

[Here Comes The Veggie Revolution](#)

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Here Comes The Veggie Revolution

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Remember not so long ago when smokers dominated the world, to the helpless dismay of coworkers and airline passengers? Now nonsmokers have the Force on their side as laws limiting smoking are passed in most nations. Well, meat-eaters are feeling a similar kind of moral intimidation as the vegetarian uprising begins to flex its newfound numerical muscle.

Public pollsters estimate that 12 million Americans are vegetarian, or at least "on-and-off" vegetarians, with 2 million being very strict. Fully 19 percent of Americans choose a restaurant based on it serving vegetarian meals. Sociologists say that the trend is a deep-rooted, permanent change and an overview shows its strong foundations. India is widely acknowledged as the main source of vegetarianism, having propagated ahimsa, or non-injury, through Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism from ancient times. Today, swamis from India have carried on the message. The many advocates include the ISKCON, Chinmaya Missions, Sri Chinmoy's Centers, Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Vedic University of America, Sri Shirdi Sat Baba Temple, Sri Aurobindo Association, The Ayurvedic Institute, The International Society of Divine Love, Satchidananda Ashram, Radhaswami Centers, the Sadhu

Vaswani Mission and Hinduism Today. All across America there are yoga ashrams and spas, religious retreats and meditation centers, and all of them promote the health and spiritual benefits of a vegetarian diet. The holy men who founded these organizations have had a profound effect on America's dietary habits.

Beyond US Hindu-based organizations, vegetarianism has many strong proponents from other religions, as well as from the ecology and animal rights movements. Through Jain Meditation International, Gurudeva Chitrabanu has reached thousands, teaching reverence for life. His wife, Pramoda, author of *Foods for Earth, Tastes of Heaven*, promotes Gujarati vegetarian cuisine and conducts cooking classes in many parts of the US. She says the "secret ingredient is love." The Jewish Vegetarian society has 1,500 members and provides a vegetarian dating service. Buddhist vegetarianism is widespread. There is a Sufi vegetarian group in Philadelphia, a Christian Quaker Vegetarian Society and the Seventh-Day Adventists who pioneered US meat substitutes with their Loma Linda products. The American Vegetarian Society claims 5,000 members. The American Vegan Society, in Malaga, N.J. promotes "the compassionate, harmless way of life found in Veganism and Ahimsa." Tennessee has a Vegetarian Awareness Network. Illinois has its International Non-Violence and Vegetarian Society. The Vegetarian Education Network of West Chester, Pennsylvania promotes vegetarianism to youth through school programs and education material. Baltimore city in Maryland boasts a 20,000 member Vegetarian Resource Group promoting every aspect of vegetarianism from internship to cooking classes. The Association of Vegetarian Dietitians and Nutrition Educators spreads information at professional levels. These are only a few of the many organizations that carry the meatless message.

Vegetarianism: "In" and Politically Correct

The message is definitely getting across. While middle-aged Americans are used to meatloaf and potatoes, the young are rapidly turning to greens. According to a study by the National Restaurant Association, about 15 percent of America's 15 million college students eat vegetarian food. Half of women students prefer vegetarian food while one-third of male students lean toward vegetarian diets. Many of these young vegetarians are influenced by books like John Robbins Diet for a New America and are moved by animal rights, environmental and health concerns. Observes Marian Salzman, president of the youth marketing consulting firm RKG Youth, in "American Demographics": "Among young people today, the term vegetarian reflects someone who is health aware, health educated, and eating in a modern way. It's become a positive label, a positive statement about yourself." No longer "rabbit food," --vegetarian food now fits a politically correct lifestyle.

Beans to Nouvelle Indian Cuisine

As the message mounts on all sides, the food and publishing industries are picking up on the trend and making it easier to cook your own or find elegant vegetarian meals in this land of Big Macs. Large cities like New York have a multicultural population. Vegetarian falafel, tacos, samosas and a variety of sandwiches and salads are easily available. Thai, Chinese and Vietnamese restaurants have ample vegetarian dishes on the menu. Buddhist Chinese and Koreans take imitation meat to a high art, presenting artistic and delicious meatless shrimps, chicken and pork made from vegetables, tofu and gluten.

