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Spring 2002

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Environmental Side of Your Diet

How vegetarians help save the planet

By Morgan Pace

By now we have all learned that it is easily possible to get all the vitamins and other dietary nutrients we need from a meat-free diet. We've also learned that eating more vegetables and less meat can reduce our risk for developing heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and osteoporosis. Athletes and others who value their stamina might be interested to know that research done by Professor Irving Fisher at Yale, has shown that vegetarians (both athletes and sedentary) have twice the endurance as meat eaters. He reports, "There is strong evidence that a non-flesh diet is conducive to endurance." While many of us are aware of the personal health benefits of a vegetarian diet, few of us are aware of the full environmental benefits of a vegetarian diet.

The correlation between the meat industry and deforestation, soil erosion, global warming, water consumption and water pollution is undeniable. Depletion of any one of these of natural resources is significant. Collectively, such depletions spell environmental disaster, and our reliance on animal based diets contributes to an unhealthy planet.

Forests, soils and heat

Much of the beef eaten in the U.S., especially at fast food restaurants, is imported from Mexico, Central America, and South America, where hundreds of acres of forest are being cleared for the growing, grazing, and housing of farm animals for our consumption. Meanwhile, thousands of rare and exotic plants and animals are

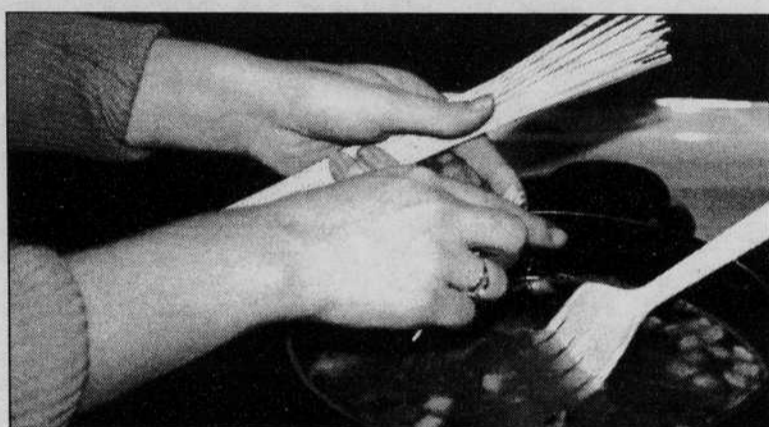


Photo by Morgan Pace

becoming extinct along with irreplaceable rain forests. Burning forests to clear land for cattle causes the vegetation to release massive amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, a primary contributor to global warming.

Forests are also great protectors of mother earth's topsoil—one of our most precious natural resources and the foundation to the entire web of life. Topsoil has been rapidly depleted in the last two hundred years, both domestically and abroad, due largely to the grazing of cattle.

A cool drink of fresh water

Did you know that raising animals for food consumes more than half the water used in the U.S.? Water consumption is largely used for growing the crops to feed the animals but it is also used to hose down the animals and the slabs they're crammed onto at factory farms. Can you imagine all the excrement that must be washed

away from 100,000 cattle each day? The amount is too large to be recycled, so in turn, excrement ponds are created. Many excrement ponds allow sewage to leak into the ground water and then into our streams and rivers. While the meat industry consumes more than half of the water used in the U.S., they are also responsible for 80 percent of all water pollution in the U.S.

Factory farming is rapidly depleting our environment at home while imported beef is depleting the natural resources of our neighbors south of the border. Deforestation, soil erosion, global warming, water consumption, and water pollution can all be drastically reduced if we were to move toward a plant-based diet. If you've been considering moving toward a veggie diet, here are a few pointers:

- *Start slow—If eating meat has been part your daily life, at first it might seem impossible to eat a satisfying*

meal sans meat. Try eating a couple of meat-free meals a week.

- *Substitute—Replace meat with soy foods like tofu or tempeh in your recipes.*
- *Explore—Look into the wonderful realm of vegetables and try different kinds (chard, eggplant, squashes, arugula, etc.) in your meals.*
- *Ordering—When eating out, try different vegetarian options on the menu or ask for your favorite dish without meat.*

Organic meat

For those of you concerned with the environment, but aren't willing to limit the meat in your diet, buying organic is the next best thing. Organically farmed meat means less pollution, no growth hormones, and more humane treatment of animals. Don't forget, we live in Eugene—where organic foods and vegetarian options are abundant. Take advantage of it!

You can make an appointment through the Health Center with Kristen Olmos (346-2794), our very own nutritionist, who would be happy to discuss a balanced vegetarian diet with you. You can also check out any of the vegetarian recipe books located in the Peer Health Ed Office on the main floor of the Health Center. There you will also find the book *Diet for a New America* by John Robbins, a great resource for many vegetarian issues. Sign up for a vegetarian cooking workshop by calling 346-4456. Last but not least, there's also the web. Check out: www.justeatveggies.com, www.peta.org, or www.vrg.org

Keeping Osteoporosis in Check

By Kate Mahaffey

Approximately 20 million women and five million men in the United States suffer from osteoporosis. Literally meaning "porous bone," osteoporosis is a debilitating disease that lowers bone mineral content making them so weak and fragile that they can fracture under normal daily use. Osteoporosis develops slowly, so often there are no symptoms until a bone fractures. This means that many young people could actually have osteoporosis right now and not realize it until they are middle-aged or older. Although far less common than in our elders, young people can and do experience bone fracturing caused by osteoporosis. Aside from being painful, fractures are often crippling. The spine, hip and wrist are among the most commonly fractured bones.

There are several risk factors, but fortunately we can control the majority of these with our lifestyle choices. This makes osteoporosis one of the most preventable diseases.

Risk factors we can't control

- *Gender—women are about four times more likely to develop osteoporosis than men.*
- *Ethnicity—Caucasians and Asians are at a higher risk than African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans.*
- *Age—Bone density continues to increase until about the age of 30-35 years, when peak bone mass is reached. Ages 15 to 45 are the most crucial years for peak bone mass development and maintenance.*

Risk factors we can control

- *Exercise—Weight-bearing exercise stimulates bone formation and strength-*

ens muscles, which keeps your bones strong. Walking, biking, weight lifting, aerobics, tennis and basketball are all examples of weight bearing exercise. It is important to practice a wide variety of weight-bearing activities to benefit all the bones in the body. On the flip side, over-exercising can be detrimental to bone health as it decreases hormones, which are necessary in maintaining healthy bones. This is especially true in regards to women as estrogen plays an important role in calcium absorption. If a woman exercises (or is underweight) to the point where she stops menstruating, her risk for osteoporosis increases greatly.

- *Nutrition—Calcium is the largest dietary contributor to building and maintaining strong, healthy bones. The recommended daily allowance for calcium is 1200-1500 mg. Vitamin D is a critical vitamin that aids in the absorption of calcium. Diets high in protein, especially from an animal source, diminish bone calcium. Caffeine also robs the body of calcium. Alcohol and smoking are also substantial factors linked to the inhibition of calcium absorption and bone loss.*

- *Smoking—Tobacco inhibits calcium absorption and contributes to weakened bones.*

Bone is a dynamic organ that contains 99 percent of the body's calcium reserves. Your dietary and exercise habits today, and throughout your life, have a direct impact on your future bone health. If you are concerned about your bone mineral density and bone mass, talk with your medical practitioner about testing. Call the U of O Health Center at 346-2770 to set up an appointment, or stop by the Peer Health Education office near area B and pick up a Nutritional Analysis card to find out if your diet promotes good bone health.

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