

Definition of veganism

Veganism represents a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, other animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of humans, other animals and the environment.

What it means in everyday life

In dietary terms veganism means doing away with all products derived wholly or partly from other animals. It also means not wearing animal skins and fur (leather, feather, fur, wool and silk), or using products that have been tested on animals. Unfortunately, all medicines have been tested on other animals due to regulatory requirements, and it may be hard to avoid them at times or to find alternatives for some medical treatments.

Language use

We use the words 'other animals' or 'non-human animals' in our language to acknowledge that humans are animals too; a fact often ignored by those who benefit from exploiting other animals. We share more with other animals than most of us realise or would admit.

How many?!

When we look at the sheer numbers of other animals raised, caught and killed for food, and the types of suffering endured by them, we are right to prioritise the issue of farming other animals over other issues, and to focus on vegan food. About 60 billion land animals and over a trillion (!) marine animals are used and killed as commodities to satisfy human taste preferences. Needlessly, as plant-based food and drink alternatives are available in many areas around the world.

All animals have a right to life

Poor welfare in captivity

Non-human animals are living beings seeking life and freedom, and avoiding harm and danger. In every 'livestock system', no matter how high the welfare standards are supposed to be, non-human animals will suffer. The Five Freedoms, frequently used to measure welfare, will never be met completely. They include the freedom:

- from hunger, thirst and malnutrition;
- from pain, injury and disease;
- from discomfort;
- from fear and distress;
- to express natural behaviour.

Individual animal welfare is never optimal in any husbandry system.

Free living other animals

Other animals living in their natural habitat may also experience one or more of the issues above, however, they have developed coping mechanisms and adaptive behaviour to help them deal with challenges. Non-human animals are usually less well equipped when coping in unnatural and

restricted husbandry environments or situations imposed on them by humans. Mental and physical suffering can be severe in captivity. And we haven't even discussed the many painful procedures routinely carried out, frequently without pain relief.

Vegans believe killing is not justified

Ultimately, humans take away life. Other animals do not 'give up their life' as some people believe – they have not given consent to be slaughtered. In over 95% of cases they are killed prematurely:

- Cows, for example, could live to well over 20 years of age, while on 'dairy' farms they are usually shot between 3-4 years of age when milk production is no longer considered 'profitable'. Cows bred for 'beef' meat are killed sooner.
- Broiler chicks are just 6 weeks old and grown too rapidly to sustain their own weight and heart when they are killed. Chickens could live to 10 years old.
- Pigs are slaughtered when they have reached a certain weight, which will be later in organic systems than in intensive farms, but they are typically killed between 4-6 months of age, while they could reach 15 years.
- Sheep can also live to 15 years but depending on whether they are slaughtered as lambs or later, they are shot and bled between 3-10 months of age.
- Every week in the UK 3,000 male calves are killed shortly after birth, usually within days, and over 40 million day-old chicks are killed each year, including those from organic farms. Males do not secrete bodily fluids destined for offspring (cow's milk), or lay eggs like hens do. Calves are either shot or exported alive to mainland European countries where they are kept in small pens to produce veal flesh - deprived of their mothers and their natural food (milk).

How does organic or free range farming compare?

The Vegan Society agrees with organic principles being more in harmony with nature. However, the intensity of human labour and other inputs makes organic products generally a less economically viable option for a large proportion of the population. UK organic livestock numbers are a tiny fraction of total number of livestock, ranging from 0.8% for pigs to 3.6% for sheep, and organic farming trends have been declining for the past five years. The result is that about 98% of animal products sold in shops and (fast food) restaurants comes from intensive farming systems. Over 15% of the meat sold comes from animals who have not been stunned before slaughter (halal meat), which is often not honestly labelled as such.

In organic 'dairy farming', for example, calves may stay with their mothers for months, but no system is stress-proof. Separation may still occur at birth at some farms. Organic milk yield and disease prevalence is usually lower than in intensive systems. There, cows are continuously artificially inseminated; impregnated as many times as possible with only two to three months of non-pregnancy periods in between pregnancies; being milked for months including during pregnancy, and separated from her calf very soon after birth. Those systems cause stress, metabolic hunger, mastitis (udder infections) and lameness on a large scale.

During life on any farm, handling, transport and slaughter, animals will suffer and die. Free range is not the answer either; many lambs suffer from hypothermia in the field, for example, and many die. While the EU has banned the use of gestation crates for sows for the entire duration of pregnancy, these sow stalls are still allowed for some of the time. Pigs in organic systems have more space, but their lives are still cut short, just so that people can enjoy eating their flesh.

The EU has also banned intensive battery cages; however, 'enriched' cages cause just about as much suffering to laying hens as battery cages used to. In free range systems, many problems with aggressive behaviour, injurious pecking, leg problems (e.g. broken bones) persist. Dairy and eggs are products of non-human animals who are caught up in systems causing cruelty and death to millions of

other animals, just as eating meat is responsible for billions of lives lost. This is needless, as products derived from animals are unnecessary for humans to maintain health.

