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About Veggies of Virginia

What is Veggies of Virginia?

Veggies of Virginia is a student-run CIO that advocates for health, wellness, and environmental sustainability through a plant-based diet. Our key initiatives include community building, education, philanthropy, and outreach.

We meet every week, and alternate between general body meetings and committee meetings. At general body meetings, we often have speakers on a wide variety of topics relating to health and the environment. Past speakers have discussed topics ranging from reducing your nitrogen footprint to making your own kombucha.

We have three committees: Health, Sustainability, and Feasibility. Each committee works on special projects throughout the semester that are designed to engage the UVA community and raise awareness of the benefits of a plant-based lifestyle.

We also frequently have social events such as game nights, baking parties, and trips to the farmer's market.

There is no pressure to attend every event or meeting, but everyone is always welcome!

Do I have to be vegan or vegetarian to join Veggies of Virginia?

Not at all! We welcome all students and community members who are interested in learning more about a plant-based lifestyle or reducing their intake of animal products. We do not pass judgment on anyone who is not vegan or vegetarian.

The Health Benefits of Veganism

What are the benefits of a plant-based lifestyle for me personally?

There is a lot of research to suggest that the healthiest diets are those that are primarily whole foods, plant-based. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, which is composed of over 100,000 experts on nutrition, [takes the following position on vegan diets](#):

"It is the position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics that appropriately planned vegan diets may provide health benefits for the prevention and treatment of certain diseases... Vegans

are at reduced risk of certain health conditions, including ischemic heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, certain types of cancer, and obesity. Low intake of saturated fat and high intakes of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, soy products, nuts, and seeds (all rich in fiber and phytochemicals) are characteristics of vegetarian and vegan diets that produce lower total and low-density lipoprotein cholesterol levels and better serum glucose control. These factors contribute to reduction of chronic disease.”

The CDC reports that chronic diseases make up 70% of the biggest causes of death in the United States. [Forty-six](#) percent of these deaths are from heart disease and cancer.

Most nutrition professionals agree that a diet high in saturated fat is a major risk for heart disease. Saturated fat is most prevalent in meat and dairy products.

Additionally, the World Health Organization has [declared that processed meats are carcinogenic for humans, and red meat is probably carcinogenic for humans](#).

While Harvard doesn't state that dairy must be eliminated from our diets, it does say that a diet high in dairy can increase the risk for prostate cancer and ovarian cancer. Additionally, it can weaken our bones. Therefore, [Harvard does suggest that dairy should be limited](#).

While it is true that nutrition is still a developing field, it is clear that diets high in fruits and vegetables and low in saturated fat help us to live healthier lives.

Problems Associated with Factory Farming

Factory farming contributes heavily to the following societal issues:

1. Climate change and global warming.

In November 2017, over 15,000 scientists from around the world issued a warning letter to humanity about environmental destruction. In their letter, they said that they found patterns of climate change “potentially catastrophic” and [mentioned animal agriculture as a primary cause of concern](#). Additionally, they mentioned that a shift to a plant-based diet is an effective step towards sustainability.

Globally, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that [animal agriculture makes up 14.5% of greenhouse gas emissions](#). Note that this estimate varies slightly depending on the source. This is just one of the latest calculations.

2. Antibiotic resistance.

Antibiotics are vital to treating many dangerous health problems. The more that antibiotics are overused, the less likely it is that they will be able to treat infections. [Approximately 80% of](#)

[antibiotics sold in the United States are used for animal agriculture](#). According to the CDC, this has resulted in germs from food and animals causing [approximately 20% of infections resistant to antibiotics](#).

3. Exploitation of immigrants and other factory farm workers.

Meat production is very dangerous and demanding. [Workers are expected to take apart carcasses at rapid rates, with almost no opportunities to rest or go to the bathroom](#). Workers report that they often have to wear diapers to alleviate themselves.

[Processing speeds have doubled in the past 35 years, and workers are expected to repeat the same tiring tasks over 20,000 times a day](#). Most people would not be willing to endure this, so processing plants turn to people that have little bargaining power, such as immigrants and refugees. [Data indicates that over a third of meat packing employees are immigrants](#).

Injuries are very common in processing plants. [The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that over 25,000 injuries occurred in the animal slaughter industry in 2015](#). The rate of injury is higher than all other manufacturing and private industry jobs.

