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Vegetarians and organic farmers might seem like strange bedfellows, but although counter-cultural food movements, there are areas where our values intersect. If our divergent behaviour can be set aside, a number of issues emerge as common concerns: animal welfare, sustainability, policy reform, naturalness, social justice, production scale, and consumer empowerment. Much vegetarian dogma (apart from “do not eat animals”) sounds like organic dogma. At a principal level, many concerns that motivate organic farmers to produce food differently, also motivate vegetarians to consume differently. For example, by vocally and publicly condemning the conventional factory farm as cruel and unjustifiable, the arguments put forth by vegetarians have tacitly supported the organic farmer.

While many vegetarians will never be comfortable supporting animal agriculture directly, this does not automatically make the movement adversarial to organics. In many ways we are combating the same oppositions. We may be better able to achieve some of our goals through detached, yet concerted efforts. There is an opportunity for common ground in our desire to be heard by the greater population, but also in our desire to be heard by each other.

We already agree that animals should live their lives free of pain, biological modification or confinement. By addressing these issues simultaneously, there exists an opportunity to achieve reforms within the agricultural sector and better the lives of animals more rapidly. The relationship between our groups may be complex and imperfect, however an opportunity exists to create a stronger opposition at a time when reform is urgently needed.

Introduction

On the surface, organic producers and vegetarian consumers seem only loosely connected, inasmuch as vegetarians purchase fruits and vegetables produced by organic farmers. But as social movements, organics and vegetarianism are more deeply related than through the obvious producer/purchaser relationship, sharing not only a similar philosophical/ideological origin but also many of the same opponents, quarrels and goals. Where the organic producer is sometimes dismissed as a different class of “farmer” who harvests specialty produce, intent on keeping foodies feeling morally superior, the vegetarian is often assumed to be a different kind of “eater,” prone to choose from an array of bizarre specialty foods from granola to tofu. To stop at this superficial description of either group— focusing instead on the *difference* in choice rather than the *rationale* behind it - is to miss the most important characteristic of either movement: the refusal to participate in an unnecessary *and* harmful status quo.

Once divergent behaviours are set aside, a number of issues emerge as common concerns. This paper will serve as an introduction to the intersections to be, hopefully, expanded upon at a later

date. This paper will explore ways in which animal welfare, sustainability, policy reform, naturalness, social justice, production scale, and consumer empowerment can be approached and addressed by both movements. We will begin with an introduction to the philosophy of both groups, followed by an examination of the history of and contexts for the two movements. In looking at the similarities and synergies between organics and vegetarianism, we will posit opportunities for these two groups to cooperate, as well as future research that may be beneficial for the study of either movement.

A Note on Vegetarian Terminology

Throughout this paper the terms “vegetarian” and “vegetarianism” will be used to refer to the vegetarian movement rather than the specific behaviours and identities associated with it. The term “vegetarian” will be used in place of specific identities within the community, such as an abstinence from consuming flesh (a vegetarian identity) and/or an abstinence from all animal products (a vegan identity) or other classifications within vegetarian strata, such as raw-vegans, fruitarians, lacto-vegetarians, and so on. Distinctions between intra-vegetarian identities and behaviours will be made only in cases where doing so provides readers with a more nuanced understanding of the implications of our research and recommendations. This decision reflects our assumption that the vegetarian social movement connects these different identities, and that they represent alternatives within this common theoretical framework.

Vegetarianism and Organics: History, Context and Intention

Much vegetarian dogma - apart from “do not eat animals” - sounds similar in rhetoric and intent to organic dogma. At a principal level, many concerns that motivate organic farmers to produce food differently are akin to those that motivate vegetarians to consume differently. The movements already unintentionally support one and other, so further synergy and cooperation on key issues may be beneficial for the achievement of short- and long-term goals.

The history of organic farming as a movement is one that is marked by resistance to and uncertainty about changes in the way that foods have been produced, and a questioning of the necessity of sacrifices that industrial agriculture was claiming as inevitabilities.¹ Sometimes defined as a return to or elaboration of traditional “indigenous knowledge,” organic agriculture is focused on biodiversity and adapted from ancient and well-respected agricultural traditions.² Samuel Fromartz in his book *Organic Inc.* describes, “organic pioneers [that] wanted to go forward, but on the premise that human, animal, and environmental health were not worth sacrificing for greater production.”³ This view is shared by the “ecocentric” approach to bio-ethics. An ecocentric approach considers the whole natural system and argues that to affect one

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S. Fromartz, *Organic, Inc: Natural Foods and how They Grew* (Harcourt, 2007) 7

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M. Sligh, "Organics at the Crossroad: The Past and Future of the Organic Movement," (USA: The Foundation for Deep Ecology, 2002) 273

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Fromartz, 7

part of the system is to affect the whole system. Though an ecocentric framework does not completely describe organic agriculture, the framework plays an active role in much of the philosophical foundation of organic dogma. Described by Henk Verhoog *et al.* ecocentricism is integrated into the movement and:

...very important with respect to organic agriculture (especially in the agro-ecological approach). [Ecocentricism] can be recognized in the positive attitude towards wild nature, and respect for the wisdom of nature, especially in connection with the principle of self-regulation, the “self” referring to the relative autonomy of nature. The principle of ecological sustainability is of great importance in organic agriculture: taking care of the fertility of the soil, rotation of crops, no use of chemical pesticides, etc. To be able to prevent diseases, it is necessary to understand the coherence of the whole agro-ecosystem. The idea of preservation of diversity is extended to agricultural breeds and varieties. Finally, the ecocentric attitude is present in the idea of participation in nature, which brings with it an element of care and responsibility (precautionary principle and sustainability).

