

Because your food choices can change the world

Food Chain Issue 5

Welcome Back!

With this issue, we are sure you will want to take the time to get to know another one of our feathered friends. Many people start to go veg by giving up eating cows or pigs, but did you know that chickens comprise about 9 billion of the 10 billion land animals killed for food each year? Each of these chickens with unique personalities is able to experience joy and feel pain, and each is an individual deserving of life the way nature intended. By not eating these remarkable birds you will be saving more lives than you can imagine!

Fortunately, there are those who have a passion for rescuing chickens and the story about Viktor is one that will certainly help you have a better understanding of the life of a chicken and just how special these birds are.

We also want to help you with one of those possibly uncomfortable situations where you have made the compassionate and wise decision to stop eating animals and yet, every time you eat with family and friends, they are eating meat around you. Do you stomp out? Or do you say nothing? Read our tips on how to handle these uncomfortable situations.

Of course you would not be the only one who is uncomfortable. Believe it or not, chickens in industrialized animal factories often suffer heart attacks due to the unnatural and growth-enhancing foods they are forced to eat. As you know, humans too suffer heart attacks, many times also due to the foods being consumed, and in this issue a medical doctor will tell you why eating vegan can lower your cholesterol and keep your heart healthy.

We also have another fabulous veg recipe and in fact, we know this issue will help you continue on your path to help the animals, yourself and the environment!



©iStockphoto.com/DaydreamsGirl

Chickens: A Time for Change

Every second, 285 beating hearts are stopped



Photo of chicks on a poultry farm
©iStockphoto.com/tanteckken

In the U.S., chickens make up the largest number of animals who are killed for food. Annually, the average person eats approximately 87 pounds of chicken. So, when it comes to sheer volume, chickens suffer in far greater numbers than any other species because given the smaller size of these birds, people eat more individual chickens than any other animal.

If you were asked to imagine 10 birds flying in the sky, could you picture them? How about 100 birds? What about 24 million birds? Such a large number is difficult to comprehend, but the grim reality is that more than 90 percent of the nearly ten billion animals raised and killed for food in the U.S. every year are chickens, which means about 24 million are killed each and every day. That is close to 17,000 chickens killed each minute, or about 285 every second!

These indeed are sobering statistics, especially when you discover that the billions of chickens killed for "meat" in today's industrialized animal factories are crowded for nearly their entire lives inside gigantic sheds, where virtually every one of their natural instincts is thwarted. These individuals, referred to as "broiler" chickens, truly lead very miserable lives.

Continued on page 2

Bred For Misery

The suffering of “broiler” chickens starts with their parents: specialized “breeders” who are genetically selected to produce offspring with what the industry considers “commercially advantageous” characteristics, such as rapid weight gain and enlarged breast muscles, which, along with the legs, are the most common body parts consumed. Kept in separate warehouses lined with nest boxes, “breeders” never see their offspring, as eggs are collected, incubated and hatched in yet another facility. This process prevents these devoted mothers—who normally build nests and warm their eggs by sitting on them—from raising any of their baby chicks.

Six Weeks in Hell

The “grower” sheds, where young “broiler” chickens spend their brief and painful lives, epitomize the modern system of mechanized animal agriculture. Contemporary industrial animal factories, run by “poultry” corporations, now deprive chickens of virtually all natural environmental stimuli. Kept indoors by the tens of thousands in warehouses the size of football fields, “broiler” chickens are constantly subjected to a completely unnatural habitat designed not for their health or welfare, but maximum productivity.

Artificial lighting substitutes for sunlight because extending the number of hours of light per day biologically tricks chickens’ bodies into growing at a faster rate. However, this almost constant light is always kept very dim (about 23 times darker than the typical office) to keep birds sedentary so they don’t burn calories. Meanwhile, most producers only darken the growing sheds for one to four hours during each 24-hour cycle.

