

COMMENT 30 January 2019

So long, veganuary: Here's how to consume consciously year round

Cutting out meat and dairy products is a great way to save the world from your dinner plate, but there are many more, says **P. K. Newby**



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By **P. K. Newby**

IN JANUARY, people around the world gave up meat and dairy for “veganuary”, a month-long challenge taken to benefit health, the environment and animal welfare. Yet there are year-round ways to dine eco-consciously.

Eschewing animal-based foods is an evidence-based approach that has impacts across the life cycle of food production, including for those who work in it.

Plant-based foods use less land, water and fuel, and create less pollution. A 2018 study of the impacts of 40 foods from 40,000 farms across 119 countries found that eating less or no animal-based food is critical for reducing our impact on the environment.

The World Health Organization says a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts and grains is the optimal path to health and longevity. The bigger the proportion of a person's diet they comprise, the greater the benefit.

Still, there are other ways your food choices matter. Take palm oil. It is often grown in monoculture, which degrades soil, and is a leading cause of deforestation, which threatens biodiversity. A 2017 Amnesty International report found the industry used banned pesticides, exploited farmworkers and used forced and child labour. The chocolate and coffee industries have similar issues.

“Avoiding animal-based foods is critical for reducing our impact on the environment”

When choosing food products, read labels and pick those that protect food producers and the environment. Buy organic, not because it is better for your own body, but because it reduces farmworkers' exposure to many fertilisers and pesticides.

Can't give up the steak? Avoid those produced with hormones, steroids and antibiotics – a critical factor fuelling antibiotic resistance. Don't buy eggs from concentrated animal feeding operations – “cage-free” isn't as lovely as you think. Use a seafood guide to choose sustainable species that won't exacerbate overfishing. Respect food. Privileged eaters waste around 40 per cent of edible food, squandering resources like water, land and fuel.

Finally, it would do many of us good to simply eat less: fewer calories is a key to longevity and better health, and reduces resource use of all kinds.

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