

– an *EVEN* exclusive interview –



with

Dawn Moncrief

Founding Director,

A Well-Fed World,

Food Justice

and

Animal Advocate

Dawn Moncrief is the Founder and Executive Director of [A Well-Fed World](#), a Washington DC-based hunger relief and animal protection organization that partners with and financially strengthens vegan feeding programs for people in need... farm animal care and rescue efforts... and pro-veg outreach campaigns.

She holds two master's degrees from The George Washington University: one in international relations, the other in women studies—both with a focus on economic development. Her work highlights the ways in which high levels of meat consumption in the U.S. and globally exacerbate world hunger, especially for women and children.

She also draws attention to the negative consequences of animal agriculture on climate change; as well as the ethical and environmental deceptiveness in “gifting” animals for food in poor countries and “humane” meat marketing, more generally.



EVEN: How did veganism become part of your life?

Dawn: I was vegetarian since 19 because I cared about animals. I didn't know the issues, just that eating animals hurt them. Obvious enough. While I was in grad school for international relations, to work on global poverty issues, a friend introduced me to the concept of veganism.

You can imagine that I wasn't very happy to have my pizza and ice cream threatened, so I was definitely going to research the issues. As I did, it became very clear that in addition to the unconscionable animal suffering, the consumption and production of animal-based foods has dire consequences for the environment and food security.

Think tanks and policymakers would express concerns about the negative consequences of “livestock” on resource scarcity, pollution, land degradation, and a host of other environmental problems (and now we have greenhouse gases, too). But they wouldn't advocate reducing meat consumption, even though it's the most obvious and a relatively easy way to reduce the pressure on the system. – Dawn Moncrief

Instead they would say that the problem is “demand-driven” and we must, therefore, figure out the best way to meet that demand and minimize the inherent harm in the system. Their solutions were (and still are) primarily focused on increasing technology and slowing population growth. There are pros and cons to those areas, but regardless---reducing consumption is a must for any viable solution. It's not enough on its own, but it must be part of the equation.

So, that's what I decided to focus on. I wrote my master's thesis: *“Rethinking Meat – Recentering World Hunger Paradigms.”* Since about 2000, I worked on the hunger-meat connections as a part-time, information campaign. I was fortunate to spend some time on it while working as

Program Director, then Executive Director, at the **Farm Animal Rights Movement (FARM)**. In 2009, I founded **A Well-Fed World** to work on the issues full-time and add a program component to the information aspect.

EVEN: Who was an influential person in your life earlier on that led you to veganism?

Dawn: My mother is the most influential person in my life. She was vegetarian from when I was young, but she never advocated it for us. Like many others, she thought it was okay for her as an adult, but was concerned about me and my sister as children. I've been very fortunate to have her support. She is mostly vegan now. My sister is newly vegan and my niece is vegetarian.

It was a friend who introduced me to the concept of veganism and gave me a tape of Dr. Michael Klaper's talk. (Yes, a tape.) I became vegetarian in 1989 for vegetarian, and vegan in 1998.

EVEN: What advice would you give to a vegan advocate wanting to become more of an activist?

Dawn: I would recommend reading some of the great books available from experienced activists... *The Animal Activist's Handbook: Maximizing Our Positive Impact in Today's World* by Matt Ball and Bruce Friedrich... *Striking at the Roots: A Practical Guide to Animal Activism* by Mark Hawthorne... and *Uncaged: Top Activists Share Their Wisdom on Effective Farm Animal Advocacy* by Ben Davidow.

I'm featured in the last two and in them I promote the power of giving away free veg food and taking care of yourself to avoid burnout. On the latter note, play the long game and keep realistic.

It takes more than just finding out the reality to change. – Dawn Moncrief

So don't go in expecting huge immediate returns on information-sharing. For many, it's likely a step towards their change but may not be the final. That said, that type of advocacy (leafleting, tabling, pay-per-view) works very well, just be patient and kind (to yourself and others).

Don't lash out. It may make us feel better in the moment, but it's not about us and that person will probably just hold resentment. It's likely a step backward for change. If you decide to be confrontational, make it intentional with the animals' best interest always coming first.

Work in groups to get social support and focus your activism on people who are interested in learning more. – Dawn Moncrief

Be intentional if you're engaging someone who is a hard sell and don't try to force family. Of course, be a resource for family when it's welcomed, but families can be more locked down than anyone and it can take a huge emotional toll (which is not conducive to activism). Think numbers not proximity.

Finally, use your natural skills. I'm very much in favor of skill-building, but focus on areas where you are naturally strong and/or particularly interested. Remember, it's about staying power.

EVEN: What do you think makes veganism hard for people?

