PCRMs was wonderful. They sponsored this event, and we had a vegan raw person from the restaurant called Elizabeth's Gone Raw in Washington, D.C., and we had Sticky Fingers, a wonderful bakery that's a vegan bakery in D.C. who provided the cakes, and we sent out the invites. In two hours, I had 150 RSVPs from people who wanted to learn about the vegan diet. They came, and we flew John Pierre in from California, who I understand is also part of this Veganpalooza, and he gave an amazing presentation. So from that, we have over 100 members of the Veggie Caucus on Capitol Hill, which is extraordinary. They're all congressional staffers either who are vegetarian or who are interested in it.

So today there's a level of consciousness that's evolving and developing, and it's really through personal relationships and through really caring for people that then individual experience can translate into policy. I think that what was so powerful for Dennis was that he himself personally experienced the value of a plant-based vegan diet, and experienced all of those things that were associated with it, and therefore had the confidence to move forward in the public policy arena and push for different legislative changes, or merely just talk to his colleagues about his own experiences, because that's what we need to do. The politics is, yes, a messy business, but really it's all about relationships and it's all about good

communication and wholesome communication. So the more we educate each other, and the more we strengthen each other, I think this engagement is really exciting.

DR. TUTTLE: That's so true. I remember, actually, when Madeleine and I had the opportunity to visit you a couple years ago in Washington, D.C., and at that point, Dennis, you were in Congress serving, and you had run for president twice, I think, and really had given such an enormous amount, from my point of view, of positive ideas, progressive ideas, pushing for getting out of the war in Iraq, closing Guantanamo, so many humanitarian things. I remember saying to you, "I guess in the United States, our democracy is still basically functioning because we actually do have someone in Congress who actually is working for the people rather than just for corporations and the military-industrial-meat-medical-pharmaceutical-media complex," as I call it. And now, in 2013, you are no longer in Congress, and I'm wondering, do you feel that we still do have a functioning democracy, actually? Is that a sign? What do you think? We live in critical times. I'd love to know what you're up to and what you think about everything.

DENNIS: Thank you, Will, and I appreciate your very kind comments, although I'm just one person who in Congress raised my voice to warn of the dangers of a war, of a national security state, of devoting a tremendous amount of our resources towards war. I'm concerned about America right now. I think that we've gone off the rails with fear, and a fear-based national security policy is one which has us sacrifice our constitutional rights to a national security state. A fear-based international relations approach is one that uses war as an instrument of policy, which sacrifices our relationship to the world. A greed-based agricultural policy is one that subsidizes agribusiness and factory farms and a system of cruelty that produces massive amounts of heart disease and diabetes and adverse medical consequences.

I am concerned about America, and I think we've gone in the wrong direction. Our policies, our politics have been celebrified. You've got to be a celebrity in order to be in public life, or we make politicians celebrities. Bad. We don't care anymore about what people think, as if that had no consequence. It's only important that they represent a certain image. That's baloney. We've sacrificed and traded the real thing for just images. So this image-based culture has trapped us into a belief that somehow if we just get a better image, things are going to get better. No, we have look for substantive change, and that change has to come from ourselves with the choices we make every day, diet's an important part, taking control of our own health, and realizing every moment when we're making decisions that in the aggregate can create conditions of health, stepping back and marveling at the fact that we were given a Garden of Eden. It doesn't have to be a place. It's a state of mind where we understand that we have the world is such a place of enormous potential and beauty, and we just shouldn't sacrifice it and throw away our birthright for a mess of potage.

DR. TUTTLE: Wow. Elizabeth? Have any thoughts? Thank you, Dennis.

ELIZABETH: It's hard to talk after him. We really need to engage, and I see and hear from so many people who just feel so disgruntled with the system that they decide to make themselves irrelevant by not engaging with it, and that is the exact opposite that we should be doing. We need to make our thinking and our type of politics relevant, and the way we do that is by engaging. It's wonderful to be independent and to be green and to be this and to be that and to label ourselves as "other than" and "special to" what's really going on, but whatever it is that we do, we need to make sure that we are vigilant for our democracy. If there's something that we see that we don't want to see, that we stand up, or if there's something that we see that we want to create and strengthen and expand, that we help that reality to develop. We can only do that through full engagement. One of the groups that I really love is run by a friend of mine called Kerri Kelly, Off the Mat and Into the World, which really reaches out to the yoga community. That community is one that obviously is on the mat and very much standing in their own

selves and really understanding their own consciousness, and what this organization does is help you to stand in the world.

