

“The Ripple Effect of One Cow”

Mary Ann P. Adams

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As you may have noted in the Order of Service the title of my sermon is a bit unorthodox, even by most UU standards. I did do a bit of mind wrestling when picking this topic—I even consulted Rev. Sara. She wisely said... Go with your heart... speak with passion.. so, I threw out the alternative title “ Lighten your footprint”... a talk that would have taken a different ,broader path but, hopefully through the windings of this journey, the ending will be the same; that you will understand a bit more about not only “being” green but *eating* green... or eating lower on the food chain...

... by eating Green, I’m not advocating a diet of broccoli and green tea.. hey eating lower on the food chain could actually start with us all mimicking wolves or sharks, who, after all as top predators, can only eat lower on the food chain. What I’d like to accomplish is to elevate our level of mindfulness when it comes to **what** and **how much** we as a society consume. From our morning latte’s to our after school super sized cheeseburgers ... We think nothing at all about pulling up to the window of the drive through, ordering a meal and then chowing down...

I’m going to play the part of Toto in The Wizard of Oz and pull back the curtain to show you just a little of the behind the scenes workings on what it takes to get that “convenient happy meal” to you... and right now if you are like me, you’re thinking...I know, I know... I probably shouldn’t be eating this, it’s not good for me... well, not to worry I’m not here to be your nutritionist... but I am going to try to explain the **ethical and green** issues regarding some of the food that you eat...and as documented at this years

UUA assembly, one of the Personal Practice Recommendations from the 2006 Statement of Conscience is

Eat and serve energy-efficient food that is locally produced and low on the food chain.

This green journey is one that I have been wandering on for many years, and I admit, not always whole heartedly..(like the tune Rob sang by Keb Mo--- I'll admit it.. I'm a Victim of Comfort) - It takes its time, meandering through different phases in my life. When I was a young college student, I took one of those January mid semester classes called Self Reliance. I figured piece of cake... but in that month, I read about Scott and Helen Nearing building their homestead up in Maine, I learned about Anna Moore Lappe and her book "Diet for a Small Planet" which spoke to the geopolitical use of food as a bargaining chip, and I read about Walden Two and other utopian experiments that explored the totality of being self reliant. ⁱ

All of these "explorers" were working to live lower on the **life** chain... not relying on others for their subsistence. They were definitely not members of the mainstream and realistically you couldn't have all of humankind living on some farms in northern New England working on their versions of utopias... but there are lessons to be learned from their experiments. Now, back to my journey...

For my part, I dabbled in eating vegetarian "it was cool" even back in the 70's... not 24/7 mind you, but I did enjoy reading and using cookbooks by Mollie Katzen, The Moosewood Cookbook and The Vegetarian Epicure by Anna Thomas—these are still classic standards in any kitchen that cooks veggie at least once in a while ... and even

today, it's easy to enjoy great meatless foods from pasta primavera to cheese and artichoke pizza. And who doesn't Love a good home made mac 'n' cheese?ⁱⁱ

There are times we can do things on an intuitive level, without understanding the underpinnings of a way of life. I think that for me, I understood on an intuitive level that eating and living lower on the food/life chain was for some greater good. And that's as far as I took it... For some not eating meat is a personal moral, spiritual dictum. It has little to do with "resources" and everything to do with the spirit and soul of all living things.

For others eating or not eating meat has to do with being mindful of the limited resources we have on this little blue planet and making the choice not to contribute to the waste of essential sources of food. Eating is a very personal, sometimes ethical, sometimes spiritual but always necessary requirement.

Something I didn't understand or take to heart until recently, was the amount of energy that is expended when you start to eat UP the food chain...and I'll explain this in more detail later. Eating as a vegetarian takes a lot less in energy resources than eating as a carnivore. ... something that you can easily see...for instance you grow the vegetable, you pick it and you eat it. ...But humankind did evolve from an herbivore, to an omnivore and this helped to develop the brain we have today-- as we began packing in the protein a meat diet gives.

But that was then, and this is now. And in researching this concept of eating lower on the food chain, I naturally had to find out more about beef...

Culturally and socially most of us grew up in a household where meat, potatoes and a vegetable were and still are the “balanced diet”. An industry grew up around it. Our government promoted and subsidized it. We watched television Westerns that always included cattle drives ..although Hollywood was very good at just showing the drive, and not the end of the line for the ill fated cows. Having meat on our plates indicated that we were well provided for. It showed that the luxury of a good steak or a beef, ham or pork roast were ours to enjoy. I don’t know why the potato or carrot never achieved the status of a T-bone steak... but it’s all about meat..

[*I’ve got to say it....*] So... where’s the beef?

I went online and Googled “Beef industry”ⁱⁱⁱ and found within the Iowa Beef Industry website a conveniently titled page called “Factoid Fighter” which contained a lot of great factual information for me to use, even if *they* thought it was supplied as a means to subvert activists and “environmental reporters”

Some of the topics I found at their website:

Meat Production is Wasteful.