Chicken litter, consisting of a mixture of manure, feed, feathers, and bedding material such as sawdust, replaces dirt and grass, so broiler chickens never get to feel real earth beneath their toes. The same litter may be left on the floor for months at a time, forcing several groups of birds to sit, stand and lie down not only in their own feces and urine, but also in the accumulated and decomposing waste from previous flocks. As the bacteria from these droppings decay, they pollute the air with dust, ammonia and fungal spores that cause serious skin, eye and respiratory disorders. In fact, the air in these facilities is so potent that undercover investigators have commented on a burning sensation in their lungs even days after they had spent less than an hour in one of these sheds, which is understandable since it has



Photo of chicken unable to stand courtesy of Viva! USA

been noted that, “Exposure to even low levels of ammonia can irritate the lungs and eyes.”²

The unnatural “growing house” environment mirrors the genetically-manipulated bodies that “broiler” chickens are born into. “In 1925, it took approximately 16 weeks to raise a 1.1 kg (2.5 lb) chicken, [6] but broiler chicken strains now reach 2.5 kg (5.5 lb) in less than 7 weeks.”¹ The birds are still essentially babies, yet their tiny bodies are made to grow unnaturally large, much too fast. This accelerated growth causes numerous painful and often deadly complications, from chickens’ legs literally snapping under their burgeoning weight to heart failure that results in Sudden Death Syndrome.

In nature, chickens are capable of living up to 15 years or longer, so “broiler” chickens are indeed babies when they are killed for their flesh.

Chicken Appreciation

Chickens are socially and emotionally complex. They have individual personalities, share strong bonds with one another, and communicate with each other using various clucking noises. It is indeed “a time for change” for these personable birds. By choosing to go veg, you can help bring an end to their suffering.

¹ The Humane Society of the United States, *An HSUS Report: Welfare Issues with Selective Breeding for Rapid Growth in Broiler Chickens and Turkeys*, http://www.hsus.org/web-files/PDF/farm/welfiss_breeding_chickens_turkeys.pdf (Jun.1, 2010)

² Susan W. Gay, Katharine F. Knowlton, *Ammonia Emissions and Animal Agriculture*, Virginia Cooperative Extension, <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/442/442-110/442-110.html> (Jun. 1, 2010).

Viktor: A Survivor's Story

Those born and raised in rural areas tend to take special notice of outsiders who move to their territories, so the sight of a "broiler" chicken being chased through the woods by a woman who had recently moved from the city must have been quite amusing.

It took some time to catch her, and when we finally caught her, she was placed in the cab of our pick-up truck. This hen became remarkably calm given that in the previous 24 hours, at only six weeks old, she had been snatched from a shed where she was being raised for "meat" with thousands of other chickens, was loaded onto a truck headed for the slaughterhouse and then had fallen or leapt from the truck. Ending up in the woods was her saving grace, and she became the first member of what would soon become the Eastern Shore Sanctuary.

We loved spending time with Moselle (as we called her). We had much to learn about caring for "broilers," and so we learned as we went along: learned that due to genetic alterations, Moselle would grow unnaturally fast; learned that she needed friends; learned that we didn't need to worry about getting her into the coop at night, as she went to bed very regularly at dusk.

Moselle had been living with us for a while, when she made a loud croaking noise and we thought she must have laid an egg. When the noise repeated itself and no egg appeared, we figured she was starting to crow. Being the good feminists we were, we assumed that all hens speak their minds and crow at first but then give way to the louder, more assertive, rooster crows. We went along happily under this delusion for some time before well-meaning neighbors set us straight regarding this outlandish notion.

We had to accept the fact that Moselle was a rooster, whom we renamed Viktor, after the concentration camp survivor Viktor Frankl.

Viktor enjoyed his new surroundings, but he was obviously lonely. When we would go into the yard, he would be there to greet us and occasionally he would even find his way to the back steps to wait for us. It wasn't long before we rescued two more "broilers" from our local Humane Society: a hen named Violet and a rooster named Chickweed. The three of them eventually became inseparable, but at first Viktor seemed to be in over his head. He had never had the chance to have a mother and live in a flock. Instead, he spent the first weeks of his life with thousands of other baby chickens in a shed, and so he wasn't sure just how to deal with these newly rescued birds.

Somehow Viktor figured out that it was his job to protect both Violet and Chickweed, as he was now the "senior" bird of the flock. Together they went out in the mornings, knowing instinctively how to scratch the earth for bugs and

minerals, wandering the yard and learning where the best places were to dust-bathe and lounge.

