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# Stepping Up to the Veggie Plate: Framing Veganism as Living Your Values

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STEPPING UP TO THE VEGGIE PLATE:  
FRAMING VEGANISM AS LIVING YOUR VALUES

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**ABSTRACT:** America's animal rights organizations (AROs) have increasingly focused on vegetarian campaigns to protect the growing number of animals who are farmed and fished. But on what basis do AROs promote plant-based diets in ways that will resonate with a meat-eating American public? To determine how AROs align their values with those of the public, this textual analysis examines how values are framed in the print and electronic food advocacy campaign messages of five national AROs in 2008. Findings reveal that ARO campaigns associate veganism with altruism, health, environmental responsibility, and humanitarianism. Campaigns appeal to Americans based on: 1) *altruistic* values such as compassion, respect for sentient beings, life, freedom, environmentalism, and the desire to make a difference and help humanity; 2) *ideals* such as honesty, naturalness, patriotism, and populist notions of fairness; and 3) common-sense *personal values* such as health, choice, belonging and social appeal, desire for pleasurable and convenient food, and pride in one's moral integrity. To better serve the motivational and identity-building function of the social movement framing process, strategic recommendations are made for how AROs could improve the resonance and logical consistency of campaign frames by emphasizing justice, freedom, and life, and re-framing naturalness and honesty. Emphasis on moral integrity is one of the most crucial appeals in expanding veganism, as attitude and behavior changes likely hinge on creating cognitive dissonance over the fit between one's value system and the consumption of animal products.

**KEYWORDS:** vegetarian, framing, values, campaign, animal rights

What does meat say about meat-eaters? As an animal activist, I often publicly opined on what was *wrong* with meat and other animal products – the suffering, the unnecessary killing, the pollution, the wilderness destruction, the clogged arteries, etc. But another way of approaching the issue, more positively, is to ask what is *right* about choosing to eat plant-based foods. What does a plant-based diet say about plant-eaters?

As a communications scholar, I decided to study how animal rights organizations attempt to entice meat-eating Americans into choosing veganism. And while that involves highlighting problems with animal flesh, eggs, and dairy, it also involves constructing solutions around eating solely plant-based foods and motivating people to see themselves as vegans – with veganism, perhaps surprisingly, being

constructed as a natural fit for their values. In this chapter I share the sixteen main values representing the presumed identity of a vegetarian in the “go veg” campaigns of five major U.S. animal rights organizations. I evaluate how this construction does serve and could better serve the motivation and identity function of the social movement framing process.

### *Vegetarianism in the United States*

For over a decade, most major animal rights organizations (AROs), and even some animal welfare groups, have made farmed animals a primary focus, realizing “food animals” comprise the vast majority of nonhuman animals (NHAs) killed in the United States – over 10 billion land animals, mainly birds, and at least as many sea animals annually (Singer & Mason 112). And the number of animals killed annually continues to slowly rise (FARM).

Donna Maurer examined the history of vegetarianism as a movement in the U.S., finding that vegetarianism peaked in the mid-1800s and again in the 1960s and 1970s (3). Ever since, vegetarianism has held a small but steady contingency without growing significantly. In spite of the animal rights and vegetarian movements, Americans’ per capita consumption of meat went up between the 1970s and the 1990s, with price and health being determining factors in which type of animal is consumed in the largest quantities (Maurer 15). While semi-vegetarianism is becoming more popular, only about 2 to 3% of the population is fully vegetarian, eating no animal flesh. About 1% of these, or approximately a million people, are vegan and eat no animal products whatsoever (Maurer 16-17; Singer & Mason 4-5, 187). The typical person attracted to vegetarianism is a young, white, middle-class, atheist female (Maurer 8).

Maurer cited Visser, a cultural historian, who suggested that “vegetarianism can be viewed as a modern response to dealing with the endless choices engendered by a consumer society that discourages the appearance of overconsumption” (138). And while environmental sustainability is a motivation for some vegetarians, the main reasons people *say* they go vegetarian is for health and/or ethics. People who go vegetarian for ethical reasons tend to be more committed to remaining vegetarian. So, Maurer posited,

“promoting concern for animals and the environment is essential to the advancement of the vegetarian movement” (45) because health-motivated vegetarians may be tempted by the convenience of a meat-based diet and new lower-fat meat items (126).

### *Communication Tactics of U.S. Vegetarian Advocates*

The vegetarian movement’s ideology is based on three core tenets that vegetarianism supports human health, compassion for NHAs, and environmental sustainability (Maurer 71). While advocacy organizations tend to agree on the merits of these tenets, they sometimes disagree on how to market them. For example, their advocacy materials may choose to promote one benefit over others, or they may shy away from the word *vegan* as it is less familiar and may seem extreme to the general public (Maurer 95). Some even opt to replace the familiar but culturally-loaded term *vegetarian* with the more benign and clinical term *plant-based diet* (96).

The main framing debate within vegetarian advocacy is whether to promote altruistic ethical benefits and a collective identity or whether to promote individual, human health benefits (Maurer 119). Maurer found that for wider appeal vegetarian campaigns often chose to emphasize health. However, a campaign promoting a strong vegetarian identity based on ethical principles, although it attracts fewer people, can be inspirational at creating a stronger commitment than a more vague and mainstream health appeal. Yet a quarter of Americans say they are actively reducing their meat consumption, primarily based on self-interest, such as health, rather than on animal or environmental protection (“Advocating Meat”). While consumers view vegetarian foods as healthy, they also generally believe that some animal products, such as dairy, chicken, and fish, are also healthy.