Unlike the cattle drives on range land in the old days, where the steer grazed the open pasture lands and drank from the ponds and rivers Today it takes 2.6 pounds of grain and 435 gallons of water to produce one pound of beef in the United States. You do the math~ when only one beef steer is ready to meet his maker he weighs in at an average of 1, 250 lbs. What makes it to the grocery store is about 500 lbs of meat, 500lbs of beef times 435 gallons of water ,,,, that’s over 200,000 gallons of water for one cow.

The State of Iowa raised 3.6 million head of beef cattle in 2004. which produced 1.6 billion pounds of meat. And Iowa is only ranked 5th in the US in beef production... So think of 20-25 MILLION Head of cattle per year...13 billion pounds of meat ... these are pretty good guesstimates... That amount of meat becomes incomprehensible, and I'll let you do the math when it comes to figuring out the amount of water used . It brought home to me one of the reasons why the Colorado River doesn't reach the ocean anymore.

Meat Consumption is Wasteful

If your arguments about eating meat daily are that you need your protein, think about this. Meat is not the top protein food. Meat only has about 20-25% protein by weight. It is considered a “middle of the road” source of protein. Eating one six oz portion of beef (think of the size of a deck of cards) provides the daily requirement for protein which is by USDA standards 50 grams. In the United States and other developed countries, getting the minimum daily requirement of protein is easy. Cereal with milk for breakfast, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch, and a piece of fish with a side of beans for dinner adds up to about 70 grams of protein, plenty for the average adult Yes, we are talking about eating less meat, but we're also talking about the underlying finite resource of water.

Remember when I was talking about the Colorado River and how it doesn't reach the ocean anymore? Well typical Americans, “use” or “utilize“ as much as 100 times our own weight in water every day. For example... if you went out to buy a t-shirt made in Pakistan with a catchy slogan on it like, ”Save water, shower with a friend”... producing that t-shirt takes 25 bathtubs full of water to grow the 250 grams of cotton used

to make it. The interconnected web of life takes that one step further... if you buy a t-shirt made in Pakistan, eat Thai rice or drink coffee from Central America, you are also influencing their ability to use water.^{iv v} Economists are actually starting to account for this water use as a value added or value subtracted item, when importing and exporting goods. I know... that gets into a lot of detail, and the information isn't readily available (I've never seen it on any labels) but it is something to think about. Accounting for water credits and debits is a new phenomenon and it makes the phrase of **Water is the oil of the future** start to sound a little closer to a present day truth. With drought, population increase, and an imbalance between where the water is -- where it isn't and who uses it, and who can't --- conservation of water needs to be viewed in light of all the ways it is used.

In our Green Sanctuary Ecoteam Workshops, we covered a section on water usage and conservation. In New England where drought is a word we hear on the news regarding "other places" it is difficult to "buy into" conserving water. Further research and reading led me to realize that the small things we do in our homes, turning the water off when brushing our teeth, getting low flow toilets and timing our showers help, but not in ways that will get the Colorado River flowing into the ocean again.

It is in the use of water to grow what we eat and drink where the numbers really start to climb. As I mentioned before.. not only the 435 gallons of water for a lb. of meat, But about 150 gallons of water into the cow to make 5 lbs of cheese, or a gallon of milk. Couple that with the world population growth.. Between 1950 and 2000 the world's population increased from 2.7 to 6.7 billion people (a little more than doubling) while meat production increased 5 fold. These increases in meat production, ie, meat

consumption are taking valuable resources and using them to create smaller quantities of less valuable resources. Instead of the water, grain and soybeans that could be used to feed the world's hungry, we're left with an exponentially smaller piece of meat.

As I said earlier... this is a journey and it is taken one step at a time. If we all take just a few small steps and share with others a little bit of the information that we learned today there will be a cumulative effect. I close this with excerpts from the UUA General Assembly 2006 Statement of Conscience.

"Unitarian Universalists are called to defer to a balance between our individual needs and those of all other organisms. Entire cultures, nations, and life forms are at risk of extinction while basic human rights to adequate supplies of food, fresh water, and health as well as sustainable livelihoods for humans are being undermined. To live, we must both consume and dispose. Both our consumption and our disposal burden the interdependent web of existence. To sustain the interdependent web, we must burden it less while maintaining the essentials of our lives. It is a bitter irony and a grave injustice that economically developed countries that are most responsible for global warming/climate change possess the wealth, technology, and infrastructure to cope with its negative effects, while those who have the least will have the largest burdens to bear."

ⁱ Living the Good Life c 1954, Helen and Scott Nearing . Diet for a Small Planet c1972 Frances Moore Lappe, Walden Two c1948 B.F. Skinner

ⁱⁱ The Moosewood Cookbook c1977 Mollie Katzen. The Vegetarian Epicure c1972 Anna Thomas

ⁱⁱⁱ Iowa Beef Industry website 10/2006

<http://www.beef.org/uDocs/Factoid%20Fighter%20Revisions%2011-03-03.doc>

^{iv} Pollan, Michael "The Nation" Sept 11, 2006 Website <http://www.thenation.com/doc20060911/forum>.

^v Pearce, Fred "Cry Me a River" website:

<http://environment.guardian.co.uk/water/story/0,,1845257,00.html>