

Vegan Outreach FAQ



Please review the questions and comments below, many of which will come up when you're doing outreach with students, and study our suggested responses to them. Being able to handle difficult questions like a pro takes time and practice. If you need help, you're welcome to practice with your advisor!

PRO TIPS

- ▶▶ Always refer to animals as “she,” “he,” or “they”—not “it.”
- ▶▶ Try to stay away from terms like “dairy cows” or “farm animals.” Don't define animals by the way they are used and exploited. Instead, try saying things like “cows used for milk” or “farmed animals.”
- ▶▶ Use literature to back up what you're talking about. If someone doubts something in the literature, remind them that everything published by PETA has been fact-checked. But don't just let the leaflet do the talking—use it to enhance your outreach.

Suggested Responses to Common Questions and Comments

“It's too difficult to be vegan in my town.”

To show that it can be easy to find vegan food if you know what to look for, name some specific brands (e.g., Beyond Meat, Gardein, and Tofurky). Bring up any vegan-friendly dining halls on campus or other food options nearby. If you have a favorite vegan spot back home, mention it. Show the person HappyCow.net. Tell them that many chain restaurants—including Del Taco, Taco Bell, Chipotle, Carl's Jr., and Denny's—are adding vegan options to their menus. You can also point out that many different cuisines—including Chinese, Ethiopian, Indian, Japanese, Mexican, Thai, and Vietnamese—already have many vegan dishes or vegetarian dishes that can easily be veganized simply by omitting eggs or dairy.

“I just love the way meat tastes.”

Always start off by trying to relate to the person. Say something like, “I completely understand. I used to like the way meat tastes, too! But that was before I found out about the cruelty involved in the production of animal-derived foods.” Mention some of the awesome vegan meat options available, such as Beyond Meat, Gardein, Field Roast, and Tofurky products. Then you could say, “Now I can have the taste I want without hurting any animals!” You could also say this if it applies to you: “I realized that the taste I loved came mostly from all the herbs and spices used to season the meat. Now I use almost all the same ingredients when preparing vegan dishes.” You can also explain that the brief experience of eating meat isn't worth the lifetime of suffering and the painful death endured by the animal.

“Vegan food is too expensive.”

Most people make this comment after they've seen the prices of some vegan cheeses or faux meats. Mention that you haven't noticed a difference in how much you spend since you went vegan—or that you actually spend less now—and that the cheapest foods on the market are vegan. Fruits, veggies, rice, beans, pasta, bread, peanut butter, hummus, and other plant-based foods cost, on average, much less than meat products.

Meat and other animal-derived foods in the U.S. are often cheap only because the government subsidizes so much of the cost. Keep your audience in mind when discussing economics—people who live in a food desert may not have access to fruits and vegetables, let alone specialty vegan products. But most of the time, you'll be speaking to college students who eat in your town and on your campus, so you can advise them on the best places to eat for the lowest cost.

Recommend *PETA's Vegan College Cookbook*, and mention that every meal in it can be made for under \$5. Point out that when you buy premade food from grocery stores—whether it's vegan or not—it always costs extra because you're essentially paying someone to prepare it for you.

“I knew someone who was vegan, and they got sick/were really tired all the time.”

Tell them, “It sounds like the problem wasn't the vegan lifestyle but rather that the person may not have been eating a balanced and varied diet. Vegan meals rich in fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains provide all the nutrients we need to be healthy. If you have questions or concerns, it's always a good idea to research dietary guidelines and talk to your doctor about making the transition. According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, ‘Well-planned vegetarian diets are appropriate for individuals during all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence.’”



“My parents won't let me go vegan.”

