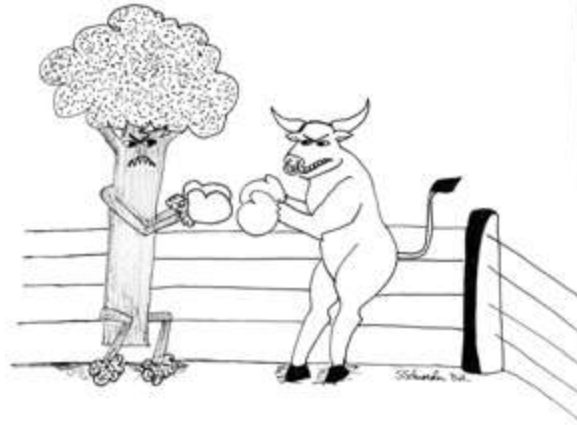# Reasons to choose a vegetarian lifestyle

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With all this talk on the tactics of UR Veg (and UR Carn), the issue of whether or not you actually should become vegetarian seems to have gotten lost in the dust. The decision has several implications, both societal and lifestyle. Let's take some time to consider them.

The first question is if it's OK to kill animals in the first place. The feasibility of the vegetarian diet means we don't need to kill animals for basic survival, although under limited circumstances it can be considered OK.

Our campus, however, is extremely hypocritical about killing animals. We were outraged at the death of a single cat, yet we don't even flinch at the daily import of hundreds of dead animals into our dining centers. We fail to recognize that what happened to that cat is the same thing as what happened to that cow for your hamburger, that pig for your ham, or that chicken for, well, your chicken. By becoming vegetarian, you remove yourself from this hypocrisy — unless you supported the cat's death.

In fact, that cat probably lived a better life. The harsh reality of our farming practices is that our farm animals are put through torturous lives and slaughtered brutally. Yes, animals have the nervous systems requisite for suffering — and, no, UR Carn, plants don't. By becoming vegetarian, you will spare many animals of this suffering. However, these animals, awful as their lives are, wouldn't have lived otherwise. Is this to say that living torturous lives is worse than not living at all? I think so, but I see room for debate. And what about eating animals that lived comfortable lives and were slaughtered painlessly, such as in kosher meat or most organic meat? It's a huge step up, but there are still other reasons to be vegetarian.

For one, a proper vegetarian diet is healthier. They are significantly lower-fat and higher-nutrient, which is worth a lot since heart disease is America's number one cause of death. As fellow UR student Jun Abraham puts it, "I feel like I have much more energy by avoiding heavy foods like meat — to cap it all off, I have lost 15 pounds since I've become a vegetarian."

Many athletes are vegetarian, including former NFL Pro-Bowler Art Still and marathoner and nutritionist Lisa Dorfman. However, in order to enjoy the benefits of the vegetarian diet, it is important to get enough of those nutrients that you would ordinarily have gotten from meat. Also, a small portion of the population cannot properly digest plants and should not be vegetarians.

Another reason to become vegetarian is because meat consumption is terrible for the environment. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, food is the second-most environmentally harmful consumer activity, after transportation, causing enormous amounts of water pollution and other problems. Meat requires over eight times as much fossil fuel and 100 times more water as plants. Thus, minimizing your meat consumption is an easy way to be a huge help to the environment.

Finally, becoming vegetarian is a step toward ending hunger. According to thehungersite.com, "about 24,000 people die every day from hunger or hunger-related causes." Yet the vast majority of our harvests go to feeding the animals we eat. If we ate less meat, we would free up more food for the hungry. To end hunger, we also need to better distribute food to those who need it, which is unrelated to meat consumption.

So should you become vegetarian? Yes, unless your health prevents you. If you do eat meat, eat as little as possible, especially red meat, and avoid factory-farmed meat by buying kosher or organic meat. And while reducing or eliminating your meat consumption, make sure you balance your diet properly so that your health won't force you to revert to more meat. Doing all this will help out yourself, your society, and your fellow animals.

Media Credit: Susana Schroeder