The vegetarian movement shares this holistic ideal for farming, viewing the production of plants and animals as increasingly unnatural, and similarly rejects anthropocentric practices that place human interests above respect for nature, animals, and the systems which have enabled us to exist interdependently for generations. The pursuit of healthy, functioning whole systems is gathering momentum. According to Dale Jamieson, a researcher who studies animals and environmental ethics “we are in the midst of a transition from a culture which sees nature as material for exploitation, to one which asserts the importance of living in harmony with nature.”⁵ Vegetarians have reacted to the rejection of anthropocentric framework in a more personal way, by refusing the notion that humans are superior or that humans are entitled to hold dominion over nature⁶ and equalizing the power relations between humans and animals.⁷ Jamieson also suggest that animal ethics are a necessary step within environmental social and cultural transition:

*It will take a long time to understand exactly what are the terms of the debate. What is important to recognize now is that animal liberationists and environmental ethicists are on the same side in this transition. Animal liberation is not the only environmental ethic, but neither is it some alien ideology.*⁸

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Henk Verhoog, et al, "The Role of the Concept of the Natural (Naturalness) in Organic Farming," Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics 16.1 (2003): 16-17

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D. Jamieson, "Animal liberation is an environmental ethic," Environmental Values 7 (1998): 54

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Rod Preece, Sins of the Flesh: A History of Ethical Vegetarian Thought (Vancouver: Univ of British Columbia Press, 2008) 9-10

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B. McDonald, R. M. Cervero, and B. C. Courtenay, "An ecological perspective of power in transformational learning: A case study of ethical vegans," Adult Education Quarterly 50.1 (1999): 7

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Jamieson, 54

Like organics, anthropocentric critiques often compare existing practices to traditions of historical food provisioning, where animals and humans were connected through hunting or animal husbandry and through a personal connection with nature. The process by which people came to collect and kill their food connected them to, and caused them to respect, nature. This sense of connection and respect has been eroded by the advent of high-intensity farming that is common today.

The sentiment from the proponents of the vegetarian and organic movements seems to be the same: practices (like those used in factory-farms) that benefit humans at the expense of respect for animals and environmental sustainability are to be opposed, and alternatives will be sought out and supported. In the book *Organic Inc* participants in the movement are described as being diverse and drawn to organics for a variety of different reasons. It is fascinating to note that the same list of reasons could apply to the vegetarian movement and be equally correct (emphasis added to highlight vegetarian examples, added in brackets/bold italics):

*The organic (**vegetarian**) movement contains extremely wide spectrum of participants. They may be driven by health and nutritional concerns (**heart disease, obesity**), a family or personal history of illness (**cancer, diabetes**), fear of pesticides (**food-borne illness/e. coli/mad-cow disease/listeriosis**), environmental ideals (**ecological footprint, waste runoff, pollution, water contamination**), adherence to principals of agrarianism or biodynamics (**ecocentricism**), spiritual or religious beliefs (**Hinduism, Buddhism**), a desire for high-quality fresh food, left- or right-wing politics, a commitment to sustainable farming (**farm-scale, use of grain to feed livestock rather than people**), economic necessity (**cost of meat**) or economic opportunism (**growing attention to vegan/vegetarian products/restaurants**).*

There are aspects of the passage that fit one movement better than the other, but the similarities are undeniable. The objectives, opponents and strategies of both movements naturally align in much the same way. The passage continues to argue “diversity has always been a strength in the movement, since it increases the pool of potential consumers and prevents any one interest group from controlling its fate.” This is true of vegetarianism as well, where modern associations and advocacy groups require knowledge of much more than animal welfare/rights issues and recipes for vegetarian chili.

Just as there is an alternative consumer path for organics (as methods of growing food without chemicals and genetic modification were common until quite recently), a healthy alternative

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C. B. Glenn, "Constructing consumables and consent: A critical analysis of factory farm industry discourse," Journal of Communication Inquiry 28.1 (2004): 64

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Glenn, 64

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Fromartz, 18

exists for those who choose not to consume animal products. This is because both movements have been successful in positing alternatives to the systems they oppose. Each movement has also worked to develop materials to reach out to the public, and raise awareness about issues present both within and without the movement. Popular documentary films like *The World According to Monsanto*,¹² *Food Inc.*,¹³ *The Corporation*,¹⁴ *Earthlings*,¹⁵ *King Corn*,¹⁶ among others, expose the practices and lax ethics that contribute to a refusal to buy from conventional, industrial systems. Books like *The Omnivores Dilemma*,¹⁷ *Eating Animals*,¹⁸ *Organic Inc.*,¹⁹ *What To Eat*,²⁰ *The Hundred-Year Lie*,²¹ *Real Food*,²² and *Food Matters*,²³ all address issues of industrial, factory agriculture and its consequences for society and the environment. In these popular materials, the unifying element is very often animals, as it is their welfare and suffering that is opposed when food is factory-farmed. There is no equivalent issue surrounding scale and intensity within plant-agriculture.²⁴ To be anti-factory farm, is in a less-explicit way, to be an animal welfareist. The movements are united in that both consider a “big picture”, seek to reduce the harm caused by individual consumer choices, and reject an unacceptable state of affairs. Put plainly:

*Organic food exists because, like any industry, it fulfills a need, in this case arising from lapses in the perceived quality and safety of conventional food production, and from desire for an alternative predicated upon personal and environmental health.*²⁵