In 2014, the CDC was asked to evaluate injuries at a plant in Maryland. [They found that over thirty percent of workers evaluated had carpal tunnel syndrome](#). Over seventy percent of those studied had nerve damage, and over eighty percent of jobs required hand activity above recommended limits. These problems are not unique to one plant. [Generally, poultry workers are seven times more likely than other employees to experience carpal tunnel syndrome](#).

Hand problems are not the only danger at meat plants. [Workers also experience chronic respiratory problems due to exposure to hazardous chemicals. Sometimes, they accidentally stab themselves in various parts of their bodies because of dangerous processing speeds](#). When workers report these injuries, they are often threatened by supervisors and denied necessary treatment.

Unfortunately, workers barely get paid for their grueling work. [In the poultry industry, workers usually make between \\$20,000 and \\$25,000. Many workers receive little health benefits and no time off](#). However, profits have increased in the poultry industry overall. The CEO of Tyson Foods is able to exceed the annual salary of a plant worker in only a few hours.

4. Destruction of the rainforest, the oceans, and biodiversity.

According to the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, [cattle ranching is responsible for 80% of total deforestation in the Amazon. Seventeen percent of the Amazon Forest has been lost](#) (mainly due to cattle ranching). [Cattle ranching is also the biggest cause of deforestation worldwide](#). This is problematic because [deforestation releases large amounts of](#)

[carbon into the atmosphere \(rain forests have 90-140 billion metric tons\)](#). This contributes to global warming.

The [destruction of the rainforest is also contributing to a big loss of biodiversity](#). Many populations of plants and animals have already become extinct. The Amazon rainforest is known for its medicinal potential, but [scientists believe that less than 1% of plants have been studied for potential benefits](#). With each extinction comes the potential loss of lifesaving medicinal remedies. [According to a major study spanning from 1985 to 2013, livestock production is the biggest cause of habitat destruction worldwide, contributing to the majority of species extinction.](#)

An ocean dead zone is an area that lacks the necessary amount of oxygen to support animal and plant life in the ocean. [The leading cause of ocean dead zones are nitrogen and phosphorus from agricultural runoff](#), which can be [found in animal manure](#). This is why [most dead zones occur near agricultural activity](#). So far, [over 166 dead zones have been documented in the United States](#).

Overfishing is another major concern. Overfishing happens when more fish are being caught than are able to reproduce. [Overfishing has caused many species of fish to become extinct or almost extinct](#). Bycatch, which are other sea creatures caught when fishing, causes profound damage to marine life. We have already seen a 90% reduction in shark populations. [Hundreds of thousands of animals such as whales, dolphins, and turtles die each year as bycatch](#). The removal of various species of marine life due to overfishing has disrupted the balance of predators and prey in our waters, causing even more species to disappear. Ultimately, [as more and more species are removed, ecosystems become further destabilized](#).

5. Air and water pollution.

Pollution is caused by an excess of nitrogen and phosphorus. This is directly related to manure production. Manure production is so intense that in some areas, [farms create more waste than cities](#). This means that in a single year, one farm alone can produce over 1.6 million tons of waste. [Manure from animal agriculture releases large amounts of nitrogen and phosphorus into the air and water. This decreases oxygen for marine life and contaminates our drinking water.](#) According to a [study by Stanford researchers](#), “the effects of marine nitrogen pollution are becoming extremely widespread and severe as a consequence of the global expansion of industrialized agriculture.” The EPA has affirmed that [agricultural runoff is a primary culprit of river and stream impairment](#). Excess nitrogen can also lead to the production of ammonia, which [limits our ability to breathe and harms our forests](#).

6. Racism.

Factory farms are [often located in minority communities](#). This is problematic because studies have found that [people living in close proximity to factory farms experience an increase in](#)

[psychological distress, such as PTSD and anxiety](#). Serious physical health issues are also prevalent in communities surrounding factory farms. Researchers have found that [people who live near factory farms experience higher rates of asthma](#). [Factory farms also emit particles linked to cardiac arrest](#).

7. Global hunger and food and water waste.

Worldwide, only a small majority of crops (55%) are directly used for food. [Thirty-six percent of crops are given to livestock](#). This is a very inefficient use of our resources. According to scientists in a recent study, [“replacing all animal-based items with plant-based replacement diets can add enough food to feed 350 million additional people.”](#) That is more than the current population of the United States. Similarly, a report from the United Nations Environment Program stated that [a reduction in meat consumption could feed 1.2 billion people in 2050](#).

