

Making Ripples

Reducetarianism

by Amanda Bancroft

Despite the new-sounding name, Reducetarianism is just giving a label to an old practice. Its appeal is that not everyone is able or willing to eat zero meat and animal products, but reducing portion sizes or eliminating meat from one or more meals per week is easy to do. While critics argue that ethical eating is a “first world problem,” what we eat in the wealthiest nations ripples out to affect people in the poorest ones which are most at risk from climate change.

First, some terminology: omnivores are those who eat both plants and animals; vegetarians are those who eat plants, some animal products like eggs and dairy, but no meat; vegans do not consume any animal products at all. Flexitarians eat a primarily plant-based diet with the occasional inclusion of meat. Reducetarians, on the other hand, gradually reduce meat consumption in their current diets. According to Reducetarian.com, this includes “cows (beef and veal), pigs (pork, ham, bacon), birds (chicken, turkey, and duck), fish, lobsters, and other crustaceans, and the flesh of any other animal.”

Reducing meat consumption is no longer a fringe fad. The Advisory Committee for the USDA’s 2015 Dietary Guidelines that will be published later this year recommends that Americans eat less meat for the sake of the environment and the public health. Eating less (or no) meat has become more popular in the US. In 1971, only one percent of Americans identified as vegetarian. In the past five years, various polls have cited anywhere from five to thirteen percent of the US population. Worldwide, eating less meat is nothing new. Over thirty percent of Indians, eight percent of Israelis, four to five percent of Chinese, and hundreds of thousands of Europeans say they are vegetarian, with three to four million vegetarians in the UK alone.

Reducetarianism is supported by many celebrities and well-known names, including bestselling author Michael Pollan, who wrote *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Dan Buettner, founder of Blue Zones (an analysis of the world’s longest-lived populations) claims that “there is no question the world’s longest-lived people eat a fraction of the amount of animal products than most Americans do,” even though they aren’t strictly vegan in most cases.

In the time it took you to read this column, 86,700 animals were slaughtered in the US alone, according to the Humane Society. Animal science has now verified that human capabilities (once considered unique to our species) are more widespread among other species, such as complex communication, problem-solving skills, tool use, and emotions. According to ABC News, pigs can outperform Jack Russell Terriers on certain computer tests, suggesting that our meat may be smarter than some pets. Chickens can control the thermostat on their own coop, and cows form lifelong friendships with each other.

To learn more and take the 30 Day Pledge (a free, fast, and flexible commitment to reducing meat consumption for 30 days) visit Reducetarian.com and join almost 600 others who have pledged. Any quantity counts!

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