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- 12 Marie-Monique Robin, *The World According to Monsanto* (2008)
- 13 Robert Kenner, *Food, Inc.* (Magnolia Pictures, 2008).
- 14 Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott, *The Corporation* (Big Picture Media Corporation, 2003)
- 15 Shawn Monson, *Earthlings*, (2007)
- 16 Aaron Woolf, *King Corn* ITVS, (2007)
- 17 Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin Group USA, 2006) 450
- 18 Jonathan Safran Foer, *Eating Animals* (Little, Brown and Company, 2009) 352
- 19 Fromartz, 309
- 20 Marion Nestle, *What to Eat* (New York: North Point Press, 2007) 611
- 21 R. Fitzgerald, *The Hundred Year Lie* (Dutton, New York 2006)
- 22 Nina Planck, *Real Food: What To Eat And Why* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2006) 1-344
- 23 M. Bittman, *Food Matters: A Guide to Conscious Eating* (New York, NY: Simon & Shuster 2009)
- 24 Though it should be noted that mono-cropping, farm-worker rights, and genetic modification are usually addressed in these critiques, these issues are almost never referred to as “factory-farms”
- 25 Fromartz, 7

If this is true, vegetarianism can be said to exist as an alternative for the same reasons, differentiated only by the added stipulation that in the pursuit of this alternative, the lives of animals are viewed as equally valuable to human lives, and that their health and wellbeing be considered as well.

Vegetarianism and Organics: Holding Common Ground

Considering the common wellspring that both movements draw from, it is not surprising that vegetarian and organic scholars and the philosophy derived from this history have many mutual concerns. Both movements may be better able to achieve some of their goals through detached, yet concerted efforts. There lies an opportunity for common ground in the desire of each group to be heard by the greater population, and also in their desire to be heard by each other. The following analysis should provide some insight into how the two groups might be able to “co-oppose” and co-exist.

Animal Welfare

Possibly one of the most contentious issues within both movements is that of animal welfare. Within vegetarianism, the issue has divided proponents into two main camps. Those who seek the abolition of all animal agriculture, and often reserve support for only those initiatives they feel will hasten this outcome, are typically referred to as *abolitionists*. Those who seek more “realistic” reforms to animal agriculture, through an evolving standard of care for animals, are referred to as *welfareist*. To people outside the movement the difference between abolition and welfare may not seem significant, but within the animal rights community this represents a heated debate between the short- and long-term goals of the movement itself. This distinction is significant for any potential cooperation between vegetarians and organics proponents. An abolitionist is unlikely to be supportive of any animal husbandry, regardless of provisions made to increase the animal’s comfort or wellbeing, as their position is that humans are not entitled to

use animals for any purpose, even if the animal does not suffer in the relationship.²⁶ Animal welfareism is the guiding philosophy behind many of our animal-care laws, as well as the rules and regulations for care within the organic certification literature. Welfareism does not challenge the ethics of using animals, but rather seeks to reduce their suffering by ensuring they are cared for appropriately.²⁷ Despite this distinction, the vegetarian movement as a whole tends to take a hybrid approach. Welfare-centered short-term goals are often pursued – even among those who choose, as vegans, to abstain from all animal products personally – because these reforms are seen to be practical steps along the path towards greater awareness about the plight of animals, and for some, eventual abolition.

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R. Garner, "Political animals: A survey of the animal protection movement in Britain," *Parliamentary Affairs* 46 (1993): 337

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Garner, 336

Animal welfare is, in our opinion, of crucial importance to the organic movement, in a similar way that it is critical to vegetarians. A main driver for the continued evolution of organic animal-care standards is that presently, many consumers equate “organic” with “free-range” or

“humane.”²⁸ While this might be perceived as favorable, this consumer concern for animal welfare is likely fragile; many authors have become weary of the *actual* conditions for animals present on organic farms and attention is being called to loopholes in the certification.^{29 30 31 32} There have already been *exposés* on organic farms that did not meet the perceived standards of animal care that the public has come to expect, even though many of the practices on these farms fell within standards for Organic certification. One such instance was around the provision that requires organic cows have “access to pasture,” which in spirit states that organic cows be allowed outside, but in letter is only a suggestion.³³ A watchdog organization in Wisconsin blew the whistle on an organic dairy with 5000 cows that was described as an organic “factory farm” where the cattle were confined year round, 24 hours a day.³⁴ Consumers and supporters felt betrayed and wrote thousands of letters calling for pasture standards to be tightened, while the dairy defended its actions by pointing out they were in full compliance with organic standards.³⁵ Circumstances like these are bad for the organic brand and bad for organic producers, as their price premiums are dependent on consumer confidence. One final example is the case of a video that made rounds on the internet in 2009 which showed a veal calf from an organic farm being horribly mistreated. News stories and blog response to this centered around the fact that the calf was organic, more than whether it was appropriate to raise or eat veal.³⁶ It is important to note that to the general population a farm animal being abused is not news, but an organic animal being abused is.³⁷

²⁸ G. C. Harper and A. Makatouni, "Consumer perception of organic food production and farm animal welfare," British Food Journal 104.3 (2002): 287

²⁹ Nestle, 611

³⁰ P. Singer and J. Mason, The Ethics of We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter Holtzbrinck, 2006) 328

³¹ Verhoog, et al, 37

³² Fromartz, 221-236

³³ Fromartz, 231

³⁴ Fromartz, 231-234

³⁵ Fromartz, 231-234

³⁶ The Associated Press, Slaughterhouse closed for inhumane treatment, November 3, 2009
<<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/33602712>>

³⁷ The Associated Press, Slaughterhouse closed for inhumane treatment.

