

Veganism

Veganism is one of the fastest-growing movements in the world today with more people than ever choosing to eat an animal-free diet. Between 2014 and 2019 the number of British vegans quadrupled. Today around 1.5% of the UK population are vegan.¹ So why is it so popular?

What is veganism?

Vegans follow a completely plant-based diet and do not eat anything that comes from an animal, including meat, fish, eggs, dairy products and honey.

Vegans also avoid using toiletries or cosmetics that contain animal products or that are made by companies who test on animals. They also avoid wearing wool, leather, silk, fur and other materials that come from animals.

Why vegan?

It's kind

Approximately one billion animals are killed for food each year in the UK. Every one of these animals is an individual with a personality, just like the companion animals with whom we share our lives at home. They are capable of feeling fear, pain and distress.

Most farmed animals are kept inside factory farms for their entire lives. They are housed in large, crowded, filthy, barren cages and sheds in which they are deprived of everything that makes life worth living – they can't breathe fresh air, exercise properly or behave as they would naturally like to.

Whether animals are reared outside on a 'free-range' farm, or in a factory farm, they don't live for very long. Sheep, for example, are sent for slaughter when they are lambs, aged only 3 to 6 months. Their natural lifespan is around 15 years.

It is often claimed that animals farmed for food are killed humanely, but undercover filming by Animal Aid over recent years inside British slaughterhouses has revealed the terrible suffering that is routinely endured by the animals.



What's wrong with milk?

Cows only produce milk when they give birth to a calf. If people want that milk, they have to get rid of the calf. Soon after they are born, the offspring are taken from their mothers. Separating a mother and her calf is extremely distressing for both. Some of the female calves will become dairy cows, but many of the males, being of no use to the farmer, are shot when they are only a day old.

The natural lifespan of a cow is around 25 years, but by the age of five they start to produce less milk and so are sent for slaughter and made into cheap meat.

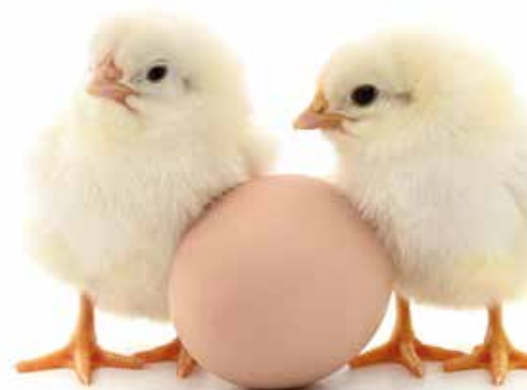
Increasingly, dairy cows are being kept inside sheds for the whole of their lives – reportedly around 20% of dairy cows in the UK are now intensively reared in what are called zero-grazing farms.²

What's wrong with eggs?

Around half of the egg-laying hens in the UK spend their entire lives in crowded barren cages. Each bird has barely enough space to move, let alone stretch their wings.

At just 72 weeks old, hens are no longer able to produce the number of eggs demanded of them by the farmer, so they are sent for slaughter and made into cheap meat products. This is the case whether they are reared on a factory farm, or a commercial free-range farm.

To maintain the size of the flock, the farmer has to continually hatch new chicks. Approximately half the chicks, being male, are useless to the farmer because they can't lay eggs (and are the wrong breed to raise for meat) – their fate is to be gassed to death at a day old.





It's planet-friendly

Rearing animals for food is a major cause of environmental destruction.

Animal farming is a leading cause of climate change, being responsible for 14.5% of all greenhouse gas emissions³ – which is more than all the cars, planes, trains, trucks and ships on Earth combined.

The demand for grazing pasture and for land to grow animal feed crops (such as soya beans) is causing habitat loss on a global scale. According to the Worldwide Fund for Nature, 60% of global biodiversity loss (habitat destruction and animal species extinction) is caused by our meat-eating diet.⁴

Today, cattle farming is the biggest threat facing the world's tropical rainforests. The clearing of rainforest to create pasture for cattle to graze is responsible for around 80% of Amazon rainforest destruction.⁵
(See our *The environmental impact of animal farming* factsheet)

Help feed the world

Animal farming is a very inefficient way of producing food for people because animals use up most of the food they are fed in their digestive systems.

Raising livestock takes about 83% of all agricultural land, yet produces only 18% of the world's calories and 37% of our protein.⁶

Only a fraction of the calories livestock consume is converted into food that people can eat. It is estimated that for every 10kg of feed (grain or soybeans) fed to beef cattle, we get back only 1kg as meat. We would be able to feed at least four times as many people by using the available land to feed people directly, on a plant-based diet, rather than by using it to fatten animals.

Rearing animals for food therefore wastes the world's scarce food resources and means that there is less food for the world's growing population.



It's healthy

A balanced plant-based vegan diet is naturally low in saturated fat and cholesterol and high in vitamins, minerals and fibre. Studies have shown that vegans suffer lower rates of obesity, heart disease, diabetes and certain types of cancer.



All the things you need to stay fit and healthy – proteins, carbohydrates, fats, minerals, vitamins and fibre – are easily provided by a well-planned vegan diet. (See our *Vegan nutrition* factsheet)

What you can do

- Visit our website to order a free *Go Vegan* pack.
- Ask your teacher to invite someone from Animal Aid to give a free talk on veganism or free vegan cookery demonstration to your class.
- Visit our website animalaid.org.uk for free recipes, booklets, stickers, leaflets and posters.

(For the references, see the *Veganism* factsheet on our website)



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