



New Zealand Vegetarians: At Odds with Their Nation

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Abstract

This qualitative study, conducted between August and December 2006, explored the opinions and experiences of New Zealanders who challenge orthodox attitudes to the use and consumption of nonhuman animals. To date, New Zealand (NZ) has under-investigated the perspectives of those who oppose animal farming, the eating of nonhuman animals, and the exploitation of nonhuman animals. Agriculture substantially influences the economy and cultural heritage of the nation. Given that national identity in New Zealand strongly associates with farming and meat production, this paper investigates how vegetarians living in this country experience and challenge prevalent imagery and ideas about New Zealand. In particular, the paper examines the ways in which “kiwi”¹ vegetarians are disputing the dominant image of New Zealand as “clean and green” and a land of “animal lovers” and how they are experiencing mainstream (meat-loving) kiwi culture in their everyday lives. The paper also examines some of the more positive aspects for vegetarians of living in New Zealand.

Keywords

vegetarians, New Zealand, farming, meat, national identity

Introduction

New Zealand “Just a big farm really”: Although industrialized countries continue to be predominantly omnivorous, much has been made of the West’s rising concern about animal rights and its corresponding increase in non-meat diets and cruelty-free consumption regimes. Fresh estimates provided by the European Vegetarian Union (1908) suggest that up to 9% of the United Kingdom’s population identifies as vegetarian. This is echoed by 4% in Canada, 9% in Germany, and 4-7% in the United States. In New Zealand, however, vegetarians make up a tiny minority, between 1-2% of the country’s 4.5 million people (Bidwell, 2002). As Laugesen and Swinburn (2000) note,

...meat and dairy products dominate plant-based products in the New Zealand food supply and New Zealand appears to be amongst the least vegetarian countries in the OECD... and possibly the world.² (p. 314)

The low numbers of New Zealand vegetarians may be partially attributed to the country's reliance upon agricultural production as its primary industry. While New Zealand's earliest settler economy focused on whaling, gold mining and timber, the production of wool, meat, and dairy products quickly became the most significant generator of external revenue (Carter & Maynard, 2001). From 1840 on, native bush was cleared to develop pastureland that would accommodate stock; by 2000, New Zealand was home to more than 100 million stock animals who inhabited nearly 10 million hectares of grassland (Pawson, 2001).

In contemporary New Zealand, the income from animal farming is significant: The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (2006) estimated that New Zealand earned six times more revenue from animal sources (cattle, sheep, deer, and poultry) than it did from horticultural sources. Farming generated a gross income of close to 12 billion NZ dollars in 2006, nearly half of which came from the production and sale of dairy products. The other most significant contributors were beef, mutton, and the sale of live animals.

The historical centrality of the farming industry is reflected in New Zealand's contemporary culture. There is a certain romanticizing of pastoral life that feeds on the nostalgic idea that "farming is the backbone of the country." For example, visitors to New Zealand are proudly informed by the national airline's in-flight magazine,

New Zealanders famously derive their identity from the land. The image of the gumboot-wearing farmer has long been associated with this country—a result of our still relying largely on selling our bounty to the world (Anon., 2003, p. 62).

Similarly, well-known kiwi journalist McLauchlan (2006) proudly proclaims:

[In New Zealand] farming is forever... No one of my generation in any walk of life could possibly have escaped the knowledge that New Zealand earned its living in the world by selling wool, meat, dairy produce... I feel a great unease now as some of the finest grassland in the world recedes, yielding to urban subdivisions and their barren, monotonous houses that will one day spawn barren, monotonous children. (pp. 8-11).

McLauchlan's (2006) rhetoric displays some of the antipathy that continues to divide rural and urban sectors in the New Zealand imaginary: rural folk

are depicted as self-sufficient, hard-working, stoic people; urban dwellers are bland, uninteresting, and living off the toil of the farming sector. Such a division was already in existence more than 100 years ago when nineteenth-century businessman William Pember Reeves admitted: "So fashionable has the agrarian cult been [in New Zealand], that, at times, to be a townsman has almost been to wear a badge of inferiority!" (cited in Belich, 2001, p. 152).