Say, “Tell your parents how important this is to you. Most parents will understand if you talk to them in a mature manner. Encourage them to try it along with you, and suggest meatless Mondays, tofu Tuesdays, Tofurky Thursdays, or fleshless Fridays.” And encourage everyone to stick to their convictions—people respect those who stand up for what they believe in, and the longer they stay vegan, the more the people around them will accept it and see that they aren't, in fact, suffering from a protein deficiency. In fact, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics states that vegetarians and vegans enjoy a lower risk of death from ischemic heart disease, lower blood cholesterol levels, lower blood pressure, lower rates of hypertension and type 2 diabetes, lower body mass indexes, and lower overall cancer rates. Encourage your parents to join you in going vegan to cut down their chance of heart disease and other health issues, and have them check out the [Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine](#) for nutrition tips.

“I can't go vegan because I'm a bodybuilder/athlete.”

You can say, “Eating vegan is actually the best way to help you build muscle and become a better athlete! Animal-derived foods weigh you down and make you feel sluggish compared to plant-based, whole foods.” Then list a few of the many vegan athletes, such as MLB player Spencer Strider; F1 champion Lewis Hamilton; current and former NBA players Chris Paul, Cade Cunningham, and JaVale McGee; WNBA player Diana Taurasi; NFL stars Colin Kaepernick, Cam Newton, and Justin Fields; ultra-endurance athlete Rich Roll; and Patrik Baboumian, one of the strongest men in the world. Recommend that they watch the documentary *The Game Changers*.

“I was raised eating meat.”

Share how you went vegan or became an animal rights activist. Explain that most vegans were raised eating animal-derived foods. Then share what you learned that caused you to stop eating meat. Use the talking points mentioned above to address any comments about the taste of meat.

“I’m a hunter.”

Say, “We live in the 21st century—we no longer need to hunt in order to survive, so there’s no excuse for killing animals purely for our amusement. There’s nothing ‘sporting’ about killing. Real sports involve competition between consenting parties—and they don’t involve the deliberate death of one unwilling participant.”

“My family has a farm.”

Reply, “About 99.9% of animal-derived foods come from industrialized farms where animals are beaten and otherwise abused, and their throats are slit while they’re still conscious. Eating those kinds of food supports cruel industries, not family farmers. Besides, even on so-called ‘family farms,’ animals are killed at a fraction of their natural life expectancy. They’re often sent to the same slaughterhouses where animals raised on a feedlot are killed. Nowadays, it’s simply unnecessary to kill animals when we can get all our nutrients and favorite flavors from plant-based sources.”

“You want to put farmers out of business.”

Say, “Actually, we want to *help* local farmers by getting them into the more sustainable business of growing plant foods. Not only are modern-day factory farms making a mockery of small and local farmers, they’re also putting them out of business. Growing fruits, veggies, beans, or grain is more sustainable, better for the environment, and more animal-friendly.”

“I need protein.”

Explain that almost everything we eat contains protein, including vegan foods, and that protein from beans, legumes, nuts, and other plants is actually better for you than protein obtained from meat, because these foods contain healthy fiber and complex carbohydrates. Tell them that animal-derived foods are often high in artery-clogging cholesterol and saturated fat, that the consumption of animal protein has been linked to cancer, and that millions of people all over the world abstain from eating meat and aren’t experiencing protein deficiency.

“I didn’t make it to the top of the food chain to eat salads.”

Say, “Well, if you don’t like salads, you’re in luck, because there are great meat alternatives available.” Explain that for any animal-based food, there’s a vegan equivalent.



Or say, “You aren’t at the top of the food chain—you’re not even part of it. Humans aren’t able to hunt, catch, and kill animals using claws or teeth as carnivores do. There are many animals in nature we’d lose a fight against, so we can’t claim a natural right to eat them when we use unnatural means to kill them.”

“Where do you get your calcium?”

Explain that getting calcium while eating vegan is easy, and then list some popular calcium sources, such as soy, almond, hemp, oat, or rice milk as well as vegetables like leafy greens, Brussels sprouts, and broccoli. Mention that countries with the highest rates of osteoporosis—such as the U.S.—consume the most cow’s milk.

“The Bible says we have dominion over animals.”