Vegetarian advocates are challenged by survey findings that reveal 80% of Americans do not intend to ever fully eliminate meat from their diet, based on concerns that it may be unhealthy to do so and their overall preference for the taste of meat. Therefore, survey data reveals that it would be more effective for vegetarian advocates to promote meat *reduction*, rather than vegetarianism, and that

reduction might lead to vegetarianism down the line (“Advocating meat”). While the health rationale in particular, and the environmental rationale, to some degree, are more useful at encouraging people to *reduce* meat consumption, the animal suffering rationale is most effective at motivating people to *eliminate* meat (“Advocating Meat”).

Maurer concluded that the vegetarian movement will not significantly increase the number of vegetarians unless it proves that meat is either dangerous to one’s health or is immoral (143). Since consuming a small quantity of animal products is not extremely dangerous, it seems that the ethical argument is the most compelling option. Maurer warned that if vegetarianism becomes just another healthy lifestyle consumer choice, it risks being reductively perceived as a form of “feminine asceticism” (145) and loses its ideological edge as a “public moral good” (126). Perhaps it is advantageous that a significant portion of the vegetarian movement is comprised of animal rights organizations whose campaigns tend to promote more ethical urgency and inspiration than do the campaigns of solely vegetarian organizations (68-69).

### *Communication Strategies of Social Movement Organizations*

Social movement organizations (SMOs), like those in animal rights, rhetorically struggle to transform a hegemonic view of reality in the dominant discourse, in this case an instrumental view of certain NHAs as food objects. Stewart, Smith, and Denton explained that SMOs need to convince the public that not only is the commonly-accepted view of reality based on a faulty premise but the situation deserves to be defined as a problem that warrants their immediate attention (52).

In the quest to create meanings in support of their worldview, SMO communicators can find guidance in sociological literature on the framing process (Johnston & Noakes 1-2). Framing is based on “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Gitlin 6). SMOs must construct collective action frames that define problems and culprits; demonstrate the problem’s severity and urgency; suggest logical, realistic

solutions; and encourage participation based on shared identity and values. Gamson defined the three components of collective action frames as: injustice, agency (we can fix it if we work together), and identity (side with us) (7). Snow & Benford more generally defined the three core tasks of framing as: diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational (464).

I am interested here in the *motivation* and *identity* component of collective action frames, as SMOs must construct a compelling incentive that serves as meaningful inspiration for people to engage in collective action toward the proposed solution (Benford & Snow 614). To garner this support, motivational frames often rely upon an appeal to shared values, demonstrating alignment between the goals of the SMO and those of the target audience. Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford determined four main frame alignment processes from which SMOs could choose: bridging ideas to reach sympathetic but unmobilized supporters; amplifying important beliefs and values to demonstrate their relevance to your issue; extending the issue's relevance out to other related social issues; and transforming people's views on the issue to cast it in a new light (467).

To increase the resonance of frames, AROs should seek credibility by using arguments that are authentic to their beliefs, truthful, and logically consistent. To be resonant, frames should also create salience by appealing to key, broad, culturally-accepted values and connecting them to the audience member's personal everyday life (Benford & Snow 619-621; Tarrow 118). Additionally, an ARO should promote a clear set of simple values, more so than facts, to accurately reflect its principles and promote a moral vision (Lakoff 74) – in this case, a primarily vegan society that does not domesticate and exploit fellow animals.

## METHOD

Grounded by social movement framing literature, I asked: to which values are AROs appealing? And how are AROs creating any alignment between their values and those of the public? To examine “food animal” advocacy, I followed Stuart Hall's cultural studies textual analysis method, examining

words and images in context to uncover the themes and assumptions grounding the construction of ideas. The food advocacy text sampled includes vegetarian or vegan materials as well as anything addressing the human practice of farming animals or fishing them to use for food. I included both electronic and print materials being used by five selected AROs as of January 2008. Electronic materials included web pages and self-produced video footage (including advertisements and animal cruelty footage). Print materials included vegetarian starter guides, pamphlets, advertisements, and collateral pieces such as stickers, clothing, buttons, and posters.

To be comparable and relevant, AROs selected for this study had: an animal rights mission supporting veganism in contrast to a more moderate welfare mission promoting “humane” meats; campaigns providing a variety of print and electronic advocacy pieces aimed at the public; and a national presence within the U.S.. The following five organizations, listed from largest to smallest, most fully met criteria for inclusion: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), Farm Sanctuary (FS), Farm Animal Rights Movement (FARM), Compassion Over Killing (COK), and Vegan Outreach (VO).

PETA was founded over 25 years ago in Washington, D.C. Now headquartered in Norfolk, VA, PETA has expanded to become the largest animal rights group in the world, with more than 150 full-time paid staff, international offices, and more than 1.8 million members and supporters (“About PETA”). FS was founded in 1986 and has grown into the largest farmed animal rescue organization in the nation, operating sanctuaries in NY and CA, with more than 100,000 members and 75 paid staff (“About FS” & “FS Financial”). FARM, located in Bethesda, MD with seven paid staff, claims to be the oldest animal rights group dedicated to farmed animal issues, starting in the early 1970s (“About FARM”). The youngest group, COK, was founded in 1995 as a high school group in Washington, D.C. and now has six paid, full-time staff (“About COK”). VO is a highly focused group which began in 1993; it primarily operates from Tucson, AZ with just three paid staff members and a host of volunteers to hand out its pamphlets on college campuses (“About VO”).

While marginalized in the public sphere, this animal advocacy has reached tens to hundreds of millions of Americans, attempting to make production and consumption of animal-products an ethical issue, or at least a problem. It represents an important challenge not only to mainstream food industry discourse but also to American social norms and basic ideals about who it is morally acceptable to use and kill and who pays the cost for America's food choices.