New Zealand's popular enthusiasm for the rural is also reflected in numerous public occasions. For example, the annual Field Days event held at Mystery Creek in the Waikato is the largest agricultural fair in the Southern Hemisphere and the highest-grossing public event in New Zealand. Here, rural culture is glorified through exhibitions of farm animals, machinery, and sheep shearing.

Similarly, the yearly Hokitika Wild Foods Festival is dedicated to celebrating the consumption of various "wild," "raw," "exotic," or "native" foods; *huhu* grubs, live crickets and insects, and unusual parts of mammals and birds are all available, offering middle-class participants the opportunity to exercise their gourmet palates while seemingly reenacting the adventurous spirit of their pioneers (Armstrong & Potts, 2004). There is no "absent referent" (Adams, 1990, p. 40) at this local festival; instead, attendees are encouraged to eat whatever most resembles the living animal, rather than portions of an animal euphemistically renamed to conceal their origin. In a similar vein, two of the most popular television programs in New Zealand, *Kiwi Kitchen* and *Hunger for the Wild*, graphically showcase local cuisine comprising animals in the wild, freshly killed—usually by the chefs themselves (Logan & Brown, 2001, p. 1).

More conventional meats, of course, also claim an important place in the traditional national diet. In colonial times, New Zealand was marketed as a land flowing with milk and honey where pioneers could indulge in foods that only the wealthy could afford in the Old Country (Carter & Maynard, 2001, p. 91). Like other "settler capitalist European colonies," Pakeha³ settlers adopted a "new diet" that was highly carnivorous (p. 91).

Following colonization and until the late 1960s, it was traditional for New Zealand Pakeha to consume three meat meals per day. Although this has changed to one meat meal per day (Bailey & Earle, 1999), meat continues to occupy a pivotal place in the kiwi diet, a trend that has contributed to New Zealand's high rate of coronary disease (Armstrong, 2007). New Zealand is second among OECD countries for overall meat-fat supply, and the country's own provision of edible meat and meat-fat provides 20% of dietary energy (Laugesen & Swinburn, 2000). In 2006, each person in New Zealand ate—on average—37 kg of poultry (up from 28kg in 2000), 34 kg of beef, and 20 kg

of pork.⁴ Although the centrality of meat-meals is not unique to New Zealand, meat claims a special place in New Zealand's history and culture. This results in societal practices that repeat and reinforce the construction of a Pakeha identity based largely on the country's agricultural success, on the assumed beauty of New Zealand's farmed landscapes, and on the last remaining pockets of a once-abundant native landscape (Bell, 1996).

Kiwi Vegetarians

In any nation predominantly defined by its farming history and its capacity to raise and kill animals, the refusal to eat meat may be viewed as a defiant, unpatriotic act. The counter-narratives of those who do not support animal farming, meat consumption, or the exploitation of nonhuman animals thereby represent a very marginalized group within dominant carnivorous kiwi culture.

Many studies on vegetarianism have been conducted in countries with similar rural associations, such as the United Kingdom and the United States.⁵ However, little empirical research has been undertaken in New Zealand where meat and farming remain such powerful, primary symbols of nationhood. A handful of informal or unpublished surveys and studies exist, such as Beynon (2002) who examined the philosophies, objectives, and tactics of individuals engaged in grassroots' animal rights activism in the Dunedin area (urban South Island). This work included some discussion on participants' vegan politics and lifestyle choices. In addition, in 2002, the Wellington branch of the New Zealand Vegetarian Society produced a book that discussed nutritional issues for vegetarians and also chronicled the lives of several (mainly older) vegetarians (Bidwell, 2002). Other studies include a small quantitative survey of New Zealand vegans, conducted on behalf of The Vegan Society of New Zealand (Murray, 2005); and a report on meat, meat-eating and vegetarianism throughout the western world commissioned by the NZ Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (Gregory, 1997). This latter report relied largely on overseas studies and was dedicated to exploring the impact of various issues on a perceived local downward trend in meat consumption in the 1980s and 1990s.

In 2006, the authors of this paper conducted the first extensive, nationwide, academic investigation into the perspectives and experiences of cruelty-free consumers in New Zealand (Potts & White, 2007). The current article focuses on three aspects of this larger qualitative study:

1. the key antecedents to becoming vegetarian in what is arguably "the world's least vegetarian country";

2. childhood or early impressions of New Zealand and how these related to, and changed with greater understanding of, human-animal relationships in this country; and
3. the experience of being a vegetarian kiwi (that is, how vegetarians—as a minority, counter-cultural group within New Zealand—view their country and how their country views them).

