

## Six Universal Reasons for Living Vegan

From [Nancy Poznak, MS, CHES, MainStreetVegan.net](http://MainStreetVegan.net)

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*Image by Cindy Thompson*

Living vegan seems daunting until we learn about the many positive impacts our food choices have on the planet, our health, the animals, and on every individual's life. Prior to going vegan July 2014, I thought veganism was extreme, weird. I didn't know that the values I held dear were already in alignment with living vegan.

Like most people, I believed I needed to eat animals to be healthy.

Then reality struck hard. I saw undercover videos of animal agriculture and I was devastated. I immediately dove into researching everything I could find, from every reliable source. Within a week, I chose to never eat, use, or wear anything derived in whole or in part from sentient beings. I learned volumes of information that I condense here.

When researching the many areas impacted by agriculture, I found these six to be most profound: **health, environment, compassion, conservation of water** (and all natural resources), **wildlife conservation**, and **food security**. While this article focuses on the impacts of agriculture, all methods of commodifying animals contribute to the inequities inherent in animal, fowl, and fish agriculture.

## 1. Health



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A preponderance of health and nutrition organizations support the superior health benefits of an entirely plant-sourced diet. All nutrition starts from plants. Farmed animals are plant eaters; they get all their protein and other essential nutrients from plants and so can we. The few nutrients found in animal flesh get there the same way they get into our muscles—from ingested plants. From the [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#):

Appropriately planned vegetarian and vegan diets are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits for the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. These diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, older adulthood, and for athletes.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27886704>

## 2. Environment

Animal, fowl, and fish agriculture are collectively responsible for greater than 50% of all environmental destruction of land, air, and sea. Damian Carrington's article, [Avoiding Meat and Dairy is the 'Single Biggest Way' to Reduce Your Impact on Earth](#), explains that livestock occupies 83% of farmland.

### 3. Compassion



Photo credit: Getty Images from [Canva](#)

We all agree that animal cruelty is wrong. However, believing we need to eat animals leads to the perceived utility of using animals for our purposes. We compartmentalize our compassion and engage in behaviors that go against the values we hold dear. Melanie Joy, PhD ,states, “[Empathy is the seed from which compassion blooms. It is the antidote to all forms of violence and is central to wellbeing.](#)”

### 4. Water Conservation

According to [Livestock’s Long Shadow](#), a report by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, “The impacts of the livestock sector on water resources are often not well understood by decision-makers.” Animal products require enormous amounts of water to produce, exponentially more than plant foods. The [Water Footprint Network](#) notes, “The average water footprint per calorie for beef is 20 times larger than for cereals and starchy roots.”

### 5. Wildlife Conservation



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[Livestock's Long Shadow](#) describes how the production and maintenance of livestock is among the greatest threats to the environment. In its Executive Summary, the report states, “The livestock sector emerges as one of the top two or three most significant contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every level from local to global, and accounts for 70 percent of all agriculture land and 30 percent of all the land surface of the planet.”

The loss of land from animal farming has greatly contributed to the tragic loss of biodiversity which now threatens life on earth. [Alkemade et al. found](#) “Biodiversity in rangelands is decreasing due to intense utilization for livestock production and conversion of rangeland into cropland.”

## 6. Food Security

If the plant foods that are fed to animals were fed to people, we could immediately end world hunger. Farmed animal production uses exponentially more plant foods than what is yielded by what their bodies supply in terms of nutrients, energy, and quantity of food. Per [A Well-Fed World](#), “Animal-based food systems are a form of redistribution that exacerbates food scarcity, especially in low-income countries.” Plant-based foods alone won’t end world hunger, but the benefits of plant-based food systems are a vital, essential part to establishing systems that work for everyone.



*Photo credit: Nancy Poznak*

**Nancy Poznak, MS, CHES, VLCE**, has a background in graphic design and health education, with a Masters of Science in Health Science. Her education also includes certification as Vegan Lifestyle Coach and Educator from the [Main Street Vegan Academy](#) and certificates in *Plant-Based Nutrition* and *Food and Sustainability* from eCornell. She also works as a certified personal trainer and group fitness instructor and certified Health Coach.

Nancy started [BotaniCuisine: Plant-Sourced Dining Outreach](#) in 2017 as a way to help increase vegan food in restaurants, then focused more on reaching consumers by hosting events and booths at farmers markets. She also prepares and sells specialty vegan food, hosts a monthly virtual meetup series, [Plant-Powered: An Extraordinary Life](#), and the Plant-Powered Meat Month promotion. Nancy hopes to again host the *Vegan Burger Smackdown*, a public event featuring slider-sized burgers from restaurants and professional chefs.