## FINDINGS

To demonstrate veganism's fit with one's identity, AROs most prominently appealed to our presumed values of compassion, respect for animals as subjects not objects, healthfulness, environmentalism, and moral consistency. They also appealed to other values such as: desire to improve the world and make a difference, choice, pleasurable and convenient food, belonging, life, concern for fellow human beings, honesty, populism, naturalness, freedom, and American pride. I categorize and discuss these values in three major categories: altruistic, idealistic, and personal. I'll share a few examples of how AROs emphasize and frame each value.

### Altruistic Values

#### *Compassion and Caring for NHA Suffering and Aversion to Cruelty*

ARO's spend a lot of time educating consumers about factory farm and slaughterhouse cruelty, implying consumers are compassionate and caring enough to be offended, an assumption which was also explicitly declared. For example, FS's new slogan is "a compassionate world starts with you." PETA's *Meet Your Meat* video ends with celebrity vegetarian Alec Baldwin telling viewers to think about the cruelty they have seen, to choose "compassion," and to go vegetarian as "millions of compassionate people" have decided to do. VO's *Why Vegan?* booklet declares "we can choose to act with compassion by boycotting animal agriculture. Making humane choices is the ultimate affirmation of our humanity." COK's *Vegetarian Starter Guide* creates a good versus bad dichotomy under the title "Choosing

Compassion Over Killing” by asking “Do we want to support kindness and mercy, or do we want to support cruelty and misery?” requesting that readers “take a stand for compassionate living.” FARM literature often describes people as “caring” and refers to those who speak out for farm animals on World Farm Animal Day as “people of conscience.”

*Respect for the Sentience and Individuality of Other Animal Subjects*

Built into the assumption that someone is compassionate toward NHAs is the idea that the person respects the other animals’ ability to feel and does not want them to suffer. The concept of sentience, as I use it here, involves not only experiencing pain, but also experiencing emotions, thought, or consciousness. AROs typically do not use the word “sentience,” rather they tend to say that NHAs “feel” or “suffer.” To refer to NHAs as subjects not objects, all AROs use gendered or personal pronouns like *he*, *she*, or *I* when referring to farmed animals instead of following the common American practice of calling them *it*.

All AROs include frequent messages to ensure the public that farmed animals are sentient, often comparing their capabilities to those of cats and dogs or sometimes to other animals, including, less frequently, humans. An example of a pet comparison is FARM’s vegetarian postcard, which states, “animals raised for food are just as intelligent, lovable, and sensitive as the animals we call *pets*.” An example of a human comparison is PETA’s teen vegetarian booklet, which declares, “animals are like *us*” and proceeds to describe farmed animals doing what would normally seem like human activities, such as pigs playing video games, turkeys playing ball, cows babysitting, and fish gardening.

FS’s “Sentient Beings” campaign seeks elevated legal status for U.S. farmed animals, to be classified as sentient beings as they are in Europe. The leaflet for the campaign is titled “Farm animals have feelings too” and says these animals are “sentient beings – capable of awareness, feeling, and suffering” who “deserve to be treated with respect.” This is contrasted with pictures of farmed animals in

extreme confinement and quotes from industry that compares them to machines and manure, a tactic used by many AROs to demonstrate how industry commodifies animals.

To showcase farmed animals as individuals, all AROs portray pictures of them making direct eye contact with the reader. Several vegetarian starter guides describe the personalities of each rescued animal and display his/her portrait and individual name, such as Travolta the cow, Emery the chicken, and Ashley the turkey. The descriptions reveal personality traits, such as friendliness, talkativeness, playfulness, and preferences for certain foods such as apples or green grapes. In FS's *Guide to Veg Living*, a photo shows a goose, Bing, happily spreading his wings in a pond and honking with gusto, and another photo shows a piglet, Rudy, standing proudly and defiantly in the grass with the low camera angle putting the viewer in the position of looking up at him so that he appears larger than life.

Several PETA publications feature an "Amazing Animals" section praising animal abilities. Here are examples of PETA's opening sentence descriptions for each species:

Chickens are inquisitive, interesting animals who are thought to be as intelligent as cats, dogs, and even some primates; Pigs are curious and insightful animals thought to have intelligence beyond that of an average 3-year-old human child; Fish are smart, sensitive animals with their own unique personalities; Cows are intelligent, loyal animals who enjoy solving problems; Turkeys are social, playful birds who enjoy the company of others; Geese are very loyal to their families and very protective of their partners and offspring.

PETA dedicates more space to fish than does any other ARO, and it is the only group that talks about fish sentience in terms of intelligence and personality. In general, mammals such as cows and pigs seem to be the most popular animals for all AROs to display, with birds being the next most popular.

Some messages overtly request that consumers view farmed animals as more than food objects. The very title of PETA's popular video, *Meet Your Meat*, juxtaposes the idea that consumers can see farmed animals both as individual subjects while alive and as objects after death. COK's print advertisement displays a cow's face reflected in a woman's eye and asks teen girls to "see her as more than a meal." FS's print ad features a young pig, Truffles, who challenges the viewers to "look me in the

eyes and tell me I'm tasty," and a sticker showing an illustration of a chicken stating, "I am not your breakfast, lunch or dinner." Similarly, PETA has several collateral materials with an illustration of a chick declaring, "I am not a nugget" and telling viewers that pigs and fish are "friends not food." Emphasizing friendship, as several AROs did, challenges the solely instrumental relationship we typically have with farmed animals.

