

“Humane” Food Choices

Debunking the Humane Myth

What does it mean when the label says “humane”?

The term “humane” on animal products is used to promote the animal-using industry’s products in a way that tricks people into believing it is possible to use and kill animals in a respectful, kind, or humane way.

What is the problem with “humane” products?

Most of the products labeled humane are barely different than their unlabeled counterparts. Even in the best of circumstances, the animals’ needs will always take a back seat to the industry’s need to make a profit; after all, the animals are commodities.

Aren’t “humane” and “organic” animal products better than factory-farmed animal products?

No. There are animal agriculture “industry standards” that take place at every level of farming, including those considered “small-scale,” “local,” “organic,” “humane,” and “family farms.” For instance, even on a “humane” dairy farm, a cow has to be pregnant and give birth to a calf to produce milk. One industry standard used by all types of dairy farms is the forcible and continuously repeated impregnation of the cows, in a process akin to rape, until the cows are considered spent and finally sent to slaughter. Male calves are of no financial interest to dairy farmers, so they are quickly taken from their mothers and sold to produce veal and cheap leather products. In every farming situation, the animals are always at the mercy of their owners, whose primary interests are financial.

What about “cage-free” eggs and “free range” items?

Most “cage-free” hens are never allowed outside and instead live confined inside barns with thousands of other hens. Pecking order issues make living in the barns more stressful for the birds than living in cages. Since this often leads to cannibalism, “cage-free” hens have their beaks burned off in a very painful mutilation. Financial issues are the same as conventional products with respect to the male chicks: They don’t lay eggs, so they are suffocated, ground up, or tossed into the trash. Egg-laying hens are considered spent and are sent to slaughter years before their natural lives would end.

Don’t farmers care about their animals?

The most inevitable part of animal agriculture is the slaughter. No matter how the animals are raised, they’re all slaughtered only to satisfy human desires to eat them and generate profits. Terms such as “free range” and “cage-free” imply that animals are running free, yet this is not the case. They are often in windowless sheds with no access to fresh air. And all animals raised for food live shortened lives. For example, although chickens have a natural lifespan of five to 10 years, on “organic” or “cage-free” broiler farms, they are slaughtered at around 14 weeks.

Aren’t animals required for agriculture? Don’t we need manure to fertilize the land?

A common misconception is that animal manure is needed to fertilize croplands; this is not the case. Animal manure is nothing more than the grass or grains cycled through an animal’s digestive system minus the nutrients the animal needs. Removing the animal from the process by using “green manures” produced from plants such as clover and compost remains the best way to fertilize the soil, as the plants’ carbon-to-nitrogen ratios are much more in balance than that of animal manure.

I've seen the animals at my local farm. Aren't these ok?

No matter how "small-scale" you take animal agriculture, the animals are still a commodity, and as such, the financial bottom line of the farm will always be the priority. The animals will never live out their natural life span; and male calves and chicks, who aren't needed on dairy farms, will always be killed.

What animal products can I eat ethically?

None. For those who care about animals, the exploitation inherent in using them for food is not consistent with treating them with the dignity and respect they deserve. No animal products are really "better" or "worse" than any other; they all involve the exploitation of animals. The truth is that it's simply not necessary for humans to use animals for food.

Don't we need animal products to be healthy?

The ADA clearly states, "It is the position of the American Dietetic Association that appropriately planned vegetarian diets, including total vegetarian or vegan diets, are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. Well planned vegetarian diets are appropriate for individuals during all stages of the lifecycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence, and for athletes."

How can you make a difference?

Go vegan

Veganism is on the rise for animal lovers. And, it's easier than you think! Replace animal products with plant products (burger vs veggie/bean burger) and reap the benefits: plant-based foods do not exploit animals and use fewer resources than animal products—less land, water, and energy. Plus, they are great for your health! Sign up for our free PAN Vegan Pledge Program to receive all the help and support you need.



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