

# Vegetarians: *The Scourge of the Earth!*

*In debates over the future of hunting in Africa and around the world, animal-rights groups claim they have the moral high ground because they are vegetarians – harmless because all they eat are plants! But here is food for thought...*

*By Charles E. Kay*



Hunters are portrayed as a lower life-form because they kill and eat animals, while vegetarians are depicted as harmless because all they eat are plants. Unfortunately, the general public and the international media have accepted these assertions without careful study or reasoned thought. They have done so, in part, because most people have a poor understanding of ecology and they know even less about human evolution. Hunters it turns out are the epitome of civilization, while vegetarians are the scourge of the Earth. Virtually all the world's environmental problems, from the loss of biodiversity to carbon dioxide emissions, can be traced to vegetarians, not hunters.

Trophic pyramids are a fundamental concept

in ecology. The simplest trophic pyramid contains three levels. On the bottom are the plants; above the plants are herbivores, which feed on the plants; and above the herbivores are carnivores, which prey on the herbivores. Did you even wonder why plants are more abundant than herbivores? And herbivores more abundant than carnivores? – because there is at least a 90% loss of stored energy between each trophic level.

Plants turn sunlight into stored energy that can be used by herbivores. Herbivores then convert those plant tissues into more herbivores but in so doing there is a major loss in stored energy because the herbivores have to expend energy on body maintenance and respiration, in addition to reproduction. The consumed

energy is given-off as heat or waste products. The same, in turn, happens when carnivores eat herbivores. Ninety percent or more of that energy goes to carnivore body maintenance and respiration, not population growth. Thus, in the simplest of trophic pyramids, if you have 100 units of plant biomass, that vegetation can support only 10 units, at best, of herbivore biomass, and that animal biomass, in turn, can support only one unit, or less, of carnivore biomass. This is why carnivores are always so rare. Moreover, this is a fundamental law of thermal dynamics and of all living systems. Some trophic pyramids have more than three levels and the more trophic layers there are, the less abundant are the top or apex predators, such as human hunters.

So in systems where humans are pure hunters, human population densities are generally very low, with correspondingly few environmental impacts. But if humans move down a trophic level, as only humans can, and become gatherer-hunters, were gatherers collect mainly vegetal foods, the human population can increase ten-fold or more. Humans also use fire to enhance both plant and animal productivity, which allows for even greater human population growth. Switching to agriculture further increases plant productivity per unit area leading to a massive increase in human numbers. The reason there are eight or nine billion people on Earth is because they are primarily vegetarians.

Vegetarian's hands are also covered in blood, lots of blood. There is not much biodiversity or wildlife in a corn field, a wheat field, or a rice field. More wildlife habitat has been, and is being, destroyed in the name of agriculture than any other human activity. Then too animals, termed agricultural pests, have to die to keep food on our tables. Have you ever seen what elephants can do to a field of maize?



Or melons? There is a reason there are no large herbivores in any country's agricultural heartlands. In Africa, more elephants are shot each year to protect agricultural crops than are ever killed by safari hunters.

The general public also has a mistaken notion of what it was like to be a hunter, or a hunter-gatherer. Life was NOT short, brutish, or mean. Instead, hunter-gatherers have been called "The Original Affluent Society" because life was so carefree and easy. Working with aboriginal people in Africa, who at the time still enjoyed a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, anthropologist Richard Lee documented that the !Kung (a.k.a. San) had more leisure time than people living in the "most advanced" western civilization – despite the fact that the !Kung inhabited one of the most inhospitable environments on Earth, the Kalahari Desert. Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins then went on to write a 1972 book on Stone Age Economics extolling the virtues of being a hunter-gatherer.

Since that time anthropologists, who work with the few remaining hunter-gatherers in South America, Australia, and other parts of Africa, have repeatedly documented that the hunter-gatherer lifestyle was not as harsh as most people think, although they have toned down some of the early rhetoric, as more data on time allocation and return-rates have become available. The most telling information, however, comes from societies where national governments have tried to "civilize" hunter-gatherers by forcing indigenous people to adopt agriculture and a settled life. As soon as the government's attention was diverted, the hunter-gatherers returned to hunting and gathering. Unfortunately, most hunter-gatherers have now been forced to accept western civilization.