### *Concern for Fellow Human Beings*

While AROs emphasize care for nonhumans, some also show how veganism is compassionate towards humans, especially innocent people who are wronged by meat-industry practices. This anthropocentric altruism is particularly emphasized by FARM, PETA, and FS who all have anti-factory-farming campaigns that fight either human hunger, worker exploitation, or the polluting and health contamination of rural neighborhoods. For example, PETA warns that "profits are put before people" by government and factory farmers, so readers are encouraged to go vegan to "stop these exploitative industries and promote a world of compassion." FARM is the only ARO who has an anti-hunger campaign, Well-Fed World; it promotes "plant-based diets" to reverse starvation rates as the worldwide consumption of unsustainable animal products and factory farming results in resource depletion and unequal distribution of food.

### *Environmentalism*

Of increasing popularity is an appeal to people's concerns for how our food choices affect nature (and its human and nonhuman inhabitants). PETA, FS, and FARM have print and online pieces specifically dedicated to framing animal agribusiness as environmentally destructive, commonly featuring photos of pipes spewing manure into cesspools next to factory farms. PETA's *Chop Chop* leaflet claims one can't be a "meat-eating environmentalist" and visually equates a pork "chop" to trees being "chopped," providing details on meat's association with global warming, pollution, excessive resource use, and damage to oceanic life.

FS's "Veg for Life" series of three print pieces all mention environmental degradation, using verbs such as *eroded*, *ruined*, *contaminated*, *compromised*, *mismanaged*, and *ransacked* and declaring that the number two reason to go vegetarian is because "much of our water and fossil fuel supply is squandered for livestock rearing." FS's gray brochure titled "Factory Farming: Destroying the Environment" emphasizes the pollution of nature and our bodies by showing photos of cesspools, chemical plants, pharmaceuticals, and a fish kill.

FARM's "Bite Global Warming" campaign, found at [coolyourdiet.com](http://coolyourdiet.com), is built around a 2006 report of the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization that lists animal agriculture as an even bigger "culprit" to greenhouse gas emissions worldwide than the transportation industry, a climate change fact increasingly cited in many other ARO messages.

### *Life*

To show a value for the life of all living beings, AROs sometimes specifically problematize the killing and death of NHAs, not just their suffering. To promote saving life, COK names its main veg starter guide sections: "Saving Ourselves," "Saving Animals," and "Saving the Earth." And consider the use of the word *life* in FARM's "choose life" slogan for its Great American Meatout and in its thanksgiving campaign declaring that killing innocent animals "betrays the life-affirming spirit" of the holiday, asking viewers to "celebrate life." In a more direct life-saving appeal, FS has stickers showing cows and chickens with a statement reading, "She wants to live and her life depends on YOU!" AROs often talk about the number of animal lives saved by vegetarians per year, or conversely, how many lives meat-eaters take.

Human lives can also be saved via veganism. In FS's "Veg for Life" vegetarian campaign, one can interpret the word *life* to mean that a healthy vegetarian diet can save one's own life and/or the lives of farmed animals. For example, FS's and PETA's main vegetarian guides title the recipe section

“Recipes for Life” to indicate food choices that result in healthy living bodies. Life could also connote time, suggesting people should eat vegetarian for the rest of their lives.

### *Freedom*

Freedom is a key human rights value in America, so AROs attempt to apply it to *all* animals having the right to freedom over their own life and body. PETA’s *Chew on This* DVD declares “everyone wants to be free,” meaning NHAs too. But, besides this example, *freedom* is not directly referenced much by AROs, rather it is implied. AROs’ consistent emphasis on animals’ extreme confinement and immobility in factory farms implies that Americans will find high levels of restriction to be unfair.

Although infrequent, direct analogies to human confinement are sometimes made, such as COK’s pork leaflet comparing the confinement of pigs “stuck” in gestation crates to how frustrated and uncomfortable people would feel being “stuck” in a car in traffic for years. It says pigs are “unable to move freely” and “can’t even walk or turn around,” as they are in a pregnancy cycle going between gestation and farrowing crates. The word *cycle* is used by many AROs to describe the treadmill of re-impregnation faced by pigs and cows to maximize industry profit.

Freedom is associated with wide open spaces, as in the American West, which may be why FS emphasizes space on its new home page, with lots of white space, a picture of rescued animals enjoying the sun, and a strip of grass across the bottom. Blue sky, sun, and grass are often represented in all ARO pictures of contented animals to emphasize their relative freedom (presumably in a sanctuary) in contrast to the darkness, filth, and discomfort of captivity on factory farms.

### *Desire to Improve the World and Make a Difference*

ARO messages indicate that people seek meaning in their lives by improving the world and making a difference. COK encourages readers to “Make a difference. Start today!” and the back of its vegetarian starter guide states in bold “every time we sit down to eat, we can make the world a better

place.” Similarly, VO’s *Even if You Like Meat* booklet tells readers “every time you choose compassion, you’re making a difference.” To emphasize personal empowerment, FARM uses the slogan, “Stop global warming one bite at a time,” describing the “power” of our food choices and how they “matter.”

Similarly, FS has a radio PSA for Earthday that says the “power is on your plate” to protect the earth “every time we eat.” Note that in many of these slogans there is a time element emphasizing the ease with which a person can make a difference through vegetarianism *everyday* because it allows him or her to improve the world “at every meal” or “one bite at a time.” These AROs transform the mundane act of eating into a convenient form of activism for those who do not necessarily want to dedicate time to being a traditional activist or do not have the money to donate to causes.

Further indicating the importance of a switch to vegetarianism, AROs often claim that vegetarianism is the *best* way to help animals and the planet. FS’s *Veg for Life* brochure says “eliminating ALL animal foods from our diets is the single most important step we can take to be kinder to animals, ourselves and the Earth.” And PETA often cites vegetarian Sir Paul McCartney telling readers “If anyone wants to save the planet, all they have to do is just stop eating meat. That’s the single most important thing you can do.”

