

## Why am I Vegan?



### COMING OUT DAILY



<sup>2</sup> Either when coming out to my family, sharing meals with colleagues, or meeting strangers inquiring about what I would eat and not eat, wear or not wear, consume or not consume, I always had to explain my reasons for being a Vegan.

Sometimes genuine concern, often rhetorical questions to prove me wrong, those daily examinations force me to explain over and over again why hurting animals for pleasure or tradition is unbearable to me.

However, as some people might actually want to understand the reasons behind that choice, I will explain once again.

<sup>1</sup> Author: Vegan Sidekick - <http://vegansidekick.com/>

<sup>2</sup> Author: Vegan Sidekick - <http://vegansidekick.com/>

## CHICKPEA WORSHIPPING



Being Vegan is refusing to use, consume or buy any product involving the exploitation of animals. Any animal, from whales having their fat put in lipsticks to bees producing honey for their new born, including cows unlikely to want to become steaks, milk vending machines, sofas or fancy shoes. It goes beyond food and impacts pretty much all aspects of everyday life, thus requiring some willpower to commit and to stay committed.



<sup>3</sup> Despite of what I often heard, Veganism is not a weird cult making its disciples worship chickpeas and avocado salads. People have very different reasons to join in this movement: minding their health, wanting to get fit, lowering their carbon footprint, save water, stop funding deforestation... However the most spread one - the one that people who stay vegan for more than a few months or years usually have in common - is acknowledging that sensitive beings

should not be exploited for pleasure or tradition, and act in accordance to this fact.

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<sup>3</sup> Scratching the back of a baby hedgehog so she would not retract herself in a bowl of spikes, in order to feed her a mix of milks adapted to her digestive system; when I was volunteering in a Wildlife Rescue Centre in the South of France (LPO Hérault).

## WHO CARES?



Everyone has their reasons and here is mine:



<sup>5</sup> "The idea that some lives matter less is the root of all that is wrong with the world" - Paul Farmer<sup>6</sup>.

I believe this sentence states a truth. We have been raised to believe that we - humans - are superior to any other species sharing Earth with us. It led us to massively destroy our environment, as well as many animal and human lives found guilty of standing in the way of our pleasure, of our power, of our profit. We put ourselves on top of hierarchies we create to justify bringing suffering upon the rest of the planet.

This state of mind leads us to kill innocent beings for the taste of their flesh, or because our ancestors did so. We are exceptionally bad at rethinking our traditions. I choose to be Vegan because I refuse to be part of this oppressive system. I just find it violent really, and obsolete.

"Who cares if you stop eating meat? The world will keep on turning", is a recurrent answer. And sure it will. But if an increasing amount of people keep on refusing to finance animal exploitation by consuming alternative products (or growing them themselves) – in a world where money is power – businesses will eventually have to rethink their ways to make profit.

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<sup>4</sup> Picture I took myself, of steers in Normandy (France)

<sup>5</sup> Author: Steve Cutts - <http://www.stevecutts.com/>

<sup>6</sup> Paul Edward Farmer (born October 26, 1959) is an American anthropologist and physician who is best known for his humanitarian work providing suitable health care to rural and under-resourced areas in developing countries.





So my reason for going Vegan is based on ethics. However, that choice has many other implications.

### NO NEED TO BLEED

Relying on animal products to survive and stay healthy in our modern society makes as much sense as letting a stranger bleed you in order to cure a cold. There are better ways now.

Fact is more and more people turn towards a plant-based diet for a short or long time period only to improve their health.



<sup>7</sup> I never cared much about my health. I could manage the frequent colds, the messed up stomach or my racing heart. I was rather indifferent to the health argument for going Vegan. But my health improved - almost against my will – as soon as I stopped ingesting animal products on a regular basis. I have not seen a doctor for a few years now and my heartbeat steadier than ever.

However, Vegan food is not healthy, nor unhealthy, by definition. Any type of food would need you to pay attention to what you eat, on the penalty of missing some nutrients in your everyday life. As we have been raised on a diet including animal products, it takes some research to learn how to manage the transition from old habits to a new plant-based beginning. However, it is rather easy to find proper information, as long as you are willing to make the effort.