In addition, because human population densities were low and there were no domesticated animals, hunter-gatherers were relatively free of disease. Highly-contagious pathogens only evolved after agriculture-induced increases in human populations provided the needed number of susceptible hosts. Moreover, deadly crowd diseases, such as smallpox, developed only after animals were domesticated and livestock diseases mutated, jumped the species barrier, and infected humans. Thus, in general, hunter-gatherers enjoyed relatively good health, long life, and low work effort, though child mortality could be a problem due to infections, accidents, and such. This was the case for 99.5% of hominid evolution and 90% of human evolution. Life became short, brutish, and mean only after the switch to agriculture, contrary to what most people believe.

In the eastern United States, archaeologists

have unearthed the remains of hunter-gatherers, early agriculturalists, and late agriculturalists. By careful examination and measurement of those skeletons, physical anthropologists have amassed data on early human health and lifespan. As aboriginal peoples in the eastern woodlands went from hunting and gathering, to early agriculture, to

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more intensive agriculture – that is as the people went from being hunters to vegetarians – both human health and longevity declined, often precipitously, while work effort, especially for males, increased dramatically. Why humans ever made the switch to agriculture is an

interesting question, and all I will say here is that while it allowed human populations to increase, individuals would have been better off to have remained hunter-gatherers. Again contrary to everything most people think, agriculture was NOT a giant leap forward, but a fall from grace.

People, like all living things, require a diet of high quality food to produce large, robust individuals. Why are Chinese and Japanese, on average, so short-statured compared to Americans? Because people from Asia are primarily vegetarians with little high-quality animal protein and fats in their diet. Animal fats and protein that are needed to fuel human growth and development. Since World War II, the average height of adult Japanese males has steadily increased, as their culture has switched to a diet with more red meat and animal fats. The same is true of Americans, who today are taller than their country men of earlier generations, as U.S. diets have improved over the decades. That is to say, height, like antler growth in cervids and horn growth in bovids, can be used to determine which humans had superior diets and lifestyles.

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## The Wildlife Game

So during the early 1800's who, on average, were the tallest people on Earth? Not Europeans, they were puny and so were Americans of that era. No, the best fed people on the planet were Plains Indians. Hunters of the highest order. Pawnee, Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho, among others. Imagine what if must have been like? All one had to do was hunt, steal horses, count coup, and procreate, while women did all the domestic chores. No closed seasons, no bag limits, no restrictions on weapons or methods, and best of all, no taxes, licenses, or government regulations. If that is not the epitome of civilization, at least from a man's perspective, I do not know what is. This is why the U.S. government, and others, could never turn the Plains Indians into farmers. Only during the latter part of the twentieth century, as the average amount of red meat and animal fats in diets increased, did Americans grow as tall as Plains Indians 100 years earlier. In every human society that has ever been studied, the preferred food is red meat and animal fats. Veggies are way, WAY down on the list.

Without a constant supply of high-quality protein and vital animal fats our large brains

would never have evolved. Hunting is not only in our DNA, but hunting is what made us human. That and cooking. Yes, cooking! Raw meat and unprocessed plant foods take a great deal of energy to digest. Cooking, by pre-digesting food, freed-up large quantities of energy and fats that then were available for

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brain enlargement and development – see *Fire: The Spark that Ignited Human Evolution* by Frances Burton.

Finally, in all pre-agriculture and early agricultural societies, hunters had preferred status and were held in the highest regard. It

is only recently that hunters have been vilified by certain members of society. But then, what would you expect from vegetarians, who have overrun the planet and become the scourge of the Earth. THEY are the real problem, not hunters. Hunters, after all are the ones who protect wildlife habitat, while vegetarians turn wildlife habitat into agricultural fields and ever increasing human populations. You cannot blame hunters for the world's problems. If anyone has sinned and continues to sin, it is vegetarians. For as historian J.R. McNeil noted, "The most enduring ecologically sustainable societies in human history have been those that did not practice agriculture." They were also the most equalitarian and freest societies the world has ever known.

*The author holds a Ph.D. in wildlife ecology and is an expert on long-term ecosystem states and processes, including human evolutionary ecology. He lives in Utah and has made four trips to South Africa to hunt. ♣*



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