Methodology

Recruitment

Participants for this study were recruited by word-of-mouth and through animal advocacy organizations such as Save Animals from Exploitation (SAFE), The NZ Vegetarian Society, The Vegan Society of NZ (VEGAN) and Pets on the Net (a local on-line service for re-homing and tracing lost companion animals). These organizations were considered appropriate forums to locate individuals whose views on animals might differ from the majority of New Zealanders. Questionnaires were sent to participants via email or post.

Participants

Participants who completed questionnaires included 120 women and 35 men.⁶ Women's ages ranged from 14-85 (mean age=39; median age=39). Men's ages ranged from 19-71 (mean age=45; median age=44). Participants were categorized according to International Vegetarian Union (2008) definitions of vegetarianism.⁷ Totals included the following:

1. 38% of participants (44 women and 16 men) classified as vegan;
2. 37% as ovo-lacto vegetarians (42 women and 15 men);
3. 7.5% as ovo-vegetarians (9 women and 3 men);
4. 7.5% as lacto-vegetarians (10 women and 2 men);
5. 5% as pescetarians (7 women and 1 man); and
6. 8 as meat-eaters (all women).⁸

Participants came from all regions of New Zealand: 93% lived in urban environments, although 34% had grown up on or around farms. The participants came from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and occupations:⁹ 47% of participants identified their ethnicity; of these, 94% were white/European or Pakeha (non-Maori New Zealanders of European descent). No one identified as Maori or Pasifika.¹⁰

Participants listed ethical, spiritual, and environmental reasons for avoiding meat and/or other animal-derived products. The most-cited reason was compassion toward nonhuman animals (65% women and 15% men); followed by (a) piritual and/or religious reasons (17% women and 6% men) and (b) environmental reasons (8% women and 4% men). There was some overlap here, as several cited multiple motives.¹¹

Questionnaire Content and Format

The 14-page questionnaire was designed using open-ended questions that sought to elicit detailed written responses on three main issues:

1. the contrast between participants' childhood and adult impressions of New Zealand, particularly this country's relationship with nonhuman animals;
2. participants' opinions on different modes of animal consumption (meat-eating, leather, and fur clothing); and
3. participants' views on cruelty-free consumption and social identity.

Participants were invited to write as much or little as they wanted in their responses; this resulted in more elaborative answers than quantitative surveys typically yield. These detailed responses allowed us to conduct more in-depth analyses of New Zealand vegetarians' perspectives.

Analysis

Completed questionnaires were grouped according to the gender of participants. A thematic analysis, involving multiple readings of individual surveys (Braun & Clarke, 2007) was conducted.¹²

This article draws on (a) participants' self-reported early influences and antecedents to vegetarianism in the context of New Zealand and (b) participants' responses to a question on vegetarianism and nationality. Specifically, participants were asked to consider the ways in which their attitudes toward nonhuman animals were affected by their being a kiwi. This article also discusses difficulties participants encountered in New Zealand because of their unconventional approach to nonhuman animals.

Becoming Vegetarian in New Zealand: Antecedents and Incentives

In her In In an empirical study involving 12 vegans in North America, McDonald (2000) identified "catalytic experiences" (p. 6) that raised awareness

of cruelty toward animals, and prompted behavioral change such as the refusal to eat meat and other animal-derived products. Our participants, like McDonald's, found their catalytic experiences to be highly emotional, fueled by the "recognition of the power relationship between human and nonhuman animals [and] fed by negative emotions, such as guilt, sadness and anger" (p. 9). In our study, participants' catalytic experiences often occurred in the context of farm life and as the result of witnessing—or becoming aware of—farming practices. For urban children, catalytic experiences were more likely to involve a relationship with a companion animal and an extension of this concern to other less-visible animals on the farm.

