



# Nature didn't mean us to be vegans

**A**fter all the doomsday predictions for the leather industry, with brands announcing they would drop leather from their collections, let's take stock of what is really happening. Let us leave the propaganda to one side and look at the reality.

The global meat industry produces around one million cattle hides and three million sheep and goatskins per day. That is the equivalent of 1,250 containers of hides and around 250 containers of goat and sheepskins. The worldwide population projection for 2019 is more than 7.7 billion people, of which more than 1.3 billion are in India. With up to 42% of the Indian population declared as vegetarians, that leaves seven billion prospective meat eaters. From this number, an estimated 3%, or 210 million people, are vegans. This is a drop in the ocean.

**Veganism is not to be confused with vegetarianism.** Vegetarians follow a meat-free diet, while veganism is a lifestyle which excludes the use of animal products and by-products. According to UK-based NGO The Vegan Society, the definition of veganism is: "A philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude - as far as is possible and practicable - all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of humans, animals and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals."

This means no fish, no eggs and no dairy products. So, what do vegans eat? The Vegan Society says a vegan diet is: "richly diverse and comprises all kinds of fruits, vegetables, nuts, grains, seeds, beans and pulses - all of which can be prepared in endless combinations that will ensure you're never bored. From curry to cake, pasties to pizzas, all your favourite things can be suitable for a vegan diet if they're made with plant-based ingredients."

Some of the basic human dietary requirements, which include water, carbohydrates, amino acids, fat, vitamins and minerals, are found in vegetables, with others found in meat and fish. Animal proteins provide all the essential amino acids, while plant proteins may be lacking in several of these essential elements. Please note the word "essential" here.

Another off-targeted nutrient is fat. Fat is an essential nutrient that boosts absorption of vitamins and helps protect the vital organs. Unsaturated fats, found in natural sources, protect the heart and help in the prevention of heart disease. These 'good' fats can be found in nuts, avocado and salmon. In March, footage emerged of vegan 'influencer' Yovana Mendoza eating fish. She defended herself by saying that her doctor had recommended she eat meat and eggs in order to improve her health. Surprisingly, there was no rioting, which is funny because vegans are often very aggressive when protesting against lifestyles they do not agree with. To make a long story short, we are mammals and mammals feed their children milk. Veganism is not natural; it is not how nature meant us to be.

Veganism is growing because of well-planned publicity campaigns that take place on social media. People take what so-called trendsetters say for granted, without thinking about why these people promote certain positions. They do it for money! The more followers you have, the more money you make. Our industry is up against people who do nothing, but who are capable of drawing people's attention, attracting sponsors and setting trends. We should counter this by exposing the stupidities they proclaim.

Let's go back to the one million hides and three million skins produced by the meat industry every day, and which are a thorn in the side of vegans and animal rights organisations. Hungary once tried to get rid of their raw hides by burying them when the market prices were so low that it was not economical to preserve them. They learned the hard way that burying raw hides without the necessary precautions caused a bacterial infiltration of their water layers and hence serious public health problems.

So, we can't bury 1,500 containers of hides each day. The daily volume of landfill ground required would be 57,445 cubic-metres. The Johan Cruyff Arena in Amsterdam has a volume of 535,000 cubic-metres. This means it would take fewer than 10 days for the meat industry to fill up one of Europe's largest stadiums with the by-product we get from meat. You can't burn the raw hides as this would release many tonnes of dioxins into the air. Using them for fertiliser is not usually workable either, owing to the volume. The world can only absorb a limited number of hides for gelatin. The only solution is to transform the hides and skins into leather in a responsible and sustainable way.

**And the vegans and vegetarians, will they be able to influence meat consumption?** Let us look here at some figures to get a realistic idea about whether today's meat production is sufficient for the seven billion human beings on our planet. Assuming that one million hides and three million skins are the by-product of 200 million kilogrammes of fresh meat per day, that means that each person on earth would consume an average of 28 grammes of red meat per day. Considering that the average annual red meat consumption per capita in the US is 100 kilogrammes, we can imagine how many people don't eat meat but would like to. It is still considered an extravagant luxury in certain countries.

The above is just *pourparler*, but I hope it illustrates to the pessimists that any action group, however organised they may be, will never be able to take meat off the table and eliminate the leather industry. What I continue to repeat is that we need to invest in an honest representation of our industry.

The virtuous members of this value chain should point the finger at the non-virtuous ones and inspire them to get their act together. After all, anyone who wants to survive in our industry must play by the rules. Those who do not play by the rules will close their doors and their production capacity will be absorbed by those who are compliant. 🌱