Until recently Americans have not picked up on Indian food which has an image of being heavy on oils and spices. Many restaurants are working to correct this. Some new restaurants in New York such as Chutney Mary and Bayleaf Indian Brasserie offer organic and nouvelle Indian fare which is light on oils and sauces, with a continental, all on the plate,

presentation. Shelly Bhaumitra, one of the owners of Chutney Mary, said, "Basmati rice, lentils and raita are served with the entree on the same plate. What we are trying to do is redefine Indian food where people get away from the word 'curry.' They think it's hot with a glob of sauces thrown together." Film producer and actor Tirlok Malik who owns four restaurants in partnership with his brother Chander Malik, P.K. Sharma and Darshan Prashad, first introduced the nouvelle cuisine approach at his Indian Cafe. His clientele is mostly American.

Every large metropolitan area in the U.S., especially Los Angeles, Chicago, New York and New Jersey, has hundreds of Indian restaurants. They offer not only traditional North and South Indian specialties, but also regional fare from Gujarat, Bengal and Kashmir along with the delicious dhaba or fast foods which are found in every Indian town and village. From the elegant Manhattan restaurants like Dawat, Shaan, Bombay Palace and Jewel of India to the tiniest fast food places like Jackson Diner in Jackson Heights in Queens, Americans can now get an unimaginable array of vegetarian delights. Some restaurants like Uddipi are strictly vegetarian, as are a number of fast food places like Dimple which serves Gujarati specialties, and Rasraj which offers everything from grandiose Ashoka Platters to authentic Indian desserts, all under \$7. It is not an uncommon sight to see American couples at the matchbox sized Rasraj, ordering mango lassi, dosas, samosas and eating mithai for dessert.

Chinmoy Center's Anna Brahma in Queens is totally vegetarian, and serves a mix of Indian and Western vegetarian cuisine to attract a larger audience. Nishta, the manager, says that they get an eclectic crowd, Indians and Americans in equal ratio and even Muslims, all drawn to this light vegetarian cuisine.

Says Julie Salmi, cooking expert and author of several books

including Classic Indian Grain and Vegetarian Cooking, "Americans eating in Indian restaurants are tremendously attracted to vegetarian dishes because the food is far more flavorful and satisfying."

Indian superstar Amitabh Bachohan is a strict vegetarian and a big fan of the newly opened Bay Leaf in Manhattan. Vijay Gupta, the owner, gives a nouvelle cuisine touch to the food, making it light and visually elegant. Gupta serves Gujarati dhokla in the Western manner with salad; srikand is placed in a pastry shell, and dressed up with kiwis; kesar pista kulfi is surrounded with fruits.

Microwave Options

Indian entrepreneurs have come up with very innovative frozen foods which make being a vegetarian as easy as knowing how to turn on the microwave oven. Jyoti and Deep Foods are just two of the many frozen Indian meals in Indian grocery stores, and tiny frozen samosas, flatbreads and even frozen paneer or milk cheese can be stored in the freezer for quick meals. Many enterprising Indian women have also started catering services from the home, providing wholesome home-cooked vegetarian meals to those who are entertaining or are too busy to cook. One woman offers two appetizers, three vegetables, hand-made chappatis, yogurt raita and dessert. She always has standing orders.

Vegetarian cookbooks have become best-sellers. Yamuna Devi, author of the best-selling cookbook Lord Krishna's Cuisine: The Art of Indian Vegetarian Cooking has gone a step further in Yamuna's Table, creating dishes which are a melange of East and West. By showing Americans how to enhance the flavor of vegetables with a tarkara of mustard seeds or white cumin, and creating flavor variations by making dosas not only from lentils but from buckwheat, cornmeal or even cream of wheat, she increases the nutritive and taste value of

vegetarian food.

Ironically, while many Americans are seriously reconsidering their meat-based diets, many Indians, some who may have been vegetarian in India, are going for a non-vegetarian diet. Trying to keep with their mainstream peers, some Indians may actually be starting on the meat and alcohol track that many Americans are getting off of.

But vegetarianism may be the future shock wave in America by sheer force of ecological change, if not by choice. A recent AP report cited energy shortages, exhausted land, scarce water and a doubling in population as factors which would radically change the American diet by 2050. Soil depletion plus shrinking resources will compel people to embrace a more vegetarian diet. While this will undoubtedly be a healthier diet, people who can afford to buy meat will still do so, in the mistaken belief that meat is essential to strength, vitality and lifestyle.

