



Belying Up to Environmentalism

James E. McWilliams

I gave a talk in south Texas recently on the environmental virtues of a vegetarian diet. As you might imagine, the reception was chilly. In fact, the only applause came during the Q&A period when a member of the audience said that my lecture made him want to go out and eat even more meat. "Plus," he added, "what I eat is my business - it's personal."

I've been writing about food and agriculture for more than a decade. Until that evening, however, I'd never actively thought about this most basic culinary question: Is eating personal?

We know more than we've ever known about the innards of the global food system. We understand that food can both nourish and kill. We know that its production can both destroy and enhance our environment. We know that farming touches every aspect of our lives - the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the soil we need.

So it's hard to avoid concluding that eating cannot be personal.

What I eat influences you. What you eat influences me. Our diets are deeply, intimately and necessarily political.

This realization changes everything for those who avoid meat. As a vegetarian I've always felt the perverse need to apologize for my dietary choice. It inconveniences people. It smacks of self-righteousness. It makes us pariahs at dinner parties. But the more I learn about the negative impact of meat production, the more I feel that it's the consumers of meat who should be making apologies.

Here's why: The livestock industry as a result of its reliance on corn and soy-based feed accounts for over half the synthetic fertilizer used in the United States, contributing more than any other sector to marine dead zones. It consumes 70 percent of the water in the American West -

water so heavily subsidized that if irrigation supports were removed, ground beef would cost \$35 a pound. Livestock accounts for at least 21 percent of greenhouse-gas emissions globally -- more than all forms of transportation combined. Domestic animals - most of them healthy - consume about 70 percent of all the antibiotics produced. Undigested antibiotics leach from manure into freshwater systems and impair the sex organs of fish.

It takes a gallon of gasoline to produce a pound of conventional beef. If all the grain fed to animals went to people, you could feed China and India. That's just a start.

Meat that's raised according to "alternative" standards (about 1 percent of meat in the United States) might be a better choice but not nearly as much so as its privileged consumers would have us believe. "Free-range chickens" theoretically have access to the outdoors. But many "free-range" chickens never see

the light of day because they cannot make it through the crowded shed to the aperture leading to a patch of cement.

"Grass-fed" beef produces four times the methane - a greenhouse gas 21 times as powerful as carbon dioxide - of grain-fed cows, and many grass-fed cows are raised on heavily fertilized and irrigated grass. Pastured pigs are still typically mutilated, fed commercial feed and prevented from rooting - their most basic instinct besides sex.

Issues of animal welfare are equally implicated in all forms of meat production. Domestic animals suffer immensely, feel pain and may even be cognizant of the fate that awaits them. In an egg factory, male chicks (economically worthless) are summarily run through a grinder.



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AnimalNews

A newsletter from
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Environmentalism *(Continued from page 1)*

Pigs are castrated without anesthesia, crated, tail-docked and nose-ringed. Milk cows are repeatedly impregnated through artificial insemination, confined to milking stalls and milked to yield 15 times the amount of milk they would produce under normal conditions. When calves are removed from their mothers at birth, the mothers mourn their loss with heart-rending moans.

Then comes the slaughterhouse, an operation that's left with millions of pounds of carcasses - deadstock - that are incinerated or dumped in landfills. (Rendering plants have taken a nose dive since mad cow disease.)

Now, if someone told you that a particular corporation was trashing the air, water and soil; causing more global warming than the transportation industry; consuming massive amounts of fossil fuel; unleashing the cruelest sort of suffering on innocent and sentient beings; failing to recycle its waste; and clogging our arteries in the process, how would you react? Would you say, "Hey, that's personal?" Probably not. It's more likely that you'd frame the matter as a dire political issue in need of a dire political response.

Vegetarianism is not only the most powerful political response we can make to industrialized food. It's a necessary prerequisite to reforming it. To quit eating meat is to dismantle the global food apparatus at its foundation.

Agribusiness has been vilified of late by muckraking journalists, activist filmmakers and sustainable-food advocates. We know that something has to be done to save our food from corporate interests. But I wonder - are we ready to do what must be done? Sure, we've been inundated with ideas: eat local, vote with your fork, buy organic, support fair trade, etc. But these proposals all lack something that every successful environmental movement has always placed at its core: genuine sacrifice.



Until we make that leap, until we create a culinary culture in which the meat-eaters must do the apologizing, the current proposals will be nothing more than gestures that turn the fork into an empty symbol rather than a real tool for environmental change.

James E. McWilliams, an associate professor of history at Texas State University at San Marcos and a recent fellow in the agrarian studies program at Yale University, is most recently the author of "Just Food." We were honored to have James as one of our speakers at last year's Mad City Vegan Fest.

SAVE THE DATE

Third Annual Mad City Vegan Fest!