Making a difference is also connected with self-interest in feeling good about oneself. FS says through veganism you will “feel good because you make the world better,” stating that vegetarians enjoy better “mental health and feel good knowing they are working toward improved health and well-being for themselves, animals and the environment.” Regarding mental health, veganism is often framed as a personal growth goal. COK’s veg guide section on transitioning to a vegetarian diet reads like a life coach’s plan praising new vegetarians because they have “made it!” and deserve a “pat on the back!”

#### Idealistic Values

##### *Naturalness*

Naturalness is a value the public relates to food's healthfulness, in contrast to artificial foods. PETA and COK frame cow's milk as natural for calves to drink but unnatural for humans, while meat was only once (by PETA) framed as unnatural for humans to eat. However, in this section I focus less on the health angle of the naturalness value and more on how AROs suggest that what is natural for animals and what is more traditional for agriculture is preferred to what is artificial or industrialized, such as the genetic modification of animals and large-scale factory-farming.

Mechanization, metal, and concrete abound in images of animals confined in warehouses, left to die in garbage cans, and disassembled on the slaughterhouse assembly line. The feel is cold, dark, gray, dirty, and industrial. This unnatural environment is juxtaposed against the cleanliness and brightness of portraits of animals, presumably in a sanctuary or smaller farm, surrounded by natural elements of sun, grass, hay, wooden fences, and ponds. To a lesser degree, wild animals are shown living in nature, particularly fish and sometimes turkeys.

AROs often directly refer to practices, conditions, and the animals' bodies being unnatural in modern animal agribusiness. For example, FS says the number 10 reason to go vegetarian is because "farm animals are usually prevented from engaging in instinctual behavior and live a fraction of their natural lives." And VO's booklets cite Michael Pollan saying of a battery-caged hen that "every natural instinct of this animal is thwarted." These stifling factory conditions are contrasted with the descriptions of how these species would behave in nature.

The industry demands animals grow to an unnatural weight, the cruelty and artificiality of which is highlighted by AROs. FS's video on the turkey industry explains how farmers alter the shape of the birds to meet consumer demands for turkey breasts, stating that this "anatomical manipulation" has made male turkeys so large that it is impossible for them to "mount and reproduce naturally," so they must be "artificially inseminated." And COK's veg guide explains how birds "grow so abnormally fast due to selective breeding and growth-promoting antibiotics" that they suffer organ failure and lameness,

collapsing under their bulk. Many AROs critique the unnatural diet and medications that agribusiness uses to fatten animals, likely inciting our fears over Frankenfoods and superbugs. Chickens are “dosed with a steady stream of drugs” (PETA) and cows are “fattened on an unnatural diet of grains and ‘fillers’ (including sawdust and chicken manure)” (COK). FS blames bovine growth hormone injections for why cows “produce ten times more milk than they would in nature,” showing engorged udders practically dragging on the ground.

ARO environmental messages claim such out-of-sync agribusiness practices contaminate the purity of nature. FS’s factory farming brochure cites the Worldwatch Institute saying, “overgrown and resource intensive, animal agriculture is out of alignment with the Earth’s ecosystems.” To further indicate the artificial, the brochure shows photos of medication as well as fumes coming from an agricultural chemical plant. Related to this, FS’s, COK’s, and PETA’s vegetarian guides all mention contamination in the resulting animal products humans eat, saying how animal products are a health risk because they contain unnatural ingredients like pesticides, drugs, and other chemicals.

### *Honesty*

Consumers need truthful information to make informed decisions, and AROs blame agribusiness for misleading consumers and hiding the ugly truth of factory farming; AROs see it as their job to give people a reality check. COK emphasizes the honesty aspect the most with its campaign against fraudulent “humane” farming labels and its television ads showing flabbergasted consumers being served a rare “side of truth” at a fast food restaurant.

In an interesting twist on honesty, PETA’s *Chew on This* DVD accuses *parents* of being dishonest to children when the narrator says “you shouldn’t have to lie to your kids” about where their food comes from. This assumes that adults know that the reality of farm animal suffering and death is gruesome enough to upset the kids and possibly keep them from eating meat.

### *American Populism, and Big Business and Government Responsibility*

This broad category overlaps with the values of naturalness, honesty, and concern for human well-being, as ARO messages capitalize on an assumed public mistrust for the exploitative and irresponsible tendencies of big business and, in some cases, government. This idea of American populism suggests that AROs assume people want corporations and the political elite to be held accountable in cases where they take advantage of the innocent little guy. For example, all AROs critique modern agricultural practices specifically on the basis that it is contemptible as “factory farming,” “corporate agribusiness,” or an “exploitative industry,” in contrast with the bucolic values that consumers may have for wholesome traditional or family farming, considered a responsible business of everyday hard-working people. Hence, AROs rhetorically center blame on *agribusiness* more than *agriculture*. AROs generally do not insinuate that small or “family farms” are nearly as problematic. They blame factory farming, in particular, for why cruelty is standard, food is unwholesome, the earth is polluted, workers are exploited, and consumers are misled.

