



STRATEGY #1: FAVOR PLANT-BASED FOOD

Favoring plant-based foods means eating less meat and other animal products and eating more plants in their place. Favoring plant-based foods gets you three ethical improvements from a single dietary change: it's great for the [environment](#), it's great for [farm animals](#), and it's [good for your health](#) (if you [do it right](#)).

Incorporating more plant-based food into your diet

Some people cut out meat entirely, adopting a *vegetarian* diet (not eating animal flesh) or a *vegan* diet (avoiding all animal products, including meat, seafood, eggs, and dairy).

[Reducetarians](#) are committed to eating less meat and other animal-source foods, but haven't given them up entirely — they are committed to shifting from their baseline consumption levels, but don't have a uniform goal for the amount of animal-source food they consume or pace at which they make the change. *Flexitarians* eat only a little meat and other animal-source foods, but are flexible about incorporating them when it makes sense. For example, flexitarians might eat a primarily plant based diet, but enjoy a steak on a special occasion. Or they might select vegan foods when feeding themselves but be willing to consume animal-source foods when a guest in someone else's home.

There are many ways to reduce consumption of meat and other animal-source foods. One popular effort is the [Meatless Monday campaign](#), which encourages people to forgo meat on Mondays. On the [VB6 \(Vegan Before Six\) diet](#), you eat vegan (avoiding all animal products) for breakfast and lunch, but then are free to include meat or other animal-source food after 6 pm.



You want me to eat...vegetables?

Straight talk: Foodies have a tendency to rhapsodize about vegetables, but not everyone's experience with eggplant leaves them coming back for more. Unfortunately, the industrialization of the food system committed some crimes against cabbage. Reformers responded by talking a little too big about turnips and overselling the superpowers of kale. So it wouldn't be surprising if you were feeling sort of skeptical about this dietary shift.

First, *plant-based eating can be veggie-centric, but it does not have to be*. While veggies offer an array of individual health perks, it is entirely possible to replace animal source foods with other kinds of plant-based foods, including grains, beans, fruit, nuts, seeds, and meat alternatives. Many people hear plant-based and balk at the vision of salads and sprouts that comes to mind. But that's just one narrow version of a plant-based diet. Another approach to favoring plant-based foods is to try plant-based versions of your [favorite dishes](#), [comfort foods](#), and [cuisines](#).

Second, treated right, plant-based food — including vegetables — can bring genuine delight. Favoring a plant-based diet can offer the opportunity to experience a range of new and different foods — beyond the mushy peas and carrots of a bygone era. Have you ever had tat-soi, jackfruit, or mung beans? What about callaloo, mujadara, or spanakopita? There is no shortage of plant-celebrating eats to explore.

Beyond the gustatory experience, for some, embracing plant-centric foods is a way to express their cultural identity or connect with their ancestors while also advancing their environmental and animal welfare ethics. Some cuisines are traditionally plant-rich (e.g., [regional Indian food](#)), while others have been remixed to reduce or eliminate reliance on animal-source foods while retaining familiar flavors, textures and traditions (e.g., [Afro-Vegan](#), [Mexican](#), and [Japanese](#)). Additionally, some pre-colonial cuisines — cuisines that indigenous people had prior to colonization by Europeans — were plant-based, and some activists and chefs see adopting these plant-based diets as a way to [decolonize your diet](#).

Favoring a plant-based diet can be a part of a [broader commitment to racial justice and fighting oppression in all its forms](#).

Does plant-based protein mean tofu and beans?

Tofu and beans are delicious, versatile, cheap, and great sources of protein. But if they're not your cup of tea, there are other plant-based options.

Veggie burgers have been around for a long time. But the last few years have seen the introduction of plant-based beef alternatives that much more closely mimic beef — its taste, its texture, its juiciness, and its color. Two of the most popular products, Beyond Burger and Impossible Burger, are now available in many grocery stores and in table-service and fast food restaurants across North America.

These products are catching on like wildfire. Sales of plant-based meat substitutes are [growing much faster](#) than sales of meat. According to Impossible Foods, [70%](#) of the people who are adopting Impossible



Burgers are regular meat eaters. One report even [predicts](#) that by 2040, 60% of meat consumption will have been replaced by plant-based meat substitutes and cultured meat.



Replacing meat with meat alternatives when you eat out is a simple first step — and one that's easier and easier to make, now that fast food restaurants across North America are offering [plant-based hamburgers](#), [whoppers](#), [breakfast sandwiches](#), [meatball subs](#) and [chicken nuggets](#).

Meat without animal agriculture?