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<sup>7</sup> Picture I took myself, homemade Vegan salad: fresh cucumber and avocado with roasted red pepper, onions and potato, oregano and olive oil - <https://www.instagram.com/ygridanyel/?hl=fr>

## PILLS

The only nutrient that will not be found in a Vegan diet is vitamin B12. “B12 is produced by bacteria found in soil as well as in the guts of animals and humans, but in order for the bacteria to make B12, the soil needs to contain the mineral cobalt. Due to declining soil quality from intensive over-farming, making the soil deficient in cobalt and bacteria, and because our vegetables are super-washed, we don't get enough B12 without supplementation and fortification” (Simple Happy Kitchen<sup>8</sup>). So, if you do not fancy getting your B12 from animals, you will have to go buy some pills at the Health Store...



<sup>9</sup> It is not natural to take pills, right? That is another argument I get a lot. How to get B12 in a real natural way then? Eating pieces of beef packed under plastic is not really natural either, as pushing a shopping trolley down the supermarket's aisle is not much of a hunt. Using a gun is really cheating as well... The only way to get B12 in a proper natural way would be to kill a wild boar or a deer with bare hands and eat their gut on the spot. Although our delicate

stomach might not rejoice in welcoming raw meat, we would find comfort in the fact that we are getting our vitamin in a “natural” way.

For now, cattle are taking pills because their owner cannot really afford for them to get sick. Farmers' living is exclusively based on animals producing meat, dairy or other products in the most efficient way possible. The expenses of their survival until slaughter need to be as cheap as possible in order to maximise profits. So food given to cattle is often low quality, therefore lacking nutrients. The lack of vitamins is worst in the huge numbers of cattle around the world not getting a chance to see actual daylight. It is worst again for animals who can never move <sup>10</sup>



<sup>8</sup> Simple Happy Kitchen is a children book about plant-based nutrition and its implications as well as a website dedicated to it: <https://www.simplehappykitchen.com/>

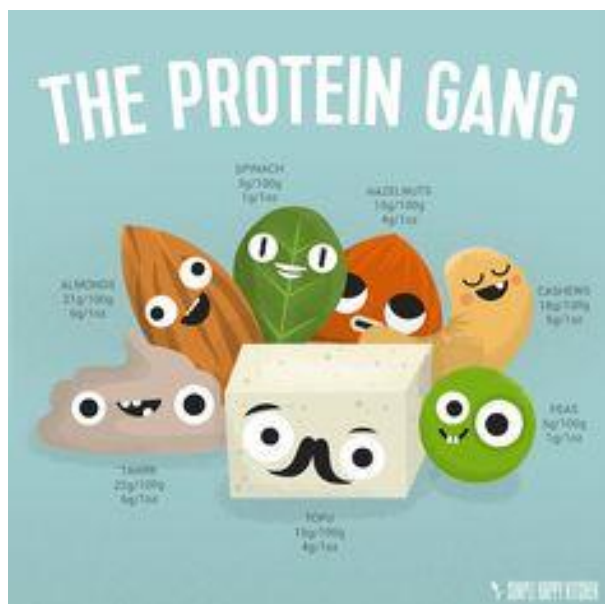
<sup>99</sup> “Simple Happy Kitchen”, children book project - <https://www.simplehappykitchen.com/>

<sup>10</sup> “My life is a cage”, videoclip – Song by “The Aim”, to see the rest of the team that worked on this project, please follow this link: <http://www.mylifesacage.com/lequipe/> - Link to the videoclip: <https://youtu.be/N21JTCKLj2o>

from their cage, to walk or to stand. They get weak and they get sick, they need to be overmedicated to live long enough to serve their purpose.

Do products coming from overmedicated weak beings have any chance to be good for the consumers' health? Meat-eaters are taking pills as well, they are just not the ones to swallow them first.