A total of 51 women and 3 men taking part in this study had either grown up on farms or were associated with farms owned by family, friends, or neighbors. These participants described disturbing or traumatic farm experiences as children or teenagers. Mostly, these related to so-called pragmatics of farm life such as (a) the home-killing of chickens and other animals for food; (b) the separation of cows from newborn calves; (c) sending animals to the slaughterhouse; (d) the culling of pests; and (d) various other farming practices such as shearing and milking. Some of the more graphic accounts of animal abuse and slaughter witnessed by participants as children were associated with school visits to farms, a rite of passage in the New Zealand education system, which testifies to the ongoing centrality of the agricultural industry. Several urban-raised adults recalled taking school trips when they were between 7 and 10 years old and witnessing the slaughter of sheep either on farms or at slaughterhouses. Those who resisted these experiences at the time—or later refused to eat meat—were chagrined by teachers or parents. For many, such incidents were hard to remember in detail, with one woman even suggesting that "dissociation" was a common way of coping with the brutality of such events:

Woman (30): Farming stories and images are the ones I remember most when I think back to being a kid. . . . One in particular sticks out about 7ish, the class standing in a paddock looking at the cute sheep. The farmer says "pick out your favourite. . . . [W]e all point "that one the cute fluffy one"; the farmer grabs it and takes it to this weird white shed. And while we are all standing there giggling and patting the cute sheep, he slits its throat. . . . [but] I can't remember anything after that. . . . [Vegetarian, North Island City]

Woman (46): One ghastly memory stands out from my teenage years. As a fund-raising thing for a school trip [we] all went "chicken picking" . . . This task involved going into these big sheds filled with chickens and you were supposed to pick them up by their legs (holding them upside down) and carry them out of the shed and into a truck or some cages or something. It was so revolting. . . . [A] kind of intense personal and cultural dissociation. . . . took place in that kind of situation for me. [Vegetarian, North Island City]

Such experiences clearly undercut any notion of romanticized farming for these particular participants. Here, “cute sheep” and chickens are transformed into objects and commodities—carcasses and units for transportation—before the children’s eyes. This conceptualization of an animal as commodity was something participants rejected as adults. One woman rebelled against what she termed “propaganda” in high school when she defaced her New Zealand textbooks:

Woman (31): As a teenager my parents made me take economics. I was upset by the way my text book referred to animals by such words as ‘commodity’. I was told off by my teacher for going through my text books and crossing out this language for the damage to school property . . . I considered the nation and authority to be largely barbaric and ignorant of the rights of animals and looked disdainfully upon the agricultural basis of the NZ economy. [Vegetarian, North Island City]

For those who grew up without a connection to farms, emotional relationships with companion animals were key antecedents to becoming vegetarian:

Man (43): I grew up in a house with cats as companion animals. It was the inconsistencies between the way we treated our cats as part of the family and the way we just regarded other animals as food that first got me started on the train of thought that led to me becoming vegetarian. [Vegan, North Island City]

Rurally raised participants’ attitudes toward companion animals were more complex because of the more explicit compartmentalized values attributed to pet versus edible animals in the farming context. Several mentioned forming an emotional attachment to a pet sheep, cow, pig, or chicken, only to have their friend sent to slaughter or even eaten by the family. This resulted in profound grief and a sense of guilt:

Woman (27): As a child I also had a pet cow which I used to visit every day after school. This cow was taken away from me when we moved off the farm which is something I never forgave my parents for and she is my motivation to always continue with vegetarianism and animal activism. [Vegan, South Island City]

McDonald’s (2006) participants also spoke of this kind of compartmentalism, where some animals were considered members of a family while others were deemed useful only as tools (food, clothing, entertainment, and income). Sabloff (2001) has described these divisions as metaphorical domains through which humans in Western societies come to understand and relate to nonhuman animals. Sabloff identified the divisions as (a) the “kinship” domain, in

which certain animals are treated with affection, and (b) the “utility” domain, in which other animals are deemed merely as instruments in the service of humans. In New Zealand, as in other industrialized countries, there is typically a strict separation in terms of worth between farmed animals (considered economically beneficial) and companion animals (considered emotionally beneficial). The collision of the two metaphorical domains in the farming context prompted our participants to challenge this conceptual separation.

On Being Vegetarian in One of the Least Vegetarian Countries in the World

Here we describe vegetarian participants’ views, once adults, on the exploitation and consumption of nonhuman animals within New Zealand. We focus specifically on the relationship between living in New Zealand, being kiwi and being vegetarian.

