

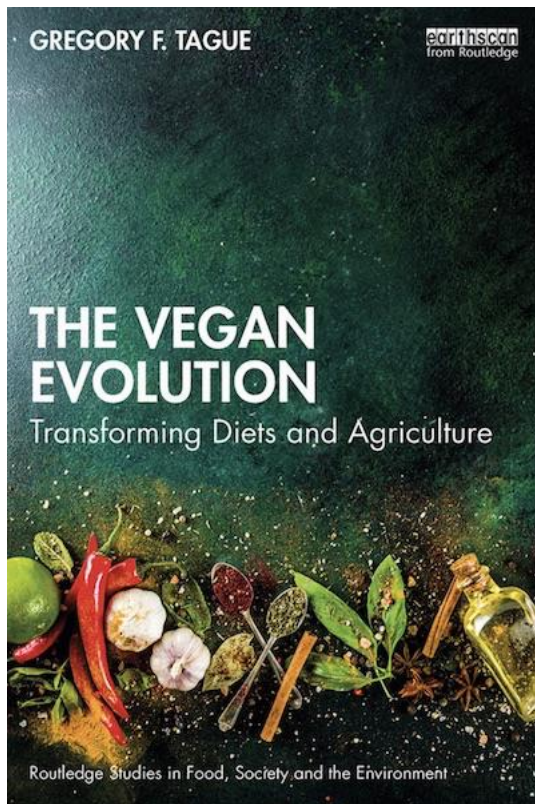
The Vegan Evolution: Transforming Diets and Agriculture

(Routledge Studies in Food, Society and the Environment)

[Author Gregory Tague Interviewed by Marc Bekoff, Psychology Today / Animal Emotions](#)

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Gregory Tague shows that a vegan ethic isn't only about food and animal welfare. Arguing for a vegan economy, this book explains how we can and should alter our eating habits away from meat and dairy through sociocultural evolution.



As I read Dr. Gregory Tague's forceful, comprehensive, reasonably argued, and futuristic new book [The Vegan Evolution: Transforming Diets and Agriculture](#), I came to realize, once again, that a "vegan ethic" isn't a radical idea that is only about our meal plans. It also underlies a way of living that touches numerous other areas, including cultural and biological evolution, food ecology, [food justice](#), and economics.

Note that the title for Gregory's book reads "evolution" rather than "revolution." He writes, "This book is about the human [diet](#), what it was, how it changed, and its power to transform health, norms, and [the environment](#) for years to come." These transformations are much-needed cultural adaptations to a rapidly changing world that occur [much more rapidly](#) than biological adaptations.

Just today, as I was completing this piece, Hal Herzog reported in his *Psychology Today* [essay](#) that "the percentage of Americans who are vegetarian or vegan jumped six-fold between 1994 and 2022—from 1 percent to 6 percent. This impressive change in patterns of meat-eating was due to shifts in cultural attitudes, not changes in our [DNA](#)."

Many people with widely varying interests—academics and non-academics alike—are thinking about the scope of what veganism incorporates, and Gregory's book reminded me of an [interview](#) I did with Emilia Leese and Eva Charalambides about their outstanding book *Think Like a Vegan: What Everyone Can Learn From Vegan Ethics*, which also clearly shows that veganism is not a "radical" view, but rather informs the choices we make in numerous situations including [politics](#), law, meal plans, friendships, and love in which fairness and nonhuman animals (animals) are involved. It also made me think about the important discussions I had with futures-anthropologist Roanne van Voorst about her challenging [book](#) *Once Upon a Time We Ate Animals: The Future of Food* and the [wide-ranging effects](#) of food on ecosystems and biodiversity.

I'm pleased Gregory could answer a few questions about his thought-provoking landmark book.

Marc Bekoff: Why did you write *The Vegan Evolution*?

Gregory Tague: *The Vegan Evolution* sprang from my interests in evolutionary and animal studies. In 2020 I published a book called *An Ape Ethic* (for which you interviewed me). While most people focus on the similarities between humans and great apes, I was fascinated by the differences. For example, apes and many other "animals," from worms to beavers, act as ecosystem engineers to ably sustain green habitats.

In our human australopith ancestry, we, too, were mostly herbivores. I read about the diets of australopiths and the dentition of ancient human species to confirm that we are not born meat eaters. The book has a chapter on ape diets, ancient and early human diets, and much on dentition to support this claim.

MB: How does your book relate to your background and general areas of interest?

GT: My Ph.D. is in literary studies, which enables me to read anything analytically. I'm not a field researcher or lab scientist, but I can absorb massive quantities of words and fashion them into a narrative argument. As one whose work is interdisciplinary, I find it easy to read across many fields, from ethics to environmental science, and find intersecting subjects and themes.

MB: Who is your intended audience?

GT: *The Vegan Evolution* will probably be read by vegans, but I wrote it for policymakers, educators, and politicians. While the book is not a blueprint, I spend time in different parts expressing ideas about green gardens, repurposing abandoned buildings or malls, using school cafeterias to help young people learn how to craft vegan food, etc. I look at two pieces of U.S. legislation, the Green New Deal and the Farm System Reform Act, to demonstrate how the intentions of lawmakers can be good yet misguided. They tend to focus on improving the economic conditions of humans with no consideration for animal rights. Mostly, though, I want to reach educators of young people—let our youth learn about their food production so they can decide what to eat.

MB: What are some of the topics you weave into your book, and what are some of your major messages?

GT: The book covers much ground, from [philosophy](#) and science to the diets of ancient humans, apes, and Neanderthals. I tackle the so-called man the hunter theory. The main message of the book is that, unlike lions and tigers in the wild, human omnivores can make a choice about what to eat.

Establishing a vegan economy through [social learning](#) via [education](#) and small groups will mean we'd have healthier children, hence strong adults, all of which will positively impact the economy; we'd also reduce large-scale factory farming with benefits in fighting climate change, and we'd spare the lives of animals who endure unnecessary pain and suffering.

MB: How does your book differ from others that are concerned with some of the same general topics?

GT: What makes *The Vegan Evolution* different is its scope. I cover human prehistory, our ape cousins, and show how cultural evolution, whether molecular or social learning, can help us solve health and climate problems while sparing animals.

MB: Are you hopeful that as people learn more about veganism, there will be a shift in their meal plans?

GT: The emphasis should be on ethical veganism, not on celebrity or health fads. In-vitro lab meat might have a place in feeding obligate carnivores as [pets](#) or zoo animals but should be avoided by humans. Corporations are capitalizing on the vegan trend with an aim for profits. You don't need a big food chain company or restaurant to tell you what to eat when you can source healthy food without meat and dairy. At least the corporate [advertising](#) of vegan foods can have cultural benefits.