



Faith and Food: Seeking a Just World for All God's Creation

Why What We Eat is a Catholic Issue



The Earth “is protesting for the wrong that we are doing to her, because of the irresponsible use and abuse of the goods that God has placed on her. We have grown up thinking that we were her owners and dominators, authorized to loot her. The violence that exists in the human heart, wounded by sin, is also manifest in the symptoms of illness that we see in the Earth, the water, the air and in living things.”

–Laudato Si’



Within the Pope’s Encyclical, *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si’)*, was an urgent call to “every person living on this planet” to reassess our relationship with the earth and all of God’s creation. Adopting a plant-based diet or adopting Meatless Friday personally or at your school, parish, or workplace is a simple way to answer Pope Francis’ call. Reducing the amount of animal products in your diet is good for both the environment and the animals and workers exploited by industrial animal agriculture.

This guide explains why and how to get started on your journey to eat more compassionately.

Why Meatless Friday?

The vast majority of our food comes from factory farms. Factory farms are large, industrial operations that house thousands and thousands of animals being raised for food. Factory farms threaten human health, safety, and the environment. In addition to significantly contributing to climate change, factory farms are also responsible for many environmental harms including deforestation, air pollution, and water pollution. Undercover investigations have revealed rampant violations of federal environmental laws, food safety laws, and labor laws in factory farms across the country.



“Work remains a good thing, not only because it is useful and enjoyable, but also because it expresses and increases the worker’s dignity.”

—Pope John Paul II, *On Human Work*

The Impact of Animal Agriculture on Climate Change and the Environment

Factory farming is a major contributor to climate change. Over a decade ago, the United Nations declared that rearing cattle, which represents only a fraction of animal agriculture, produced more greenhouse gases than transportation.¹ More recently, a study from three universities² concluded that if every person in the United States ate beans instead of beef, our country would come close to meeting the 2020 greenhouse-gas emission goals that we committed to in 2009. Unlike other sources of climate change, we can easily and quickly take a stand against factory farming. Each of us has the power to make a difference by leaving meat off our plates one day a week.

The Impact of Animal Agriculture on Workers

Factory farm workers are victims of severe physical injuries, psychological problems, and even at risk of death. A comprehensive study of factory farm employees from Human Rights Watch concluded there are “systematic human rights violations embedded in meat and poultry industry employment.”³ Many factory farm employees are immigrants, some undocumented, and easily exploited by companies that are looking to cut corners wherever possible. Agriculture workers are killed on the job at a high rate, much higher than law enforcement officers, and twice the rate of construction workers according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.⁴ Meatless Fridays are an easy way to reduce your support of this industry.

The Impact of Animal Agriculture on Animals

The billions of animals raised and slaughtered for our food suffer immensely in factory farms. To many people's surprise, farmed animals are not protected by any federal laws while they are being raised.



The life of a farmed animal is marked by pain, mutilation, and then death. Systematic cruelty is embedded into the animal agriculture industry. Once informed, most people are horrified by standard factory farming practices such as castrating piglets and dehorning and branding calves

without pain killers. Millions of pigs, cows, and chickens are intensively confined their entire lives, some without even enough room to stand up or turn around.

In 2002, Pope Benedict stated "Animals, too, are God's creatures... Certainly a sort of industrial use of creatures, so that geese are fed in such a way as to produce as large a liver as possible, or hens are so packed together that they become caricatures of birds, this degrading of living creatures to a commodity seems to me in fact to contradict the relationship of mutuality that comes across in the Bible." By reducing the amount of animal products in our diet, we show mercy to animals and witness the promise of a non-violent future.



Protecting God's Creation through Compassionate Eating

Simply by eliminating or reducing animal products from your diet goes a long way to protecting God's creation. Meatless Fridays is a small but meaningful change that you or your parish can adopt. Check out these tips to help you get started. For a comprehensive guide to transitioning to a plant-based diet, visit Forks Over Knives (forksoverknives.com). This great website has meal plans and tips to stay on track.

Why Not "Fish Fridays?"

Most Catholics are comfortable with foregoing chicken, cows, and pigs on Fridays because historically Catholics abstained from meat on Fridays. Today, this practice is observed during Lent. But eating fish is neither good for the environment nor the fish themselves. Remember, fish are animals, too. Until recent decades, we've known little about fish sentience or their capacity to feel joy and pain. But the latest research proves fish do experience pain, and many species have complex social lives. The fishing industry is also not sustainable. Overfishing is depleting the earth's resources and polluting the oceans. For more information about fish and the fishing industry, check out the organization Fish Feel (fishfeel.org).



"It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly."

—Catechism of the Catholic Church,
Respect for the Integrity of Creation

What Do I Eat Instead?

Overhauling your diet might feel overwhelming. That's why Meatless Fridays are a great way to start changing your diet to match your values. It's only one day a week.

Check out our favorite animal-free recipes on our website. For more inspiration, head to One Green Planet for thousands of plant-based recipes. If you're looking to eat out, Happy Cow has a great online guide to restaurants and grocery stores. And remember, many international cuisines are naturally plant-based like Indian and Thai food.

You'll also find lots of great ideas that fit your needs by simply going online and searching for your favorite food plus the term "vegan" or "plant-based."

There are also many substitutions available for meats and other animal products easily found at your local grocery store.

Meat (*hamburgers, chicken strips, beef crumbles, chicken patties*)

- Beyond Meat
- Tofurky
- Gardein
- Boca

Dairy (*ice cream, milk, yogurt, cheese*)

- Dozens of brands of soymilk and almond milk now exist
- Daiya
- Ben & Jerry's Non-Dairy Ice Cream
- Soy Delicious
- Almond Dream

Eggs

- Commercial products like Ener-G Egg and the VeganEgg are great for baking. But it's easy to substitute eggs in most baking recipes using flax seed. For every egg that a recipe calls for, simply whisk 1 tablespoon of ground flax seeds with 3 tablespoons of warm water.

SOURCES:

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3. Blood, Sweat, and Fear: Worker's Rights in U.S. Meat and Poultry Plants, Human Rights Watch, Jan. 24, 2005. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/01/24/blood-sweat-and-fear/workers-rights-us-meat-and-poultry-plants>
4. Tim Craig, Deaths of Farmworkers in cow manure ponds puts oversight of dairy farms into question, Washington Post, Sept. 24, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/deaths-of-farmworkers-in-cow-manure-ponds-put-oversight-of-dairy-farms-into-question/2017/09/24/da4f1bae-8813-11e7-961d-2f373b3977ee_story.html?utm_term=.f1c68d3aace3#comments



St. Francis Alliance: Faithful Voices for Animals is a group of Catholics and other people of good will committed to seeking a just and compassionate world for all creatures. Inspired by Pope Francis's encyclical on integral ecology, *Laudato Si'*, we aim to foster dialogue, to educate, and to act faithfully in our daily choices to promote the inherent value of animals, who share our common home.

www.stfrancisalliance.com