In a study from 2002, which interviewed organic purchasers regarding their principal concerns, the majority of respondents were found to be either concerned or very concerned with animal welfare and indicated their willingness to pay more for improved welfare conditions.³⁸ Moreover, consumers in this same study associated a natural life and good living conditions for animals, with food safety and quality.³⁹ One respondent was quoted as saying “I can not see how chickens that are kept in cages could produce healthy eggs...if they never see the sunlight! It’s a horrible thought.”⁴⁰ People who currently do not purchase organic food were found to be confused about the differences between free-range and organic, assuming that the terms were interchangeable⁴¹ which may be detrimental to the organic movement as free-range is cheaper to produce. Vegetarians and those who support animal care favor accountability, especially regarding living conditions. Since there is less scrutiny of “free-range” and other “humane” labels than “organic”,⁴² welfareists may come to support organics more consistently with more knowledge about what these standards mean.⁴³

Environmental Sustainability

The environment and sustainability have always been present as concerns of the organic movement. It is more recently that sustainability began to gain traction within the vegetarian movement. Understanding that vegetarians are concerned with environmental sustainability (especially since they already see their actions this way) opens a door for organic foods to become another consumer expression of their commitment to vegetarianism. In addition to this, sustainable animal products are expensive, so skills and outreach designed to decrease the frequency that these products are consumed would make it possible for more people to afford more expensive alternatives. A study of organic consumers in Australia found that all consumers rank the environment and animal welfare more highly than political values.⁴³ The only difference between those who currently purchase organic food and those who do not, was that the organic purchasers cared more about animals and the environment than the non-purchasers.⁴⁴ With the focus on environmental sustainability in the media and various marketing campaigns, organic

³⁸ Harper and Makatouni, 287

³⁹ Harper and Makatouni, 288

⁴⁰ Harper and Makatouni, 296

⁴¹ Harper and Makatouni, 292

⁴² Singer and Mason, 37-41, 93-94, 105-109

⁴³ S. Lockie, et al, "Eating 'green': motivations behind organic food consumption in Australia," *Sociologia Ruralis* 42.1 (2002): 33

⁴⁴ Lockie, et al, 33

producers should take care to preserve their standards, as research suggests that many corporations attempt to simulate social responsibility by adopting the rhetoric of environmentally conscious movements⁴⁵ (sometimes known as “green-washing”). The rise in organic pet-foods, lipstick, seafood, and all manner of other products where there are neither specific certification processes nor standards for these items⁴⁶ suggests that this has already begun.

The environmental benefits of organic farming are well documented and understood within and outside of the movement. There is strong evidence to suggest that there are long-term negative implications for the natural world from pesticide use in agriculture.⁴⁷ The statistics are staggering. Focusing only on birds, it is estimated that 672 million birds are affected by pesticide use on farm lands, and that of these birds, 10% are killed by their exposure, annually.⁴⁸ With respect to marine ecosystems, “between 1977 and 1984 half of all the fish kills of the coast of South Carolina were attributed to pesticide contamination.”⁴⁹ Organic agriculture responds to this threat to nature by excluding the use of pesticides in crop production, which is beneficial to the health of both wild animals and people. Abstaining from chemical fertilizers is also beneficial to the living organisms present in the soil itself, which are easily damaged beyond repair or “burned up” by nitrogen fertilizers.⁵⁰ In contrast to an ecologically disastrous status quo, organic agriculture today is an “ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity.”⁵¹

It is no accident then that the vegetarian movement is beginning to be seen as an environmental movement. Culturally, added value is being assigned to nature as energy efficiency and reduced ecological footprints are lauded as positive goals for conscious citizens of the earth. For this reason, the eating of meat, especially industrially-raised meat fattened on GM soy and corn, is beginning to look as negligent as driving an SUV or using aerosol hairspray. Dale Jamieson in his article *Animal Liberation as an Environmental Ethic* posits:

45 L. T. Raynolds, "Re-embedding global agriculture: The international organic and fair trade movements," Agriculture and Human Values 17.3 (2000): 299

46 Fromartz, 201

47 A. Kimbrell, The fatal harvest reader: the tragedy of industrial agriculture (Island Pr, 2002) 29

48 Kimbrell, 30

49 Kimbrell, 30

50 Wes Jackson, "Farming in nature's image: Natural systems agriculture," The fatal harvest reader: The tragedy of industrial agriculture (2002): 70

51 Sligh, 277

Some issues that directly concern animals are obviously of great environmental import as well. The production and consumption of beef may well be the most important of them. The addiction to beef that is characteristic of people in the industrialized countries is not only a moral atrocity for animals but also causes health problems for consumers, reduces grain supplies for the poor, precipitates social divisions in developing countries, contributes to climate change, leads to the conversion of forests to pasture lands, is a casual factor in overgrazing, and is implicated in the destruction of native plants and animals.

Jamieson goes on to argue that the environmental movements are well-suited for collaborative efforts with animal rights, because “the environmental movement has the numbers and wealth while the animal liberation movement has personal commitment.” Putting a finer point on it, Jamieson goes so far as to suggest that animal liberation *is* an environmental ethic, and one that can only further empower the environmental movement.

Just as the statistics surrounding the environmental implications for pesticide and fertilizer use are compelling within organics, data regarding the inefficiency and waste from the animal agriculture sector is similarly adverse. There are numerous studies to verify that greener diets are comprised predominantly of plants. Presently, almost 40% of the world’s grain feeds livestock, while overgrazing has also contributed to soil erosion and the destruction of North America’s grassland ecosystems. The production of livestock requires more resources per unit of food than any other type of food-production. Cattle, which are the least efficient, consume 7:1kg of grain eaten to meat produced. Poultry, which is more efficient, is still a 2:1kg ratio of grain eaten to meat produced. A great deal of attention is also being paid to the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions produced by animal agriculture, especially by conventionally/intensively-raised animals. Statistical data about the GHG emissions directly related to beef, excluding the slaughter, transport and processing of the animals in Europe, is approximately 16kg of CO₂e per

52 Jamieson, 46

53 Jamieson, 52

54 Jamieson, 52

55 T. White, "Diet and the distribution of environmental impact," Ecological Economics 34.1 (2000): 146

56 White, 146

57 T. L. Fleischner, "Ecological costs of livestock grazing in western North America," Conservation Biology (1994): 629-44

58 White, 149

59 White, 149

1kg of beef, compared with 0.8kg CO₂e for 1kg of wheat, or 0.4kg CO₂e for in-season lettuce. In summary, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that 18% of climate change is caused by animal agriculture. Considering that world leaders are poised to make deep reductions in GHG emissions, it would be logical to assume that intensive agriculture is on the verge of becoming highly regulated, carbon-taxed or incredibly unpopular with eco-friendly consumers. It would be advantageous for organic producers to distance themselves from the environmentally detrimental processes that exist in mainstream agriculture, both for the cohesion of organic as a responsible alternative and to avoid allegations of hypocrisy.

