

# Walking the Path of Compassion, One Meal at a Time

“To refrain from killing but rather cultivate and encourage life” is the very first vow that we take when becoming a Buddhist. In addition to understanding this vow as meaning not to kill humans, many of us have also willingly expanded our commitment to this vow by mindfully refraining from killing or causing the killing of any sentient being. Every day, this personal conviction to compassion practice energizes and propels some of us to say “No” to fish and meat on our plates, even when it is not always an easy choice.

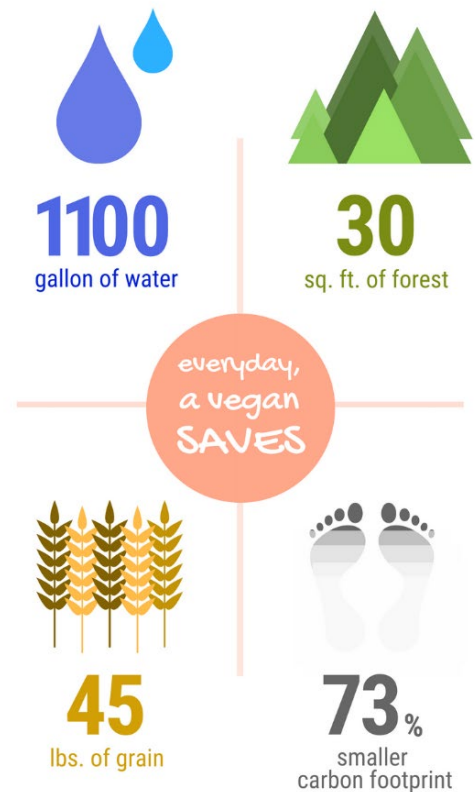
Imagine if we can view all animal products – including dairy, eggs, and honey – with the same compassionate lens as how we view meat, we can collectively set an example for the world, to shine a light on the harmful nature of these products, and incorporate conscious diet choices even more into our truth-seeking and compassion practices. We would also be following the example that prominent Zen Teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, has set for us – he transitioned all of his Plum Village practice centers around the world into vegan centers as long ago as 2007! <sup>(1)</sup>

## Be Kind to Our Planet

Many studies have shown that animal agriculture is responsible for making this world unsustainable – not just with climate change, but also with land use and rainforest destruction, water use, water pollution, etc. It's a multi-faceted destructive force<sup>(2)</sup>:

- 1,000 gallons of water are required to produce 1 gallon of milk.
- 477 gallons of water are required to produce 1lb. of eggs.
- Growing feed crops for livestock consumes 56% of water in the US.
- A farm with 2,500 dairy cows produces the same amount of waste as a city of 411,000 people.
- Animal agriculture is the leading cause of species extinction, ocean dead zones, water pollution, and habitat destruction.
- Animal agriculture is responsible for up to 91% of Amazon destruction.
- Animal agriculture is responsible for 18% of greenhouse gas emissions, more than the combined exhaust from all transportation.
- Even without fossil fuels, we will exceed our 565 gigatons CO<sub>2</sub>e limit by 2030, all from raising animals.

United Nations<sup>(3)</sup> has urged the world to become more meat- and dairy-free for some years now, and a University of Oxford Study<sup>(4)</sup> finds that *eating a vegan diet can be the "single biggest way" to reduce one's environmental impact on Earth.*



## Be Kind to Our Neighbors

From a social injustice / inequity point of view, the world is currently growing enough crops to feed 10 billion people - more than the total human population of 8 billion (2023 figure). Yet, instead of feeding all of them to people, at least 50% of those grains are fed to livestock that are in turn made into animal products for those who can afford it, while over 800 million people starve around the world, including millions of children dying from starvation each year.

## Be Kind to Our Fellow Beings

And of course, if we expand justice & equity, or simply compassion, to include other sentient beings, then dairy and egg industries are some of the cruelest industries, and the honey industry is not innocent either. This is true even at smaller farms:

- Dairy Industry<sup>(5)</sup>: just like any mammal such as humans, a cow (or goat) only produces milk after giving birth. Therefore, to produce dairy for humans' consumption, cows are forcibly impregnated over and over again, and their babies taken away 1-3 days after birth, so that the mothers' milk can be produced for human use. The fate of the baby cows? Either slaughtered for veal if male, or raised as another dairy cow if female and the cycle of suffering repeats. A dairy cow is subject to an unnatural rate of pregnancy, udder infections, and a much-shortened lifespan (~4 years vs. 20 years), and is ultimately slaughtered for low-grade meat.
- Egg Industry<sup>(6)</sup>: millions of male chicks are ground up alive or suffocated alive each year at birth as they are useless to the egg industry, while female chicks spend ~2 years being forced to lay more eggs than what they would naturally, their beaks cut off with a hot blade, and cramped into small cages (even "cage-free eggs" are not much better), and then killed at the end for meat regardless.
- Honey Industry<sup>(7)</sup>: queen bees' wings are often clipped to keep the colony in place, and the colony's main source of food (honey) is taken away, substituted with less nutritious sugar which causes the bees to overwork to replenish the nutrition they need.
- Consuming dairy, eggs, or honey not only contribute to animal deaths directly and indirectly, it also goes against the second Buddhist precept of "*refrain from taking that which is not given*" because those animals have not offered these resources to us willingly; instead, we are forcibly taking these resources away from them for our own use.

We sincerely hope that this article helps to shed some light on the truth behind animal agriculture, and to encourage more people to consider taking even some small steps towards reducing animal product consumption – even doing that one meal a day or one day a week would already make a huge impact! Veganism is a growing trend. With increasing consumer demand, more and more tasty plant-based food is now available including many animal product replacements (vegan meat, fish, milk, cheese, eggs, honey, and more); we hope you will add to that voice of the consumers. We believe, collectively, we can make this world a much more sustainable, gentle, and compassionate place, for all inhabitants of this planet.

*Chicago Buddhist Meditation Group's Board Members,  
Belinda Li, Phyllis Lee, and Stephen Hoover, with joined palms (June 2023)*

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### Information Sources:

- 1) "Plum Village: New Contemplations Before Eating": <https://plumvillage.org/news/new-contemplations-before-eating/>
- 2) "Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret": <https://www.cowspiracy.com/facts/>
- 3) "UN urges global move to meat and dairy-free diet": <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/jun/02/un-report-meat-free-diet>
- 4) "Veganism Is 'single biggest way' to reduce our environmental impact, study finds": <https://www.independent.co.uk/veganism-environmental-impact-planet-reduced-plant-based-diet-humans-study-a8378631.html>
- 5) "18 Images Big Dairy Doesn't Want You to See (but PETA Will Show You)": <https://www.peta.org/features/dairy-industry-cruelty>
- 6) "21 Things the Egg Industry Doesn't Want You to See": <https://www.peta.org/features/egg-industry-cruelty/>
- 7) "Is Honey Vegan, And Is It Ethical? The Not-So-Sweet Truth": <https://plantbasednews.org/lifestyle/food/is-honey-vegan-the-not-so-sweet-truth/>