The World Health Organisation (WHO)<sup>11</sup> and the World Cancer Research Fund Expert Report<sup>12</sup> have



warned that “the high levels of consumption of livestock products in the industrialised world have been clearly linked to a number of health problems, particularly heart disease, stroke and certain cancers”<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, a lot of people are very concerned with not getting enough protein (especially in a Vegan diet) but “most people living in the industrialised world, particularly meat eaters, consume more than their daily protein requirement”<sup>14</sup>, while “eating more protein than the body needs has been linked to health problems, including an increased risk of kidney problems”<sup>15</sup>.

Such diseases call for more pills. In the end, taking my B12 pill in the morning does not sound so bad.

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## SOCIAL JUSTICE

“But don’t you think there are more important things happening in the world? How can you be so picky when so many people are starving on this planet?”

This is the whole “finish-your-plate-because-some-children-are-starving” argument, from people convinced that starving children’s top priority is to know whether I chose to eat broccoli or chicken wings. It makes it seem like not eating animal products is an insult to world’s hunger and global pauperization. How is it that caring for animals automatically makes one unable to care for humans? Aren’t we animals as well?



<sup>11</sup> “Q&A on the carcinogenicity of the consumption of red meat and processed meat”, World Health Organization (WHO), October 2015

<sup>12</sup> “Link between lifestyle & cancer risk”, “Red & processed meat”, World Cancer Research Fund website

<sup>13</sup> UK’s Friends of the Earth’s report: « What’s feeding our food », “Livestock and Health” p. 19

<sup>14</sup> UK’s Friends of the Earth’s report: « What’s feeding our food », “Livestock and Health” p. 19

<sup>15</sup> UK’s Friends of the Earth’s report: « What’s feeding our food », “Livestock and Health” p. 19

<sup>16</sup> “Simple Happy Kitchen”, children book project - <https://www.simplehappykitchen.com/>





<sup>17</sup> We are consumers maintaining “a system that is failing to feed some of the poorest people around the world”<sup>18</sup>. “As forests (...) are destroyed to make way for crops for animal feed and pasture for grazing, indigenous people also lose their territories. Rural communities are being forced off their land, and small scale farmers have nowhere to grow the food they need for their families”<sup>19</sup>.

Growing enough food for cattle is devastating as well, because of the pesticides needed for mass producing the amount of food necessary to feed so many beings; and because it “has reduced the number of small farms – traditionally the source of food for the local community, as well as changing farming patterns on larger farms”<sup>20</sup>. “The result has been an increase in food insecurity (...) Urban poverty and high unemployment have been exacerbated by the loss of rural employment”<sup>21</sup>. It goes as far as cases of slavery: “Soy producers in

Brazil have been found to use slave labour to clear forest land to make way for soy plantation”<sup>22</sup>, while “97 per cent of the soymeal produced worldwide is used for animal feed”<sup>23</sup>. Also, “Livestock uses 70 per cent of all available agricultural land, and uses 8 per cent of the global human water supply”<sup>24</sup>.

We are massively deforesting and using intensive agriculture in order to feed animals that then feed us. But who is “us”? Not people who cultivated the crops in the first place. Animal products are too expensive for them. More expensive than the plants they grow on their land.

<sup>17</sup> “Simple Happy Kitchen”, children book project - <https://www.simplehappykitchen.com/>

<sup>18</sup> UK’s Friends of the Earth’s report : « What’s feeding our food », Introduction, p. 4

<sup>19</sup> UK’s Friends of the Earth’s report : « What’s feeding our food », Introduction, p. 4

<sup>20</sup> UK’s Friends of the Earth’s report : « What’s feeding our food », “Food insecurity” p. 18

<sup>21</sup> UK’s Friends of the Earth’s report : « What’s feeding our food », “Food insecurity” p. 18

<sup>22</sup> UK’s Friends of the Earth’s report : « What’s feeding our food », “Impacts on rural communities”, p.17. “In 2004, the government intervened and found 1.012 slaves on farms in Mato Grosso, some of whom were children”

<sup>23</sup> Livestock’s Long Shadow, UN FAO, 2006, p. 43

<sup>24</sup> UK’s Friends of the Earth’s report : « What’s feeding our food », “Impacts of the livestock sector”, p. 6



<sup>25</sup> What about giving food to people and not to cattle? Humans surely eat less than cows. How many people could we feed with the crops we give to farm animals? If people could consume what they produce, they would not go hungry and they would have enough to sell to their compatriots for direct consumption. They could trade their precious harvest with other goods and have a balanced diet made of local products<sup>26</sup>. More food would be available for human consumption. Prices would not need to rise. Except of course if some big company finds another way to privatise people's work so they cannot afford to buy the food they grew.

