

His Holiness, Pope Francis
Domus Sanctae Marthae
00120 Vatican City State

Dear Holy Father,

We are writing to you out of our deep love and compassion for our brothers and sisters everywhere and for all of God's Creation. In addition to not knowing God's love, eating animals is a fundamental cause of the millions of poor people who go hungry every day, of deteriorating human health, of skyrocketing medical costs, of economic instability, of environmental degradation, of war, and of the culture of death.

Eating animals and their by-products has wreaked havoc on our planet and now threatens our very survival. Our continued existence on planet Earth depends in large part on our willingness to change our minds about our food.

The Poor and the Hungry

For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh... (Galatians 5:17)

We can no longer feign concern over the plight of the poor and hungry while we (sometimes intentionally) look away from the solution. Aside from human corruption of food distribution systems (lack of love), eating animals is the number one reason our brothers and sisters go hungry every day.

There is more than enough food to feed every person on this planet. We can easily feed the world simply by giving to humans the plenteous grains, fruits, and vegetables that are grown instead of feeding them to animals raised for food.

John Robbins, in his landmark book, *Diet for a New America*, reveals that, "...the world's cattle alone, not to mention pigs and chickens, consume a quantity of food equal to the caloric needs of 8.7 billion people – nearly double the entire human population of the planet."

Animals eat much more food than they produce. They require food, water (2,500 to 4,000 gallons to produce one pound of beef), medical care, and shelter...all at the expense of our hungry and thirsty brethren. Poor mothers choose to end their pregnancies every day because they don't have enough food to feed their babies. According to the United Nations, a child dies of hunger someplace in the world every five seconds. Despite there being plenty of food to feed the world's population, precious food and resources are used disproportionately to feed the western appetite for animal-based foods.

Overpopulation is cited by some as the real problem regarding food scarcity, even prompting China to, at one time, enforce the disturbing practice of allowing only one child per family. Food scarcity is a real threat, but only while we continue to feed immense amounts of food to "grow" animals instead of to feed humans.

“...vast swaths of the world population suffer from malnourishment and starvation while those of us living in prosperous western nations indulge in our favorite foods,” comments physician and nutrition expert Dr. John McDougall in his powerful book, *The Starch Solution*.

We must do better to preserve precious lives.

Human Health / Skyrocketing Medical Costs / Economic Instability

“Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then see how we look in comparison with the other young men who eat from the royal table...after ten days they looked healthier and better fed than any of the young men who ate from the royal table.” (Daniel 1:12-15)

The scientific evidence is now irrefutable that consuming animals and their by-products is the primary contributor to most of the world’s chronic illnesses, such as heart disease, diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, cancer, fibromyalgia, Alzheimer’s disease and beyond. According to some studies, food is linked to early childhood diagnoses such as ADD and Autism, as well. A rich diet of animal foods is also implicated in human fertility and reproductive issues.

According to T. Colin Campbell, author of the highly respected study and book, *The China Study*, “People who eat the most animal-based foods get the most chronic disease. People who eat the most plant-based foods are the healthiest and tend to avoid chronic disease.”

Unfortunately, most of the planet has now adopted the rich Standard America Diet (SAD) of meat, dairy, refined grains, and sugar resulting in a worldwide epidemic of chronic illness. The world, it turns out, was much better off without the rich man’s diet. The indigenous whole, starch-based foods (beans, potatoes, corn, rice, etc.) that fed most humans for thousands of years are some of the healthiest and enabled civilizations to survive throughout the ages.

Despite “advances” in medical technology, humans are getting sicker and sicker every day. Medical costs are devastating families and threaten to topple the economies of entire nations. To add insult to injury, “Over 70 percent of (infectious) human diseases (Swine Flu, etc.) originate in animals...” according to the 2013 United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report, *World Livestock 2013: Changing Disease Landscapes*.

The information to reverse this trend is known and well researched, but because of politics, money, and power it is kept hidden from the general public. Powerful lobby interests promulgate erroneous information about the need for humans to consume animals and their by-products for health. Countless doctors, organizations, and scientists know that there are “...virtually no nutrients in animal-based foods that are not better provided by plants”, as T. Colin Campbell states. And yet, most people have never heard this well-documented information.

“Some people think the ‘plant-based, whole foods diet’ is extreme. Half a million people a year will have their chests opened up and a vein taken from their leg and sewn onto their coronary artery. Some people would call **that extreme**,” proclaimed the esteemed Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn, a heart surgeon at the Cleveland Clinic.

The Lord’s people do indeed perish for a lack of knowledge.