Saturday, June 8, 2013, 10 - 5

Goodman Community Center

www.veganfest.org

**Free admission, distinguished
speakers, food samples, and demos!**



Your Alliance for Animals

Elephants and the Circus

The clock's ticking. Before we know it -- thanks to last year's amazingly progressive decision to ban elephant acts in Dane County by the County Board of Supervisors -- elephants won't be beaten and coerced into performing silly and sometimes painful acts in Dane County any longer.

Hastening that day, our awesome volunteers and observers from the Dane County Board of Supervisors attended every performance of this year's Zor Shine Circus. As a result, yet another extensive complaint was filed with the USDA supported by photos and video of the many problems our observers recorded.

Thank you to our volunteers for all of their help: Joyce Aasen, Ben Collins, David Diehl, Ann Emerson, Lee Falligant, Debbie Fields, Julie Grosso, Leslie Hamilton, Maddie Keldahl, Megan Ryan, Gina Stuessy, Charlie Talbert, Jamie Bradley, Elizabeth Ward, Stephanie Weis, and Ben West.

Trapping in County Parks

No matter which way one turns, it's hard to miss the news about increased hunting and trapping in our state parks, the state-wide war on wolves, and at the local level, the ever increasing opportunities for people to hunt and trap wild animals.

AFA's efforts were rewarded by Dane County District 36 Supervisor Cynda Solberg's introduction of a ordinance amendment to limit trapping to only county-owned lands that are required to be open to trapping by state mandate. If passed, the current number of acres open to trapping

will be greatly reduced. The county will probably have voted just prior to this newsletter reaching you. Check allanimal.org for the update.

UW Continues to Mislead Public

"It's important to know what the cost is to the animal. It's important to know what the potential benefit is . . . And then you . . . decide for yourself whether or not [it is] something you think is ethical, and that's where people have a right to differ." UW-Madison spokesperson Eric Sandgren, February 15, 2013, in a statement to WMTV, NBC 15, on the occasion of James Cromwell's disruption of a meeting of the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents to protest their continued support for the highly invasive and painful brain and ear experiments using cats in Tom Yin's laboratory.

We agree with UW spokesperson Eric Sandgren. Everyone ought to have reasonable access to the details of how animals used in the university labs are treated, what the justifications are for hurting and killing them, and then decide for him or herself whether it is ethical.

But the university works very hard to keep the details of the costs to the animals a secret. In the case of Tom Yin's experiments on cats, the university fought in court for three years to keep the details hidden. It is entirely because of the diligent efforts of PETA and the legal challenge led by AFA's board member, attorney Leslie Hamilton, that anyone outside the university labs has any understanding of the costs to the cats.

By now you may have also learned that when UW spokesperson Eric Sandgren said that the USDA had

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AFA Volunteer Vicky Talbert

We are thankful for volunteer Vicky Talbert who has recently taken on some very important administrative duties such as processing donations, writing checks, and keeping close tabs on our database. If you've ever met Vicky you'll agree with us that she's a true asset to AFA.



"I am a grateful volunteer for the Alliance For Animals. Its brave voice, its compassion, its creative and talented staff and volunteers all renew my faith in humanity. AFA gives me a hands-on opportunity to make a difference for all beings. The more I learn about the impact of the global food system on our world, the more certain I am that the single most effective action I can take, as an individual, to reduce animal suffering, help feed the hungry in our world, and slow climate change and environmental degradation is to live vegan. AFA supports me and gives me many ways to support others in this justice work." - Vicky Talbert

Please consider volunteering for AFA. No matter what your skill, we could use your help! Visit our website and click on the "Get Involved" tab.



Alliance for Animals
 P.O. Box 1632
 Madison WI 53701
www.allanimals.org

Non-profit org.
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Tributes



In memory of Mr. Peabody, my beloved puppy mill dog. From Eilene Ribbens.

In memory of Tipper (bunny) from Linda Carlisle.

In honor of Gerald Flynn, Jr. from Shanna House-Flynn.

**Tributes of 20 words or less will be listed for a donation of \$25 or more. Pictures welcomed. Visit our Support page at www.allanimals.org or include your tribute in the enclosed envelope.*

Join Us!

Alliance for Animals Monthly Meeting

2nd Tuesday of each month, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.
 122 State Street, 4th floor Conference Room.

Our next meeting is April 9. We'll discuss animal issues in the news and plan and organize our campaigns.

Antivivisection Committee

1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month 6:00 - 8:00 pm
 122 State Street, 4th floor Conference Room

This is an active group, so be prepared to do some work!

UW Madison Continues to Mislead *(Continued from page 3)*

cleared them of any wrong doing in the cat experiments, that he was knowingly misleading the public.

"Exhaustive independent investigation by the USDA, which regulates the use of animals in research, concluded that PETA's allegations are baseless," asserted Eric Sandgren in UW-Madison's Feb. 7, 2013 official response to PeTA's disruption of the Board of Regents meeting.

But Eric Sandgren and the university knew when that statement was released that the USDA had indeed cited them for the poor care and treatment of the cats. The university had written a long and detailed appeal to the USDA and asked them to keep the citation a secret until their appeal was considered. And so it goes.