



## **JANUARY CHALLENGE: WHAT WE EAT**

It's really easy in today's world of convenience to get distanced from the consequences of our actions. We run on autopilot a lot of the time, rarely thinking about why we're doing what we're doing. We just know that we've always done it this way so we'll keep on doing it this way - which is kind of terrifying when you think about it... which we don't.

Eating is one of those things that a lot of us just \*do\* without really giving it much thought. Sure, we consider the taste of the food, what cuisine we feel like eating, how long it will take us to make it - but those are all just issues of our individual convenience and pleasure.

What about our Kin? How does what we eat affect the planet and those we share it with? This challenge is all about examining what impact our individual diets have on the world around us.

### **PART 1: ANIMALS**

There's just no getting around it - eating animals is terrible for the environment. If you currently eat any kind of animal product, your challenge this month is simple - just eat less of it.

Don't make this a huge mission. Start slowly with little steps that are easy to accomplish so you don't fall on your face and give up too soon. All you have to do is take it down a notch from where you currently are.



If you eat meat for every meal, try and NOT eat meat one meal a day. If the only meat you eat is white meat or fish, try cutting back on those. If you are a part-time vegetarian, try being a full-time one. If you are a vegetarian, try going vegan (dairy products aren't so great for the world, either).

If you're a vegan, have a stiff drink, you probably need it. KIDDING, vegans, I'm kidding. You guys are champs. But, you're not off the hook - this challenge has something for you, too. Stay tuned...

Here's a more in-depth look as to why scaling back your consumption of animal products is so important.

### *FEED PEOPLE, NOT YOUR BURGER*

People go hungry everywhere and it's not as if population growth is slowing down. An additional 4 billion people in the world could be fed if land currently used to grow crops for livestock were instead used to grow crops for humans, according to [this study](#)<sup>1</sup>.

### *THOSE POOR BASTARDS*

If you were ever looking for the very definition of hell, factory farms are a pretty good fit. Put aside 12 minutes and watch this [video](#)<sup>2</sup> - perhaps you'll still want to eat meat afterwards, but you'll at least know what that entails.

### *THE ENVIRONMENT (YEP, STILL)*

Raising all those animals creates an awful lot of greenhouse gas, which, unless you're a troglodyte, you know is no good thing. Beef is definitely the worst at this - as per [this](#)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.meatfreemondays.com/feed-an-extra-4bn-by-growing-crops-for-humans-not-animals/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.meat.org/>



[article](#)<sup>3</sup> in Time, *"it produces twice the emissions of pork, four times as much as chicken, and 13 times that of vegetable protein such as beans, lentils, and tofu. That's especially alarming since we waste so much meat — ultimately throwing away about 20% of what we produce — meaning that all that carbon was generated for nothing."*

### NO ONE LIKES CANCER

The New York Times called Dr. Campbell's book, *The China Study*, "the most comprehensive large study ever undertaken of the relationship between diet and the risk of developing disease." In it, Dr. Campbell states, *"No chemical carcinogen is nearly so important in causing human cancer as animal protein."* Cancer's not just an individual problem - it affects your Kin, too. Think of the family, friends, colleagues, employers, employees, doctors, nurses, etc, who are all affected by your disease. If there's a clear link between eating meat and developing cancer, that's one very good reason to reduce your intake of the stuff.

### YOU ARE LITERALLY EATING SHIT

On a selfish note, it might be slightly off-putting to know that there is poo in basically 100% of [hamburger meat](#)<sup>4</sup>. 90% of pork chops and ground turkey and 95% of chicken breasts are "contaminated with fecal matter" says this FDA [study](#)<sup>5</sup>. Oh, so delicious. On the bright side, if you start scaling back the meat/poo consumption, you're going to have to eat something else instead. This means foraging around for new recipes and new ingredients - that's a whole new world (I can't stop singing that Disney song now) of flavour to enjoy.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://science.time.com/2011/07/26/how-meat-and-dairy-are-hiking-your-carbon-footprint/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.motherjones.com/tom-philpott/2015/08/poop-ground-beef-superbugs-antibiotic-resistant>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.fda.gov/downloads/AnimalVeterinary/SafetyHealth/AntimicrobialResistance/NationalAntimicrobialResistanceMonitoringSystem/UCM293581.pdf>



