

V-COP presentation text.

I wish to take this opportunity to describe my perspective on veganism and my observations of what is happening in New Zealand. It may sound that I am disappointed with the New Zealand situation, but that is not the case, I treasure the fact that my family and I live here. I do, however, believe that our small country is a sad microcosm of what is happening around the world.

Last year, in New Zealand, 18 million fat lambs were slaughtered for meat. It is astounding that at the same time, 125,000 children (2.5% of the population of 5 million) were recorded as being underfed.

Shockingly, every one of the lambs goes to their slaughter in prime condition whilst our children go to school hungry.

The lambs grow on milk from their mothers and both mothers and lambs thrive on succulent plant pastures. There is no question that lambs are ruminants and humans are not, but the advantage humans have, over all other species, is that we modify our food with cooking, making all vegetation equally edible and beneficial.

While our children are often raised on highly processed commercially modified foods our lambs grow healthily on plants.

Similarly, cows produce unnatural volumes of milk, all from eating vegetation. To continue to produce milk, year after year, they must have a calf every year, generally forced on them through artificial insemination. All the 2 million male calves are slaughtered at around 8 days of age. The resulting meat is often sold as turkey.

Around 900 years ago, New Zealand was first colonised by Polynesian people, who discovered a pristine country in which they learned to thrive. The population was small, but de-wilding, through human interference, had started. They brought rats, dogs and fire and inevitably initiated changes in the environment.

Around 200 years ago Europeans, - my ancestors amongst them - arrived, and in short order caused much greater de-wilding, bringing in millions of alien plants, terrestrial and aquatic animals, whilst clearing one-third of forest land and draining 90% of wetlands, for the raising of livestock, and ultimately many other monoculture activities.

Today, more than 75 percent of our native plants, birds, bats and fish species are threatened with extinction or are at risk of becoming threatened.

I grew up believing that farming was a patriotic activity, as we were "*feeding Britain, in their hour of need*" and later we took pride, and the funds, in producing wool, "*to keep soldiers in Korea warm*".

Truth is that we only fed and warmed those who could afford to pay for products produced at the other side of the world, and where no environmental costs were ever counted.

The New Zealand population, eating large volumes of animal products, tragically suffers from very high incidences, by world standards, of cancer, bone frailty, obesity, heart disease, and many more non-communicative diseases.

There are those who express concern about the huge increase in human population. However, the much greater increase in the numbers of farmed livestock is the real worry. Livestock are raised to, purportedly feed the human population, while the damage to human health, the destruction of the environment and the cruelty meted out to the farmed animals are all ignored.

My rough estimates of New Zealand terrestrial biomass calculated in terms of human body weights, includes -

- Humans - 5 Million
- Dairy and beef cattle - 59 million
- Sheep - 27 million
- Herded poultry - 1.2 million

This adds up to a total human equivalent of more than 92 million people now being imposed on a country where 900 years ago had no humans and prior to that, a 50 million-year history of being in ecological balance.

The human population makes up only 4% of the country's introduced biomass. But we are still responsible for the other 96%, which decamp on cleared and drained forests and wetlands, creating soil degradation, fresh water despoilment and the emission of huge amounts of CO₂ and methane; causing a monumental de-wilding on the original flora and fauna.

The surrounding sea water has also suffered significant de-wilding, through the annual removal of sentient fish (with the equivalent weight of 7 million people). What was once a pristine and balanced environment, is now de-wilded through changes in fish populations and pollution from livestock effluent, run-off of degraded soil and human-generated flotsam and jetsam.

The very worst aspect, of the burgeoning biomass of livestock, is the cultural and political credibility given to these industries, in the face of the known damage being done to human health, the environment and to the contribution to climate change. New Zealand seems to cling to the concept that meat and milk production are essential for the country's economic survival. And to the idea that we are "*feeding the world*": a fatuous thought!

Farmers in New Zealand are contributing nothing to the desperate need for a severe reduction of global warming. Laws pertaining to reductions of greenhouse are weak or non-existent.

Many forces are now coming together to eliminate the demand for meat, fish and milk and, with good fortune, our forests, our health and our children's well-being, will return.

It is heartening that livestock numbers in many countries appear to have peaked. One hopes that any drop in livestock production will provide opportunities for rewilding.

I know that this is an ambitious dream, but I am impatient to see it come about. I read with optimism the magazine Vegconomist, reporting on so many exciting non-animal food developments. A recent headline read *“Plant-based Alternatives Now Cheaper Than Animal Products Across Several Categories in Germany”*

Nowadays, many of us are working to rewild much of the countryside but we are hampered due to the severe delineation of boundaries, introduced by the European colonists and their surveyors. To rewild New Zealand's original wetland and forests, will mean that private ownership will have to be forfeited, for the good of the endeavour: a monumental task.

I regard myself as being incredibly privileged. I grew up living a wonderful life on our family farm. In turn my wife, Barbie, and I raised our children on the same farm, giving them a life of outdoor freedom.