Clean, Green New Zealand?

New Zealand boasts a “clean, green and beautiful” image that Auckland sociologist Bell (1996, p. 28) has called the New Zealand “nature myth.” According to Bell, this nature-myth includes two versions of a romanticized New Zealand landscape: The landscape is depicted as beautiful yet potentially dangerous (rugged, untamed, and inspiring); or it is portrayed as beautifully cultivated, “a tribute to both nature itself and to the efforts of human labour” (Bell, p. 29). Both images of landscape are related to animals: The first version evokes New Zealand’s native fauna, namely birdlife, for New Zealand was a land of birds prior to human migration (the only mammals were native bats); the second version is a tribute to introduced animals brought to New Zealand for meat, dairy, and other animal products (Potts, Armstrong & Brown, forthcoming). Although these two depictions of natural New Zealand continue to predominate, they have changed and weakened in various ways over the past 20 or so years in response to greater awareness of environmental matters and animal welfare concerns (Armstrong, 2007).

The vegetarians in this study provided counter-perspectives to the prevailing vision of New Zealand. An overwhelming number of respondents stated that they no longer saw New Zealand as a clean, green paradise. They reported that as they had grown “older and wiser,” they came to see the conventional image of New Zealand as “naïve.” This realization was attributed to an increased awareness of animal farming practices, as well as a greater understanding of

the links between animal exploitation and the New Zealand economy. The following extract exemplifies this position:

Man (41): I definitely bought into the 'clean, green, paradise' view of New Zealand [when young]. The sight of farm paddocks stretching off into the horizon was iconic, natural, and something to be proud of. Farmers were good, hard-working men of the land—the backbone of our country. And animals stood in fields, eating grass, because that's what they did. They were then milked or killed because that's what they were *for*. I may have had mixed feelings about it, but that was clearly my problem. After all, I was a city kid who couldn't possibly understand the harsh reality of it all. If it wasn't for farming, we'd be a third world country, so I should just 'get real' and buy into the folklore of it all.

My image of New Zealand has changed drastically. I've learnt more about farming practices and the harm they do to animals and to the environment... My image is now of people leeching off a wonderful natural resource. We've been able to hide the damage but it's starting to show. Already it's unsafe to swim in most of our rivers due to pollution, and the sea-life is being over-fished. Because of the high economic value of farming, animal welfare laws are toothless and virtually ignored here. But we're able to point to remaining wilderness areas to attract the tourists and make ourselves feel better. [Vegan, Rural South Island]

This account touches on both aspects of Bell's (1996) "nature myth;" The "iconic" farmed fields are seen as a source of environmental erosion, while the rugged wilderness is viewed as a compensation or distraction for the degradation taking place on the plains as a result of "the efforts of human labour" (p. 29). Perhaps most crucially, this account disputes the notion that farming is "the backbone of the country." Instead, farming is conceptualized as "leeching," as a practice that disregards the welfare of both nonhuman animals and the environment.

Such disregard was perceived by participants as an attitude pervading every domain associated with animal farming. Farmers, politicians, and government were all criticized for their part in a system that favored economics over ethics. For example, farmers were accused of being callous to the needs of their "stock."

Woman (36): Farmers in general would have us believe that they care for these animals because this is their income, yet I see animals out in paddocks with no water, no shade and no shelter belts. Year after year hundreds of thousands of lambs die in late winter or early spring snows because of inadequate shelter provided by farmers who have artificially bred animals early to get fatter lambs for Christmas. These are not the practices of people who care for their animals. I am tired of seeing the news items every year of dead lambs by the truck load, while the farmers moan their misfortune. [Ovolacto Vegetarian, North Island City]

Woman (37): I was aware of animal abuse and cruelty of farming even as a child, however I got spoon-fed the story of clean green New Zealand which kind of counteracted these thoughts... I can't believe the government here stalled on basic, easy to change things like battery chicken farming, pig stalls etc. They are definitely kept under wraps by the influential farming community. [Ovo-lacto Vegetarian, North Island City]

Here, participants reject the popular belief that New Zealand is a leader in humane farming. The imagery of rolling green pastureland full of fat, healthy animals is replaced by either neglected, exposed animals or cramped factory farms.