Reply, “Dominion does not mean domination. The king of England has dominion over his people. That doesn’t mean he gets to confine, torture, kill, or eat them. Having dominion over animals means that we are responsible for ensuring their welfare.” Do *not* get into scripture battles or tell someone that their religion is wrong or invalid.

“Animals don’t have souls.”

Say, “Although that’s debatable, one thing we do know is that animals have a central nervous system and feel pain, just as you and I do.”

“Well, Hitler was a vegetarian!”

Tell them, “Actually, there are photographs of Hitler eating meat and sitting at the dinner table with meat on his plate. There’s also firsthand testimony from Hitler’s wife—who prepared his meals—stating that he liked to eat Bavarian sausage. She said that he ate liver, too. But even if it were true that he was a vegetarian, there have also been plenty of murderers and tyrants who ate meat. Regardless of Hitler’s murderous ways, *you* can help save animals by not eating them.”

“Soy milk contains estrogen.”

Say, “If you’re worried about food that contains estrogen, you should know that meat and dairy foods can contain up to twice as much estrogen as soy does. The kinds of estrogen found in plants are phytoestrogens, which don’t harm the human body.”

“Cows need to be milked.”

Explain it this way: “Like humans, cows produce milk only after pregnancy, to feed their babies. Farmers artificially inseminate them in order to keep them pregnant for most of their lives and steal the milk that was meant for their babies so that humans can consume it. When the cows’ exhausted bodies no longer produce enough milk to be profitable, they’re slaughtered. Meanwhile, the calves are torn away from their mothers shortly after birth. The females face the same fate as their mothers, and the males are sent to feedlots to await slaughter or are sold to the veal industry. If you’re drinking milk, you’re supporting all this suffering.”

“I only buy free-range products, so it’s OK.”

Say, “It’s great that you’re trying to help animals, but many organic and ‘free-range’ farms still cram thousands of animals together in sheds or on mud-filled lots in order to increase profits, just as other factory farms do. Animals on ‘free-range’ farms often endure the same mutilations—such as debeaking, dehorning, and castration without any painkillers—as animals on factory farms. On ‘free-range’ farms, chickens require access to the outdoors, but this ‘access’ is often nothing more than a single door that chickens may never even see during their short lives. Animals on ‘free-range’ farms are sent to the same slaughterhouses as factory-farmed animals, and they endure a terrifying, painful, horrific death.”





Additional talking points regarding “free-range” farms

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations regarding “free-range” claims require nothing more than giving animals access to the outdoors. They specify neither the quality and size of the outside range nor the duration of time an animal must be given access to it, which means that a farmer could put a door or window on a chicken enclosure but never let any birds out.
- The USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service, which doesn’t regulate farms’ treatment of animals raised for meat, bases its approval of claims like “humanely raised” and “raised in a stress-free environment” on the companies’ own submissions, with no supporting evidence required and no ability to audit farms. As a result, companies can submit claims that are completely false or grossly misleading and still get the agency’s stamp of approval—and the financial motivation to do so is high.

“I only eat organic animal products.”

Start by saying, “That’s great that you’re trying to help animals!” Then add, “But on some farms, organically raised chickens have higher mortality rates than non-organic chickens because extremely crowded, filthy conditions—coupled with a lack of antibiotics—can lead to even more pathogens. Also, ‘organic’ refers only to the type of food the animals are given, not how they’re treated. All animals on organic and ‘free-range’ farms are killed in the same way as animals raised on factory farms: Their throats are cut—often while they’re still conscious and struggling to escape.”

“We need meat to survive.”

Reply, “Not true. I’m still alive. And human bodies are best suited to a plant-based diet. Carnivores’ jaws move only up and down, requiring them to tear chunks of flesh from their prey and swallow them whole. Humans and other herbivores can move their jaws from side to side, allowing them to grind up fruits and vegetables with their back teeth. Like other herbivores’ teeth, humans’ back molars are flat for grinding fibrous plant foods. Carnivores lack these flat molars. We’re also unable to hunt animals without weapons, kill them using our teeth, or digest the uncooked flesh.”