In the 1970s, the age-old adherence to maintaining mixed pastures of grasses and legumes, was disassembled by the intrusion of nitrogenous fertilisers. I disagreed with this retrograde step and so dabbled in regenerative and organic farming practices, both of which led to much improved animal health. But I ultimately learned that they did nothing for reductions in carbon or methane emissions,

On the farm I could express much of my creative nature and developed many inventive farming systems; amongst them new fencing methods, animal ID systems and associated databases.

While I was promoting my products and systems, Barbie took over running the farm. In those days, even this was a revolutionary adaptation. However, a visit to the farm by Prince Charles, now King Charles, gave her great mana.

For 68 years of my life, I ate and promulgated the consumption of animal foods. We raised our children to eat like this as our parents, and theirs before, had done. After the children left home, we sold the farm.

Later, thanks to Caldwell Esselstyne, Colin Campbell, and a great many others, I came to learn the folly of eating meat and milk and the joy of living cheaply and healthily on plant-based whole foods. This joy is severely tempered by the painfully slow uptake of a plant-based whole-foods lifestyle by the population.

I am heartened by the many prophets who are bravely predicting an imminent change in our eating habits, but I find the huge amount of old money being spent to resist the inevitable change very concerning.

Fonterra, New Zealand's largest company, the sixth-largest dairy company in the world, is like its competitors, surreptitiously investing in the development of all forms of “vegan” food, such as precision fermentation, no doubt in an attempt to maintain their controls in the market, wherever it may go.

The obvious disregard for our nation's health and the threat of climate change, by those with wealth and power, beggars belief. We must accept that, just as lambs and cows can convert plants into good proteins, so can humans.

The proliferation of the "ownership" of pets concerns me. Having spent many years, selectively breeding various species to create a more profitable animal, I now recognize that the dominion over these animals was a reflection of the disregard I held for them; they became mere chattels.

There are approximately two million dogs and cats registered as companion animals in New Zealand. These animals are all well fed, consuming an average of 200kg meat-equivalent per year; this amounts to 400,000 tonnes of meat, that could have been fed to hungry children, or preferably - the land so taken up, with this meat production, could have grown a surplus of healthy vegetables for the malnourished.

Furthermore, the survival burden of the native fauna. The many ground-nesting birds and lizards are tragically easy prey for dogs and cats.

When I converted to veganism, I was driven by my desire to become healthier. Once that was achieved, I explored the other positive effects of veganism.

As I wrote, in my book, "Plant Paradigm", I came to see that there are three prime legs that support veganism. Human health is one and is very persuasive.

Another is the ultimate elimination of herding of animals and the inevitable cruelty to them. It is the herding of alien animals that has led to the mass destruction of the natural flora and fauna in New Zealand and, on reflection, I recognise that through economic necessity and disregard for the sentience of the animals in my "care", I was cruel to them in so many ways.

I, like all my peers, due to our need to keep control of our assets and to maintain blindness to the sentience of our charges, paid little heed to the golden rule - "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". We knew that the animals we were treating with barbaric-cruelty were incapable of doing the same to us. I ultimately rewrote the rule for me to read "Do unto others, only as you would, have done to your children".

In my time I have whipped and kicked animals to get them to submit to my will. I have also killed every imaginable farmed animal, or caused them to be killed, for food for the table, or for income. In return I have been kicked, bitten, bunted, scratched and pecked, by sentient animals in their efforts to defy me.

I now recognise that any insensitive action against a sentient being is an act of inexcusable cruelty. Such behaviour is not instinctive; it is learned and exemplified by financial necessity and, with time, becomes normal. It is only by looking back at my past life that I can see this. Present-day farmers with assets and income to preserve and the need to maintain control over their livestock, will continue to see this conduct as normal, natural and necessary.

Slavery, male dominance and carnism all share the same philosophical justification of being regarded as normal, natural and necessary. But, as time passes, each of these practices is coming to be seen for what they are - an absurd justification for control over those we want to dominate.

The reality is that we were never designed to kill and eat animals. We have no claws, our teeth and guts are designed for eating and digesting plants.

Humans only came into making meat a significant part of our diet around 10,000 years ago, that is less than 1% of the time humans have been managing fire and developing their intellect. The herding of animals and developing efficient methods of killing them is a very recently learned behaviour, passed down from generation to generation.

The song from "South Pacific" comes to mind "*You've got to be carefully taught*", applies to many memes we are subjected to.

If we survive the present vicissitudes, humans will look back at herding and eating animals as a brief and mistaken period in our history.

As Thoreau wrote, "*I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other when they came into contact with the more civilised.*"

The third prime leg that supports the vegan table is the environment.

Destructive de-wilding has been carried out since herding and farming domesticated animals first started. We are now living at a time when the damage to the environment is growing at an exponential rate.

Global warming is now acknowledged as a very real and huge problem, but the real cause of this is - not the burning of fossil fuels - it is the massive adherence to meat and milk production and consumption with the concurrent de-wilding of forests and wetlands.

Now is the time to acknowledge that, the herding and eating of all terrestrial animals, fish and fowl must cease.

I am very grateful to all the mentors who have guided me to the path I am on.

And I am grateful to Sailesh Rao, to the Million Vegan Grandmothers and [Climate Healers](#) for the opportunity to speak at this V-COP 19 gathering.