Naturalness

The concept of naturalness within the organic movement is deeply embedded in the history of the movement. Within plant-based agriculture in particular there is strong support for using nature as the blueprint for production methods. This concept was touched upon in the first section of this paper with regards to the intent of the movement, however the issue of naturalness with respect to animal's lives remains largely unaddressed by organic standards. Current organic standards have suggested that animals be given access to the outdoors, but have not made this

necessary.⁶¹ Organic birds may be raised as organic from their second day of life, leaving the producers open to purchase eggs from intensive hatcheries which are held to no higher standard

of care.⁶² Ruminants are not required to be fed their natural diet of grass,^{63 64 65 66} and chickens

raised as organic can still be de-beaked.⁶⁷ To tenaciously pursue naturalness in organic plant agriculture, while allowing for organic animal agriculture to be marred by confinement, cruel hatcheries, unnatural grain diets, and de-beaking, raises questions about whether the latter is closer to its industrial counterparts than to the ecocentric respect for the unspoiled natural world that is thought to be at the heart of the organic movement. It is impossible to predict how much longer this 'good-enough' approach to organic animal husbandry will suffice with welfareist consumers. Vegetarians who have read the literature about food selection and production methods (which tend to strongly favor organic produce over factory-farm practices) are generally

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T. Garnett, "Livestock-related greenhouse gas emissions: impacts and options for policy makers," Environmental Science and Policy (2009)

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Fromartz

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C. Dimitri and C. Greene, "Recent growth patterns in US organic foods market. Agricultural Information Bulletin No. 777," US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, September, www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aib777 (2002): 18

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Dimitri and Greene, 18-19

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Singer and Mason, 217-220

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Nestle, 89

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Pollan, 157

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Singer and Mason, 102-103

unconvinced by claims of naturalness or humane conditions in *any* animal agriculture. Organics have yet to prove that skepticism about their claims of pastoral superiority is unfounded. Unless steps are taken now to cease further relaxation of regulations regarding how animals should live, it will become increasingly difficult to draw any meaningful distinction between organic and conventional agriculture. Both vegetarians and organic producers agree that conventional methods have failed, and are detrimental. Wes Jackson in his chapter *Farming in Nature's Image* takes the stance that:

*Thinking on the history of agriculture's abuse of the earth, and especially the recent dependency on fossil fuels, chemicals, and the genetic narrowing of our major crops, it becomes increasingly clear that the problem of agriculture cannot be solved within our*⁶⁸
current conventions of thought and actions.

The critique of unsustainable, unnatural processes should not end at plant-based agriculture. If the convenience and intensity of plant-based agriculture is detrimental and worthy of an alternative system, so should change apply as well to the animals that are present within it.

Social Justice

Social justice issues are another area of overlap between the vegetarian and organic movements. Within organics, concern for farm workers and food consumers are of principal concern. This concern is expressed in the desire to provide people with healthy food that is free of unsafe pesticide residues and genetically-modified materials. The welfare of farm workers is an issue that organic agriculture has taken seriously, both explicitly and implicitly. Explicit standards for producer-related social justice were included in the recent decision of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM) to include standards for basic human⁶⁹ rights and labour conditions to the qualifying conditions for organic certification. The standards set by IFOAM includes attempts to ensure attention to social justice issues by⁷⁰ upholding indigenous rights, and regulating wages to ensure they are adequate. The movement implicitly supports social justice by protecting producers, their families and the surrounding community from dangerous and debilitating chemicals and compounds. There are numerous studies to support that there is a:

...Suspected link between agricultural pesticides and diseases in humans. Direct links are often impossible to establish... however, a summary of cancer risks among farmers cites "significant excesses for Hodgkin's disease, multiple myeloma, leukemia, skin melanomas, and cancers of the lip, stomach and prostate" due to pest-control chemicals. Another study posits that the herbicide 2,4-D has been associated with two- to eightfold increase in non-

⁶⁸ Jackson, 71

⁶⁹ Raynolds, 300

⁷⁰ Raynolds, 300

*Hodgkin's lymphoma in agricultural regions... other reports reveal that numerous pesticides can reduce the immune system's ability to deal with infectious agents.*⁷¹

The organic movement has the best interests of consumers in mind, but also the safety and well being of food producers, who ought to be paid fairly and protected from cancers and other diseases that may be caused by agricultural chemicals and other inputs.

Vegetarians are also concerned with issues of social justice. Rather than centering around farm inputs, their concerns often center around the inefficient use of grains to feed animals who are in turn fed to largely first world consumers, rather than to feed those people (often in the developing world) who are most in need of nourishment. There is a school of thought that

⁷² considers a person's diet itself as an issue of equity. In a study of the distribution of calories for example, plant-based calories were fairly evenly distributed across the globe, with only Oceania (comprised of Australia and other Pacific islands) as a group being considered well

⁷³ below average. Animal products were a completely different story, which more closely reflects the differences in purchasing power and wealth among different regions of the world:

... by 1995 the available calories per capita from vegetable sources was spread fairly evenly across regions... On the other hand, calories derived from animal products was much more unevenly distributed, with Europe, North America, and Oceania consuming over five times the amount of calories in Africa on a per capita basis, about three times that of Asia, and about twice that of South and Central America.

