Project Title: Eating as an Act of Justice Working Group, 2011-2012

Co-leaders: Matt Halteman (Philosophy)  
            Steve McMullen (Economics)  
            Chris Smit (CAS)

Participants:  
Matt Bonzo (Philosophy, Cornerstone University)  
Gail Heffner (Director of Community Engagement)  
Michele Lloyd Page (Dean of Multicultural Affairs; Sociology)  
Kenneth Piers (Chemistry)  
Steven Putt (Hekman Library; Library Science)  
Aubrey Sykes (Engineering)  
David Warners (Biology)  
Adam Wolpa (Art)

Description:  
We who live in the developed world normally do not think of eating as an act of justice; instead, we have grown used to having year-round access to cheap, abundant, and often globally-sourced food. Moreover we think of our choice of which foods to eat as an intensely private and personal matter guided by our likes and dislikes. In our work together this year, we concentrated on five distinct, but related, themes.

First we investigated eating as a matter of justice to our own bodies. In Scripture we read that our bodies are “temples of the Holy Spirit”. Yet the modern developed-world diet does little to honor our bodies as such. There is now substantial evidence that what has been called the “diseases of affluence” – coronary heart disease, various forms of cancer, diabetes, obesity and certain diseases of the digestive tract – are strongly correlated with the consumption of diets that are founded on animal-based products and rich in processed foods. Conversely, diets that are rich in plant-based whole food products are strongly correlated with substantially reduced incidence of such diseases. At a time when ever-increasing costs of healthcare are of great concern, such considerations could have profound implications for modern society.

Second, we studied eating as an act of justice in relation toward the food animals in our modern agricultural system. The industrialization of agriculture in the last few decades, featuring ever increasing efficiency, specialization, and concentration of operations, has reduced the lives of the industrial commodities we used to call animals to one of substantial misery. This is largely true whether we consider the conditions in which beef or dairy cattle live, market or farrowing hogs are produced, broiler or laying chickens are generated, market turkeys are raised, and even how farmed-fish are raised in the modern industrial operation. We investigated not only the conditions in which these animals are raised but also the conditions in which they are harvested in the modern industrial slaughter-house. One of the central questions in this consideration was “Are these conditions something like what the biblical concept of ‘having dominion’ had in mind when it was rendered in Gen. 1?”
Third, we explored eating as an act of justice toward the biophysical environment of the planet which provides the foundation that supports all forms of life on earth. There was a time when the small family farm, even one that was considerably mechanized, placed a rather small “pollution burden” on the earth - crops were rotated, animal wastes were returned to the land, and water demands were largely met be natural rainfall. Most animals lived in “free-range” condition when weather conditions allowed and were provided shelter when weather was inclement. But modern agricultural operations have become one of the largest polluters of the air, land, and surface and ground-water in our society. Industrial agriculture makes intensive use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. Recently, bioengineering has resulted in the introduction of genetically modified grains/animals. Animals are regularly fed growth hormones and dosed with antibiotics to control disease. Over 50% of the productive US agricultural land is now irrigated, placing severe stress on underground aquifers – especially the deep aquifers which are replenished only slowly. We investigated the factors that have given rise to such a system of agriculture and explore ways in which the environmental burden of food production might be reduced.

Fourth, we investigated eating as an act of justice toward civilization as a whole. As it is presently structured, modern agriculture is not sustainable. Industrial farming depends on (non-renewable) fossil fuels - mainly oil and natural gas - as a crucial input for machines and chemical materiel. It has been said that modern agriculture “turns fossil fuel calories into food calories”. Seventy percent of the productive land in the US is growing crops that are fed to animals. If all 6.8 billion people on the planet consumed a diet like that which is consumed in the developed world, especially the USA, it seems highly unlikely that we would be able to produce enough food to feed the entire population an adequate diet, not to mention the 2- or 3 billion more people that are expected in the next 40 years. As food stresses increase, it seems likely that the poor of the earth will be impacted most severely. It has been suggested that land devoted to producing foods that could be eaten by humans directly, could support about five times as many people as the same area of land devoted to growing food for animals. Our study explored the question of what a globally sustainable agricultural/food system might look like.

Fifth, the study of the above four themes was undertaken in the context of a consideration of biblical/ethical/theological considerations regarding, our stewardship of the earth and all of the other creatures with whom we share the earth especially as these bear on food production. Therefore we studied relevant scriptures as well as ethical and theological writings that bear on the subject.

The Working Group was successful on three fronts.