Our animal-products-based food system is far from fair. It is not feeding the world and because of the disparities and poverty it creates, it will never be able to do so.

Not giving money to this system does not seem so absurd when witnessing how it crushes social justice. As basic level citizens and consumers, the first action to take is giving our money to initiatives we believe in rather than to industries we despise.

## ENVIRONMENT



<sup>27</sup> UK's Friends of the Earth's report<sup>28</sup> states that "It is clear that the current model of livestock production is no longer affordable in environmental or social terms. The climate, water systems, soil and wildlife cannot sustain the damage that is being caused"<sup>29</sup>, with "impacts such as deforestation nutrient overloading, greenhouse gas emissions, nutrient depletion of grazing areas, dry land degradation (...), dust formation, and bush encroachment."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Picture I took myself, harvesting some organic herbs, fruits and vegetables of one of the gardens I am volunteering in.

<sup>26</sup> "Local food production (...) encourages the production of a wider range of food crops, locally-appropriate diets, greater local control over food supplies and less price volatility for farmers" - UK's Friends of the Earth's report : « What's feeding our food », "Solutions", p. 28

<sup>27</sup> Picture that I took myself, of sheep in county Leitrim (Ireland)

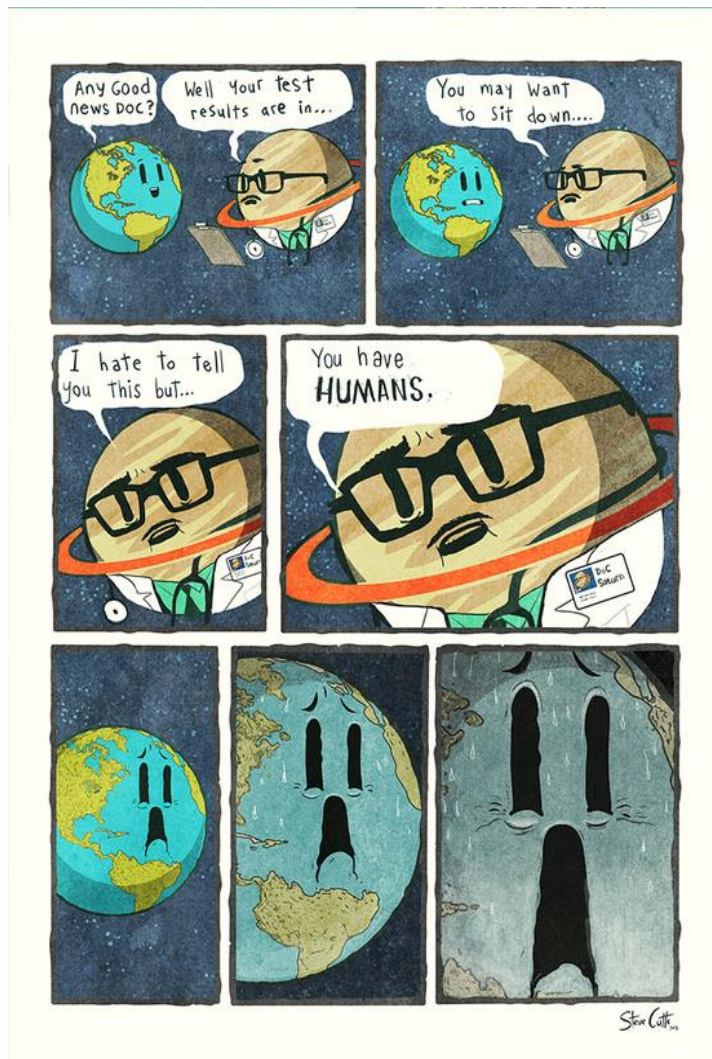
<sup>28</sup> The Friends of the Earth's report is not praising veganism, but sustainable local small scale farming sheltered from globalisation by new governments' policies and agreements. My personal belief is that eating the food harvested in the fields instead of giving it to animals whose flesh will then feed us would be a more efficient way to feed the world. The amount animals eat and drink compared to the amount of food they produce is the strongest ground for this belief