The statistics surrounding the over-abundance of animal products in North America is also reflected in the number of animals being raised for food in the United States alone. Each year, more than nine-billion animals are raised for meat in the USA, making the farm animal

⁷⁴ population roughly five-times greater than the population of humans in the country. These billions of animals consume seven-times more grain than the whole population of the United

⁷⁵ States, which would be sufficient to feed 840-million people a plant-based diet.

The chemical, genetic modification and intensive farming industries suggest that there is no way to feed the expanding global population without the salvation of mega-corporate intervention; this is a primary reason that organics is sometimes labeled "yuppie chow." The discussion would

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Jackson, 70

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White, 147

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White, 148

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D. Pimentel and M. Pimentel, "Sustainability of meat-based and plant-based diets and the environment," American Journal of Clinical Nutrition 78.3 (2003): 661S

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Pimentel and Pimentel, 661S

be very different if these statistics on population growth and food availability reflected the excessiveness of eating grain-fed animals. Perhaps the real revelation is not that we cannot feed the world organically, but rather we cannot feed the world organically and feed them animals as well. The meat produced in the USA is enough to feed each American ⁷⁶77g of animal protein per day, ⁷⁷roughly double the recommended amount of protein that should be consumed daily by adults. ⁷⁸As a result, Americans consume animal protein at a rate of 124kg per year. With three-billion people currently undernourished in the world, ⁷⁹for (North) Americans to consume twice as much protein as necessary - which was in essence grown twice, once as soy, then fed to cows to be grown a second time as flesh - meat eating seems irresponsible and extravagant. Less gripping, but equally relevant is the amount of fresh water lost to animal protein production, which uses on average about 100 times more water per/kg (about 100 000 litres/kg for beef, 3500 litres/kg for chicken) ⁸⁰compared to producing one kg of grain protein. If organics is to defend the ability of sustainable farming methods to feed the world, there will come a time when it will need to address the gross inefficiencies present within the agricultural system, especially with regards to animal agriculture. So long as organic producers are looking to conventional agriculture as a model from which to work back from, rather than looking at nature and working forward, grain-based organic animal production will continue to be socially unjust.

Both movements will also need to examine less visible social justice issues that are present in agriculture as an industry, both in the production of animal foods but also vegetables and fruits. Frequently, the focus on animal ethics distracts from issues such as temporary immigrant farm labour, unions and collective bargaining, employee rights, wages, import/export markets, free ⁸¹versus fair trade, and as other issues of social equity. Currently, both movements are guilty of avoiding these concerns, with many vegetarians not questioning where their tomatoes or soy comes from, and organic producers participating in inherently unfair trade and consumer markets. There is certainly more work to be done in this regard.

Vegetarianism and Organics: Where Do We Go From Here

The overlap and alignment of the organic and vegetarian critiques of modern farming practices presented thus far in this paper provide three main entry points for cooperation to occur. The first

⁷⁶ Pimentel and Pimentel, 661S

⁷⁷ Pimentel and Pimentel, 661S

⁷⁸ Pimentel and Pimentel, 661S

⁷⁹ Pimentel and Pimentel, 660S

⁸⁰ Pimentel and Pimentel, 662S

⁸¹ Singer and Mason, 151-169

point is, at the level of organic regulation and production, where organic farmers would do well to guard against charges that their farms are no more sustainable or humane than their non-organic competitors. Secondly, there is another opportunity at the level of public education and lobbying, where shared concerns provide ample room to challenge an unacceptable status quo. Finally, there is a point of entry at the consumer level, where the opportunity exists to market plant-based organic foods as healthy, safe, delicious and sustainable.

Existing Opportunities for Cooperation

Addressing vegetarian concerns on organic farms	Public education & lobbying	Marketing organic foods
Animal welfare on organic farms	Public education about farming and food issues	Showcasing healthy, delicious organic foods
Refocusing on sustainable, natural organic farming	Public lobbying for animal welfare	Marketing the organic brand to vegetarian consumers
Veganic farming	Public lobbying against farm subsidies	

Addressing Animal Welfare on Organic Farms

Organic dairy and egg producers have the ability to reach out to non-vegan welfareists as potential consumers of their products, provided that animal welfare concerns are adequately addressed on their farms. The issue of animal welfare is comparatively as important to consumers of organic food as more widely discussed issues, such as the environment, price, natural content and/or health benefits.⁸² Organic producers will need to be vigilant as consumers are exposed to horror stories about modern farming, and will have to take steps to ensure they are not cast in the same light.⁸³ The film *Food, Inc.* is a recent example of animal welfare concerns being raised by omnivores who believe in humane conditions and responsible behaviour. This discourse opens the door for alternatives to differentiate themselves. If exposés into organic farming lead more consumers to dissociate organic farming from humane farming, consumers⁸⁴ faced with these issues will be left with a choice between action, apathy or vegetarianism. It

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Lockie, et al, 35

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Kenner, *Food Inc.*

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Consumers who are impacted by the imagery they are faced with will choose to act against the Organic movement for deceiving them, or being too lax, which may in-turn cause there to be greater scrutiny of the standards and the implication of organic farming. If not that, they may become disenfranchised with the organic movement as alternative and take a “why bother” approach, leading them to return to buying conventional projects, feeling that organics were no longer worth the premium price. There also remains the response of overall abstinence from products deemed to be inhumane, and ultimately

seems pertinent, therefore, for organic farmers to be proactive in establishing and following more humane guidelines concerning the treatment of animals.