## EXTINCTION

Finishing this part on a high note! We humans are an unprecedented "global super-predator" responsible for an enormous loss of biodiversity - a rate of about 140,000 species each year drop off into extinction because of us. Our meat consumption is considered one of the primary contributors to this [mass extinction](#)<sup>6</sup>. Man, we suck. As in, we are literally sucking the life out of the planet.

## PART 2: FARM TO TABLE

The expression 'farm to table' conjures up this idyllic image of a friendly farmer growing some tasty vegetables and tenderly caring for the herd of animals she's raising. For most of us, when it comes to what we eat, this scenario couldn't be farther from the truth. Animals are factory farmed in conditions that are beyond inhumane and crops are grown on a scale that is really detrimental to the planet.

Part 2 of January's challenge asks us to consider where our food comes from and how it gets to our home. What resources are used in producing that food? How far across the planet did your food have to travel before it made it to your plate? Who produced your food and what conditions do they work under? Do you know what ingredients are hidden in your food and what they do to the planet or your body?

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<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holocene\\_extinction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holocene_extinction)



## *VEGANS, YOU'RE NOT OFF THE HOOK*

While vegans help the planet enormously by not consuming animal products, they also have to consider what they are actually eating. You might not be eating meat, but if you're eating plastic-wrapped meat-substitute products that are made with dozens of ingredients you don't recognise, which are then shipped across the planet, maybe you might want to revamp the diet a bit. Everyone needs to pay attention to where their food comes from, no matter what food it is.

## *WHAT'S YOUR SOURCE?*

A general rule of thumb is to try to source most of your food from small, local suppliers. Your weekly farmer's market is the place to be if you want to ensure that the carbon footprint of the food you're consuming is low. If the products you're buying have been driven in from a farm 20 minutes away, that's far better than food that's been flown across the world to line the shelves of your supermarket.