<sup>29</sup> UK's Friends of the Earth's report : « What's feeding our food », "Solutions" p. 28

<sup>30</sup> Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005



Environmental issues and social issues are closely linked. Our planet warms, ice melts, sea level rises, the weather gets extreme for more and more people. Parts of the world are getting impossible to live



<sup>31</sup> in. Communities are forced to leave their home and the situation will not improve<sup>32</sup>. Given how refugees are treated in most countries they seek shelter in, this situation promises to make more populations face extreme poverty and other unbearable conditions<sup>33</sup>.

Between trees, pandas, fellow humans, yourself or the next generations, we should all be able to find a good reason to want to save our planet from Climate Change and other human-based disasters.

According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the livestock sector "emerges as one of the top two or three most serious contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale from local to global"<sup>34</sup>. "Livestock's contribution to climate change is greater than transport"<sup>35</sup> and it "is responsible for 18 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions"<sup>36</sup>.

Our developed countries are now praising sustainable behaviours: recycling, using public transport, cycling, producing and buying eco-friendly products... And reducing meat consumption. However, livestock is used for milk, eggs, wool and other products. Focusing only on meat is not enough to solve the various problems enumerated above.



<sup>31</sup> Author: Steve Cutts - <http://www.stevecutts.com/>

<sup>32</sup> "Climate Change "will create world's biggest refugee crisis", Matthew Taylor, The Guardian, 2/11/2017

<sup>33</sup> "Syria's refugee crisis in numbers", Amnesty International, 21/12/2016 + "The refugee crisis is a problem of poverty, not just migration", Sarah Dalrymple, 20/06/2016

<sup>34</sup> Livestock's Long Shadow, UN FAO, 2006, p. XX (executive summary)

<sup>35</sup> Livestock's Long Shadow, UN FAO, 2006, p. XXI (executive summary)

<sup>36</sup> Livestock's Long Shadow, UN FAO, 2006, p. XXI (executive summary)

Some people would replace meat with fish. However, the health of our oceans (the very reason why there is life on Earth, as we often forget), is greatly impacted by the fishing industry.



<sup>37</sup> Fishing impacts their target species but also other beings living in harmony with them. "They reduce their abundance, spawning potential and, possibly, population parameters (growth, maturation, etc.). They modify age and size structure, sex ratio, genetics and species composition (...). When poorly controlled, fisheries develop excessive fishing capacity, leading to overfishing, with major

ecosystem, social and economic consequences"<sup>38</sup>. "Fishing may also affect ecological processes at very large scale. The overall impact has been described as comparable as, in aquatic systems, to that of agriculture on land (...) Overfishing transforms an originally stable, mature and efficient ecosystem into one that is immature and stressed"<sup>39</sup>. The fishing industry has many other implications which some of them are detailed in the foot notes.

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<sup>37</sup> "Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (SSCS) is an international non-profit, marine wildlife conservation organization. Our mission is to end the destruction of habitat and slaughter of wildlife in the world's oceans in order to conserve and protect ecosystems and species" – for more information, please visit their website: <http://www.seashepherd.org/who-we-are/>

<sup>38</sup> "The ecosystem approach to fisheries – Issues, terminology, principles, institutional foundations, implementation and outlook", Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) – "Fisheries impact on the Ecosystem", p. 10