Welfareist vegetarians, on the other hand, would likely welcome the opportunity to improve the lives of animals on farms as until now, agricultural methods have been slow to react to their criticisms. Improvements to animal welfare on organic farms would be especially valued if these reforms were used to highlight the dire situation of animals in the majority of non-organic, factory farms. Given that the vast majority of the public consumes at least some meat, and that among those who abstain from meat, dairy and eggs often remain a part of the vegetarian diet, meaningful welfare reforms could provide consumers with an opportunity to abstain from the worst possible option of non-organic factory-farmed products. By following a transparent and meaningful set of regulations, organic producers can reach out to the general public and appease vegetarians who are looking for a higher standard of care in the production of animal products.

Refocusing on Sustainable, Natural Farming Practices

While an alignment exists between vegetarians and producers of organic produce, environmental concerns represent a serious threat to organic animal farmers. Given the huge carbon footprint of animal agriculture in general, even organic producers need to worry that environmental concerns will lead consumers away from animal products in general. Political/economic solutions designed to curb climate change and greenhouse gas emissions – should these ever materialize in Canada – will likely cause a spike in the cost of producing products derived from farm animals in general. Given the upswing in meat-reduction campaigns by vegetarian *and* environmental organizations, organic animal farmers may be pressured to demonstrate how they are not part of the climate change problem, and answer to charges of hypocrisy within their movement. One way to ensure this is to focus on proven and underscored sustainable farming methods such as grazing cattle, as opposed to corn- or soy-fed livestock and so on. Organic farming also often faces the criticism that its methods can not possibly feed the world, however, if organic grains were diverted to feed people, rather than animals, the notion of organic as a viable global alternative to conventional methods becomes far more plausible.

Growth of “Veganic” Farming

Veganic farming represents a merger of the vegetarian and organic movements to produce a philosophy as well as an agricultural alternative:

*“Veganic agriculture is an approach to growing food that encompasses a respect for animals, the environment, and human health. Also known as "stockfree" "vegan organic" and "plant-based," this is a form of agriculture that goes further than organic standards, by eliminating the use of products that are derived from confined animals and by*⁸⁵
encouraging the presence of free-living animals on the farmland.”

vegetarianism or veganism. This would see Organics lose consumers from their fastest growing sectors within the movement.

This approach, which is gaining momentum and interest within the vegetarian movement, is a marriage of standards and objectives from both movements. This hybrid approach to agriculture would offer an advantage to organic farmers as vegan consumers in particular are a highly loyal, highly activist subset of the vegetarian movement, presently under-considered by product developers and the general consumer market. For vegetarians, veganic produce represents a response that comes closest to living up to the fundamental vegetarian critique of all agriculture. It is in fact a solution that would please even the most strident abolitionist vegetarians, who may be reluctant to support even vegetable and fruit producers using animal inputs such as bone or blood meal, manure, or animal-derived inputs.

Public Education About Farming and Food Issues

Opportunities exist for organic producers to work with vegetarian consumers to draw attention to our shared critiques of commonly accepted farming practices. Possible initiatives could include co-sponsored academic conferences and public forums on food issues including sustainability, animal welfare, public health, and social justice. Advocates for vegetarianism and organics could work together to influence academic curriculum to draw greater attention to farming and food issues and the consequences of unsustainable industrial agriculture. Resources could also be devoted to mutually supported campaigns aimed at the promotion of healthy, sustainable eating (through projects like the *Meatless Monday* campaign launched by the Johns Hopkins'

⁸⁶ Bloomberg School of Public Health). Awareness can also be raised through the use of shared critiques (via messaging, akin to the educational value found in *The Meatrix* ⁸⁷, an online video that provides a five-minute synopsis exposing the perils of modern animal agriculture as practiced on American factory farms). By increasing the food literacy, food citizenship, and food ⁸⁸democracy, awareness of both movements would be supported, and the public support for existing goals and standards will be strengthened.

Public Lobbying for Animal Welfare Legislation

For organic farmers and vegetarian consumers who champion the call for a greater focus on animal welfare, the biggest opportunity for cooperation may be through co-opposition. Currently the two groups are each fighting for these reforms from separate silos, but through a united call for stronger legislation surrounding farm animal welfare, they will both be better able to recruit

⁸⁶ Meatless Monday, 2003-2010,2010 <<http://meatlessmonday.com>>

⁸⁷ Sustainable Table, The Meatrix Free Range Studios, 2006)

⁸⁸ N. Hassanein, "Practicing food democracy: a pragmatic politics of transformation," Journal of Rural Studies 19.1 (2003): 77-86

public support, and foster an engaged political process. In lobbying against the cruel and deplorable conditions on factory farms, which both groups consider to be intolerable – albeit in favour of their own preferred alternative – the organic and vegetarian movements can reach out from their highly motivated respected bases and push for meaningful changes. A number of common policy objectives ought to be agreeable to both groups, from stronger environmental regulations for farmers, or more stringent animal rights regulations for the care and handling of livestock and poultry, or a more comprehensive ban on pesticides. A starting point could be for the two groups to work towards an end to battery cages for chickens, as advocated by the “broken wings” campaign of the welfareist Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals.⁸⁹

Economically, more stringent laws would increase the costs for non-organic products, making factory farming more expensive, and organics more affordable by comparison. In addition to this, organic operations are already above and beyond legal standards of care in order to achieve their certification, so even if the lobby were successful, it would be unlikely to cost organic producers much to comply. Another benefit to evolved and strengthened legislation regarding animal rights, is that it would prevent back-sliding within the organic movement by big-agriculture and corporate entrance into the organic market, thus further safeguarding the original and essential values of the movement. As a tactic, vegetarians believe that abstaining from animal products influences demand for products, and ultimately reduces suffering. Vegetarians should therefore support regulations that would make animal products more expensive, as fewer products would be purchased, having a boycott-like effect on demand, which will consequently reduce animal suffering.

