

Vegetarianism, World Peace, and Justice

By moving toward vegetarianism, can we help avoid some of the reasons for fighting?

We find ourselves in a world of conflict and war. Why do people fight? Some conflict is driven by a desire to impose a value system, some by intolerance, and some by pure greed and quest for power. The struggle to obtain resources to support life is another important source of conflict; all creatures have a drive to live and sustain themselves. In 1980, Richard J. Barnet, director of the Institute for Policy Studies, warned that by the end of the 20th century, anger and despair of hungry people could lead to terrorist acts and economic class war

for example, Americans, "have the largest material requirements in the world ... each directly or indirectly [using] an average of 125 pounds of material every day ... Americans waste more than 1 million pounds per person per year ... less than 5 percent of the total waste ... gets recycled". In the US, we make up 6% of the world's population, but consume 30% of its resources [<http://www.enough.org.uk/enough02.htm>]. Relatively affluent countries are 15% of the world's population, but consume 73% of the world's output, while 78% of the world, in developing nations, consume 16% of the output [*The New Field Guide to the U. S. Economy*, Nancy Folbre, 2000, 10.11; www.fguide.org]. The Union of Concerned Scientists identifies **meat** production as causing the **single largest impact** of all human activities on land habitat alteration, and second only to driving as biggest impact on environment degradation [<http://boston.earthsave.org/awareness/DrivingVsMeat.htm>].

Vegetarianism isn't a panacea, but is a solid step toward making the world a better place in which to live. People move toward a vegetarian diet for a variety of reasons. Increasing medical evidence suggests that consumption of any animal protein is a significant **health** problem (in fact, along with light exercise and meditation, a pure vegan diet is the only way proven to reverse heart disease [*Journal of the American Medical Association* 274(1995):894]). In addition to **ethical** and **nonviolence** arguments, reduction of **world hunger** is another compelling basis for adopting a vegetarian diet. Only 4 billion of the world's 5.6 billion [in 1989] are properly nourished; if we all became vegan, current vegetarian food production could nourish 7 billion (of course, there would still be distribution problems) [R.W. Kates et.al., *The Hunger Report*. Providence: Brown Univ. Hunger Project, 1988 & 1989 Update]). Vegetarianism promotes protection of the **environment** and **efficient use of resources**. Each 4-ounce hamburger made from imported beef, for example, requires the destruction of 55 square feet of tropical forest to create grazing and pasture lands that do not regenerate [<http://schwartz.enviroweb.org/jenviro.html>]. If in the US we switched to a vegetarian diet, we would **cut our imported oil requirements by 60%** [*Vegetarian Times*, April 1990] - without drilling in the Alaskan Wildlife Refuge! Vegetarianism is good for human health, good for the environment, and **reduces**

resource requirements for water, petroleum, and other energy sources – thus reducing a major source of conflict in the world today.

Just as scarcity of food can lead to war, so can scarcity of sources of energy. The dependence of affluent countries on oil from the Middle East [is] ... a major factor behind the ... conflict[s]. ...

Meat-centered diets contribute to energy shortages, a prime factor in threats of war today. In the United States, an average of 10 calories of fuel energy are required for every calorie of food energy obtained. (The main contributors to this are feedlot cattle raising and deep-sea fishing, which are very energy-intensive).

To produce one pound of steak (500 calories of food energy) requires 20,000 calories of fossil fuels, most of which is expended to produce feed-crops. It requires 78 calories of fossil fuel for each calorie of protein obtained from feedlot produced beef. Grains and beans require only two to five percent as much fossil fuel. Energy input to the US food system now accounts for about 16.5% of the total energy budget.

Feeding people rather than factory-bred animals requires far less irrigation, fertilizer, pesticides, mechanization, refrigeration, and processing, all of which consume much energy. ... If all the petroleum reserves in the world were devoted solely to feeding a typical North American diet to the world's more than 4 billion people, all the world's oil would be used in only 13 years. ... [in October 2001, we're up to over 6 billion]

One of the world's most explosive areas, the Middle East, has suffered from severe water shortages recently. The standard [US] diet ... requires 4200 gals. of water/day (for animals' drinking water, irrigation of crops, processing, washing, cooking, etc.) A person on a pure vegetarian diet requires as little as 300 gals./day. The production of one pound of steak uses 2500 gallons of water, while only 25 gallons are required to produce a pound of potatoes. Livestock production consumes over 80% of the water used in the US, and this water is becoming increasingly scarce.

If the entire US population were total vegetarians, no irrigation water at all would be needed to produce our food.

The relationship between the meat-based resource usage and war is dramatized by the following dialogue from Plato's *Republic*:

and there will be animals of many other kinds, if people eat them? *Certainly.*

And living in this way we shall have much greater need of physicians than before? *Much greater.*

And the country which was enough to support the original inhabitants will be too small now, and not enough? *Quite true.*

Then a slice of our neighbors' land will be wanted by us for pasture and tillage, and they will want a slice of ours, if, like ourselves,

they exceed the limit of necessity, and give themselves up to the unlimited accumulation of wealth? *That, Socrates, will be inevitable.*

And so, we shall go to war, shall we not? *Most certainly.*

In a world where an estimated one in every six people goes hungry each day, the politics of meat consumption are increasingly heated, since meat production is an inefficient use of grain - the grain is used more efficiently when consumed directly by humans. Continued growth in meat output is dependent on feeding grain to animals, creating competition for grain between affluent meat eaters and the world's poor.

Global meat consumption is highly concentrated, dominated by only a few nations. The United States and China, which contain 25 percent of the world's population, combine to consume 35 percent of the world's beef, over half of the world's poultry, and 65 percent of the world's pork. If Brazil and the European Union are included, this group consumes over 60 percent of the world's beef, over 70 percent of the world's poultry, and over 80 percent of the world's pork. ... Only the United States ranks high for all three major meats: beef, pork and chicken.

Join **Triangle Vegetarian Society** at our monthly potlucks and restaurant reviews, as well as many special events, including discussions on peace, ethics, environment, social justice, and religion. Membership: \$15 (\$20 family, \$10 student); TVS, POB 3364, Chapel Hill, NC 27515, 919-489-3340, www.trianglevegsociety.org, tvsv@ivu.org. Don't miss our upcoming Thanksgiving feast and raffle, which features a tremendous gourmet spread of food for \$18-22; details at www.trianglevegsociety.org/thanksgiving01.html (reservations: 919-363-8595) - watch for us on the evening news on Thanksgiving, as well!

Along with NC Society for Ethical Culture, NC Peace Action, US Servas, Baha'is, and other groups, we are helping to co-sponsor a community "Dialogue for Peace and Justice" to share different perspectives. It will be in Durham on Saturday November 10, 6:30-9pm. Please visit our calendar or the peace calendar (www.trianglevegsociety.org/peacecalendar.html) for details.

A vegan diet is low on the food chain, fully plant-based, and does not use any dead animals, egg, dairy, or other animal products. Recommended readings include: *Vegan: The New Ethics of Eating* (Erik Marcus, 1997; a revised 2000 edition is available and can also be downloaded for free from www.vegan.com), *Mad Cowboy* (Howard Lyman, 1998), and *McLibel: Burger Culture on Trial* (John Vidal, 1997). We have many links at www.trianglevegsociety.org about these and other issues, as well as information about our events.

Many vegetarians see peace and non-violence as starting with the fork, and extend the circle of compassion. One cause of the current conflict we're in is the tremendous inequities in the world and the disproportionate amount of resources we use in the west. Eating vegetarian is a simple – and tasty! – thing we can easily do to