

Confessions of a Christian vegetarian

Mary Raddon

Almost 40 years ago, when I was chief cook for a young family of meat eaters, I met some vegetarians who had amazingly good health and some compelling reasons for being vegetarian. For me the most interesting fact was that by eating a plant based diet, you could still have good nutrition and save a lot of money!

Years later, I think that the economics still hold true, though I confess I haven't priced meat for a long time. What has happened over the years is that my reasons for maintaining a plant based diet have changed. For me the economics have become less important, having had six children grow up and leave the nest. Now I am more compelled by spiritual reasons.

Many people choose not to eat meat because of concern for animal welfare. While that is a noble sentiment, it is not my motivation.

I am motivated to eat plants because I believe what scientists are telling us; that vegetarianism is better for the earth as well as for all the inhabitants of the earth. Modern industrial farming is depleting the soil, and reducing diversity. Half of the world's arable land is used to raise meat. Ruminant animals belch methane, and modern industrial farm practices with their heavy use of fossil fuels contribute more carbon dioxide to the atmosphere than the entire transportation sector. In his book, *Drawdown*, Paul Hawkin states that if people continue to move to a plant-rich diet, the amount of carbon dioxide entering the atmosphere would be reduced by 66.11 gigatons by 2050. Modern meat farming requires enormous amounts of water and monocultures of corn and soybeans necessitating vast amounts of pesticides. The earth simply



Most North Americans need less protein than they think says Mary Raddon. Photo-iStock.

cannot continue to support carnivorous diets.

As Christians we are called to love our neighbours, and a part of loving our neighbours is caring for the welfare of this planet which gives us a place to live.

People often say to me that they just cannot bear to give up meat. When we began to change from a meat-based diet to a plant based diet, we made the change very gradually. So we tried just one vegetarian meal a week, then perhaps two, until our bodies and minds adjusted. The point is not to feel deprived. So if you feel a strong urge for bacon, go ahead, crumple some in your broccoli salad, or your baked beans! Reducing our carbon footprint by eating a plant-based diet is not about living with less, it is living abundantly in a different way.

I am often asked "How do you get enough protein on a plant based diet?" Our children's grandparents were very worried about their nutrition at first, but as they saw healthy growth and lots of energy, they became less concerned. The first question is how much protein does one really need? Less than most North Americans think they do. A balance of

grains, beans, pulses, nuts and seeds can easily satisfy most health requirements. So don't just think lettuce! One of the things we most enjoy about a plant-based way of eating is its immense variety. There are way more kinds of beans, grains, nuts and seeds and ways to enjoy them than there are kinds of meat. Furthermore, on the whole, most vegetarians enjoy better health, with reduced risks of obesity, heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

People ask me what we do eat, and where I find recipes. The internet is a wonderful resource, as it is for everything else.

Often I am asked, "So you are vegetarian, don't you sometimes eat meat?" Yes, we do. Some vegetarians are strict, but we are more relaxed and willing to eat meat on social and cultural occasions, when the situation calls for it. To do otherwise would sometimes be rude. But we entertain, and often our guests don't notice that there is no meat.

In terms of living lightly on the earth, a plant-based diet is a great way to nourish ourselves, our neighbours and the planet. Give it a try, the earth will thank you!