

The power of advocacy

From [Reality Checks With Staci-Lee Sherwood](#)

October 2022

The world has many problems. There isn't any group of people that isn't negatively impacted by at least some of them. Think about what worries you, think how you might want to help, find a group fighting to change things. Let the power of advocacy work its magic.



The world today is a mess, perhaps this is the one universal sentiment we can all agree on. Many people want to change what they see as inhumane, misguided or wasteful policies. Those are advocates looking to change the world. It's a daunting task to attempt to shift public opinion, especially long held beliefs. Amidst the daily borage of sad, disgusting and dangerous news there are a few bright spots that give hope. Perhaps humanity is not entirely lost as long as some good things move us as a species toward a more enlightened and compassionate way of thinking and acting.

Here are a few examples of how advocacy did manage to shift public opinion and action. While they may seem small they all took decades to achieve with relentless persistence by people who refused to throw in the towel. All these shining examples are wins, but still show how much more we need to do.

Saks 5th Avenue going fur free

For many women wearing fur, especially a fur coat, is a sign of having made it and joining the ranks of glamorous women. Fur has long been a symbol of wealth and luxury being held up as something to strive for. For many men buying a fur for a woman has a different meaning. For some men it's a way to make up for a year's worth of missed presents with one big ticket item, while other men often see giving fur as a way to gain a woman's affection. Scratch under the façade of glamour and beauty and the ugliness of the fur industry shows itself.

While the appeal of fur may seem like something pretty, the wearer is really just adorning themselves with the body parts of an animal tortured and killed for this privilege. There is nothing glamorous about torture regardless of species. For decades there were rumors of heinous abuse and pain inflicted on the millions of animals trapped and bred to feed the never ending demand for their fur. Before the internet

seeing the truth was almost impossible and made it easy for industry to hide their horrors. The internet made sharing documentation easy and the modern movement against fur was born.

In 1981 the first of many undercover videos showing the horror on fur farms was produced. Thanks to **PETA** they showed the world the truth and public opinion started to change. The horrors of fur still go on today, it's a massive global problem driven by consumers. We have a long way to go but having a giant retailer like **Saks Fifth Avenue** decide to go fur free is an amazing feat to have accomplished. They still have a ways to go before giving up all animal products but let's applaud this monumental moment. Let's hope more big retailers follow their lead. **Macy's, Bloomingdale's** and **Nordstrom** have all gone fur free as well. <https://www.npr.org/2021/04/07/985042627/saks-says-no-to-fur-the-latest-fashion-seller-to-go-fur-free>

Saks Fifth Avenue Statement on Fur

Saks Fifth Avenue has made the decision to stop selling animal fur products by the end of fiscal 2022*. With this commitment, we will no longer offer products from animals raised for the use of their fur, including but not limited to mink, fox, chinchilla and sable, as well as fur products derived from wild animals, such as coyote and beaver. We will take a phased approach, starting with closing fur salons by the end of fiscal 2021** and eliminating products sold by brand partners by the end of fiscal 2022. We will continue the sale of faux fur products, as well as those products that include:

- Sheepskin/lambskin (e.g., shearling), goatskin, or cattle hide (e.g., “pony” and “calf hair”) • Down/feathers • Leather

This change will apply to all merchandise sold on saks.com and at Saks Fifth Avenue stores, including brand partner and private label products.

**The end of fiscal 2022 is defined as the period ending January 28, 2023.*



To learn more about fur farms and the fur industry here are several links

<https://respectforanimals.org/horrific-fur-farm-footage-from-france-reveals-the-truth-about-fur/>

<https://www.furfreealliance.com/environment-and-health/>

<https://www.peta.org/videos/a-shocking-look-inside-chinese-fur-farms/>

Leaping Bunny logo

The image of a leaping bunny on a product shows the buyer that this product was *not* tested on animals nor does it contain animal by-products. For a growing number of consumers buying a product not made from cruelty is an important part of their decision process. Animal exploitation has unfortunately been part of our species history forever. This does not mean it has to continue. Safer and more effective ways of testing new products that do not involve animals exist and are in use.