Like the farmers, the New Zealand government was charged with being insensitive to animal suffering; government agencies and officials were viewed as "pawns" of the agricultural sector. Several participants commented that the Minister for Agriculture is also the politician responsible for setting animal welfare laws in New Zealand, arguing against the inherent conflict of interest in these two roles:

Woman (48): New Zealand needs to be exposed to the truth about animal issues, including our politicians who perpetuate the situation and turn a blind eye to cruel animal husbandry such as battery hen and sow crate practices. The Minister of Agriculture should *not* be the person deciding on animal welfare issues. There needs to be a separate focus on animal welfare that operates independently of this structure because it is so inherently *biased*. [Vegan, North Island City]

The general public did not fare much better in participants' estimations. Although it was felt that New Zealanders were now more aware of the conditions of intensively farmed animals, participants stated that New Zealanders were "in denial" about—or deliberately ignored—animal suffering:

Woman (39): I have found New Zealanders prefer to live in a type of self imposed anaesthesia rather than acknowledge their part in animal abuse. [Vegan, South Island City]

Woman (29): I don't know how [kiwis] can have pets and love them for their companionship but then eat a piece of chicken because it doesn't offer the same kind of affection [Vegan, North Island City]

Woman (40): New Zealanders believe animals are a commodity. I don't think they give them much thought as sentient beings. It's the culture. [Vegan, North Island City]

Although New Zealand has an increasing number of ethically oriented shops and a handful of vegetarian restaurants in major cities, most participants, especially those who had lived in the United Kingdom, felt that the amount

of ethical consumables on offer in New Zealand was significantly less than in other parts of the world. Participants' apathy toward the public may reflect the perceived isolation they face as a minority counter-culture. It is to these feelings of isolation and deviance that we now turn.

Deviant Kiwis: At Odds with Their Nation

When participants were asked about how they fit into mainstream New Zealand culture, the overwhelming response was "We don't!"

Woman (34): I don't fit in; I feel like an outsider. [Vegan, Rural South Island]

Woman (31): I feel like a minority. [Lacto-vegetarian, North Island City]

Woman (48): I feel like a freak. [Vegan, North Island Town]

Woman (39): I feel quite alone really. [Ovo-lacto Vegetarian, North Island Town].

Man (32): I feel almost like an outcast in every sense. [Vegan, North Island City]

Man (62): I am generally treated as an alien. [Vegan, North Island City]

Woman (46): I think in New Zealand it is very counter-cultural to refuse to eat meat... [Ovo-lacto Vegetarian, North Island City]

Some commented that being raised in New Zealand had led to an early, unquestioned acceptance of animals as commodities and that becoming vegetarian or vegan had required a radical break from that prior conditioning. This break involved consciously pushing against the ingrained kiwi-farming culture and practices that were seen to stem from it: barbeques, family roast dinners, and pride in traditional kiwi values. Even in the cities, many participants noted that their anti-meat stance was seen by friends, colleagues, and even strangers as a threat that was often described as being 'unpatriotic':

Woman (31): I had a stranger confront me at a barbecue when he saw I wasn't eating meat. He said I should be ashamed of myself for not supporting New Zealand's agricultural industry. [Ovo-lacto Vegetarian, North Island City]

Woman (23): As meat is a large proportion of our national exports and GDP, eating meat almost seems an expression of our nationality and national pride, and to not eat meat is letting down the team. [Ovo-lacto Vegetarian, North Island City]

One person had even experienced this kind of reception overseas:

Man (64): When in the United Kingdom years ago, on finding I was a vegetarian I was asked, "Are you *allowed* to be vegetarian in New Zealand?" [Ovo-lacto Vegetarian, North Island City]

The association between eating meat and patriotism was something many participants had encountered. Such farm-based national pride was regarded with disdain:

Woman (46): I still feel immense discomfort with the place of farming and meat in New Zealand. I feel profoundly at odds with 'my culture' in that regard—never able to fully be a full 'member' because of this. . . . I've often thought how impossible it would be to be a vegetarian Prime Minister. . . . how 'un-New Zealand' almost unpatriotic it would seem. [Ovo-lacto Vegetarian, North Island City]

Although vegetarians in other Western countries undoubtedly find themselves marginalized from mainstream culinary culture, kiwi vegetarians' dietary choices challenge something fundamental, something close to the collective sense of national self. They perceive themselves as taking a stand against nearly 200 years of farm-based identity, against the very foundations upon which their nation's prosperity was—and is still—conceived.