Farming Stock-free makes for a smarter economy

The Vegan Society believes in a world in which humans do not exploit other animals, and would like to see farmers thrive without raising and killing non-human animals. We would like to see efforts, skills, knowledge and funds redirected into plant-based agriculture. Without subsidy the 'dairy', 'pork', lamb and 'beef' industries would already have collapsed. If subsidies are to be continued, they would be better invested in stock-free horticulture.

Stock-free farmers (arable farmers who don't use manures or other products from farmed animals) avoid the reliance on the livestock industry to produce manure. They are unaffected by fluctuating costs of animal feed and can function well without subsidies. In the UK stock-free farming offers an alternative to the tight margins and low farmer confidence currently placing many 'dairy farmers' in a precarious situation. Stock-free organic farms are already well established in many countries. In the UK, Ian Tolhurst has been a pioneer in this field.

Being vegan protects other animals used and killed for human purposes

Veganism is about so much more than the food on our plate. Veganism means respect for all life. Millions of other animals are kept in captive environments such as fur farms, zoos, safari parks, aviaries, breeding programmes, circuses and other 'entertainment', in private homes and 'collections', and in laboratories.

The majority of mammals and bird species do not 'thrive' in captivity. They may 'survive' but all living beings have remarkable instincts and coping mechanisms to stay alive - there are many human examples too of horrific survival situations. That doesn't mean quality of life is necessarily acceptable, let alone good.

Take flight

Have you ever sat in awe listening to the amazing calls of different birds in a garden, park or nature reserve, watching them find food or enjoying them take flight?

Did you know that many birds in zoos, aviaries and falconries might never fly or be released in the wild again? Many birds in captivity had their wings clipped (called pinioning). One of the birds' most basic needs will never be fulfilled anymore. Mammals and fish who roam or swim thousands of miles are locked up in small enclosures for life.

Positive behaviour

Studies by behaviour experts of animals living in-situ (that means, where they belong, as opposed to ex-situ, which is in captivity such as zoos, parks or labs) have demonstrated that other animals have a wide range of behaviours and experience emotional states that were previously thought to be exclusively human. We now know that not only do most animals feel pain, distress and discomfort, many also feel joy, seek company, like to play, use tools and engage in pleasurable activities, more so than people once thought.

Learning about the lives of other animals is so fascinating! But unfortunately the lives in captivity are not representative of those living in their natural habitat.

Take action

There is no educational value in watching other animals in captivity, where they cannot display their natural behaviour. Whether animals are taken from their natural habitat or bred in captivity, stress is inevitable. What you can do:

- Watch kingfishers dive into a stream, birds of prey hover in the air and massive flocks of starling sweep in the sky – isn't that literally awesome?
- Watch nature documentaries or search for information and videos about other species online
- Learn more about successful reintroduction programmes such as sea eagles in Scotland, the Mauritius pink pigeon, and other successful conservation programmes
- Visit a natural history museum
- Read a good book about animal behaviour

Non-human animals used in research and testing

Vegans do not wish to support cosmetics companies that have commissioned or conducted tests on other animal in the past. The vegan sunflower trademark only registers products that have not been tested on other animals. An EU ban on the use of other animals for cosmetics testing was finally fully enforced in March 2013, but many companies have been involved in tests until recently, and may continue doing so when selling products outside the EU.

Over a hundred million non-human animals are used in research, testing, and education worldwide each year. The effectiveness of this research and testing is questionable, as many systematic cost-benefit reviews have demonstrated. Research on other animals is also expensive, and can cause severe disease, pain and discomfort, as pain relief is frequently not applied. To acknowledge these facts, toxicological research now increasingly uses in vitro methods (using other animal or human cells or tissues), computer simulations and methods not reliant upon other animals.

More and more humane medical research methods are being developed. Certain charities fund research and testing on other animals, so make sure to check that organisations only support humane methods when considering making a donation.

Conscientious objection in education

Students in some schools, colleges and universities may conscientiously object to taking part in harmful animal use laboratory classes. The Vegan Society would like to see this become commonplace. No student should be forced to act against their beliefs for so-called 'education' purposes. The same learning objectives can equally be achieved through non-animal methods, and in several cases learning outcomes are superior due to the advantages offered by the use of alternative education methods.

In short - Veganism is the answer for a compassionate life

The Vegan Society is not a single-issue organisation; we address problems and solutions holistically. The rights of other animals, people and the planet are deeply interconnected, and the solution is simple: going vegan means being compassionate, taking action for animals, and helping them the best way possible. To learn more, see the 30 min film *Making the Connection* : <http://bit.ly/tvsmtc>