Animal agriculture makes up approximately [a third of humanity’s water footprint](#). According to a 2012 study, [“the water footprint of any animal product is larger than the water footprint of crop products with equivalent nutritional value.”](#) Beef is especially problematic, with researches estimating that “the average water footprint per calorie for beef is 20 times larger than for cereals and starchy roots.” As consumption of meat increases worldwide, extensive pressure will be put on freshwater systems. This is problematic because billions of people around the world already experience water scarcity.

8. Release of pathogens.

[Animal manure contains over 150 pathogens that pose human health risks](#). Over time, the likelihood of these pathogens spreading has increased due to animals living in concentrated confinement. These dangers, which can ultimately lead to death, are especially severe for people that are in certain health risk groups, such as infants, children, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems. Currently, 20% of the U.S. falls in this category.

People get foodborne illnesses when their food is contaminated with harmful bacteria. [The CDC estimates that almost 48 million people get sick from foodborne illnesses each year](#). Approximately 128,000 people are hospitalized, and just over 3,000 people die from these illnesses annually. In the CDC’s breakdown of which foods are most likely to cause illnesses and deaths, [meat and dairy products account for 48.1% of illnesses, and 73.4% of deaths](#). [Meat and dairy products are also a likely source of contamination for almost all of the most common pathogens](#).

Health Concerns with a Vegan Diet

Where do you get your protein?

Most people are very concerned about getting enough protein, even though [a majority of Americans consume twice their daily recommended amount](#). Some research has found that eating too much protein has negative consequences, such as an [increased risk of kidney disease and prostate cancer](#). Meat and dairy often contain higher amounts of protein than plant-based alternatives. For example, one serving of beef contains 22 grams of protein, which is already almost half of the daily recommended amount for women. One serving of almonds contains approximately 8 grams of protein.

Vegan sources of protein include nuts, seeds, quinoa, tofu, and beans.

Can I get proper nutrients as a vegan?

You can absolutely get proper nutrients on a well-planned vegan diet. Many people don't realize that [Americans of all diets often lack the vitamins they need](#). B12, which is a deficiency that most people think of with veganism, [can also be lacking in omnivores](#). Just [12% of Americans eat the recommended amount of fruit on a daily basis, and only 9% eat enough vegetables](#). This means that most people may not be getting enough vitamin C, [which is mainly found in fruits and vegetables](#).

However, it is true that [vegans need to be mindful of getting the following nutrients](#):

- 1) Vitamin B12, which you can get from fortified cereals, yogurts and milks. Most likely, this is a vitamin that you should be supplementing. [You can buy B12 vitamins that will last three months for only \\$8.](#)
- 2) Vitamin D, which you can get by spending time in the sun in warmer months. In colder months, you should take a supplement. Many vegan milks contain some vitamin D, although not enough to meet daily recommendations. [You can buy vitamin D supplements that will last three months for less than \\$5.](#)
- 3) Omega-3s, which can be found in walnuts, flax seeds, hemp seeds, and chia seeds.
- 4) Calcium, which can be found in fortified milks, almonds, kale, broccoli, and tofu.
- 5) Iodine, which can be found in iodized salt and seaweed products. Just [half a teaspoon of iodized salt each day will be enough](#).
- 6) Iron, which can be found in fortified milks, beans, nuts, seeds, and cruciferous vegetables.
- 7) Zinc, which can be found in tofu, whole grains, seeds, legumes, and nuts.
- 8) Riboflavin, which can be found in spinach, mushrooms, and almonds.

Although the list above may seem daunting, you should be able to get most of these nutrients easily if you're eating a healthy and balanced diet. Nuts, vegetables and seeds are already likely to be found on your plate when you're eating plant based.

Do I need animal products to be healthy?

You don't need animal products to be healthy. As mentioned above, [the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics has affirmed that vegan diets are appropriate for people of all ages](#). Vegan diets also decrease the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and certain cancers.

Aren't humans designed to eat meat?

Our gut is [actually quite similar to monkeys, whose diet consists mainly of fruits and vegetables](#). Our teeth have not evolved to tear flesh, and our jaws move from side to side. Carnivores have jaws that only move up and down.

It is true that early humans depended on meat for food, but we have evolved as a society. We no longer need to hunt our food to meet our nutritional needs. Our body is able to process meat, but that doesn't mean meat is necessary.

Can I eat soy?

Soy contains isoflavones, which can mimic estrogen. Thus, the debate around soy mainly concerns hormones. It is true that some studies provide reasons to be concerned about soy. One highly cited study found that [soy contributes to tumor growth](#). Another study found that [soy increases thyroid-stimulating hormone in women](#).