PETA and FS appeal to these populist values the most, as they both have online sections discussing the exploitation of workers and the contamination of rural communities by animal agribusiness. The implication is that industry is greedy and callous and fails to demonstrate justice, respect, responsibility, and decency toward the common man. The jobs agribusiness provides are described as dangerous, dirty, and low-paying. PETA cites workers who explain how their bosses cheat them out of wages and workers’ compensation, firing those who complain. To highlight objectification, PETA quotes a farm worker saying he felt he was “disposable” and treated like a “machine,” and a contract chicken farmer said she was “treated like a dog” by the industry. To further emphasize worker mistreatment, PETA shows pictures of working class people protesting and striking and describes industry as anti-union. In this section, PETA also occasionally uses trigger words for exploitation like *serfs*, *slaves*, and *child labor*. This is contrasted with wholesome “community” values of rural America, or the “heartland,” where people simply expect basic, fair treatment from employers and a safe, healthy environment for their families and community. FS’s section on the economic issues of factory farming

laments the loss of family farms, saying “small farms help to create close-knit communities and thriving local economies.”

Perhaps surprising for such a liberal ARO, PETA’s sections on the polluting of rural communities and the negligence of government might also appeal to politically conservative values, especially those that mistrust the federal government. Because most AROs propose a consumer solution instead of a government solution, this could be construed as valuing the notion of personal responsibility, consumer choice, and free market capitalism. For example, PETA’s page on government negligence shows a photo of the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., specifically emphasizing *federal* government agencies, such as the USDA and EPA, and not implicating local governments. Regulation is portrayed as a joke because money has corrupted the process, so consumers, more so than government, must right the wrong by boycotting factory farming.

#### *American Pride*

In a few cases, American pride is directly referenced through the use of patriotic symbols, such as PETA’s bumper sticker displaying an American flag and declaring, “Proud to be a Vegetarian American.” And FARM’s Great American Meatout campaign uses red, white, and blue colors. One of its posters has Uncle Sam, portrayed by a cow, pointing at the audience, reminiscent of the iconic war recruitment poster, saying “I want you to stop eating animals.” The text emphasizes loyalty by stating viewers should join the meatout “for your honor, for your family, for your country, and for your planet.”

Sometimes the AROs give an indirect nod to American pride by suggesting the humane policies of the U.S. government lag behind those of other countries. This strategy of comparing humane laws internationally is used most frequently by FS because it has some of the only campaigns calling for federal legal reform of industry. FS’s *Eggribusiness* video explains that European nations have already outlawed battery cages, so “It’s time for birds to be protected from abuse in America too.” And in FS’s *Life Behind Bars* video, spokesperson Mary Tyler Moore informs viewers that legal protection for

American farmed animals is “grossly inadequate.” She states gestation crates, battery cages, and veal crates should be banned in the U.S. as they have been in Europe. The call-to-action is that America has an “ethical obligation” to prevent animal suffering as a “civilized nation.” In a similar appeal to advanced civilizations, FARM uses a cave man analogy to imply that meat-eating in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is barbaric.

## Personal Values

### *Health*

All AROs except VO prioritize human health as a major benefit of vegetarianism, second only to showing compassion for NHAs. Messages tend to be about how a pure vegetarian diet can be healthy in general and often healthier than a standard meat-based diet, especially in preventing major diseases and obesity. They often cite the American Dietetic Association’s positive position on vegetarian diets. AROs do not just attempt to say that plant-based diets are *as* healthy as animal-based diets, they often attempt to problematize animal-based diets as *un*healthy. For example, while their health information is mostly positive, COK’s and FS’s veg guides both say animal products are the “main source of saturated fat and the only source of cholesterol” for most Americans. FS links excess protein intake with a variety of common diseases as well as revealing “links between animal food consumption and many forms of cancer.” FS’s vegetarian guide also debates the bone-building myth of dairy by saying “studies suggest a connection between osteoporosis and diets that are rich in animal protein” due to calcium being leached out of the bones. Both COK and FS’s guides also list the antibiotic-resistant bacteria strains that are found in animal products, and FS’s brochures warn against “harmful pathogens like Salmonella and E. coli” as well as declaring Mad Cow Disease and Avian Influenza are “sickening and killing” people.

PETA is the only group that openly appeals to our desire to be sexually active and attractive. On goveg.com, PETA cites a scientific study claiming that meat leads to impotence. PETA also takes a more positive approach to sexual enhancement claims by saying that a vegetarian diet helps one to be thinner and more energetic, which is seen as sexier than being overweight and sluggish. This positive association

with vegetarianism and sex is endorsed through its annual “sexiest vegetarian” contests. PETA’s veg guide has a page on weight loss where a medical doctor states that vegetarian diets are the “only diets that work for long-term weight loss” and that “meat-eaters have three times the obesity rate of vegetarians and nine times the obesity rate of vegans.”

### *Choice*

Through emphasizing choice, AROs appeal to our desire to have plentiful options, so both the palate and conscience are satisfied. COK’s materials repeatedly empower people through use of the word *choice*, such as in asking consumers to “choose vegetarian” or “tryveg.com.” Choice relates to freedom in terms of not being bound by restrictions on food – even though, ironically, veganism is about *not* eating certain things. Yet PETA’s goveg.com “Veg101” section declares that vegetarians eat “whatever we want,” which is an unusually liberating phrase that implies the choice to eat vegetarian foods is a satisfying preference and not a sacrifice. All AROs illustrate this abundance and variety of food choices with images of bountiful produce, packaged store-bought foods, and home-cooked meals.

ARO sometimes remind us that we humans, unlike NHAs, have the luxury to choose whether or not to be conscientious consumers. COK’s brochures on egg and pork both say these animals “don’t have a choice – but you do.” Similarly, COK has a television spot called “Choices” that asks “would you choose to live like this?” as it shows crated animals. In rare cases, it is the NHAs who plead with viewers to choose vegetarian, such as in a few of PETA’s collateral materials where the farmed animals say “please don’t eat us.”