Loss of habitat, mass extinctions, cruelty and environmental degradation are all part of the problems that come from vivisection (testing on animals in labs). In 1996 the **Coalition for Consumer Information on Cosmetics in the US and Canada** created the **Leaping Bunny Program** with a list of companies that did & did not test their products on animals. The list of companies that no longer conduct these tests grows every year but it's a long process to change old ways.

There is no legal requirement in the US for cosmetics to be tested on animals. These tests do not lead to a ban on toxic or dangerous chemicals or products being banned. Contrary to popular belief the results of these tests go into a file where it remains hidden from the public, and that's where it ends. Bans on chemicals usually happen after approval was granted and after people got sick. In January 2023 California will become the first state to ban testing chemicals on dogs and cats for consumer products, other species like mice and rats will have to wait.

Just in the U.S. more than 50 million dogs, cats, monkeys, rabbits, rats and mice are tortured in labs. Even owls can't escape the industry, John Hopkins tests on Barn Owls. Most of these experiments are repeats of tests done years ago, others are too insane to understand how they got approved. Consider the validity of tests and honesty of companies doing the tests before purchasing any products. Animal research is a multi-billion dollar global industry that will not go away quietly.


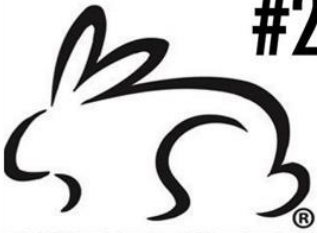

Since the Leaping Bunny list came out nearly 30 years ago, other groups have come up with their own list. Some cover the globe while others are more local. Some lists only cover animal testing while others include using animal parts and animal by-products. Most lists focus on cosmetics but some include medicine and other consumer products. It pays to google several groups to get a fuller picture.

Click here to learn about Leaping Bunny program

<https://www.leapingbunny.org/leaping-bunny-logo>

Here is their extensive list of cruelty free products <https://www.leapingbunny.org/shopping-guide>

Here are a few cruelty free symbols you might see on packages:

 <p>#1</p>	 <p>#2</p> <p>NOT TESTED ON ANIMALS</p>	 <p>#3</p> <p>cruelty free</p>
<p>LEAPING BUNNY</p> <p>REGION: International</p> <p>PROOF OF CRUELTY-FREE STATUS: Random supply chain audits</p>	<p>CHOOSE CRUELTY-FREE</p> <p>REGION: Australia-based</p> <p>PROOF OF CRUELTY-FREE STATUS: Legally-binding contract</p>	<p>PETA BEAUTY WITHOUT BUNNIES</p> <p>REGION: USA-based</p> <p>PROOF OF CRUELTY-FREE STATUS: Cruelty-free pledge</p>
<p>LEARN MORE AT VEGANRABBIT.COM</p>		



No kill animal shelters

During the 1980s ‘no-kill’ animal shelters was the beginning of a growing movement in humane treatment for companion animals. The **Elmsford Animal Shelter** in Westchester County, NY, which was taken over by **Pets Alive** in 2010 to avoid closure, was a first of its kind. Back then I volunteered there and it was refreshing to know the animals dropped there would not be killed simply because their owners abandoned them. The upside of no-kill is the guarantee of life no matter what. The downside is once the shelters are full that means no more animals can be taken in. It’s not a perfect system but combined with public education and a robust spay/neuter program in the long run it will have great benefit.

