

Kaufman, L., Springen, K., Rogers, A., & Gordon, J. (1995, August 28). [Children of the Corn](#). Newsweek, pp. 60-62.

OVERVIEW

Vegetarianism has hit mainstream American teenagers. They are passing on pepperoni pizza and Big Macs and are learning to eat "green." This summer, research conducted by [Teenage Research Unlimited](#) of Northbrook, Ill., found that:

- 35 percent of girls and 18 percent of boys surveyed thought that being veggie was "in."
- 37 percent of teens in another survey said they try to avoid red meat. This number is 50 percent higher than people a generation older. Danny Seo, the 18-year-old founder of a teens-only advocacy group called Earth 2000, says that the "defining focus" of his generation will be "no animal cruelty, no meat."

A primary reason for the teen boycott of meat is concern for animals. It is no wonder: in the last decade, animal-rights groups have targeted teenagers with their messages. [Animalearn](#) made presentations on "alternative diets" to approximately 20,000 kids last year. [Chris P. Carrot](#), the seven-foot tall dancing mascot of [PETA](#) (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), visits elementary schools and hands out buttons reading "Eat your veggies, not your friends." PETA also visited this year's [Lollapalooza](#) festival of alternative music armed with disturbing footage of the worst slaughterhouses.

Most veggies are indignant about factory-farming practices such as clipping off pigs' tails and debeaking chickens. They link eating meat with ecological destruction. Celebrities have also helped to spread the veggie word. Jennie Garth of "Beverly Hills, 90210," Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam, and REM's Michael Stipe are among those living the vegetarian lifestyle.

Parents may have trouble relating to this trend. While they may agree with the desire to reduce red meat intake, they tend to worry about whether the nutritional needs of their vegetarian teens are being met. Dr. David Herzog of [Massachusetts General Hospital](#) says vegetarianism "scares the hell out of (parents)." However, the typical fear of parents—that their child is not getting enough protein from his or her "green" diet—is not necessarily a

problem. Protein is plentiful in the whole grains toward which vegetarians tend to gravitate. Whether the young person is getting enough iron and zinc is a more serious consideration, because these minerals are most concentrated in animal flesh.

Many adolescent veggies fall prey to the call of junk food. While they talk about the goodness of black beans and rice, they often prefer french fries. High school vegetarians are faced with cafeteria food that does not fit within their dietary realms. In these cases, greasy cheese pizza and peanut butter sandwiches, which are both high in fat and protein, become their staples. Vegetarian selections in restaurants are becoming more commonplace but veggie eateries have not yet found the malls, where teens often congregate.

Experts feel that giving up meat can sometimes be a warning sign of eating disorders. Many young women who suffer from anorexia start out as vegetarians. Giving up meat is an inconspicuous, socially accepted way to cut calories. The problem is that more destructive self-imposed dietary restrictions often follow.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- Are you surprised by the teen veggie movement? Why or why not?
- What do you think of the messages of animal rights activists? Do you see benefits or problems in the fact that they target teens with their messages?
- In what ways do you think society could meet and support the teenage vegetarian movement?

IMPLICATIONS

- Parents and teachers need to support the teen vegetarian movement by offering dietary information to help ensure that the young vegetarians are getting balanced diets. Also, it is important that adults monitor teen vegetarianism to make sure it is not an early sign of dangerous eating disorders such as anorexia.
- The veggie trend illustrates that teens are becoming more aware and active regarding health issues and their environment.
- School cafeterias should amend their menus to include healthy veggie alternatives. School health courses should provide information

on balanced vegetarian diets.

Sheila Walsh 1995 CYS