Positively Kiwi Vegetarians: The Luxuries of Living in New Zealand

Although the majority of viewpoints obtained from this study were pessimistic about New Zealand's relationship with nonhuman animals, some presented a more positive picture about being kiwi and vegetarian. For example, several saw their nature-based upbringings in New Zealand as an antecedent to becoming vegetarian:

Woman (36): I'm sure growing up in a country that values anti-nuclear policy [and being] around nature a lot—beaches, native bush and so on—has had a positive influence on me. [Ovo-lacto Vegetarian, North Island City]

Woman (25): I think that being kiwi has meant proximity to animals, and awareness of endangered species and ecological fragility. [Vegan, South Island City]

These participants established a link between vegetarianism and a love for nature that fostered their thinking about nonhuman sentience. Moreover, New Zealand's democratic political structure, its relative prosperity, and its egalitarian politics were seen as positive factors enabling kiwis to become vegetarian. Significant events in New Zealand's recent political history (anti-whaling and anti-nuclear policies and not participating in the so-called War on Terror) were regarded as factors that allowed kiwis to think independently and be different:

Woman (52): I'm quite proud to be a citizen of an independent-minded New Zealand at the moment. The official anti-whaling line [is great] for example. In some ways [this is] a more inclusive and tolerant society than other cultures... it's ok to be out of the mainstream. [Ovo-lacto Vegetarian, North Island City]

Woman (36): Because I don't have to worry about day to day survival, war, starvation, homelessness etc I have the luxury of being able to think [about] improving the lives of those less well off than myself. [Vegan, South Island City]

Discussion

This article represents one of the first systematic, empirical analyses of New Zealand vegetarians. The dearth of academic material on the matter to date perhaps reflects the historical hegemony of animal-based agriculture in New Zealand, a hegemony that operates at governmental, commercial, and popular cultural levels.

As a small minority within New Zealand, most vegetarians in this study reported feeling profoundly disconnected from their country's default omnivorous culture. For many, the feelings of marginalization appeared early in life when encountering farming practices or becoming aware of nonhuman animal exploitation through other means. The beliefs and attitudes accompanying the dietary practices of participants suggest that many of them have had to take a stand against the culture in which they were raised. Many reported having to tolerate challenges and, in some cases, abuse from others about their (perceived) lack of patriotism.

The decision to adopt a vegetarian lifestyle accompanied a wide-ranging critique of New Zealand's agricultural practices and the various myths and cultural norms that stem from it. This critical view of New Zealand farming offered a challenge to two of the central components of the country's historic national identity. First, it challenged the clean, green component of the national identity. For many, rejecting meat also meant rejecting the notion that New Zealand was beautiful: Almost all participants refuted in some way or other the nature myth that New Zealand was beautifully cultivated. Rather than being a pristine land of native forests and rolling pastureland, New Zealand was viewed as an inhumane and environmentally contaminated country that supported itself through the slaughter of millions of creatures per annum.

The second challenge to national identity posed within this study involved the rejection of those products for which New Zealand has historically been famous: meat, dairy, and wool. The prejudice experienced by participants suggests that mainstream New Zealanders continue to be invested in these historical identity symbols. Indeed, many participants indicated that

their own culturally marginalized status was a product of a conservative mainstream failure to critically reflect upon how the one aspect of national identity (meat production) so negatively affected the other (the supposedly pristine environment).

However, although many participants rejected the cultivated aspect of Bell's "nature myth," the evidence presented above shows that some accepted the other, wilderness aspect, believing that the access to wild nature in New Zealand was an important corollary of their becoming vegetarian. This suggests that elements of the New Zealand national identity work to facilitate vegetarianism, despite the prominence of meat in the culture. Moreover, New Zealand's contemporary and historic tendency toward radical politics hints at a strand of national identity that, in some cases, stimulated concern for animal welfare.