What I do with my work at the Center for Food Safety, again, is to lead more people into the food movement and the power of the food movement. We've talked about veganism, we've talked about the power of plants and the beauty of plants and sunlight and all of these different dynamics that you will experience when you really focus on eating plants, but something that we're trying to work on so diligently at the Center for Food Safety is to ensure that those plants aren't corrupted in a way that's irreversible. So we have several systems of agriculture which are quite mainstream. Obviously, there's something that's been labeled conventional which actually is contaminated. So when you go to Whole Foods and you see conventional agriculture labels, what that means is that it's got any number of sprays on it, herbicides, pesticides, goodness knows what on your fresh produce. We've got organic, which is minimally contaminated, which is sort of as pure as we can get in our system now.

We have GMO, genetically modified, genetically engineered organisms. It's a very violent process. It takes place of actually invading a cell, overcoming all of the defenses of this cell, using very violent techniques, which I won't go into here, but it really is. It's consciousness, again; we split the atom with nuclear power, now we really are invading the cell in a very destructive way. So we in the movement, it's not only good enough to say that we're looking at really being vegan. It's looking at the level of engagement and how we spread the message compassionately, but also being aware of our own health, but actually very, very sadly, fruits and vegetables can also be quite destructive to our health when they're sprayed with so many chemicals. We need to make sure that we've now got proper FDA and USDA standards that companies are held accountable, that we really get to see what we're eating, and that we know if it's GMO, we know the different processes it's gone through. We look at one peach, one peach can have up to 36 different sprays on it. That's not something that you can just wash off in a couple seconds underneath your water faucet. So again, engagement, but also increasing and continual levels of vigilance and engagement with the system.

DR. TUTTLE: Thanks. So I definitely want to underline that for everyone, the importance of being aware of what you're eating when you eat whole foods, plant-based, vegetables, fruits, nuts, grains, seeds, and so forth. Genetic engineering really involves smashing into cells and destroying DNA and injecting things into DNA that would never, ever be there from completely other species, and then actually eating that stuff, feeding it to animals. We're feeding most of the genetically engineered grains and things we're creating, we're feeding to animals, like corn and soy and so forth, and then we're eating those. So as vegans, eating organic is really important. I think what you're saying too is supporting groups like the Center for Food Safety, who's working with the government to make sure that at least we're protected, right? Isn't that the idea, to protect us, to have regulation from the government?

ELIZABETH: It absolutely is the idea. The Center for Food Safety has pretty much been responsible for seven GMO crops not being deregulated, so we're a legal authority in Washington and really do those legal battles. But also we work on animal factory issues. We work on pollinator protection, so because of a class of pesticides called neonicotinoids that people may be aware of – in Europe they've just had a moratorium on them for two years, they can't use them as of the end of this year for two years – because of the colony collapse, all our bees are dying. One-third of the food that we eat generally comes about because there's a pollinator that has pollinated a plant. So we need to make sure that bees and butterflies are able to exist. At the moment, we've got a system of agriculture that uses wide-scale toxic chemicals to either increase yields or to reduce pests. Whatever it is, it's toxifying our environment, and there are other methods that are organic that can produce equal, if not better, yields and reduce pests and control weeds. So we need to be looking in the other direction because in a thousand years' time, are we really going to be continuing, and can we even conceive of continuing, the dumping of millions of tons of

toxic chemicals on our fields every single year in order to sustain a population? Our waterways, our groundwater, our environment is becoming so toxic just because of our system of agriculture. So there are areas that I now work on, and we try to focus in on to help building that conversation.

DR. TUTTLE: Yeah, traveling around the country, I'm sure you saw this, Dennis, Madeleine and I lived in an RV, actually, for 17 years, traveling. We see mainly these gigantic monocrop fields of genetically engineered corn and soybeans that are not being used to feed humans but to feed animals, and then people eat the flesh and secretions of those animals and really concentrate all those toxins in our bodies. They all end up going into the water and affecting, like you say, the insects, the butterflies, the bees, birds and fish, and then into the oceans. We have this whole web of violence towards the environment, towards the selves in our own bodies, and we wonder why people have a hard time thinking clearly about the issues that we're having. I think that's an underlying people, is people eating so much meat and dairy, how do they have enough clarity to actually make policies that are healthy? Do you ever think about that?

DENNIS: Absolutely. I think about it in terms of my responsibility for being able to be aware of what's going on and to make the best decisions. You have to have clarity, and if you're bogged down in your thinking by your diet, which after all, you're talking about the chemicals that make up your brain. If your thinking's bogged down, the world that you imagine that's out there is going to be distorted. I think that's so much of what happens, is people are working from distorted perceptions of the world, and those distortions come inevitably from what we take in from outside and put inside of ourselves. Whether it's drugs or alcohol or a diet that is not healthy, loaded with chemicals or sugars or whatever, we have the ability to affect our internal thought processes by what we consume.