Additional talking points to debunk the claim that humans must eat meat

- Carnivores swallow their food whole, relying on their extremely acidic stomach juices to break down flesh and kill the dangerous bacteria in meat that would otherwise sicken or kill them. Our stomach acids are much weaker than those of carnivores, because strong acids aren’t needed to digest pre-chewed fruits and vegetables.
- It’s the position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics that well-planned vegan diets are appropriate for athletes and for all stages of the human life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, and older adulthood.

“Plants are alive.”

Say, “The simple answer is that, currently, no one is sure whether plants can feel pain. We certainly know that animals feel pain, just as we do. We can agree that there’s a difference between mowing the lawn and slitting a cow’s throat, right? And consuming animal-derived foods is actually responsible for using *more* plants than eating vegan is, because animals consume a large amount of plants before they are eaten.”

“Are you a Democrat or a Republican? Are you pro-life or pro-choice?”

These questions are a distraction from the conversation you’re trying to have about animal rights. Explain that you’re not there to talk about those topics and that your purpose is to converse about issues involving animals. Or try to steer your answer back in the direction that you want the conversation to go in.

Everything you need to know about B₁₂ from Neal Barnard, M.D.

Q: I've been following a vegan diet now for about five years. I feel great, but I've heard that vegans should take vitamin B₁₂. Is that true? If so, how much do I need?

Yes, taking vitamin B₁₂ is important, not just for vegans but for everyone else, too. It's as easy as taking a daily multivitamin. Here is what you need to know:

The vitamin is not made by either plants or animals. It is made by bacteria. Vitamin B₁₂ is essential for healthy blood and healthy nerves. Without it, red blood cells cannot mature normally. B₁₂ is also essential for producing the myelin that surrounds nerve cells and allows them to function normally.

Vegan diets need to be supplemented with B₁₂. However, the National Academy of Sciences recommends that *everyone* over age 50 take a B₁₂ supplement or use B₁₂-fortified foods, and some have suggested that this should apply to all age groups. The reason is that about 15% of older meat-eaters—and some younger ones as well—are low in B₁₂.

It's easy to find. B₁₂ is in any common multivitamin. It is also in fortified products, like breakfast cereals, soy milk, meat substitutes, and nutritional yeast. Check the package labels for vitamin B₁₂ or its scientific name, cobalamin. The B₁₂ in supplements is not animal-derived.

The recommended daily allowance for adults is 2.4 micrograms, and pregnant or nursing women need slightly more. (B₁₂ is essential for a growing baby.) Multivitamins have more than this, and some B₁₂ supplements have 1,000 micrograms or more. A high intake is OK, as the vitamin is not toxic.

By the way, algae called spirulina have sometimes been marketed as a source of B₁₂. However, they very likely have no active B₁₂ at all. The same is true of fermented soy products, such as miso or tempeh. Some types of seaweed, such as nori, may contain traces of B₁₂, but the drying process may destroy it. So don't depend on any of these as sources.

Q: What will happen to me if I never take a supplement?

Nothing at all for several years, probably. Because the liver stores B₁₂, it can take years for a deficiency to manifest. As time goes on, however, nerve damage can result, leading to sensory loss and abnormal, painful sensations. In some cases, anemia results as well. Symptoms may also include irritability, personality changes, and depression.

Doctors can test for deficiency with a simple B₁₂ blood test.

Q: I would think my natural diet ought to provide all the nutrition I need. Doesn't taking a supplement mean that there is something wrong with my diet?

Think of it this way: Our environment is not even remotely like that of our ancestors. Just as most of us no longer get frequent sun exposure, so we need a vitamin D supplement, most of us are not surrounded by B₁₂-producing bacteria either. So a supplement is essential.