However, plenty of other studies have found that soy provides health benefits. A [recent study on over 6,000 women with breast cancer found that those who ate soy were more likely to survive](#). Another study found that [eating soy decreases bad cholesterol](#).

Medical professionals have affirmed that [there is no need to avoid soy](#), although it should be eaten in moderation, like most food products. Try to limit your intake to one or two servings a day, and consume less processed forms of soy. [Tempeh, tofu, and edamame are preferable to products containing isolate forms of soy](#). If you decide that you would rather avoid soy, there are plenty of other great sources of vegan protein.

Feasibility Concerns with a Vegan Diet

Is finding vegan food too time consuming?

Eating vegan does not have to be time consuming. Like all dietary shifts, it will require some initial research. Once you learn more about it, you should be able to go grocery shopping and navigate dining halls and restaurants with ease. Packaged goods have allergy warnings that indicate whether they contain dairy. Most grocery stores also have special sections for mock meats and milk substitutes.

The [Happy Cow website](#) and phone app will tell you about nearby restaurants with vegan options, and many places in Charlottesville have at least one vegan option or are willing to make substitutions. Many of the meals people make at home, such as pasta, tacos, and stir-frys, can be made vegan with a few substitutions. There are also many websites and YouTube channels that can provide inspiration for easy recipes.

Would I be missing out if I went vegan? Is vegan food boring?

There is probably at least one vegan recipe for every food that you could crave. Like all types of recipes, some are amazing and some are not as great. Experiment with various recipes and substitutes and find the ones that are right for you. There are vegan versions of [mac and cheese](#), [pizza](#), [burgers](#), [hot dogs](#), [cakes](#), [cookies](#), and so much more. [One of the top bakeries in the world is actually vegan!](#) Vegans enjoy the exact same foods as non-vegans, just without the animal products. It is truly a myth that vegans just eat salads!

How do I deal with the societal pressures of eating meat and dairy?

Many people feel that the hardest part of being vegan is actually that most people are not vegan. They get tired of the jokes, questions, and feeling different. These are completely understandable concerns, and it would be wrong to pretend that they don't exist. However, here are some thoughts that may make things easier:

- 1) Everyone feels better with company. Join vegan groups (such as Veggies of Virginia) and make new friends that are vegan or trying to eat less meat. Even if you move away from Charlottesville, many cities have their own vegan meetup groups. You'll feel a lot better when you find people that share your passion for plant-based food.
- 2) Bring alternatives. Ask your friends if you can contribute a vegan dish to their dinner or birthday party. They'll feel less pressure to make something special for you and you'll know that you have something yummy to eat. You can also bring snacks wherever you go so you always have something ready when you're feeling hungry.
- 3) Surround yourself with people that are supportive of veganism. Most people aren't plant-based, so make sure that you spend time with people that are supportive of your choices when possible.

- 4) Make peace with your choices. Not everyone will be supportive. It is important for us all to do what we think is right, no matter what other people think. Work on feeling confident in your beliefs and passions.
- 5) Educate yourself. When you know the facts, it is much easier to squash the myths of veganism and animal agriculture. With a little research, you will find many ways to approach common jokes and questions.
- 6) Give people time. Your family, friends, and co-workers may not immediately warm up to a huge lifestyle change. Make an effort to be patient with those around you. They won't always ask the same questions or wonder if your lifestyle shift will cause huge changes in your relationship. Most likely, veganism will fade into the background.
- 7) Remember that good should not be the enemy of perfect. If you truly find it difficult to eat plant-based around others, then don't give up. Many people eat plant-based at home and incorporate animal products in social situations. Any reduction in animal products makes a huge difference!

Is veganism too extreme?

Veganism may seem extreme at first, since most people are brought up eating large amounts of animal products. However, giving up animal products doesn't seem nearly as extreme when one thinks about the problems associated with eating them. Saturated fats, which are found in animal products, contribute to heart disease. Heart valve surgery is extreme. Receiving a heart transplant is extreme.

Thousands upon thousands of dangerous injuries occur at meat processing plants each year. Workers stab themselves, and wear diapers because they are refused bathroom breaks. That's extreme. Animal agriculture is responsible for ocean dead zones and deforestation. That's extreme. We could feed over a billion people by reducing animal consumption. That is extreme. Veganism really isn't that extreme when compared to so many devastating problems associated with animal agriculture.

Is veganism too expensive?