Conclusion

Participants' accounts indicate how two competing versions of the New Zealand national identity have affected their vegetarianism. On the one hand, participants felt marginalized by the resonances of an historically farm-based culture that seemed threatened by vegetarianism. On the other hand, however, some participants saw their alternative stand on animal advocacy as distinctly kiwi, something akin to the other revolutionary stances taken by New Zealand in the past. From this perspective, these participants could be seen as descendents of the New Zealand suffragists, the anti-whaling protestors, and the anti-nuclear activists—as critical thinkers determined to make an impact upon their country's dominant meat-eating culture and its exploitation of nonhuman animals.

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Notes

1. Kiwi is a colloquial term for New Zealanders. The kiwi is a native bird and national symbol of New Zealand (Peat, 2006).

2. Where appropriate 'New Zealand' is abbreviated to NZ.

3. Pakeha is the term used by Maori to refer to New Zealanders of European descent.

4. 24-million lambs are slaughtered each year in New Zealand, along with 2.2-million beef cattle, 1 million dairy calves, 750,000 deer, 350,000 pigs, 67-million chickens, and 0.75-million tons of fish (Amey, 2007).

5. Such studies have focused on various qualities of vegetarians and/or motives, values, moral, and ethical reasoning behind compassionate consumption. UK studies: (Fiddes, 1991; Santos & Booth, 1996; Kenyon & Barker, 1998; Franklin, 1999; Stuart, 2006; Fox & Ward, 2007). North American studies: (Kalof et al., 1999; McDonald, 2000; Fessler, Arguello, Mekdara, & Macias, 2003; Rozin et al., 2005).

6. The dominance of women over men in studies on vegetarianism is common. For discussions on animal advocacy and gender: (Kalof, Dietz, Stern & Guagnano, 1999; Kruse, 1999; Peck, Bell & Dunham, 1996).

7. Vegetarians were classified as pescos—(consume fish but no other animal flesh), pollo- (consume chicken but no other animal flesh), ovo-lacto- (consume no animal flesh but eat eggs and dairy products), lacto- (consume dairy but not eggs or animal flesh), and ovo-vegetarians (consume eggs but no animal flesh or dairy products). Those identifying as vegans in this study avoided all animal products (www.ivu.org).

8. The survey was advertised nationally as research on ethical consumption. We were also approached by 15 women and one man who ate animal flesh but wished to take part in order to voice their strong opposition to factory farming in New Zealand. These people tended to consume only organic and free-range meat, dairy, and/or eggs. Their views appear in the full-length report of our study (Potts & White, 2007), but they are not included in this article focusing on the experience of kiwi vegetarians.

9. Other studies focusing on the socio-demographic profile of vegetarians in western countries have noted vegetarians are more likely to be women, highly educated, of high socioeconomic status, and living in urbanized areas (Hoek et al., 2004). In our study, participants were more likely to be women and live in cities, but participants were spread across all socioeconomic groups.

10. The failure to attract Maori or Pasifika participants is partly related to the membership characteristics of the organizations and groups from which we recruited participants. In New Zealand, animal rights organizations predominantly attract Pakeha middle-class volunteers, not least because they are structured and run in ways favoring Pakeha culture and values, as well as Western ideas about humans, animals and human-animal relations. However, it is important to note that a survey conducted in 2001 indicated Maori had a stronger preference for vegetarian meals than Pakeha New Zealanders (Sanitarium Health Food Company, 2001).

11. The motivations for being vegetarian in this study were similar to previous studies. However, our participants most often cited compassion as their primary motivation, whereas other studies indicated environmental and/or health-related reasons as the primary motivation (Kalof et al., 1999). Like us, Fox and Ward (2007) found the ethical treatment of nonhuman animals was the main motivator amongst their UK and US participants.

12. In general, participants' responses appearing in this article are unchanged from their original written form. In some cases, where repetition of an idea, words or phrases occurred, portions have been cut from a quote. A deletion from quoted material is indicated by the presence of three consecutive dots (...); the presence of word(s) contained in square brackets [] indicates a longer phrase has been condensed; and italicized portions of transcript show where a

participant has emphasized a word or phrase in their survey. The number in brackets preceding quoted material indicates the age of a participant at the time s/he completed the survey.

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