So we're headed towards a future, in this generation, we are working on redefining, what does it mean to be human? What does it mean to be healthy? What does love mean? Each generation goes through redefinition of the basic terms of existence, and our efforts to redefine in this time and place are weighing heavily towards a negative definition. We're moving towards a post-human future with technology intervening and, in its effort to try to improve our nature, it actually degrades nature, and in doing so, we are creating a society which is disconnected from the natural world. Thomas Berry, the great philosopher, said that the great work of our lives should be reconciliation with the natural world. We are so drifting away from that opportunity for reconciliation and so close to detaching ourselves from a slower, gentler, more compassionate way of life, which is something that really should be a birthright of every human being.

DR. TUTTLE: Just from the point of view of sustainability, just actually living on this planet with some modicum of wisdom and awareness, it seems that moving toward a plant-based diet is really the baseline of that because otherwise, we're just feeding huge amounts of resources to animals. It's just unbelievably inefficient. And one wonders how we can continue to do this when we're supposedly an intelligent species, how we can be so wasteful and destructive to rainforests, to oceans, to entire ecosystems, to be cutting down everything and destroying it in that way, just for our food. I guess what you've both seen, probably, is that we have public policies in place that actually give subsidies to these industries that do this and actually encourage that behavior. So that's I guess what we have to work on. I'm so grateful for you being here. I'm a little concerned because it's getting close to the end of our time, and I'd love to hear if you could just talk a little bit more.

DENNIS: Let me thank you for your dedication, and everyone who's participating in this. We're very grateful for you. I've got to run right now, but I want to thank you, and much love to you and to Madeleine.

DR. TUTTLE: Thank you so much, Congressman Dennis Kucinich, for joining us here on Veganpalooza. I really appreciate your being with us and sharing your wisdom with us. Elizabeth, are there any final things you want to say about the work you're doing, what Dennis is doing, what you see for the future for us as a movement, and to wrap up?

ELIZABETH: I'd like to invite people to follow us on Twitter, we're quite easy to find, and I also blog on Food Issues on Huffington Post, so you can find me on there. I'd like to hear from people, really, because I want to write about things that people are interested in. The Center for Food Safety, I'm just starting now with a video project where I'm going to be putting out short videos on different topics, and I'd love to hear from people as to what they would like, issues they would like addressed, or questions that they have, anything to do with different aspects of food, particularly food safety and maybe food and government. You mentioned the subsidy system, that absolutely subsidies are weighted towards those most destructive agricultural policies and industries, which is such a shame, but the more of us that get in the game, the more of us that really make a fuss about these issues in a constructive way, we can help to drive the change. We really are. When you look at the foods that are available in the supermarkets now, there are so many more vegan products, there are so many more products that are voluntarily labeled in that way. It really shows that there's a level of consciousness that's rising, and there's a level of mainstreaming that's happening. Again, when you look at organics, when you look at the products that are organic that are now available, and how much of a supermarket is taken up with them, that section is growing. So we as activists, as advocates, as people who are politically engaged, people who are sadly but really part of an economic system and engage in market forces, we can start to play the same game as we've seen others, and we can really move things, and we are moving things.

So as bad as things may seem, and as weighty and heavy and dark as some of these areas really are to look into and dive into, there is some real light there, and I really want to help people to move into that and to feel strengthened and supported and anything that I can do, and the same with Dennis, to really help the movement and help individuals within that to grow and explore these different areas. We're here. We really are. I tweet prolifically, I answer as many tweets as I can, so that's an easy way for people to reach out.

DR. TUTTLE: Thank you so much, Elizabeth Kucinich. Dennis and Elizabeth are available, as she said, primarily through the Huffington Post articles that she's writing and through Twitter. I want to wrap up our time together here on Veganpalooza and thank you both from my heart for the work you've been doing, and thank everyone who's been joining us here on Veganpalooza 2013. This is Dr. Will Tuttle. This has been a wonderful glimpse into not only what Veganpalooza is all about, but what the whole vegan movement is all about on every level: on the health level, the environmental level, the spiritual level, the governmental and public policy level, the level of social transformation, and really as Dennis said, I think, the idea that we do live in an Eden. It's an abundant, beautiful planet, and our own wisdom and compassion, as they get brighter, will help us to live in this way. Thank you, Elizabeth and Dennis, for being such warriors of spirit to help remind us of these things.

ELIZABETH: Thank you, Will. We love you. You're just tremendous. I take your book everywhere.

DR. TUTTLE: Thank you. Thanks so much for joining us.