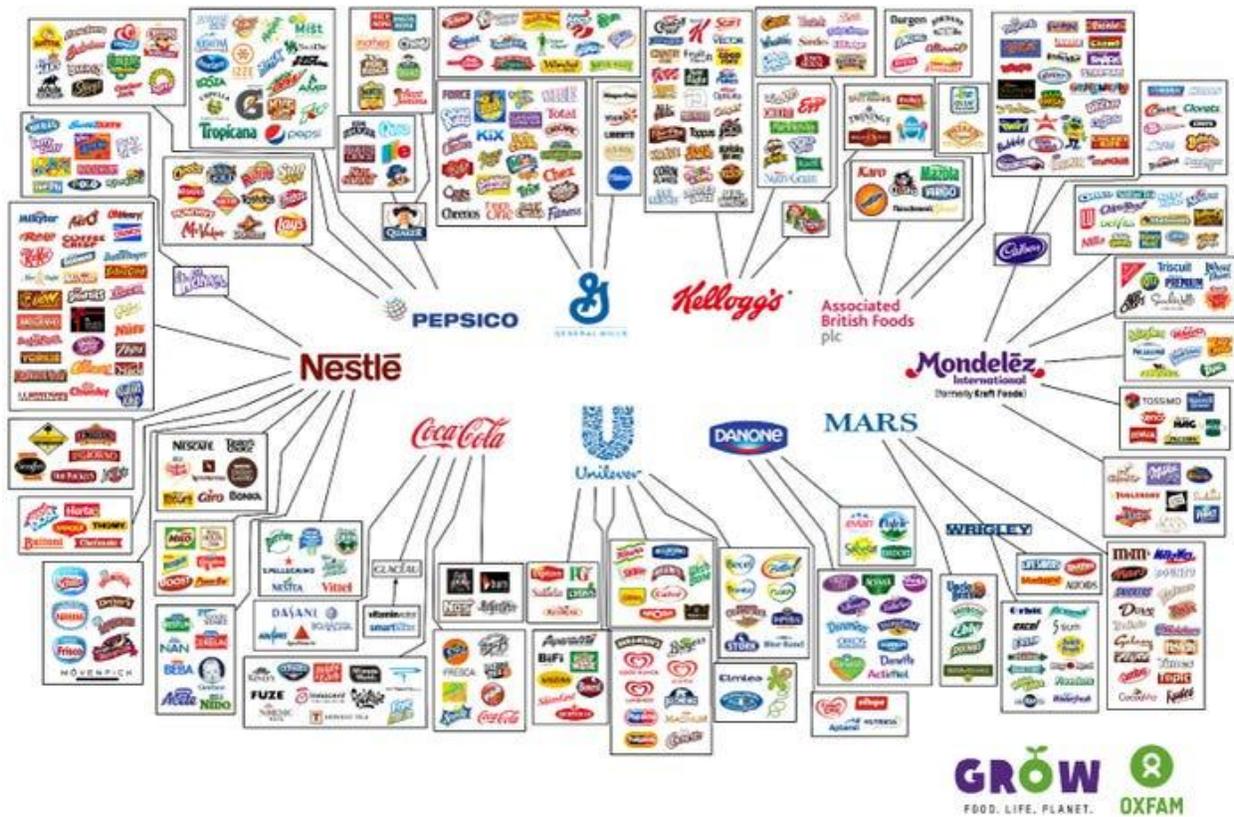
## *TRANSPARENT PRODUCTION*

The more transparent the producers are about how their food is made, the better. No factory farm is ever going to want consumers visiting their facilities. The atrocities occurring there on a daily basis would turn off even the most ardent of meat-lovers.

You want to know who produces your food and how. Trace the brand you're buying back to the original company - it's pretty shocking to realise that just ten companies control almost every food and beverage brand in the world<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/10-companies-control-the-food-industry-2016-9>



## WATCH OUT FOR GREENWASHING

Marketing has a lot to answer for. There are so many products out there that are marketed as being eco-friendly or healthy yet are actually terrible for the planet or your body. Here are three things to watch out for when you spot a package that appears healthy or eco-friendly:

- 1) Read the labels, not just the packaging. That way you can tell whether there are actually vegetables in that product or just hydrogenated powder and artificial flavourings masquerading as vegetables. Imagery can be very misleading.
- 2) Watch out for environmentally friendly slogans that actually mean nothing. A brand that says it is 'good for the earth', for example - how? What is the company doing to make that product 'good for the earth'?



3) Look for proof. Find out which organisations in your country actually verify whether a product is what it implies it is. For example, in the USA, USDA Organic and Green Seal are legitimate and verifiable labels. However, in 2011, a company named [Tested Green was targeted by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission](#)<sup>8</sup> for false claims. It turned out companies could essentially buy the Tested Green label for \$200-500 USD. No real certification process was involved - the label meant nothing.

### *CONSIDER THE STATE*

The closer the food is to its original state, the better it is for both the planet and your health. For example, many vegan, low-fat, or low-sugar products that appear healthy, have a variety of nasty ingredients in them. If you don't know what the ingredient is that's listed on the food label, you probably don't want to put it in your body. For example, you can make your own peanut butter in many shops now. It's literally just ground up peanuts. But if you buy a jar of peanut butter off the shelf, it will usually have sugar, salt, molasses and oils added to it. Sometimes that oil is palm oil... which gets its own little section!

### *DITCH PALM OIL*

Palm oil is one of those ingredients that seems to have found its way into everything. Once trans-fats got a bad rap, producers rushed to find a substitute and landed on palm oil. Unfortunately, this cheaply produced oil is knocking out large swathes of delicate ecosystems such as the [Leuser ecosystem](#) in North Sumatra. This is the last place on

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/are-green-labels-legitimate-or-just-greenwashing/>



earth where critically-endangered elephants, tigers, rhinos and orangutans all still coexist under the same forest canopy.