Dawn: I think one of the hardest things about transitioning to veganism, is the addictive relationship so many of us have with food. There is more and more research clearly showing how our body chemistry is affected by food and how intense physical cravings can be.

When I need a booster shot of kindness, I think about how attached (even addicted) I am to chocolate and, more generally, to sugar. I'll go more than a year without them, and then "fall off the wagon." It's been a life-long struggle.

Food is used for comfort. It's associated with family, friends, holidays, and even love. So there are a lot of physical and emotional ties to our favorite foods. – Dawn Moncrief

Oftentimes when people don't feel well when trying veganism or vegetarianism, it's an easy way out to say their body needs animal-based foods. Oftentimes, however, it's withdrawal. When I quit caffeine or sugar, I didn't feel well either. It doesn't mean that it wasn't a good idea. I was withdrawing. When I quit both of them at the same time, I actually had to take a few days off work!

Other factors that can make veganism difficult include the social dynamics with unsupportive friends and family. There is also dealing with constantly being around non-veg food and not partaking, especially if you're still interested in the foods and/or there aren't other good options available. Finally, convenience and availability are important determinants for or against our efforts.

EVEN: What, in your opinion, is the most misunderstood idea about veganism?

Dawn: People like to dismiss veganism as sentimentalism.

In addition to its ethical strengths, it's extremely logical. It is meat-eaters' rationalizations and intense physical and emotional attachment to eating animal products that is illogical.

– Dawn Moncrief

There is more than enough nutritional science to back the case that veganism is healthier than vegetarianism or carnism (consumption of animal products). People eat meat, dairy and eggs because they want them, not because they have to for health reasons.

EVEN: What one thing from your thinking in childhood do you wish you could change?

Dawn: Just the obvious. I wish I had had more insight and options as a young person so I could have been vegan sooner. I also wish there had been more nutrition information widely available so that my mother would have been more comfortable making more plant-based meals. She felt she had to include meat for us to be healthy. She was willing to sacrifice her own health because she cared about animals, but her concern for our health kept her making meat.

I also think about my mom's suffering. She would fry pork chops for us and the blood would seep out onto the white flour. It was bad enough for me to witness that and I hadn't made the connection yet. How much more horrible for her to endure that after already being sensitized to animal suffering and the literalness of eating animal flesh.



EVEN: If you were to mentor a younger person today, what guidance might you offer? What encouraging words might you share with a newbie?

Dawn: Same advice as I had for the advocate and I would encourage them to be patient and kind with themselves and others.

EVEN: Do you have a favorite vegan meal or food you can tell us about that really makes veganism work for you?

Dawn: I love my tofu scramble. I eat it pretty much every morning. I use an entire pound of collard greens with one package of extra firm tofu and a tomato. (I include the tomato because citrus increases the absorption of iron from the collard greens.) Plus, it's delicious! I use a little olive oil, onions, garlic, as well as turmeric, paprika, and a season blend. The secret ingredient is actually brown mustard. So good!

EVEN: What one thing makes veganism worthwhile for you?

Dawn: Veganism is the best thing I've ever done. First, going vegan. Then, working for veganism. It's perfect in concept for people, animals, and the environment.

I'm someone who sees multiple sides to many things. With veganism, there's no downside in concept. The only downside is in practice --- adjusting to new foods, inconvenience, and lack of social support. But those are logistical pains and the issues are improving as more people adopt a vegan lifestyle. The good veganism does for your body and for the world is indisputable (even though people try to dispute it anyway).

Veganism isn't the only thing that matters, but it's a must for those who strive to make ethical choices. – Dawn Moncrief

EVEN: Any opinion or insight on the future of veganism in today's world?

Dawn: I'm hopeful about the increasing popularity of meat-reducing in high-consuming countries and that veganism is expanding and becoming a mainstream concept.

Unfortunately meat consumption is growing at the global level because people in lower- and middle-income countries are eating more meat per person. That's why it's all the more important that Americans and other people from high-income countries reduce our per capita animal consumption. We need to set a better example so that eating animals is not associated so strongly with wealth and power.

Furthermore, we need to change our actions so that we have moral authority to advocate for global reductions.

One of the innovations that I'm most excited about is the Hampton Creeks product *Beyond Eggs*. Its focus is on making it inexpensive and simple for manufacturers and large-scale restaurants to use in their products. Not only does it have immense reach, it has the backing of the Gates Foundation. I expect this to be a real game-changer and drastically reduce egg-production. This would save millions (probably billions) of egg-laying hens the horrific suffering in their lives and their brutal deaths.

Forbes announced veganism as the #1 food trend in 2013. Influential people from many walks of life are going vegan and popularizing the concept. We're gaining momentum! – Dawn Moncrief

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