

Respect life – it's never too late

As parents, we strive to give the best possible life to our children, to ensure that their health and wellbeing are taken care of. We're vigilant about what they eat, we teach them to stay safe. The thought of their being harmed is every parent's worst nightmare.

But how does human life impact on nonhuman families?

We've been using other animal species as food and clothing since we domesticated them about 10,000 years ago. Prior to that, although humans hunted for some of our history, we used plants to meet our needs. Ten thousand years may sound like a long time, but in terms of our evolutionary history it's a very short time.

Our health and wellbeing don't depend on animal use. Abolishing animal use from our lives, coincidentally, has many benefits for us. In fact, major world dietetics associations, including the NHS, The Dietitians Association of Australia, and The American Academy of Nutrition, all agree that a well-planned plant diet that includes reliable sources of vitamin B12 from fortified foods or supplements, not only provides us with all the nutrients we need for health but is appropriate for all stages of our life, including pregnancy, lactation and infancy through to older adulthood. In addition, it lowers the risk of many health conditions including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, some cancers, and obesity.

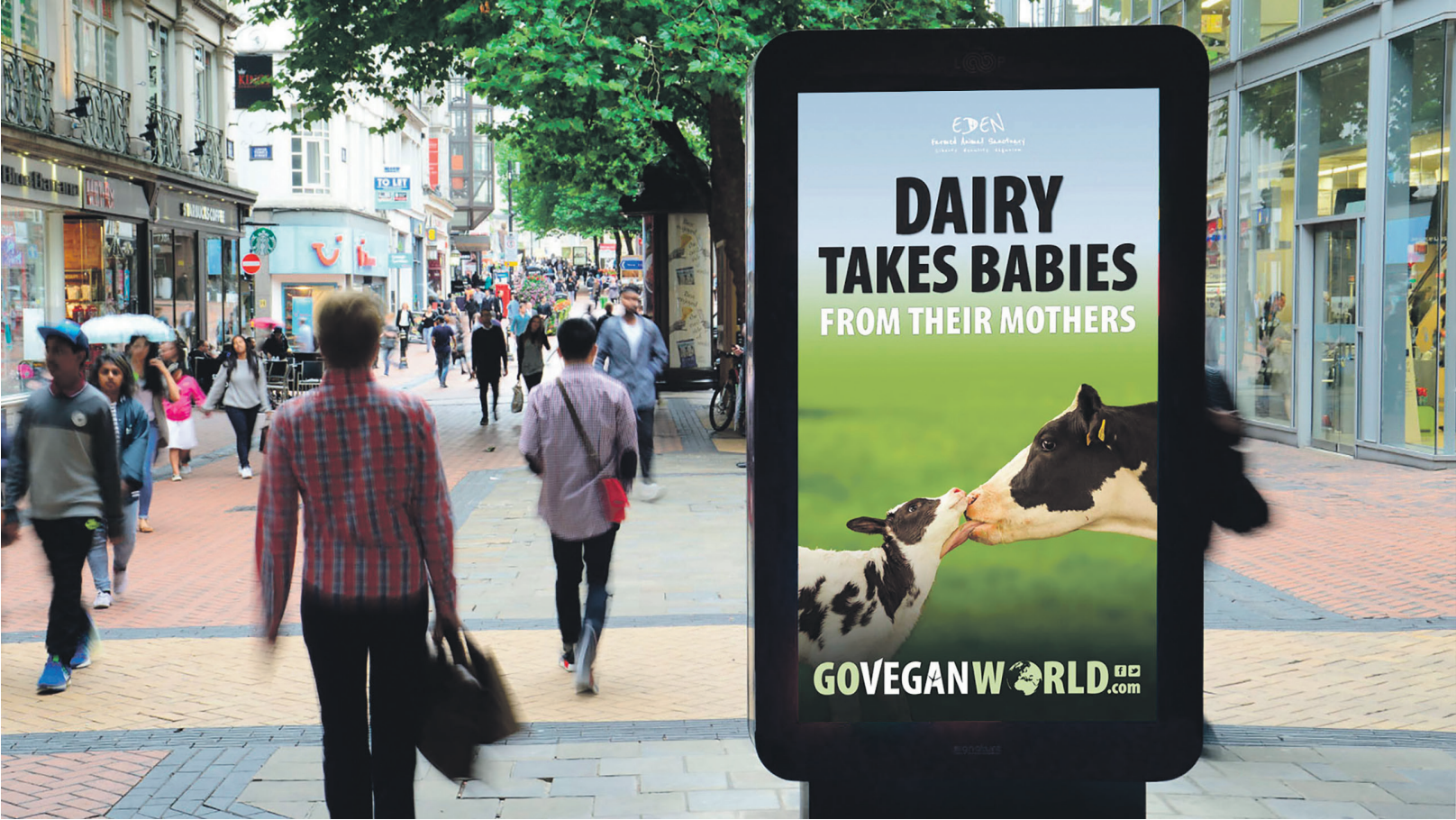
A vegan lifestyle is more environmentally sustainable than one that includes animal use, using significantly fewer natural resources and associated with less environmental damage.