First, we succeeded in staying on task in moving through a wide-ranging syllabus, covering topics as diverse as food and cultural identity; the theology of food; animals and religion; animal sentience; industrial agriculture and its implications for the environment, global development, food security, and animal welfare; plant-based nutrition; and competing views on ethical dietary practices. One of the most exciting features of the discussion was a burgeoning consensus as our work progressed on the necessity of adopting a holistic perspective on the importance of our food choices for the flourishing of creation—a perspective that acknowledges the many deep, complex, and inevitable (if sometimes hidden) interconnections among these seemingly far-
flown topics. We were surprised to find, as a practical reminder of this necessity, that our subject moved us to discuss theological, ethical, environmental, cultural, and nutritional concerns in almost every meeting regardless of the topic slated for discussion.

Second, we succeeded in bringing together a diverse group of faculty and staff whose work together on this topic is likely to bear fruit across the curriculum and in extra-curricular settings too. Our diversity can be accounted for along a number of axes. For one thing, we came together from a wide diversity of disciplines: art, biology, chemistry, community engagement, communications, economics, engineering, multicultural affairs, philosophy, sociology, and theology. For another thing, our participants represented a wide range of different kinds of life experience outside the halls of academe. We counted among our participants, for instance, a small-scale farmer, a disability activist, several animal rights advocates, a member of the West Michigan Food Systems Council, a person doing healthful eating awareness work in African-American church communities, and a research librarian. The upshot is that we cultivated a community that can be expected not only to teach and write on this crucial issue across the liberal arts and sciences, but also to take this work into unexpected places in the broader cultural discussion: to the intersection of issues concerning food and, for instance, race, gender, disability, differences of outlook and style between farmers and activists, and building institutions that foment broader awareness of food justice issues (it wasn’t lost on us that having a research librarian who is sensitive to these issues is an enormous asset to the college).

Third, we succeeded in making our work accessible and exciting to the broader communities of Calvin College and West Michigan through a series of public lectures, workshops, and potlucks that gave hundreds of students, faculty, and other interested parties the opportunity to engage some of the nation’s leading voices in animal welfare advocacy, food justice activism, and cognitive ethology. The following lectures may be accessed online:

- Wayne Pacelle, President and CEO of the HSUS: [http://vimeo.com/35773007#at=0](http://vimeo.com/35773007#at=0).
- Bryant Terry, author of *Vegan Soul Kitchen* and *The Inspired Vegan*: [http://wakeupweekend.com/2012/01/01/bryant-terry](http://wakeupweekend.com/2012/01/01/bryant-terry).

**Frequently asked questions and the resources to pursue them:**

**Is there a single book that could get me up to speed on most of the big issues surrounding the idea of eating as an act of justice?**

- Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*

**Is there good reason to think that compassion for animals should be an important issue for Christians?**

- Matthew C. Hallmen, *Compassionate Eating as Care of Creation* (2008)

**Is it plausible to believe that non-human animals are capable of thinking, feeling, and valuing their lives?**


**How does this animal justice stuff tie in with our strivings for human social justice?**

- Bryant Terry, *The Inspired Vegan* (2012)

**What is life on a concentrated animal feeding operation really like for the animals?**

• Timothy Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight* (2011)
• Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (Reprinted, 2001)

How do concentrated animal feeding operations affect the environment?

How does industrial agriculture affect the lives and livelihoods of the world’s poorest people?
• Doris Janzen Longacre, *The More With Less Cookbook; Extending the Table*

Is a diet free of animal products really a healthy option for human beings?
• Dr. Joel Fuhrman, *Eat to Live* (2011)
• Dr. Kerrie K. Saunders, *The Vegan Diet As Chronic Disease Prevention* (2003)
• Choose from many books by Dr. John McDougall; Dr. Dean Ornish; or Dr. Andrew Weil
If the moral, environmental, and nutritional drawbacks of our current eating habits are so bad, why haven’t I heard about these problems before?


Aren’t animal rights activists generally violent, anti-social misanthropes?


Isn’t compassionate eating just a newfangled fad for self-righteous hippies and pretentious, sentimental yuppies?


If I commit to eating lower on the food chain, do I have to resign myself to a life of steamed vegetables?