Viktor definitely considered himself the head rooster. When we brought new chickens into the yard, either "broilers" or others whom we had rescued, he made it a point to introduce himself and make his position clear. Sometimes he had to reinforce the point with a bit of physicality, but he never inflicted actual damage upon his new flock-mates.

Viktor, like many birds, had a rich emotional life. Rosa was his first love, and when she died he truly mourned for her, showing no interest in any other hen, until quite a bit later when Ellie Mae showed up.

Eventually, one summer the heat became too much for Viktor, as it does for so many "broiler" birds, and he had a heart attack. He was vital and vigorous until the end, though, which is rare for roosters raised for "meat;" they get even larger than the hens and often lose the use of their legs when they can no longer withstand their unnatural weight. We felt grateful that his life was as good as it could have been, and were also grateful to be able to be there with him when it happened. Mostly, though, we were happy that other chickens were around him as he passed.

As much as we love our rescued birds, we want to see the end of industrial animal farming. Until these places no longer exist, however, we will continue to savor our relationships with these special birds. And we will always remember Viktor.

Courtesy of the Eastern Shore Sanctuary & Education Center



Photo of a "broiler" rooster

Toxic Chicken Manure

Littering the Environment

When you imprison thousands of chickens in sheds the size of football fields, it's no surprise that after a few weeks, you'll have more than your share of chicken manure. This manure is mixed with feathers, spilled feed, perhaps some dead rodents, dead chickens, bedding material and more, resulting in what is often referred to as chicken or "poultry" litter. Environmental Health News has estimated that industrialized chicken factories in the U.S. produce anywhere from 13 to 26 million metric tons (14 to 29 million U.S. tons) of poultry litter every year.¹ So, what happens to all that waste matter?

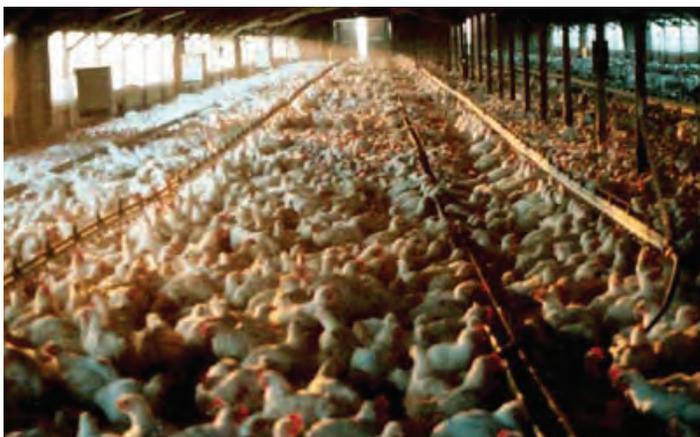


Photo of commercial shed of chickens raised for meat courtesy of Viva! USA

Typically, most industrialized chicken factories do not clean their sheds and collect the litter until several different flocks of chickens have been raised, rounded up and sent off to be killed. The litter may then be taken to an incinerator to be burned or end up mixed in with the feed for cattle or farmed fish. It is also often used as a fertilizer for commercial crops, as well as sold to the public in pellet form to be used in gardens. A major concern is that this litter typically contains a variety of toxic materials. You can find both lead and arsenic, as well as salmonella and antibiotic resistant bacteria.² All of these toxins can cause problems for both humans and animals, and the environment too.

When chicken litter is burned in an incinerator, the toxins in the litter, such as arsenic, are released as toxic air emissions or even toxic dust, affecting all who live in the surrounding areas. In 2009, the Carolina News stated: "According to the North Carolina Division of Air Quality,

a chicken litter incinerator emits more pollution than a newly-built coal-burning power plant."³

Because arsenic can be found in the manure of chickens raised for "meat," some studies have focused on the possible effects of using poultry litter on crops. According to the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (NSAIS), "Many growers regularly use poultry litter. If you do this with poultry litter containing arsenic, arsenic will build up in the soil. Unlike nutrients that are removed from the soil at predictable rates by crop harvests, heavy metals such as arsenic may or may not be taken up by crops and removed from the field through harvests." The NSAIS also noted that studies have shown "that more than 70% of the arsenic in uncovered piles of poultry litter can be dissolved by rainfall and potentially leach into lakes or streams."⁴