Public Lobbying Against Farm Subsidies

The two groups could also come together to call for an end to subsidies for industrial-style factory farms, which could be an influential partnership and rallying point. In addition to supporting mega-farms, it is commonly understood that farm subsidies also hinder the ability of third-world farmers to develop sustainable agriculture at home or compete in Northern import/export markets. The removal of subsidies would help to bring about a more “true-cost” economics in farming – a movement that ought to assist low-impact organic farmers and make their products more competitive. If either group really believes in the importance of animal welfare, vegetarians and organic farmers should have reason enough to set aside differences in behaviour and focus on making legitimate gains in their shared concern for animals. This ought to be a winnable battle, since the public has already been targeted by many campaigns (local food, CSAs, farmer’s markets, organic, wild food, slow food, etc.) that support small scale farming over the intensified, industrial, homogeneous methods that have become more and more dominant in North America. Furthermore, such a campaign would echo calls from food policy critics like Michael Pollan, who seek to make processed foods more expensive for public health reasons.⁹⁰ Whether or not these policy objectives are achieved, these campaigns to see this

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No Battery Cages, Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals <<http://www.humanefood.ca/battery.html>>

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Michael Pollan, "Farmer in Chief," New York Times Magazine October 9, 2008

discourse come to light would serve as a much-needed political, social and cultural critique of the current dominant system of contemporary animal agriculture, which by virtue of its existence, makes necessary both vegetarianism and organics.

Showcasing Healthy, Delicious Organic Foods

The Toronto Vegetarian Association has learned through its Annual Vegetarian Food Fair that effective outreach need not be political. There is room for cooperation through the promotion of organic plant-based foods as a healthy, delicious and sustainable option for consumers. Vegetarian alternatives are often left to speak for themselves, through sampling, cooking education, potlucks and bake-offs. This soft touch could demystify organic products in much the same way. Organic and vegetarian products already share the same real estate in health food stores, cookbooks, and restaurants. A concerted effort to market these foods through the promotion of recipes and/or cooking demonstrations that feature organic fruits, vegetables, beans and whole grains could pay dividends, especially with vegetarian audiences already sensitive to many of the reasons people would choose organic over conventional food. The Vegetarian movement is on the whole very interested in all the issues present in organic dogma, and vegetarian events and campaigns are a channel to a supportive and mindful audience.

Marketing the Organic Brand to Vegetarian Consumers

Producers have a number of channels to pursue in order to market organic foods as part of the vegetarian ethic. Issues around the threat posed by pesticides and GMOs, to wild animals and the biodiversity of whole ecosystems, would likely be enough to convince many vegetarians who value animal welfare and sustainability to commit to buying organic foods. The difference in quality between organic and non-organic produce can also be highlighted – since the last thing vegetarians want are bland-tasting salad vegetables. It is already difficult enough to convince people to try eating meat-free, so tasteless vegetables and fruits certainly won't help. Finally, if organic producers are willing to address this consumer group on its own terms – i.e., by showcasing vegetarian recipes on the one hand and co-opposing mainstream farming on the other – organic products should be able to make further headway with vegetarian consumers. This outreach has the potential to be especially influential if vegetarians' values are echoed publicly in the organic movement, and farmers who appear to be listening to pleas for meaningful change and greater accountability address concerns for animals.

Vegetarianism and Organics: Final Thoughts, Conclusions

Challenges exist for any potential cooperation between organic producers and vegetarian consumers, particularly on the matter of how organic farms address questions of animal welfare and sustainability. With so much common ground, there seems to be plenty of room for public education and lobbying aimed at challenging our mutual enemy – large-scale industrial farming practices that are unnatural, inhumane and unfairly subsidized. There seems to be room for campaigns that market organics as an extension of the vegetarian consumer ethic. Organic goals

and values will be further supported and re-enforced if vegetarians come to perceive organics as a complimentary movement. Partnership opportunities exist through shared interests in animal welfare, the environment, naturalness, and social justice, and through the many potential points of intersection between the opportunity for political and social action to be undertaken by both groups.

Opportunities for Cooperation

Production:

- Evolving standards for animal welfare on organic farms
- Refocusing on sustainable, natural organic farming, resistance to “organic factories”
- Hybridization of the movements through initiatives like veganic farming, or coalitions

Public education & lobbying:

- Public education about contemporary farming and environment, health, and welfare implications
- Public lobbying for animal welfare reforms and more stringent legislation
- Public lobbying against farm subsidies especially for factory-farms and unsustainable crops
- Working with environmental groups to create even stronger oppositions and larger organizations to expose and refuse big, conventional agricultural operations.
- Campaigns about food safety, risks and corporate complacency

Marketing

- Showcasing healthy, delicious organic foods
- Marketing the organic brand to vegetarian consumers
- Repairing the trust and relationships between vegetarian consumers and animal product producers (especially in egg and dairy operations.)
- The appearance of a unified resistance to unsustainable and inhumane practices

If proponents of vegetarian and organic movements can put aside differences on the few issues where they are distinct, and focus instead on the common ground they share philosophically and politically, the potential exists for a unified opposition and a stronger challenge to the cruel and unsustainable actions of big agri-business and factory-farming operations. It is easy to feel as though the foes we face are too large to defeat, and if we remain divided that supposition may very well be true, however, we can succeed if we unify our movements, grow our influence, seize opportunities for outreach, and mutually strengthen the validity our doctrine. The road may be long, but it is always good to have company for the journey.

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