- Carole Raymond, *The Student’s Go Vegan Cookbook: Over 135 Quick, Easy, Cheap and Tasty Vegan Recipes*
- Bryant Terry, *The Inspired Vegan,* *Vegan Soul Kitchen,* *and Grub*
- Crescent Dragonwagon, *The Passionate Vegetarian*
- Mark Bittman, *How to Cook Everything Vegetarian*
- Tanya Barnard and Sarah Kramer, *The Garden of Vegan*
- Ann Gentry, *The Real Food Daily Cookbook*
- Roberta Kalechofsky, *The Jewish Vegetarian Year Cookbook*
- Terry Hope Romero, *Viva La Vegan!*
- Isa Chandra Moskowitz, *Vegan With A Vengeance* *
- Isa Chandra Moskowitz and Terry Hope Romero, (1) *Vegan Cupcakes Take Over the World;* and (2) *The Veganomicon* and (3) *Appetite for Reduction* (*These are our favorites!*)
- Lorna Sass, *The Complete Vegetarian Kitchen*
- Doris Janzen Longacre, *The More With Less Cookbook*
- Hockman-Wert and Lind, *Simply in Season*

Where can I find out how to become a more informed and compassionate consumer?


Additional Resources, arranged topically.

Selected Philosophical Literature in the Ethics of Eating and Animal Ethics

Christian Perspectives on the Ethics of Eating
5. Matthew Halteman, “Living Toward the Peaceable Kingdom: Compassionate Eating as Care of Creation” (http://www.hsus.org/religion/resources/compassionate_eating_as_care_.html)

Christian and Other Religious Perspectives on Animal Ethics


**Recent Popular Books on the Ethics of Eating**


**Recent Popular Media on the Ethics of Eating**


**Development Reports**

1. Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, *Livestock’s Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options* ([http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/a0701e/a0701e00.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/a0701e/a0701e00.htm))


### Internet Resources, arranged topically

#### Animal Welfare and Sustainable Farming
- **Local Harvest**
  - [http://www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org)
- **Polyface Farm (Joel Salatin)**
  - [http://www.polyfacefarms.com](http://www.polyfacefarms.com)

#### Animal Rights
- **Tom Regan Animal Rights Archive**
  - [http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/animalrights/index.html](http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/animalrights/index.html)
- **The Philosophy of Animal Rights**
  - [http://www.cultureandanimals.org/animalrights.htm](http://www.cultureandanimals.org/animalrights.htm)

#### Organizations that Address Food and Development Justice Issues
- **Compassion in World Farming Trust**
  - [http://www.ciwf.org.uk](http://www.ciwf.org.uk)
- **Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN**
  - [http://www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)
- **National Catholic Rural Life Conference**
  - [http://www.ncrle.com](http://www.ncrle.com)
- **World Society for the Protection of Animals**
  - [http://www.wspa-international.org](http://www.wspa-international.org)
- **World Watch Institute**
  - [http://www.worldwatch.org](http://www.worldwatch.org)

#### Animal Advocacy Organizations
- **Not One Sparrow** (Christian)
  - [http://www.notonesparrow.com](http://www.notonesparrow.com)
- **Christian Vegetarian Association**
  - [http://www.all-creatures.org/cva](http://www.all-creatures.org/cva)
- **Farm Sanctuary**
  - [http://www.farmsanctuary.org](http://www.farmsanctuary.org)
- **Mercy For Animals**
  - [http://www.mercyforanimals.org](http://www.mercyforanimals.org)
- **Compassionate Consumers**
  - [http://www.compassionateconsumers.org](http://www.compassionateconsumers.org)
- **Humane Society of the United States**
  - [http://www.hsus.org/religion](http://www.hsus.org/religion)
- **Farm Kind**
  - [http://www.farmkind.org](http://www.farmkind.org)

#### Vegetarian and Vegan Recipes
- **ChooseVeg**
  - [http://www.chooseveg.com](http://www.chooseveg.com)
- **Vegan Yum Yum**
  - [http://veganyumyum.com](http://veganyumyum.com)
- **Post Punk Kitchen**
  - [http://www.theppk.com](http://www.theppk.com)
- **FatFree Vegan**
  - [http://blog.fatfreevegan.com](http://blog.fatfreevegan.com)

#### Health and Nutrition Links
- **Physicians Committee For Responsible Medicine**
  - [http://www.pcrm.org](http://www.pcrm.org)
- **Dr. Joel Fuhrman**
  - [http://www.drfuhrman.com](http://www.drfuhrman.com)
- **The Cancer Project**
  - [http://www.cancerproject.org](http://www.cancerproject.org)
- **Dr. McDougall’s Health and Medical Center**
  - [http://www.drmcdougall.com](http://www.drmcdougall.com)