But the question is how does arsenic end up in the feces of chickens? Arsenic compounds, such as roxarsone, have been added to the feed of chickens raised for "meat" since the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved of its use in the 1940s in order to promote growth, kill parasites and improve the color and pigmentation of the flesh of chickens. After doing some of the first tests regarding arsenic exposure resulting from the use of arsenic additives in animal feed, the European Union banned the use of such additives in 1999, but more than 10 years later, arsenic-based food additives are still being used in the feed of about 70% of the chickens being raised for "meat" in the U.S.

Arsenic is odorless and tasteless and occurs naturally in the environment and in plants and animals; however, adding organic arsenic compounds to animal feed results in small amounts of a dangerous inorganic form of arsenic being present in the flesh and feces of chickens. Small amounts of this toxic chemical may also be consumed by those who eat the crops that have been fertilized by this chicken litter, as well as by those whose drinking water supplies have not only been contaminated by natural means, but also by chicken litter used as fertilizer that has run off into waterways or leached into the groundwater. Being exposed to and consuming small amounts of arsenic over a period of time can lead to a variety of cancers and other serious health effects.⁵

Continued on page 5

¹ Paul Eubig, DVM, *Synopsis: Antibiotic-resistant bacteria persist in chicken manure*, Environmental Health News, Aug. 7, 2009 (<http://www.environmentalhealthnews.org/ehs/news/science/antibiotic-resistant-bacteria-persist-in-chicken-manure>)

² <http://www.environmentalhealthnews.org/ehs/news/science/antibiotic-resistant-bacteria-persist-in-chicken-manure>

³ "New Poll Indicates Strong Opposition To Proposed \$140 Million Fibrowatt Power Plant in Surry County," *Carolina Newswire*, Mar. 27, 2009 (<http://carolinanewswire.com/news/News.cgi?database=0001news.db&command=viewone&id=2064&op=t>)

⁴ Barbara C. Bellows, *Arsenic in Poultry Litter: Organic Regulations*, National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service (http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/arsenic_poultry_litter.html) (Jun. 1, 2010).

⁵ Arsenic, "Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)," August 2007, <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts2.html#bookmark05> (Jun. 1, 2010).

Continued from page 4

Farmers who prepare the chicken feed and workers spreading the chicken litter are also at risk for arsenic exposure, as are those who live near farms using this manure mixture because they too may be exposed to arsenic dust. Since some of the chicken litter ends up as fertilizer pellets sold to the public for home or commercial use, arsenic exposure is again possible. In recent years, individuals who believe they have been directly or indirectly affected by arsenic dust resulting from chicken litter spread on nearby crops have filed lawsuits against both the maker of roxarsone and the “poultry” companies using the arsenic-laced feed. Unfortunately, they have not yet been successful in their efforts to make these companies accountable.



Poultry litter being readied for crop application
Courtesy of USDA

Arsenic-based feed additives are not necessary⁶. One way to help the workers, the animals and the environment, and also avoid having toxic chemicals taint the food we

eat, is to follow a vegan diet consisting of organic produce whenever possible.

⁶ Bette Hileman, “Arsenic in Chicken Production,” Chemical & Engineering News, Apr. 9, 2007 (<http://pubs.acs.org/cen/government/85/8515gov2.html>)

Q Does a vegan diet decrease the risk of coronary heart disease?

A The number one cause of death in the United States every single year for both men and women continues to be heart disease, with coronary heart disease being the most common. In 2008, a landmark review by William Clifford Roberts was published on the cause of our number one killer.

Dr. Roberts, who is the head of Baylor University’s Cardiovascular Institute, has authored more than 1,300 scientific publications, written more than a dozen textbooks on cardiology, and has been the editor-in-chief of the *American Journal of Cardiology* for 25 years.