Veganism does not have to be expensive. Rice, beans, oatmeal and pasta are extremely cheap. Many fruits and vegetables are affordable. [You can find carrots and potatoes for 99 cents.](#) There are many online blogs and YouTube videos that show people how to eat vegan for only a few dollars a day.

It is true that some of the frozen vegan meals and animal substitutes can be expensive, but these products are not necessary to eat a healthy diet.

What would happen to all of the animals if we all stopped eating meat?

It is highly unlikely that the world would go vegan overnight. Most societal movements, such as women's rights and gay rights, indicate that opinions change slowly. [Livestock production has dramatically increased in recent decades to keep up with human demand.](#) Animals don't naturally reproduce at such high rates. Humans force cows to be continually impregnated. If people slowly reduce their meat consumption, there will be less demand for animal products.

This means that humans will breed animals less and less, and animal populations can return to natural rates. While some animals depend on human intervention, wild cows and wild pigs are able to survive on their own. Since domesticated animals have been [bred to be larger than their bodies can handle](#), it would be better for them if their populations were dramatically reduced.

If everyone went vegan, many farmers and businessmen would lose their jobs.

This is not a reason to discount veganism. Should we say the same about tobacco production? Supplements and treatments known to have adverse health effects? Restaurants that don't meet health and safety standards? Does this keep companies in business when they're not making enough money? Sadly, there are always going to be reasons why people lose their jobs.

Since people reduce their intake of animal products gradually, it is unlikely that thousands of workers would lose their jobs at the same time. Farmers could transition to growing crops as profits start declining, and companies could start selling plant-based foods. Many meat companies such as Tyson Foods have already added [plant-based companies to their portfolio](#). Organizations could make plenty of resources available to help employees transition to other industries. There are many solutions that could make a shift towards veganism more feasible for workers.

Animal and Environmental Questions with a Vegan Diet

Do animals raised for food live happy lives?

Most people are used to seeing images of cows grazing in open pastures, and people lovingly petting farm animals. However, this is far from the reality. [Over 99% of farm animals raised for food in the U.S. come from factory farms.](#) Animals on factory farms live in such small spaces that [there is not even enough room for them to move their limbs or lie down.](#) They are subjected to the [violent removal of their horns, tails, and beaks without anesthetics.](#) Animals are bred to be so large that [they routinely experience heart and lung failure and have trouble walking.](#) They are frequently [beaten, kicked, and dragged](#) by farm workers. After a lifetime of misery, chickens and turkeys ["are shackled upside down, paralyzed by electrified water and dragged over mechanical throat-cutting blades ... all while conscious."](#) Other kinds of animals don't fair much better, and often die [piece by piece](#). While cattle and hogs are supposed to be stunned so they don't feel pain at the beginning of slaughter, they are often not.

Why should people care about animal rights?

A group of international scientists have declared that [“the weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness. Nonhuman animals, including all mammals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses, also possess these neurological substrates.”](#) In addition to being conscious creatures, animals raised for food feel [pain](#) and [stress](#). They also experience [empathy](#). Birds, for example, [were found to exhibit behavioral changes when those around them were exposed to a negative stimulus](#). Pigs have been found to [possess cognitive and emotional traits that are similar to dogs and chimpanzees](#).

Many people are outraged at the idea of eating dogs, yet [this is an acceptable practice in other countries](#). Eleven million people signed a petition against the Yulin festival in China in 2016. But dogs are not the only animal that have cognitive and emotional intelligence. It is important to realize that all animals that experience pain and suffering deserve the same protections.

Even if you do not feel bad for farm animals that live in terrible conditions, it is in your best interest to support improved conditions for them. Animals in confined conditions are [more prone to diseases and abscesses](#), which can be [missed by meat inspectors](#). They often live in their own waste. These horrors are far from appetizing.

Is it enough to eat humanely raised, organic, sustainably raised, and cage free animal products?

These labels exist for a reason. People are increasingly becoming concerned about the ethics of eating animals. However, these labels don't mean much for the ways that animals are treated. Certified humane products [allow for face branding and beak trimming](#). The Washington Post recently found that in [one major organic egg operation, each barn holds almost 200,000 birds](#). In a major study comparing methods of hen-housing, [cage free birds died at double the rates of birds in confinement](#).

There is no possible way to raise meat in a sustainable way for the general population. As previously mentioned, over 99% of animals are raised in factory farms. Factory farms contribute to global warming, climate change, deforestation, ocean dead zones, loss of biodiversity, and pollution. [Fifty-six billion animals are killed for food each year](#), with this statistic expected to double by 2050 as the population grows. We do not have enough space on Earth for meat to feed the billions of people on our planet without intense animal confinement.