<sup>39</sup> "The ecosystem approach to fisheries – Issues, terminology, principles, institutional foundations, implementation and outlook", Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) – "Fisheries impact on the Ecosystem", p. 10 --- "The alteration of the habitat by various human activities may be physical (e.g. by adding artificial structures like artificial reefs, oil rigs, aquaculture installations), mechanical (e.g. through the "ploughing" effect of dredges and trawls), or chemical (e.g. through injection of nutrients, pesticides, heavy metals, drugs, hormones). (...)Some aspects of fisheries can have significant and long-lasting effects, e.g. destructive fishing techniques using dynamite or cyanides or inadequate fishing practices (e.g. trawling in the wrong habitat); pollution from fish processing plants; use of ozone-depleting refrigerants; dumping at sea of plastic debris that can entangle marine animals or be swallowed by turtles; loss of fishing gear, possibly leading to ghost fishing; lack of selectivity, affecting associated and dependent species, resulting in wasteful discarding practices, juvenile mortality, added threat to endangered species, etc. Poorly-managed large-scale mariculture can damage coastal wetlands and nearshore ecosystems, often used as nurseries by key capture fishery resources, and contribute to ecosystem contamination with food residues, waste, antibiotics, hormones, diseases and alien species." --- "The decline of primary productivity consumers low in the food chain removes important forage species needed higher in the

Here is a small example of the damage fishermen's litter inflict on marine wildlife I had to face while I was volunteering in a Wildlife Rescue Centre in south of France:



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According to WWF<sup>41</sup>, "More than 85 percent of the world's fisheries have been pushed to or beyond their biological limits"<sup>42</sup>.

Fishing industry is as harmful to our oceans as the meat industry is harmful to our forests and soil.

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food web, with cascading effects for the ecosystem. Conversely, the removal of top predators such as mammals, tuna or sharks, may release an unusually large abundance of preys at lower levels with cascading and feedback effects on the food chain and species composition"

<sup>40</sup> Facebook post I posted on my personal account referring to one of my experiences facing the damage fishermen's litter inflict on marine wildlife while I was volunteering in a Wildlife Rescue Center in south of France – LPO Hérault - <http://herault.lpo.fr/centre-de-sauvegarde/#>

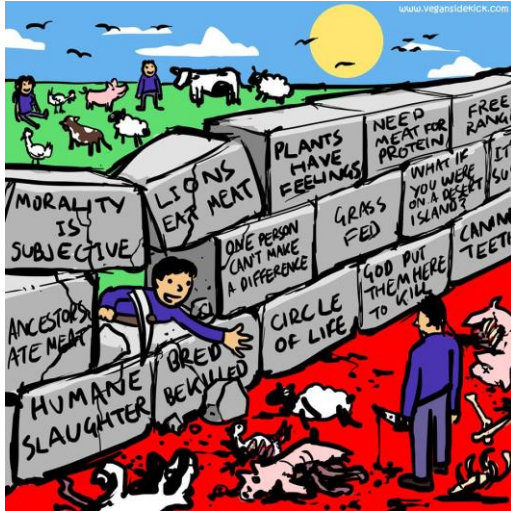
<sup>41</sup> World Wildlife Fund, environmental Ngo protecting wildlife worldwide

<sup>42</sup> WWF website, « Sustainable seafood », « Wild-caught seafood »



## HAPPINESS AFTER ALL

Veganism is linked to health, social and environmental issues. It is my personal view that - in order to



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be efficient - it has to acknowledge this and use it as a strength by connecting with other social and environmental actions. This way, being Vegan makes more sense as it will make more of an impact on society.