The review, published in the peer-reviewed scientific journal *Nutrition in Clinical Practice*, was entitled “The Cause of Atherosclerosis.” First of all, doesn’t he mean causes? Aren’t there many things that increase our risk of coronary heart disease, such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity, inactivity, and cigarette smoking? None of that matters, he says, unless our cholesterol is too high. Even though all those other things can speed the build-up of plaque in our arteries, the plaque itself is made mainly out of cholesterol so, if our cholesterol level is low enough, our body has nothing to use to build the plaque. According to Dr. Roberts, atherosclerosis simply does not occur if cholesterol is low enough.

If cholesterol is the main cause of atherosclerosis, how low does our cholesterol have to be for us to become heart-attack proof? Ideally, our bad cholesterol—“LDL”—should be under 70. Quoting from the review: “If such a goal was created, the great scourge of the Western world would be essentially eliminated.” There are only two ways, he says, to get it down that low: 1) put a hundred million people on a lifetime of high dose statin drugs starting in their twenties or 2) eat a whole food vegan diet.

Now if we put everyone on drugs, then thousands of people would suffer side effects, so, according to Dr. Roberts, “Of course a...[vegan] diet is the least expensive and safest means of achieving the plaque-preventing LDL goal, but few in the Western world are willing to live on the herbivore diet.” In his words in a recent interview: “The best way to prevent heart disease is to be a...nonflesh-eater, a non-saturated fat eater.”

The main cause of our number one killer is elevated cholesterol. So according to Dr. Roberts, probably the most renowned cardiovascular pathologist in the world, the cause of coronary heart disease is: not eating vegan.

Courtesy of Michael Greger, MD, www.DrGreger.org

Q What do I do for those non-vegan encounters?

A Whether you are at work, at school or with family, it isn't easy to find a vegan bubble to live in. Although each of these situations might be uncomfortable, they should be looked at as an opportunity to provide a positive example for veganism. In fact, if we aren't around non-vegans, wouldn't we just be preaching to the choir?

Some will start to tell you stories about how they don't eat certain foods (such as veal or foie gras) or how they tried to go vegetarian for a bit but couldn't stick with it due to a variety of reasons, such as health issues, but some might react defensively and question your choices. You can always refer back to our suggestions in Food Chain Issue #2 to review how to handle that type of situation.

The important key in all of this is how you react. Many of us, when we first learn about the suffering of animals who are raised and killed for food, wonder how anyone could eat these feeling, wonderful beings. We think that if we could just explain to each and every person the realities of what takes place, certainly they would agree to stop eating them too. Well, we might be lucky that some people have the same empathy that we do, that same desire not to contribute to suffering, and their immediate reaction will be to go vegan. But many will not—at first at least, or perhaps never. We might even want to share videos or photos of animals in industrial farms and slaughterhouses, but it's better not to do that at the dinner table! At a later time, if you feel comfortable, you may want to send them a link with a polite email.

Whenever possible, try to maintain a compassionate attitude, knowing that your choice is a just one. Others will want to listen to you if you have positive energy and conviction about your decision and you aren't being confrontational. Focus on using "I" statements instead of "you" statements. For example, you could say, "Personally, I feel better when I eat foods that are consistent with my beliefs of reducing suffering."

One of the best ways to handle situations with those who eat animals is to share delicious vegan foods with them. You might start by sharing some scrumptious vegan ice cream or vegan cookies with co-workers, friends and family. Most people do not recognize that many of the foods they eat are already vegan, or how tasty vegan foods can be. This is your opportunity to show them while helping the animals at the same time!

When eating out, try to secure a place ahead of time that has vegan options. Review the menu, often found on the internet, or call for information. No point in making it seem as if eating vegan is difficult—just check out your options before you go. This way you can role model how easy it is to enjoy vegan food, even while dining out!

Many of us wear our veganism on our sleeve as we are proud of our just and compassionate choices, while others might not bring it up at work or in certain social situations. If you are in that second group, sometimes you will be offered food that is not vegan. How might such a situation be handled? Depending on the circumstances, it is often easy to decline such offers without any need for an explanation. If that is not possible, accepting a gift of food and passing it along to someone else is always an option. Most importantly, being understanding and appreciative of the offer goes a long way.

Mentioning that you are vegan before you head out for a work lunch or dinner party can save you from some difficult moments, but what if someone invites you over to their house for dinner? It is best to let them know that you are vegan and offer to bring some vegan food that you know everyone will enjoy.