### *Pleasurable and Convenient Food*

Every ARO highlights the positive aspects of vegan foods, recognizing that taste, convenience, accessibility, and variety are very important to food consumers. For example, the *ease* of the diet is often emphasized, especially by PETA, by stating many accessible options exist now for vegetarians. PETA’s starter guide explains “restaurant options for vegetarian diners keep getting better and better,” and “you

can now find veggie burgers and other mock meats and soy milk in pretty much every supermarket nationwide, including Wal-Mart.” Equally optimistic, COK and FS also declare that it’s “easier than ever” to go veg.

To create a positive connotation with vegetarian foods, AROs often accompany messages with cheerful, bright colors such as green, yellow, and blue, connoting freshness, and showcasing photos of ripe produce, name-brand convenience products, and hearty cooked dishes of common favorites. Frequent use of words like “tasty” and “delicious” imply you won’t compromise on taste. The recipe section of COK’s starter guide, labeled “Recipes for Vegetarian Delights” assures readers “eating vegetarian foods doesn’t mean giving up the tastes you love.” And FARM also uses positive marketing when enticing readers to sign up for its Meatless Mondays campaign: “Have fun. Remember, going veg isn’t about restricting your diet – it’s about discovering new possibilities and experiencing fresh, exciting flavors.”

*Belonging (Especially to the Right Crowd) or Desire for Popularity*

All AROs emphasize the growing popularity of vegetarianism, presumably so it does not seem like a fringe lifestyle or odd dietary choice. People do not want to be alienated, so, by emphasizing popularity, AROs provide assurance that vegetarianism is socially validated. To combat hippy stereotypes, FS’s starter guide assures readers there are a wide variety of people who eat vegetarian, saying “from former cattle ranchers to Hollywood celebrities, more and more people from every corner of America are recognizing that vegetarianism is good ...” and “after years on the fringe, meat-, egg-, and dairy-free fare has earned a well-deserved place in the American food culture.” One page is dedicated to proving vegetarians are in “good company,” as the “best people” have gone vegetarian for ethical reasons, showcasing famous vegetarians throughout history.

PETA often appeals to our desire to be part of the “it crowd.” Celebrity pictures and quotations are used to demonstrate that vegetarians are morally progressive, healthy, attractive, and popular. PETA’s teen booklet features attractive young stars under the headline “everyone’s doing it.” To further

emphasize that beautiful people go vegetarian, PETA hosts annual “sexiest vegetarian” contests and uses naked or scantily-clothed bodies in some campaigns.

*Integrity, Including Moral Consistency and Pride in One’s Morality*

I define moral consistency and integrity as reflecting one’s values through actions and applying those values uniformly and fairly in all situations. Regarding the major value of compassion, AROs activate the logic of moral consistency as such: if people already care about the welfare of cats and dogs and do not want to see them harmed, and if farmed animals are equally sentient, then it would make sense that compassionate people would not want to see farmed animals harmed either. To show consensus for farmed animal welfare values, vegetarian guides for FS and PETA both use survey data to prove that most Americans are in favor of legal protection of farmed animals and against intensive confinement. But a consensus clearly doesn’t exist in favor of saving farmed animals from death and consumption, although there is consensus that people should not eat dogs and cats, so that is where AROs often point out moral inconsistencies in American attitudes.

Messages by FS, FARM, PETA, and COK use questions as a tool to provoke viewers to rationally justify why they *eat* certain species and *befriend* others, implying it is a morally random decision who gets killed. A COK t-shirt shows a photo of a dog seated on a dinner plate with a knife and fork on either side. The headline asks “Why not? You eat other animals, don’t you? Go vegetarian.” Similarly, a FARM vegetarian postcard shows a picture of a cat and a piglet nose to nose with the question “Which do you pet? Which do you eat? Why?” FS collateral materials show a happy dog and cat cartoon and an anxious cow and pig with the question “If you love animals called pets, why do you eat animals called dinner?” And to help create empathy for sea animals, a PETA brochure says we humans wouldn’t “stab our cat or dog through the mouth” (as a fishing analogy), and “none of us would drop a live cat or dog into boiling water. Why should it be any different for lobsters?”

VO also appeals to moral consistency, as their booklets openly talk about the need for people to widen their “circle of compassion” to include farmed animals. The “Even if You Like Meat” booklet states that most people are “appalled” by farm animal cruelty, not because they believe in “animal rights,” but because they “believe animals feel pain and that morally decent human beings should try to prevent pain whenever possible.” In this way, the appeal is not asking for a *change* in values, since it assumes people are generally supportive of animal welfare, but rather it asks for an equal application of this welfare value.

By undermining the welfare claims made by some free-range farms, AROs attempt to show that veganism is a true reflection of one’s compassion, while supporting so-called “humane” farming is not. For example, FS’s position paper on “Humane Meats” says that people who are “sincere” in their concern for animals will stop eating them, insinuating that animal lovers are hypocritical if they still eat meat, even “free-range.”

#### FRAMING IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

By appealing to a wide variety of culturally-relevant values, AROs largely follow the strategic framing advice for social movements for creating an appealing identity – in this case one that is broad enough to dispels myths of vegetarians only being a feminine subculture of liberal hippies and animal rights activists. And while the diet they promote is vegan, they usually call it by the more open and familiar term *vegetarian*, per Maurer’s findings. By appealing to people’s *values* instead of just reason, AROs follow Lakoff’s advice, but they don’t necessarily provide a collective moral vision, such as a vegan world. However, considering that over 95% of the population eats animal products, promoting a vegan America may be too utopian at this point. So AROs settle for displaying optimism about a movement towards vegetarianism, which provides a vision for a better world as each vegetarian helps mitigate global problems, such as animal suffering, disease and obesity, pollution and climate change, resource depletion, and human hunger. In this effort, most AROs promote the three standard vegetarian

tenets: animal ethics, human health, and environmentalism, in that order. But most do not follow the Humane Research Council's pragmatic advice to promote meat-reduction ("Advocating Meat"), with the exception of FARM's Meatout Mondays campaign and VO's *Even if You Like Meat* booklet. And even in these latter approaches, a transition to veganism is still touted as the best option. In keeping with an animal rights mission, AROs do not suggest that Americans switch to so-called "humane" animal products, preferring people eat plants, not better-treated animals.