The most common cause of B₁₂ deficiency actually has nothing to do with diet. Rather, some people simply cannot absorb it adequately. Normally, cells in the stomach produce a compound called *intrinsic factor*, which combines with vitamin B₁₂ and allows it to be absorbed in the small intestine. Some people cannot make intrinsic factor, because of various stomach disorders. Certain medicines for acid reflux, such as omeprazole (Prilosec), esomeprazole (Nexium), ranitidine (Zantac), or famotidine (Pepcid), may interfere with intrinsic factor production, making it harder for them to absorb B₁₂. So people who do not make adequate intrinsic factor need monthly B₁₂ injections or very large oral doses (1,000 to 2,000 micrograms per day). Deficiencies are also common in developing countries, even among nonvegetarians, possibly because of the overgrowth of unhealthful bacteria in the intestine.

So, take a multivitamin or a B₁₂ supplement. If you've had no B₁₂ in your diet for several years, you'll have some catching up to do, and daily doses of around 1,000 micrograms would be advisable. This is not a reason to add meat to your diet, as that would lead to far worse problems. But it is a reason for simple planning.

“I won't support you because PETA ...”

“... is too extreme for me.”

Ask, “What's extreme about this campaign?” or “Is giving free vegan samples away extreme?” Mention that the ways in which humans treat animals are extreme. For example, say, “It's extreme to electrocute rabbits for their fur” or “It's extreme to slit chickens' throats while they're still conscious.”

“... is ridiculous.”

Say, “PETA employs over 250 staff members across the U.S.. In addition, there are 10 international PETA entities. The tactics are rational and strategic and take months to plan. PETA tracks the public's responses to its demonstrations, campaigns, articles, ads, and literature. The organization wouldn't waste time or money on billboards, demonstrations, or campaigns if they weren't successful.”

“... is a terrorist organization.”

Reply, “PETA is a certified 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit group—therefore, it can't partake in any illegal activity. The organization is regularly audited by the IRS, which could take away its tax-exempt status if any illegal activity were found.”

“... is sexist.”

Here are several effective responses:

- Sexy isn't automatically sexist.
- PETA's founder and president is a woman, and the majority of its employees are women, including vice presidents and managers.
- Both women and men volunteer to draw attention to PETA's lifesaving campaigns by shedding their clothes.
- All the women in PETA's demonstrations or ads are volunteers.
- To judge or condemn a woman for using her body in the way she wants to is inherently sexist.
- We don't judge women for using their sexuality or showing their body in instances of female empowerment.
- List men who have also done ads for PETA (e.g., Steve-O, Waka Flocka Flame, David Cross, Tony Gonzalez, Chad Ochocinco, Bret Lockett, Willis McGahee, etc.).

- PETA’s ads feature people of different genders, races, sizes, etc. However, the ones that often get the most attention are those in which women aren’t wearing many (if any) clothes, so media may make it seem as though those are the only ads PETA produces.
- Leafleters and petitioners often get ignored—that’s why PETA uses men and women in sexy outfits (as well as free food and silly costumes) to get attention.

“... kills animals.”

These responses and talking points will help inform people about animal shelters and outreach:

- PETA operates a shelter of last resort, meaning that animals who are in dire situations and unadoptable because of health status, age, or temperament are sent to us intentionally. Animals who can be helped and are adoptable are transferred to an open-admission shelter in the area.
- More than 6 million animals enter shelters each year, and only half of them get adopted. PETA and other organizations are left to clean up the mess caused by careless people who intentionally breed animals, don’t get their dogs and cats sterilized, and buy from pet stores.
- PETA has spayed or neutered more than 224,200 animals at no or low cost.
- There’s no such thing as a “no-kill” shelter. So-called “no-kill” shelters turn animals away, and they end up in shelters that do euthanize, they’re abandoned by the side of the road, or worse.

If someone tries to get into a long debate with you about PETA, change the subject after a couple of tries. The conversation shouldn’t be about defending PETA but rather about the animal rights issues that you’re there to talk about. Say, “Let’s leave PETA out of it—the issues remain the same” or “Not taking action won’t hurt PETA—it will just hurt animals.”