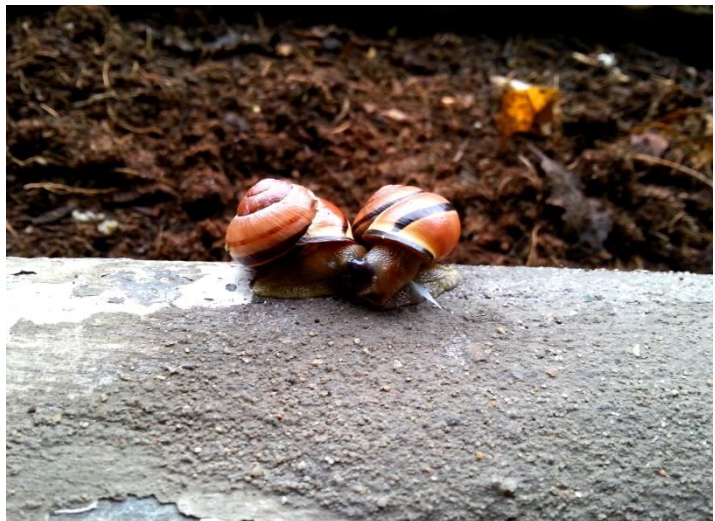
Finding allies, hearing echoes of your concerns in other caring people is soothing. As society advertises a self-centred lifestyle every chance it gets, trying to stray from this overrated path is a lonely journey. Once refusing to inflict death and suffering upon other sensitive beings, it gets hard to look at your close ones (and at the rest of the world) and see them supporting this violent system.

So, are all Vegans completely miserable?

Well, I'm not. Not only did my physical health improve by eating healthier food, my mind found comfort in treating others in a gentler way. There is a unique feeling in sparing lives you know society allows you to take. A sweet feeling on which you can keep on building a nicer world for yourself and the ones you care about (family, friends, strangers, animals, plants, even the whole planet if you have the heart for it). There is peace for your mind and in your life when you find your place in the world without hurting it.

My generation and the one following - the two current waves of young adults – have a reputation of questioning themselves and society, of losing faith in the world or not having any at all, of feeling unfit without even knowing where they should fit in. We are full of questions as we are overfed with images of war, climate disasters, crimes, incentives to spend money most of us don't have or won't have for long, and a promised land of happiness through consumerism while anti-depressant consumption keeps on rising in our wealthy countries. We have this bitter feeling that something is off without being able to put our finger on it, a general feeling of emptiness without knowing what we lack.

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<sup>43</sup> Author: Vegan Sidekick - <http://vegansidekick.com/>

<sup>44</sup> Pictures I took myself, of snails in Sevres (France, near Paris)



<sup>45</sup> I would not say that being a Vegan gave me purpose. But making this choice showed me just how much of a grip I could have on my own life. I can control what I buy, what I eat, what I wear, I can chose not to consume what I have always been urged to consume. I can even avoid consuming by opening my eyes on other ways to get by. My world surely makes more sense since I know bits and pieces of what I want to stand for. That is not much for stability, but that is enough to go forward.

On this ground, I want to build a life respectful of others. I seek harmony with all that Nature provides instead of imposing myself at all cost. On this ideal I

try to build happiness piece by piece, with other people who pursue the same kind of reachable dreams. When I cook tasty Vegan meals, when share them with my close ones, when I plant seeds or harvest organic fruits and vegetables, when I help rescuing a life, I feel good, at peace, happy.



<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Drawing of myself and the rescued animals I was taking care of at the time. Realized and given by Arielle Demilecamps for my birthday – To discover more of her work, please refer yourself to her blog:

<http://arielledemilecamps.blogspot.ie/p/portfolio.html>

<sup>46</sup> 3 pictures of the work I did with wild animals while volunteering in the Wildlife Rescue Centre in south of France (LPO Hérault); with two baby field rats, one adult Eurasian eagle owl, one baby pigeon + 7 pictures of Vegan dishes and desserts I cooked – more pictures available on my blog:

<https://uncontrolledpest.wordpress.com/category/vegan-cooking/>

## REFERENCES

### Graphic documents:

- **Steve Cutts** is a freelance animator and illustrator whose corrosive work reflects the worth sides of modern society and human nature with a touch a black humour:
  - > Website: <http://www.stevecutts.com/>
  - > Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SteveCuttsArt/>
  - > Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/steviecutts>
- **"Simple Happy Kitchen"** is a children book about plant-based nutrition and its implications as well as a website dedicated to it:
  - > Website: <https://www.simplehappykitchen.com/>
  - > Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SimpleHappyKitchen/>
  - > Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/simple\\_happy\\_kitchen/](https://www.instagram.com/simple_happy_kitchen/)
- **"Vegan Sidekick"** is a cartoonist and usually pushing meat-eaters arguments and excuses to the extreme to emphasize on their absurdity:
  - > Website: <http://vegansidekick.com/>
  - > Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/vegansidekick/>
  - > Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/vegansidekick/?hl=en>

