

November 27, 2007

Veggin out: Vegans pursue their diet for a number of reasons

November is Vegan Month, and vegan outreach groups across the nation are encouraging Americans to give veganism a try.

By GARRON MARSH

TAHLEQUAH DAILY PRESS — What do animal testing, factory farming, global warming, good health, spirituality or ethics have to do with one's diet?

For many Americans, these are the reasons they choose to live a vegan lifestyle.

The term "veganism" simply refers to the philosophy or lifestyle choice a person makes to eliminate the use of animals as food, clothing or for any other purpose in their daily lives. Some choose veganism to avoid inflicting suffering on animals in factory farms, fur farms, and laboratories; others, simply to enjoy the health benefits of a plant-based diet.

Vegans in America are by no means a majority, but for whatever reason, a growing number are making the choice to "go veg."

A Time/CNN poll taken in 2002 found 4 percent of American adults consider themselves vegetarians, and of this group, 5 percent consider themselves vegans. This means 0.2 percent of American adults are vegans -- or a little more than 600,000.

For many -- like Tahlequah resident Gary Cheatham -- the health benefits of a vegan lifestyle helped make the transition to an animal-free diet.

Cheatham himself made the switch more than 12 years ago.

"I think health is the primary reason," said Cheatham. "Of course, ethics creeps in there a little bit, but my reasons are primarily for health. I just don't want to consume any animal products."

Carol McKiel, Cherokee County Health Coalition coordinator, provided evidence to support those health claims -- including a reduced risk of obesity and cancer.

"Since vegans have a low-fat diet, research has shown they are able to control the pain associated with rheumatoid arthritis," said McKiel. "Also, studies by the World Health Organization have shown a vegan diet can be a good preventative measure against cancer -- especially breast, prostate and colon cancer.

"People on a vegan diet usually have an increase in the phytochemicals that come from a diet high in plants, which can contribute to a reduced cancer risk," McKiel said. "Combined with plenty of exercise, a vegan diet can keep us very healthy."

For others, perceived animal cruelty issues related to overcrowded and inhumane factory farms, as well as invasive and painful vivisection and animal tests, offers plenty of incentive for going vegan.

But what does any of this stuff have to do with global warming?

In a 2006 report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, titled "Livestock's Long Shadow," the livestock sector of modern agriculture was shown to be responsible for 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, and more than 8 percent of global water use.

Likewise, the report found that "in all, livestock production accounts for 70 percent of agricultural land and 30 percent of the land surface of the planet."

As it turns out, what a person puts on his plate can have an impact on the planet as a whole.

London newspaper The Guardian, for example, reported the "average burger man... emits the equivalent of 1.5 tons more [carbon dioxide] every year than the standard vegan."

Attorney Roland Windsor Vincent, of Biteglobalwarming.org, puts it another way.

"A meat eater on a bicycle leaves a bigger carbon footprint than a vegan in a Hummer," said Vincent.

Often, the choice to become vegan requires a conscious effort that many are not willing to make.

For those who do, however, the benefits of going vegan seem to outweigh any hassle.

"I think it was just in the news yesterday -- another beef recall due to E.coli," said Cheatham. "I sit there watching those news reports and thinking to myself, 'I'm glad I don't have to worry about that.' A disease that attacks the brain -- why risk that?"

Soft and Chewy Chocolate Chip Cookies

Courtesy of www.vegweb.com

- 1 cup cold vegan buttery spread [such as Earth Balance]
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup applesauce
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 2 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 bag vegan chocolate chips (such as Sam's Choice Baking Chips) -- about 6 ounces

Preheat oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit. Stir the vegan buttery spread around in a medium sized mixing bowl to soften it up. Add 1 cup sugar, and stir the two ingredients together very well. Add the brown sugar; stir together again. Add the applesauce and vanilla, and stir together once more. Now add all the dry ingredients -- excluding the chocolate chips - at once and mix together quickly. Try not to over-mix. If the dough is too soft, add a bit more flour (around one-fourth cup). Mix in the chocolate chips, and spoon dollops of dough onto an ungreased baking sheet at least one inch apart. Bake for 9-11 minutes at 375. Let cool slightly on the baking sheet, remove, and let cool completely on wax paper.

Learn more

To find out more about how a vegan lifestyle, visit www.americanvegan.org. For an extensive list of free vegan recipes, check out www.vegweb.com.