H. Jay Dinshah, president of the American Vegan Society, believes that as the hordes of the homeless poor increase in America, diets will be divided along demarcations of rich and poor. He notes, "The gaps are getting wider and wider between the rich and the poor. What do you think happens when we run out of a resource? The people who can afford it will go and pay for having their heart attacks, and then pay to have a triple by-pass for \$50,000. The ones who turn vegetarian will be the smart ones, the compassionate ones and the humane ones. In the long run, karma is a great leveler and equalizer."

"We don't use much oil and are very health conscious. Some of the innovative 'fusion' dishes we've introduced include tofu with jeera and coriander, okra cooked with Indian spices, breadcrumbs and rosemary leaves."--Film producer,

restauranteur, Tirlok Malik

"The foundation of health is in aharashuddhi, the purity of food. When you take innocent food, food which is free from the vibrations of violence and bloodshed, a miracle happens in your life. The body, which is a house for the mind, becomes an instrument for healthy mindedness. "-- Pramoda Chitrabhanu

Sidebar: A Buffet of Meatless Matters

Television, vegetarian-girls-only internet clubs and publishers are proliferating the message of dietary nonviolence. An older generation struggles to integrate the awakened conscience of coming generations. Consider these recent headlines.

"The Wall Street Journal," July 18, 1995

Teen Vegans' Diet Rules Bring Parents to Boiling Point

"Vegans, who outdo vegetarians by half, won't eat meat, fish, poultry or dairy products and won't wear silk, leather or wool. Teenage vegans follow all those strictures just like their adult counterparts but with one extra consequence: they drive their parents crazy. 'She has a hotline number that she calls to check if there are animal substances in the ingredients before she'll take anything,' complains Patricia Hunt, a registered nurse in Mukilteo, Wash. about her daughter Jennifer, 18 years old....Parents are harangued about cooking ingredients, annoyed by mealtime lectures from the kids and often feel compelled to prepare two sets of meals....Keith Mason says he "yelled a lot" when their 18-year-old daughter, Christina, and son Jacob, 14, became vegans two years ago. "I have a lot of admiration for what they're doing, but at the same time it makes me want to gnash my teeth!" (by Clametta Y. Coleman)

"Animals' Agenda," Summer, 1995

Dinosaurs and Dinner--A Vegetarian Analysis of Jurassic Park

"As the main characters arrive, the viewer learns that the young girl is a vegetarian....she symbolizes stewardship and a renewed sense of place in an environment where all creatures have equal standing....Her brother represents humanity's dominance over all other life forms and its willingness to exploit the earth and its creatures in the name of science....the comparisons between the humans devoured by the feisty reptiles and the nonhuman animals killed in our nation's slaughterhouses seem unavoidable. Both victims meet their ends trapped in inescapable situations....Despite the fact that the villainous dinosaurs are meat-eaters, both the slaughtering of the livestock [to feed them] and the unfortunate characters' deaths seem "murderous"....the murderous quality of eating animals, both human and non-human, is central to the nature of flesh-eating." (by Joseph M. Smith, reprinted by Vegetarian Singles News)

"Veggie Life," November, 1995

Teens: Going Green and Lean

"One third of girls aged 12 to 15 say vegetarianism is 'in.' That fraction rises to 48 percent of 16- to 17-year-old girls and fully half of 18- to 19-year olds. The stats are lower for boys, but more than a fifth of guys aged 18 to 19 agree.... 'I became a vegetarian because one summer I adopted a dairy cow, and we became really attached. When she died, I cried for days," says Brighid O'Dea, a 14-year-old girl from New York. 'I got sick at the idea of eating her relatives. I went cold turkey [slang for "gave up"] on meat that very moment.' Reema Popli, a 19-year-old from Fremont, CA, says, 'I grew up in India...for me, eating meat was normal, since my family never opposed it. But recently I became a vegetarian, because I think it will

help me get closer to God.' ...Judy Krizmanic, author of *A Teen's Guide to Going Vegetarian* (Puffin, 1994) says 'Most of the time when a young person adopts a vegetarian diet, it's not a sign of an eating disorder. More likely, it's an expression of youthful idealism. I'd say most have well thought-out reasons. Often they are involved in the animal rights or environmental movements. They tend to have very strong convictions about these issues of compassion, and I think that is very encouraging.'" (by Linda Wasmer Smith)

Sidebar:

Associated Press Digests an American Trend

Excerpts, reprinted with permission from AP, indicate just how widespread and mainstream vegetarianism has become. Vegetarian eating today means much more than a plate of beans and brown rice. Inspired by spices, foods and cooking from around the world, meatless cuisine has been transformed. Eating habits have changed, with health-conscious Americans embracing ethnic foods and newly available produce from afar. Vegetarian and international cuisines are a particularly good fit. Now it's vegetarian cooking that's profiting. If you are eager to skip the meat but crave the exotic in your kitchen, try cookbooks ranging from *Indian Vegetarian Cooking* by Michael Pandya and *Mexico: The Vegetarian Table* by Victoria Wise to *The Lowfat Jewish Vegetarian Cookbook* by Debra Wasserman. *Vegetarian Times* magazine, whose circulation has doubled to 340,000 in five years, features international cooking in every issue. In August, readers could learn to dish up broiled Caribbean fruits, grilled vegetables with couscous or cashew chutney.

In haute dining, Charlie Trotter's restaurant in Chicago serves a \$65 "Vegetable Menu" nightly alongside its \$85 "Grand Menu." At the Country Life Vegetarian Buffet in Los Angeles,

the most popular dish is an Ecuadorean pancake, a spicy potato creation that's grilled, baked, then topped with salsa. "It's a big draw," says manager Richard Coon. "Once vegetarianism started to expand more and to experiment with foods from around the world, our foods expanded too."

Some of the new customers at the Blind Faith vegetarian restaurant in Evanston, Ill., sport fur coats. "That's very frustrating for me and my staff," says manager Rob Levin. "But we don't kick them out. We get a real variety of customers these days." Mink-garbed diners may be a disturbing sight to purist vegetarians, who are animal defenders of old. But they're a sign of a sea change in vegetarian eating. Spurred more by concerns for their health than pity for animals, many Americans are becoming part-time vegetarians, gobbling down vegetable brochettes or avocado burritos one day while enjoying their pork chops another. "They're not coming out and saying I want to save Bambi," says Linda Gilbert, president of the Des Moines, Iowa-based research firm Health Focus Inc. "People are getting into it because they want to eat less fat. You can see the change on menus, on grocery shelves, at supper tables. Restaurants can't get away without offering meatless entrees."

Supermarket sales of imitation meats are booming. Nearly a quarter of the new Nestle's Lean Cuisine frozen dinners in the last two years have been meatless. The popularity of such food has become so great that PBS plans the first nationally broadcast vegetarian cooking show in December, with Mollie Katzen, author of such classics as the Moosewood Cookbook. The revolution in American attitudes toward health and food, the obsession with getting fit, along with the discovery that fat is the enemy transformed vegetarian eating--just at the time that a broader audience was discovering it. Add to this the inspiration of ethnic cooking and the new availability of varied

produce, and vegetarianism began to look downright tantalizing. "It's not like the old days when you'd be eating lettuce and rice, rabbit food," says Patrick Downey, manager of Angelica's Kitchen, a trendy vegetarian restaurant in New York City's East Village. Vegetarianism has evolved from a Cinderella of cuisines to a belle of the table.

Strict vegetarians are rare. Up to two million Americans--one percent of the population--completely abstain from meat. But some 12 million Americans consider themselves vegetarian--even while many admit to eating some meat--a finding that underscores the growing appeal of part-time vegetarianism. Some companies are cashing in on the trend. Archer Daniels Midland Co. has sold a veggie burger under the Green Giant label nationally for a year, with results "far beyond our expectations," says Larry Cunningham at ADM. Linda McCartney, wife of the former Beatle, has sold 10 million frozen vegetarian meals--such as "Mexican-style Stew With Spanish Rice"--since introducing them in ten US test markets last year. Sales of imitation meat or poultry products shot from \$44 million in 1994 to nearly \$65 million in 1995. According to the research firm A.C. Nielsen Inc. "You don't find food categories that grow like that. Most grow 3 to 5 percent a year," says Don Ludemann, manager of strategy and brand development for Green Giant, a Pillsbury Co. brand.

A restaurant guide put out by the Vegetarian Journal has ballooned from 1,000 listings in 1990 to 2,000 today, including children's camps and adult resorts that offer meatless eating. Those who've embraced vegetarianism fully view its new popularity with both amusement and relief. At the least, they are happy to shed the stigma their choice once carried.

Protect both our species, two-legged and four legged. Both food and water for their needs supply. May they with us increase in stature and strength. Save us from hurt all our

days, O Powers! -- Rig Veda 10.37.11