Environmental Stewardship

You have lived on earth in luxury and pleasure; you have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter. (James 5:5)

The recently released United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) report, *Tackling Climate Change Through Livestock*, revealed that more global warming is caused by the meat industry than by all transportation combined (including cars, planes, trains, and other forms of transportation). As well, in 2009 the prestigious Worldwatch Institute reported that animals raised for food account for more than half of all human-caused greenhouse gases.

Further, the prior FAO report (2006), *Livestock’s Long Shadow*, revealed that “livestock are one of the most significant contributors to today’s most serious environmental problems,” as stated in Robbins’ book. The precious Amazon rainforests are being destroyed at an alarming rate to raise cattle for beef resulting in severe weather patterns. We do not come close to understanding the long term impact of our environmental decisions to our long-term survival.

Eating a whole food, starch and plant-based diet is the single most effective action we can each take to reduce our carbon footprint. If every human reduced their animal consumption by even a small percentage it would have a tremendous positive effect on the environment.

“God saw all that He had made and it was very good.” -- Genesis 1:31

War / Violence

For your imperishable spirit is in all things! (Wisdom 12:1)

Who is looking out from behind the eyes of an animal? Is this the same God-breathed spirit who is looking out from behind our own eyes?

Factory farming is an incomprehensible system that we have thrust on our dear animal brothers and sisters, as St. Francis might refer to them. What we consume has a very powerful affect on us. How then is it affecting us to consume animals that have died undeserved, unwanted, and violent deaths? How might that be reinforcing our own violent tendencies and warring natures?

We read in the Catholic commentary re: Genesis 1: 29-30 that, "According to the Priestly tradition, the human race was originally intended to live on plants and fruits as were the animals, an arrangement that God will later change in view of the human inclination to violence." The Church doesn't excuse violent behavior in any other area. Can She remain silent in this?

We were given responsibility to take care of God's creatures and instead we have exploited them in the most abominable ways..... almost 60 billion of them every year. How can we ever hope to eradicate the culture of death so present in our world when we are willing to brutally and cruelly abuse and kill these beautiful sentient beings (sometimes with our eyes wide open)? What hope do we have then of convincing people to protect the unborn child who isn't readily visible to the human eye?

As far back as Abraham and Lot, the potential for conflict existed over land needed to raise animals. At the root of much war is the fight for land, primarily for natural resources and for the purpose of raising animals for food. People become afraid when their land is threatened for fear they will go hungry. A fraction of the land required to raise farm animals is needed to raise crops. Conflicts for more land might be greatly diminished and the world could be fed if the land used for animal production was instead used for grains and vegetables.

"Starvation poses a threat to more than individual or even population health; it threatens global stability and security, affecting even those of us living far from politically unstable regions," says Dr. McDougall underscoring the very real threat of violence caused by lack of food.

Summary

God said: See, I give you every seed-bearing plant on all the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food. (Genesis 1-29)

God in His infinite wisdom and generosity has given us all that we need for our nourishment and pleasure, but we have lost our way.

This is not about condemning anyone for eating animals, nor is it implying that a person's salvation is threatened by doing so. Indeed, the Lord said that it is not what goes in, but what comes out of the mouth that defiles. And St. Paul writes that people should be free to eat in the ways that they want. However, not all things are beneficial, even if permissible. We are killing ourselves with sickness and destroying the rest of God's creation by consuming animals and their by-products.

Countless experts now believe that our world's health care disaster, hunger crisis, and environmental devastation can begin to be reversed by changing our food choices. Dr. McDougall encouragingly says, "As luck would have it, the very same actions that can save your health and that of your loved ones will also mitigate the monumental environmental and food

access problems that plague the world we live in.” When God provides the solution, everybody wins.

This is an urgent matter. We don’t believe the Church can remain passive on the issue of the destructive animal-based food system. This is one of the most important pro- life issues, affecting every stage of human life from natural conception to natural death. We believe the Church can play a very important role in leading the flock to a deeper appreciation for Creation and understanding about how our food choices impact all stages and all forms of life.

Indeed, all of Creation is groaning waiting for humankind to fully awaken. Then truly the mountains and the hills will burst into song and the trees will clap their hands.

We ask you, Dear Holy Father, to consider this matter with the utmost care and discernment. We know you have many challenges and issues to tackle, but this is as urgent a matter as any because it affects all of life. You have been leading the universal church to the boundless mercy and love of God. Won’t you please include in that mercy and love the truth about our food choices?

Most respectfully,

The Catholic Vegan Sisters

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