

The Problems with Animal-Based “Regenerative” Agriculture

-Executive Summary

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Thank you for your feedback. I can speak for myself as one of the authors, but I cannot speak for the entire Animal Rights Committee, because the Animal Rights Committee understands that any animal consumption, even “regenerative,” is inhumane and incompatible with animal rights. More on this later under “Ethics.”

We have struggled with the important and difficult question of how to make animal consumption sustainable even if it cannot be made compatible with animal rights. The [supplemental policy document I have drafted](#) (see chart on p. 7) recommends diets that are 100% plant-based and also allows for about 10% animal consumption. These recommendations are fairly universal from climate experts. This particular chart is from the EAT-Lancet Commission, the largest group to study the issue. But Drawdown, the United Nations, and other sustainability experts agree.

It may be impossible to make animal consumption sustainable because of the massive water and land requirements as well as the waste and pollution issues. Even the best animal-based “regenerative” agriculture and silvopasture systems can produce only a small fraction of animals for consumption without both a climate catastrophe and continued unsustainable biodiversity losses. If we do not learn to share the planet by allowing wildlife a significant share of intact ecosystems, we will not survive. And any such animal products would be expensive and so elitist.

Domesticated vs Wild Animals

Wild animals are part of ecosystems, but domesticated animals are not necessary for growing crops, indeed are problematic because of e-coli, etc. contamination. Domesticated animals have been integrated into agricultural systems solely because of high demand for animal consumption. The domesticated animals in “regenerative” agriculture harm biodiversity by replacing the apex herbivores with domesticated ones and require the elimination of apex predators. We know from the removal and later reintroduction of wolves in Yellowstone Park how essential these predators are for biodiversity and ecosystem restoration. And the domesticated cattle usually cannot eat the native grazeland plants or don’t get to market weight fast enough on them, so ranching further disrupts the ecosystem by replacing them with non-native grasses.

This negative wildlife impact of grassfed beef is also causing conflicts between grassfed cattle ranchers and Native American tribes. The latest battle is in Point Reyes National Seashore in California, where water resources and the best land are dedicated to the exclusive use of two dozen cattle ranchers at the expense of the native Tule Elk and all other wildlife. The elk, cherished by the Coast Miwok and other native peoples and a food source for them, are being killed on public land to save water and land for the cattle. Plains Indians want buffalo, not cows; Pacific Northwest want wild, not farmed, salmon, etc.

Other Alternatives

Cultured cell meats also appear unsustainable environmentally and also violate animal rights, but may help provide small amounts of animals for consumption. Some similar newer technology may also be developed.

Neither EAT-Lancet nor any researchers I know of have come up with a sustainable way to produce domesticated animals in quantities required even for 10% of calories. My own view is that those who refuse to eat plant-based would ideally switch to occasionally eating wild animals only in tiny quantities, but indigenous and any subsistence-level peoples would have priority along with native wild animal predators. The Animal Rights Committee has not discussed this detail, and we'd need to consider that impact on animal rights. I also favor small amounts of insect consumption, if that can be made sustainable given the crisis in insect populations.

Survival

Humans originally started eating small amounts of animals because survival required it. Our survival now requires that most of us stop eating them. The current scientific understanding is that we have no biological requirement for any animal or insect consumption; even the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics agrees that a fully plant-based diet is appropriate for all life stages. Our anatomy as Great Ape relatives also confirms that we are herbivore-insectivores who don't need meat. We cannot sacrifice the future of life on earth for something we don't need.

Ethics

Animal-based "regenerative" agriculture is consistent with animal *welfare* theory, not animal *rights* theory. The Green Party shifted from animal *welfare* to animal *rights* when the Animal Rights Committee was formed in 2016. Greens cannot uphold the unethical animal welfare theory and so need to move away from animal agriculture.

Even if we put aside environmental harms of eating animals, we Greens need to sit with the truth that no animal consumption is humane. Even those who think it can be would never call it humane if it were dogs or cats in the place of those "free-range" cows, chickens, pigs, etc. I know that cognitive dissonance makes this hard to see for those who eat animals. I am sorry to be the bearer of such "inconvenient" truths, but we cannot look away. If you think you're ok with eating dogs, check out this [company that sells organic dog meat](#) (not dog food but dog meat for human consumption).

Although animal agriculture is unsustainable, the Animal Rights Committee would oppose it for ethical reasons even if it could somehow be made sustainable because we oppose the "commodification of life." If "slavery" and "mass execution" for profit were sustainable, we would still oppose them on ethical grounds.

I'm glad I adopted a plant-strong diet 30 years ago, because animal-eaters are in a bind these days trying to defend a diet that is indefensible on environmental, health, or humane grounds. As a former smoker, I really do sympathize. This is one of many areas where sustainability requires many of us to make changes that we do not want to make even if we will be glad we did later. I have seen my own extended family members slowly come around, and they are doing so mostly for health reasons only.

Plant-strong diets are one of the fastest-growing food shifts. The #1 barrier to eating more plant-based foods is that “No one has ever asked me to.” Let’s start asking and set a good example! We’ll all be glad we did.

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[See this document](#) for a more thorough analysis (can request pdf)