Furthermore, [researches have not found that grass-fed livestock can combat climate change](#). While it is great that some farms are working on ways to decrease their environmental footprint, keep in mind that there is no way to eliminate the resource intensity and environmental consequences of raising animals for food.

Is soy bad for the environment?

It is true that growing soy contributes to environmental problems such as deforestation and runoff. As already discussed, animal food production is the biggest cause of deforestation. It is also helpful to keep in mind that [more than 70% of soybeans grown in the United States are given to livestock](#). This means that cutting back on meat would lead to the most dramatic reduction in soy production. Additionally, [meat is the largest food culprit of greenhouse gas emissions](#), and [meat production creates a much larger water footprint than crop production](#). Reducing meat intake is therefore most helpful to reducing our environmental footprints. However, if you don't want to eat soy, there are plenty of other sources of plant-based protein.

Is it really ethical to eat plants?

It is true that plants exhibit remarkable capabilities to understand the world around them and respond to attacks on their well-being. But according to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Census of Agriculture [“while 56 million acres of U.S. land are producing hay for livestock, only 4 million acres are producing vegetables for human consumption.”](#) If you are worried about plants, reducing your meat consumption will make the biggest impact.

Other Common Questions

Is veganism a first world luxury?

It is absolutely true that it is unrealistic to expect many people in developing nations to be able to go vegan. However, most people's omnivorous diets would also be considered a luxury in the developing world. Many people are not able to eat steak, ice cream, or mac and cheese. Owning a home and basic toiletries are also out of reach for certain populations. We have to do our best to care for ourselves and the world around us. If we know that our dietary choices make a dramatic impact on the world, we should do our part to buy food that is less burdensome. It doesn't mean that we are disrespecting the poor. In fact, [poor people are most affected by environmental destruction](#). By decreasing meat production, they will be helped too.

Why are the problems associated with animal agriculture hidden from the public?

Many prominent people, industries and corporations do everything possible to promote animal agriculture. Around [80% of antibiotics sold in the U.S. are used to make meat products](#). Farmers depend on antibiotics to raise livestock in confined conditions to prevent the spread of disease. Big Pharma is an extremely powerful industry, and spends more money than all other major industries on lobbying. In 2017, Big Pharma spent [\\$279,113,483](#) on lobbying. Since Big Pharma makes a tremendous profit from the meat industry, it wants to protect it.

Pharmaceutical companies also profit from sick people. They do not make much money from consumers in good health. As discussed above, excessive amounts of meat and dairy consumption lead to health problems, which generates pharmaceutical companies more money. It is therefore no surprise that pharmaceutical companies are major sponsors of the [American Diabetes Association](#) and the [American Heart Association](#).

Companies with ties to the dairy and meat industries also work with health associations directly. Dannon Yogurt is a [sponsor](#) of the American Diabetes Association. Yoplait has [worked](#) with the Susan G. Komen Foundation. The Texas Beef Council has [partnered](#) with the American Heart Association. The Kentucky Beef Council has also [focused on building relationships](#) with the American Heart Association. In past years, health organizations have even taken money from [Kraft Foods and cookies made with dairy products](#). It is not difficult to see why health associations [encourage](#) the consumption of animal products--it contributes to their funding.

Members of the U.S. Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, who advise the US Health and Human Services and the USDA, [have been found to have multiple ties to the meat and dairy industries](#). For example, [2015 member Wayne Campbell](#) has [received grants from the US Whey Consortium, the National Pork Board, and the American Egg Board](#) for his research. Studies have revealed that many scientists feel obligated to protect industries when given money or other gifts.

Congressional members that work on food policy also take money from the meat and dairy industries. In 2015, [30 senators received \\$500,000 from the beef and cattle industry](#). Republican members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture received thousands of dollars from organizations such as the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Herbster Angus Farms, and Western United Dairywomen. It is unlikely that politicians would reject food that is providing them with a source of income.

I'm just one person. Why does my contribution matter?

Should this argument be applied to voting? Recycling? Giving to charity? As a society, we are able to function because each person adds up to make a collective difference. Meat and dairy are funded by consumer demand. Each person that lessens the demand for these products helps play a role in decreasing production. Companies can only stay in business if people are purchasing their products. There are also vegan calculators that can show you how your choices can create a better world. After even a day of being vegan, you will [reduce deforestation, animal deaths, and water waste](#).