### Livestock impact on the environment and society:

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- "What's feeding our food?", Friends of the Earth's (Environmental NGO) report on "The environmental and social impacts of the livestock sector", available in pdf: [https://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/livestock\\_impacts.pdf](https://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/livestock_impacts.pdf)
- "Redefining agricultural yields: from tonnes to people nourished per hectare", Emily S. Cassidy, Paul C. West, James S. Gerber and Jonathan A. Foley – available on the IOPscience website, in the "Environmental Research Letters" section

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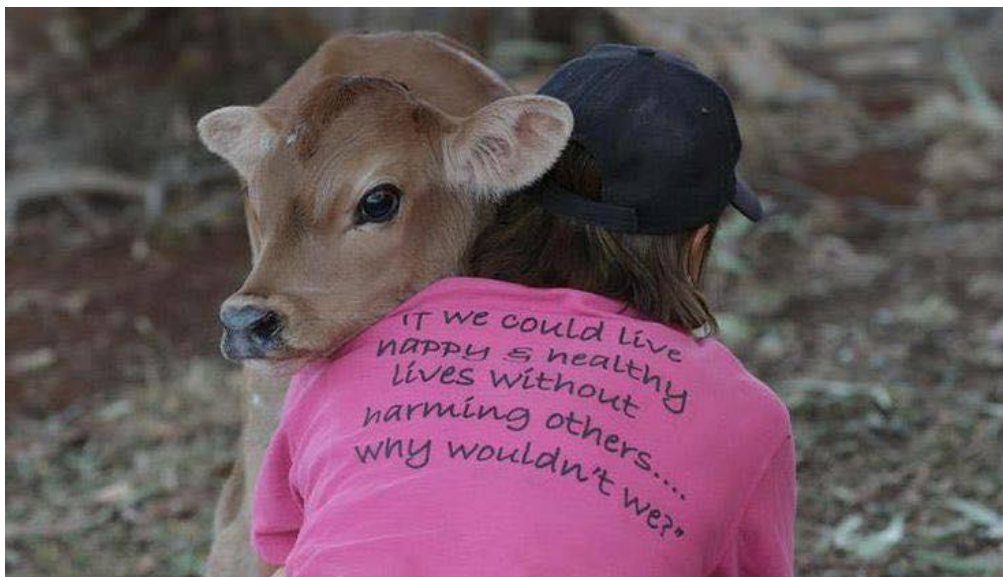


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- “IARC Monographs evaluate consumption of red meat and processed meat”, World Health Organization (WHO) - [https://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/pr/2015/pdfs/pr240\\_E.pdf](https://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/pr/2015/pdfs/pr240_E.pdf)
- “Link between lifestyle & cancer risk”, “Red & processed meat”, World Cancer Research Fund website - <http://www.wcrf.org/int/cancer-facts-figures/link-between-lifestyle-cancer-risk/red-processed-meat>

#### Fishing impacts

- “The ecosystem approach to fisheries – Issues, terminology, principles, institutional foundations, implementation and outlook”, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) - <http://www.fao.org/tempref/docrep/fao/006/y4773e/y4773e00.pdf>
- “Impacts of Biodiversity Loss on Ocean Ecosystem Service”, Boris Worm, Edward B. Barbier, Nicola Beaumont, Emmett Duffy, Carl Folke, Benjamin S. Halpern, Jeremy B. C. Jackson, Heike K. Lotze, Fiorenza Micheli, Stephen R. Palumbi, Enric Sala, Kimberley A. Selkoe, John Stachowicz, Reg Watso, 3 november 2006 – <https://www3.epa.gov/region1/npdes/schillerstation/pdfs/AR-024.pdf>
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- WWF website, « Sustainable seafood », « Wild-caught seafood » - <https://www.worldwildlife.org/industries/wild-caught-seafood>



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<sup>47</sup> Image found on Facebook without any reference to its author.