ARO's mainly aligned their values with those of the audience by using frame building, amplification, and extension processes (Snow et al.). Companion animal welfare was used as a tool for frame *bridging*; AROs often used analogies comparing the sentience of farmed and companion animals in an attempt to use logic and a plea for moral consistency to get the public to transfer their respect for the subject status and individuality of dogs and cats over to land-based farmed animals. In selecting species, most AROs emphasized mammals over birds and fish, even though the latter are killed in greater numbers, as humans can presumably identify more with fellow mammals who more closely resemble themselves and their companion animals. PETA was the exception, as they attempted to build that longer bridge to connect people to aquatic animals.

ARO's implemented frame *amplification* by deepening the notion of what it means to be compassionate and respectful toward NHAs, so that these values applied to supporting freedom and life values (veganism) instead of just reducing suffering (humane farming). AROs also amplified appeals to American populism and corporate skepticism so they applied to animal agribusiness, in particular factory farming, stating it was cruel to NHAs, destructive to the environment, unfair to human workers, and misleading to consumers. Related to the populist ideal, frame *extension* occurred where AROs equated vegetarianism with human rights and environmental causes.

My recommendations for increasing the resonance and logical consistency of ARO frames include an emphasis on justice, freedom, and life, and a re-framing of naturalness and honesty. To begin, I

contend that the AROs' implicitly appealed to the American values of rights and justice when they used appeals to compassion and respect for animal subjectivity as a call-to-action for veganism (animal rights) not a switch to so-called "humane" animal products (animal welfare). More direct comparisons between human and nonhuman animals and between human rights and animal rights would further bolster this abolitionist stance in favor of justice, escalating the frame alignment process from amplification to transformation (ideological change).

While AROs generally appealed to *naturalness* by framing factory farming and slaughterhouse practices as "unnatural" in comparison to traditional animal farming, AROs could more logically promote veganism by extending a naturalness frame out to communicate that *all* farming of other animals for food is itself unnatural when viewed in relation to how predation operates in nature through hunting and scavenging. This connects naturalness to *freedom*, indicating that all animals, human and nonhuman, want to live free of captivity.

Overall, AROs appealed to the best of our humanity to show how veganism is a natural fit with many cherished values. Therefore, I contend the emphasis on *moral integrity* is one of the most crucial appeals in creating a vegan upsurge, as attitude and behavior changes likely hinge on creating cognitive dissonance over meat's fit with one's value-system. The appeal to *honesty* could be tied more directly to moral integrity if it focused less on expecting truth from the meat industry and more on being truthful with ourselves. An honesty frame could state that one should willingly, openly, and frequently confront the agricultural practices and consequences behind one's food choices to ensure they are in accordance with one's own values in order to maintain moral integrity and model it for one's children.

## CONCLUSION

According to these animal rights organizations, veganism says a lot about someone. It says they likely prioritize altruistic values such as: compassion, respect for sentient beings, life, freedom, environmentalism, and the desire to make a difference and help humanity. It says they likely believe in

ideals such as: honesty, naturalness, patriotism, and populist notions of fairness toward the little guy. It also says they identify with common-sense personal values such as: health, choice, belonging and social appeal, desire for pleasurable and convenient food, and pride in one's moral integrity.

While meat industry executives or wing-eaters at a sports bar might disagree with this positive and admittedly flattering characterization of vegans (as meat-eaters might see many of these values as applying to themselves and not conflicting with meat-eating), the animal rights movements seeks a broad identity for vegans if it is to become a mainstream dietary choice. Perhaps that is why the appeals seem bipartisan, non-gender-specific, and non-denominational. AROs attempted to show how a variety of values with which many Americans already identify are a natural fit for choosing plant-based foods and are out of sync with their current habit of consuming animal products. But if plant-based foods represent altruism, health, and sociological and environmental responsibility, then do meat, eggs, and dairy represent the opposite? Is America's food identity represented by selfishness, irresponsibility, unsustainability, violence, injustice, and apathy toward the lives and suffering of humans and other animals? If so, this hypocrisy is concealed by the dominant commercial discourse of pleasurable consumption because most Americans would not identify with these unflattering traits. Meat-eaters might argue that they simply frame or prioritize their values differently when it comes to food.

But you do not see AROs constructing a heartless meat-eater as much as they choose to construct a thoughtful vegan. Blame for problems was mainly targeted at industry, while AROs chose positive and optimistic appeals toward consumers as the solution. The underlying subtext suggests "Now that you know about the problems with animal agribusiness, an ethical and rational person such as yourself will surely make the right choice and go vegan." But once consumers *do* know about the suffering, injustice, pollution, etc., and if they choose to continue to support it, how is the animal rights movement supposed to address them then? What if consumers do not mind being hypocritical or do not agree with extending welfare values out to "food" animals? Will meat-eaters be increasingly shamed as part of the problem?

Regardless if AROs give the public the continued benefit of the doubt regarding blame, meat-eaters ultimately hold the solution. So, appeals will continue to be made for them to literally and metaphorically step up to the veggie plate, hopefully not just as individualistic food consumers but also as altruistic citizens who are politically and socially engaged in improving society and living their values – one bite at a time.

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