In 1994 San Francisco became the first no-kill *city* when the **San Francisco SPCA**, established an adoption pact with the Department of Animal Care and Control. In 2019 Delaware becomes first no-kill animal shelter *state*. It has been a long time in the making and much more is needed. Looking back before the movement the number of dogs and cats killed every year in shelters numbered several million, even more animals killed by their owners, hit by cars or by other means that went unreported. The no-kill

movement has cut that number by educating owners to fix their pets to help curb unwanted breeding. If you would like to help make more shelters no-kill and spread the message of humane treatment check out Maddie's Fund here <https://www.maddiesfund.org/the-history-of-the-no-kill-movement.htm>

A misconception used by breeders is that spay/neuter programs, especially local laws requiring that of pet owners, will lead to fewer dogs being available for sale which is not true. The spay/neuter program has nothing to do with professional reputable breeders but that doesn't stop them from spreading fear and false claims. In 2008, I spoke at a Palm Beach County, FL hearing about the county implementing a *voluntary* spay/neuter program. The breeders, most of whom were not local, muddled the issue and killed the program. It's clear we still have a long way to go but it's hopeful this movement still has momentum after 40 years. A deep appreciation goes out to those who had the courage and compassion to initiate the movement and to those who keep it alive on a daily basis.



The Veggie Burger

Consuming products made only of plants is not a new idea. Veggie burgers have been around since the 1980s. Admittedly, the first generation of veggie burgers were pretty tasteless and fell apart when cooked, not much of a selling point. Over the years they have morphed into a variety of flavors from spicy to Asian influenced and are much easier to eat on a bun or cook on a grill. For years veggie burgers were a fan favorite among the vegetarian and vegan crowd but outside of that small group not many meat eaters were convinced it was tasty or even food.

In Florida a well known steak house, **Houston's** in Boca Raton and Ft Lauderdale, is famous for their delicious veggie burgers made with beets. Plant based food is no longer a specialty item found only in health food stores, they can now be found in almost any grocery store. Not to miss the trend even fast food chain **McDonald's** created The McVeggie which was introduced in 2012 in India when McDonald's opened their first vegetarian-only restaurant in the country.

Vegetarians/vegans make up about 5% of the US population but interest in plant based food is growing. Many meat eaters have to cut back for health reasons, others want food more sustainable. As Kelly Swette, CEO of Sweet Earth, puts it "**The interest in more sustainable plant-based foods has gone**

beyond young people, gone beyond those who are concerned with animal rights or ecology,” says Swette. “It’s now about your personal health.”

In 2011 there was big news in the food industry. Rumbblings about a new wave of veggie burgers that would enter mainstream restaurants and hopefully be embraced by all types of eaters. **Impossible Foods Inc.**, founded in 2011, is a company that develops plant-based substitutes for meat products. They launched their signature product, the ‘Impossible Burger’ in July 2016. They partnered with **Burger King** creating the ‘Impossible Whoppers’ which have been sold nationwide since 2019. **Grubhub** just revealed that the ‘**Impossible** Cheeseburger’ ranked as the most-ordered food item for 2021. These aren’t the veggie burgers of yesterday.

What makes the ‘Impossible Burger’ different is its rock star status. With all that attention comes a shift in the way the main stream consumer thinks about food and protein sources and in particular veggie burgers. **“We really changed our minds,”** said Jack Bishop, chief creative officer at [America's Test Kitchen](#). **“The Impossible and Beyond Burgers are head and shoulders above earlier generations.”** Better tasting + healthier option = mainstream acceptance.



Joe Lingeman

Many studies have been done showing the benefits of plant based diets. They’re easier to do than most people think. **“Research shows that plant-based diets are cost-effective, low-risk interventions that may lower body mass index, blood pressure, HbA1C, and cholesterol levels. They may also reduce the number of medications needed to treat chronic diseases and lower ischemic heart disease mortality rates. Physicians should consider recommending a plant-based diet to all their patients, especially those with high blood pressure, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, or obesity.”** Here is the study:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3662288/>

If you would like to give it a try here are some terrific easy ideas:

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-a-plant-based-diet-and-why-should-you-try-it-2018092614760>

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Only YOU can make the world a better place.

Good advocates learn how to speak well and get their points across. Here are some tips: [How to make your voice count and have impact.](#)