These are the secondary benefits of veganism. The rationale for veganism is respect for sentient life. The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness, signed in 2012 by some of the world's most prominent scientists and neurologists, determined that nonhuman animals share our capacity for conscious awareness and that the animals we use as food, clothing, entertainment, labour and research, are at least as conscious as ourselves, experiencing emotion as well as physical sensations.

There's no possible way to use them that doesn't harm them, because they feel and have an interest in their lives. Therefore, it's morally imperative for us to stop using them. The notion that some types of use are humane is simply a myth. The very fact that we breed them for our use, taking their freedom and purpose from them, is a form of discrimination based on membership of a species other than our own.

Many people defend their use of other animals by claiming that they're well treated. But as with an equivalent human rights issue, the issue is not how we treat them but that we use them in the first place. Indeed, selective breeding of the farmed animals we use for food causes so much harm that their own bodies become their prisons, regardless of the conditions in which we use them.

For example, the hens used by the egg industry evolved from wild birds in Southeast Asia who lay just two clutches of eggs a year, for the purpose of hatching their young. Hens used in today's egg industry have been selectively bred to lay eggs on an almost daily basis. This results in a range of health issues such as osteoporosis, infection, prolapse and high rates of reproductive cancer. Even in the best of conditions on vegan sanctuaries, they have health issues and die at 4-6 years of age. Hens on free range and organic farms are slaughtered at 18 months



It's our children's right to live in a way that protects the planet that they need to sustain them. It's the right of every other animal and their children not to be used by us.

'I went vegan the day I visited a dairy. The mothers, still bloody from birth, searched and called frantically for their babies. Their daughters, fresh from their mothers' wombs but separated from them, trembled and cried piteously, drinking milk from rubber teats on the wall instead of their mothers' nurturing bodies. All because humans take their milk. Their sons are slaughtered for their flesh and they themselves are slaughtered at six years. Their natural lifespan is 25 years. I could no longer participate in that. Can you?'

and even those in your friendly neighbourhood orchard or back garden will die young or may be slaughtered when their egg production declines. Every one of them had a brother who was killed at birth because male chickens don't lay eggs.

The lives of other individuals aren't our property; we're not entitled to use them, and we harm them when we do. A vegan lifestyle is easy, enjoyable, cheap, and has benefits in terms of health, the environment and wider issues such as world hunger. So why are so few people vegan?

As children, most of us were fed the bodies and lives of other animals — literally, in the form of food and clothing; and metaphorically, in the customs we were taught. When something becomes habitual before we acquire language, we tend to accept it without being able to think outside the box of the society and culture in which we're embedded. Any parent who's concerned that veganism means forcing one's ethical views on one's child may wish to reflect how most of us have had the view forced on us from birth that it's acceptable to harm and kill others.

Children have a natural affinity with animals and wouldn't dream of harming their companions or those they meet in films or books. Few children would be happy to eat an ice cream if they knew another child was left motherless so we could have her milk. Few would emerge free of trauma if they witnessed what a pig like Babe endures to be transformed into a piece of meat. Few would want to eat their tea of eggs if they saw the torment of the hen who laid them, or her baby brother as he was gassed or minced alive at only one day old. There's an irony in teaching children that it's wrong to harm someone or take what's not ours while we put food on their plates,

clothes on their backs, and entertain them with the blood of others.

There's a hidden process happening at the dinner tables of families everywhere — the elephant in the room of the sentient children whose body parts lie on our own children's plates; or the eggs and dairy that cost another mother her child and her life. It's our children's right to have their needs met in a manner that they'd find morally acceptable if they knew the truth of what it takes for those products to reach them. It's our children's right to be given food that maximises their chances of living long and healthy lives, with the lowest possible risk of disease and premature mortality. It's our children's right to live in a way that protects the planet that they need to sustain them into adulthood. It's the right of every other animal and their children not to be used by us.

Rearing your child vegan from birth is probably the greatest gift of social justice, empathy training, and critical thinking skills that you can give. Your child will grow into an adult who treats others fairly and as equals, helping to make this world a better place for everyone.

It's never too late to go vegan. For more information and practical help for families to become vegan, download our free Vegan Guide and use the resources of our website. Before long, being vegan will be habitual and easy and, like all of us who are already vegan, you'll be singing the refrain, 'This is the best decision of my life. My only regret is that I didn't do it years ago.'