Another option on the horizon is [cultured meat](#) (aka lab-grown meat). Cultured meat is real meat, it just doesn't come from animals. Instead, it is grown from animal cells in a growth medium. Essentially, cultured meat is grown in a vat (a "bioreactor"), rather than harvested from a dead animal. The first cultured meat product was a hamburger patty produced by Mosa Meats in 2013. Companies are creating not just burgers but a range of foods and cuts of meat, including meatballs, steaks, chicken, shrimp, and bluefin tuna.

One company, [New Age Meats](#), even has a vision of growing cultured meat using the cells of animals that have not been typically raised as livestock — so cultured meat could eventually make your diet more diverse, not less. Some pioneers of cultured meat expect that consumers will be able to buy such products within the next five to ten years, so this isn't a viable option just yet, but soon enough may be one way to reduce the environmental and animal welfare effects of your diet.

The case for favoring plant-based foods

The food system is the "[largest cause of global environmental change](#)." Agriculture uses 40% of global land. In most regions, agriculture accounts for [at least 70% of freshwater use](#). The way we produce food is a major source of air and water pollution. And, maybe most urgently, agriculture and food production are responsible for around a quarter of all human-caused greenhouse gas emissions.

The global population is increasing, and fast. We may reach 10 billion humans by 2050, all of whom need to eat. This means that food production will have to increase, perhaps by as much as 60% by 2050. And as global food production increases, the environmental impacts of food production will also increase.

As we look ahead to 2050, not only will we need to produce more food, we could see rising demand for meat. This is because as populations around the globe rise out of poverty and have more money to spend on food, they tend to eat more meat. Meat and dairy consumption is on pace to [increase by 70%](#) by 2050. This will make the environmental impacts of food production much worse: raising animals for food generally takes more land, more water and produces more greenhouse gas emissions than growing plants to feed people.

Beef has a particularly large environmental impact. It requires two to four times more water than other animal source food and over seven times more water than plant-based foods, and is associated with much higher greenhouse gas emissions. Raising ruminants (i.e. cattle, goats, sheep) accounts for 40% of total greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture emissions. On our current trajectory, beef consumption may



increase 80-90% between the early 2000s and 2050, at a time when the world is trying to reduce greenhouse gas emissions dramatically, in order to prevent the worst effects of climate change.



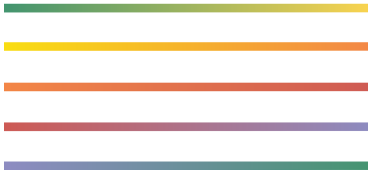
To make a long story short, experts have concluded that if we continue on our current trajectory, the environmental impacts of the food system will exceed acceptable limits. To avoid this, many experts agree that we need to do three things. First, shift towards plant-based diets, so that we can feed more people without animal agriculture growing at such a face past. Second, grow food more sustainably. And third, reduce food waste.

Plant-based diets are also good for farm animals. Each year, 50 billion chickens, 1.5 billion pigs, 300 million cattle, and 500 million sheep are killed for food worldwide. Depending on the country they're raised in, many of these animals may spend most of their lives raised in large indoor facilities, where many animals can be densely packed together. These animals may have high rates of injury and disease. They are not able to engage in many "species-typical" animal behaviors. For example, when thousands of chickens are packed together in a large shed, they cannot engage in behaviors like foraging for food, establishing social hierarchies or "pecking orders," or nesting. Some chickens and pigs spend most of their lives confined in cages or pens, where they don't even have room to turn around.

For decades, activists and ethicists have been raising alarm at the treatment of animals in confinement. Some advocate for the total abolition of commercial animal agriculture. For others, their ethics doesn't require the abolition of animal agriculture, but just requires raising animals on farms that give them a good life. If that is your personal ethics, you might consider buying meat, dairy, and eggs from a local farm, where you can see how the animals are raised. Or you could choose products in the grocery store that have a seal from a credible animal welfare certification, such as Animal Welfare Approved or Certified Humane.

Some argue that consuming meat is not the problem, but the dominant ways we produce meat are the problem. These folks argue, "It's not the cow, it's the how." For example, organizations like Sacred Cow promote the integration of livestock into diversified farms as part of a regenerative approach to agriculture, which may be capable of mimicking natural systems, building soil health, and sequestering carbon. But raising animals in this way on range or pasture requires more land and takes longer. So it is not possible to produce as much meat in this fashion. Thus, even if we get our meat, dairy, and eggs from animals who live on pasture on farms using regenerative agriculture practices and philosophies, this is not a complete solution. We still need to consume less meat. So we say, "It's not the cow, it's the how AND the how much."

Favoring plant-based foods does not require giving up meat or dairy entirely, just incorporating more plant-based meals into your week. Our tips might help you ease into plant-based eating.



<https://bioethics.jhu.edu/choose-food>