About 45% of land in Southeast Asia currently used for palm oil production used to be forest as recently as 1990, including more than half of all palm oil plantations in Indonesia and Malaysia<sup>9</sup>. The amount of forest lost to palm oil production is frightening, especially considering that deforestation has devastating effects on global warming. Our forests play a vital role in tackling climate change as they absorb carbon from the atmosphere.

The destruction of native landscapes also threatens the health and diversity of wildlife which is especially worrying when you consider the impact on endangered species. For example, Bornean orangutans are now facing extinction due to habitat loss<sup>10</sup> as a direct result of palm oil production.

There have also been reports of human rights violations by palm oil corporations, such as clearing farmlands and forests without permission, paying low wages, providing unsafe working conditions and significantly reducing the quality of life<sup>11</sup>. All in all, palm oil is an ingredient that is best to avoid.

Unfortunately, palm oil can show up on food labels under a variety of different names. So how do you know which products have conflict palm oil in them? As companies disguise it in their list of ingredients, your safest bet is to use a tool such as [Buycott](https://www.buycott.com/)<sup>12</sup>. It's

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27462984>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3492325/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.jus.uio.no/smr/english/about/programmes/indonesia/docs/report-english-version-jan-2015.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.buycott.com/>



an app that allows you to scan the barcode of a product to find out its exact contents and how sustainable it is.

### **PART 3: TASTE, NOT WASTE**

No matter what you eat, chances are you buy too much food and throw away far too much of it. When you were little, you were probably told countless times to finish the food on your plate because there were starving children who didn't have anything to eat. Sadly, we've managed to create an entire chain of consumption that not only doesn't finish the food on its plate but throws out the food before it gets there. What can we do about food waste?

#### *STRAIGHT TO LANDFILL*

In the USA alone, there are 50 million people who struggle to put food on the table. What's appalling about this statistic is that more than enough food is produced to make sure none of those people go hungry. However, almost half of the perfectly edible food produced gets thrown into landfill - 40% of all food produced never gets eaten<sup>13</sup>.

#### *WALLET WORRIES*

One of the reasons this happens is that we throw away about 30-40% of the food we buy<sup>14</sup>. Essentially, we go to the supermarket, buy 4 bags of food and then chuck at least one out on our way home. This is not only obscenely wasteful, but expensive - to the tune of thousands of dollars per family per year.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/americans-waste-up-to-40-percent-of-the-food-they-produce>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lanabandoim/2020/01/26/the-shocking-amount-of-food-us-households-waste-every-year/?sh=621044747dc8>



## *FOOD = GAS*

All that perfectly good food chucked into landfill rots without air meaning it releases methane. Globally, if food waste were represented as its own country, it would come just behind the USA and China as the third largest greenhouse gas emitter<sup>15</sup>. Take a moment (well, 18 minutes) to watch this great video summary<sup>16</sup> of our food waste problem by John Oliver. My favourite point is around the 5 minute mark.

## *PLAN OF ATTACK*

So what can we do to tackle food waste? Here are a few simple ideas to start:

1. Plan your meals so you don't buy extra food that ends up going to waste.
2. Store your fruit and veg properly so it doesn't go off.
3. If you know you're not going to eat it in time, chop and freeze it for smoothies, sauces, etc.
4. Be careful about portion sizes when eating out.
5. Donate to food banks.
6. Compost food scraps rather than scraping them into the bin to go rot in landfill.
7. Ignore sell-by dates! They are arbitrary dates chosen by manufacturers, the same manufacturers who benefit greatly if you chuck out a 'past the sell by date' item and buy another one of their products.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/food-waste-climate-emissions-b1811880.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://youtu.be/i8xwLWb0LLY>