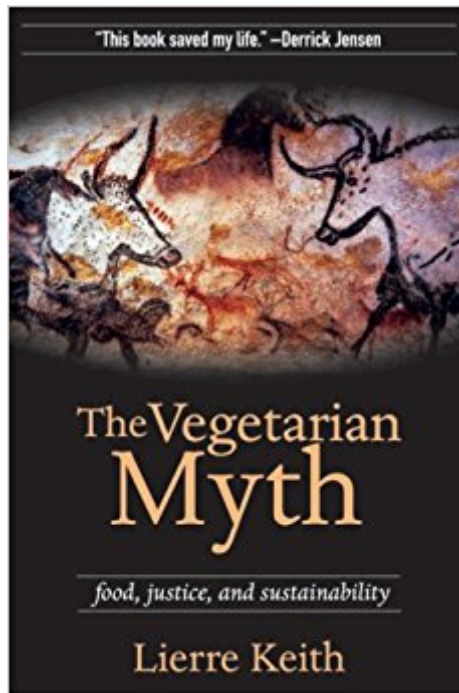


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The Vegetarian Myth: Food, Justice, And Sustainability



Synopsis

Part memoir, nutritional primer, and political manifesto, this controversial examination exposes the destructive history of agriculture—causing the devastation of prairies and forests, driving countless species extinct, altering the climate, and destroying the topsoil—and asserts that, in order to save the planet, food must come from within living communities. In order for this to happen, the argument champions eating locally and sustainably and encourages those with the resources to grow their own food. Further examining the question of what to eat from the perspective of both human and environmental health, the account goes beyond health choices and discusses potential moral issues from eating—or not eating—animals. Through the deeply personal narrative of someone who practiced veganism for 20 years, this unique exploration also discusses alternatives to industrial farming, reveals the risks of a vegan diet, and explains why animals belong on ecologically sound farms.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I want to be clear about a few things: 1) I am a female. 2) I give the idea of this book 5 stars, but its execution 1. 3) I have been a radical vegan, a rabid meat-eater and everything in between (currently in the in-between). 4) I am working on an archaeological PhD on hunter-gatherer diets, subsistence, hunting and transition to agriculture. I picked this book up after reading Jonathan Safran Foer's "Eating Animals". I thought it would be interesting to read a different perspective on the vegetarian debate. I found Safran Foer's book to be much more geared towards the inhumane practices of

meat while Keith's book is geared more towards diet/health. I admit that it took a very long time for me to get through this book, for several reasons. I purchased this book hoping to get something out of it. I am not an upset vegan who wants to hate it and I am not someone who bought it knowing I'd love it. I was just neutral. There were two main reasons for my disappointment with the book. One minor, one major. First, I found the second agendas (specifically the radical feminism) distracting and unnecessary. I have nothing against the feminist agenda, but this wasn't the place to put it. Second, I found the book absolutely riddled with bad information, faulty facts and just plain lazy research (if you can call it 'research'). As someone who intensively researches these issues on a daily basis, I found myself underlining items on nearly every page that I knew were just plain untrue or were 'cherry-picked' facts slanted to give a certain perception. This is such a disappointment as a really great case could be made for the author's view if she had only put the real work into researching the book properly.

As a vegan (since 2002), I quickly learned that you can't trust the vegetarians for information as they are just as likely to skew the truth as the Beef or Dairy Boards. So I always love to read non-veg writing, and this book was worth reading for sure. Keith has done her homework and has some very interesting insights to share. I usually burn through books in 2-3 days, but it's taken me a full week to get through this one and I've got about 25 dog-eared pages. Here's what was interesting: 1 - The need to admit that agriculture itself is screwed up and unsustainable (whether veg based or meat based) 2 - The reality that grains are a pretty bogus basis for a diet. 3 - The bitter truth that our planet can't support us, period (veg or non-veg) 4 - The potential problems with fat soluble vitamins (note: if you haven't read the book yet, the above might not seem that ground-breaking, but seriously, Keith uncovers some new, very compelling stuff). Here's where it was deeply flawed: 1 - We vegans are so few in numbers, writing a book about us is so uninteresting to most, that it had to become a book about vegetarians (in most countries, they don't even have a word for vegans, btw). But it's not a book about vegetarians, except in title. There are loads of vegetarians, lots of them who don't give much thought to their diet, and most of whom consume copious amounts of animal products (dairy, eggs). So the Vegetarian Myth is itself a myth that most vegetarians don't subscribe to. Vegans, yes. We get attacked so often, every vegan I know has had to create a core story to explain "why" (except me... I just shrug and smile).

I'm not going to summarize the book. That's been done well in earlier reviews. This is just a description of some of my issues with the book. The author interweaves her deepening political and

environmental understanding - looking at the whole picture and realizing that pretty much everything in the supermarket, not just the meat, is produced by methods that make the world a crueler, more polluted and, worst of all, less sustainable place, and that to avoid contributing to the problem calls for much more radical solutions than merely leaving the animal products out of your diet - with her own story of worsening health on a vegan diet followed by recovery when she began to eat meat again. This is where my first caveat comes up: she implies, without coming right out and saying, that her vegan diet was also a low-fat diet. I have also been vegan for long periods of my life (although never the decades that she logged) and it was only during the last one, from 2004-2006, that I experienced the slight beginnings of the back problems she describes. No coincidence: that was the one where I went low-fat as well as vegan and actually lost my ability to digest fat. Fortunately I got an accurate diagnosis promptly, got nutritional therapy to regain my ability to digest fat, and lost the back pain within a year. In the latter half of her Nutritional Vegetarianism chapter, she devotes several pages to challenging the demonization of dietary fat by the mainstream medical community. Nevertheless, she continues to attribute her health problems mainly to lack of meat rather than lack of fat.

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