Sometimes people will insist that you have a taste of their food, even though it is not vegan. They believe that veganism is just a preference (like you prefer ketchup over mustard) or that your food choices are just a fad. Clearly, these people do not understand that it is an ethical decision you have made to not contribute to suffering. Many new vegans face this lack of understanding. It might be uncomfortable to decline their offer, but if people respect and care for you, they will understand your decision and hopefully the next time only offer you a vegan option. But do remember, that most people are offering to be friendly and are not being disrespectful—it might be hard for them to remember that you have chosen to go vegan. Give them some time and be sure to have them try some of the vegan foods that you know they will not be able to resist!

Above all, try to be patient. Change is happening, and each of us can greatly contribute to this change by sharing our compassion with others while working for a just world.

Fab's Chickenless Salad

Serve this delicious updated classic over a bed of greens, as a sandwich on whole grain bread, or in pita pocket bread. Also great served as an appetizer with whole grain crackers or lettuce cups. Trust me, this vegan dish will have you asking for more.

Ingredients

1 package of tempeh*
4 green onions (white and light green part) thinly sliced
1 celery stick diced
1 large dill pickle diced
½ bunch of fresh dill minced or 2 tsp. dried dill
4 to 5 Tbsp. vegan mayonnaise**
1 to 2 tsp. yellow mustard
1 tsp. Braggs Liquid Aminos or soy sauce
Salt and pepper to taste



Preparation:

1. Crumble tempeh with hands and steam in a pot for 15 minutes. When done, place cooked tempeh in a large bowl and allow to cool.
2. Once tempeh has cooled completely, mash with a fork to make smaller crumbles.
3. Add remaining ingredients and mix well. You can add more of the mayonnaise, mustard, etc. depending on the flavor and texture you wish to create.

Courtesy of Fabiana Arrastia

* Tempeh is a fermented soy product; Food Chain Issue#4 has more information.

** You can buy prepared vegan mayonnaise or make your own using the recipe below.

Vegan Mayonnaise

Ingredients:

2¼ cups of safflower oil
1 cup of soymilk
1½ tsp. agave nectar or maple syrup
¾ tsp. sea salt
2 tsp. fresh lemon juice
2 tsp. apple cider vinegar
½ tsp. Dijon mustard

Preparation:

Use a blender or handheld immersion blender (works well) to mix all the ingredients except for the lemon juice and vinegar. Add the lemon juice and the vinegar slowly until the mixture thickens and looks like mayonnaise. You can also add more vinegar, mustard, salt, etc. to create your own flavor.

Web Highlight

Using toxic chemicals and animal manure on crops might not only taint the food we eat, but can pollute our water supply as well, which is why we suggest choosing organic foods whenever possible. What we hope may one day be an option for all is food grown by veganic farmers. The non-profit Veganic Agriculture Network is a new movement in North America, which promotes plant-based farming and gardening.

Veganic agriculture involves growing organic vegetables, fruits, nuts, legumes, and cereals without using any animal products or substances and avoids using synthetic nutrients, pesticides, herbicides and fungicides. Animal sourced fertilizers typically come from industrial animal factories and slaughterhouses, which is why veganic agriculture avoids using animal manures, blood, bones, feathers and fish.

The Veganic Agriculture Network was formed to expand awareness of plant-based agriculture, help farmers transition to veganic methods, and create a network that allows farmers and gardeners to share knowledge and publicize options for veganic certification in North America.

For more information on this revolutionary approach to agriculture, check out <http://www.goveganic.net/>

Although the Food Empowerment Project refers to the work of other organizations, we do not necessarily endorse the entire content of their websites or missions.



Food Empowerment Project
P.O. Box 7071
San José, CA 95150
530.848.4021
www.foodispower.org
www.veganmexicanfood.com

Food Suggestions

There are lots of yummy humane alternatives to chicken. Yes, you can still enjoy stir fry, salad, nuggets and patties while living your vegan lifestyle.

A number of pre-made products are available in grocery stores such as Whole Foods Market and are becoming more readily available in other food stores too. For instance, Gardein, typically found in the produce section or deli case, offers a number of chicken-free foods, from filets in a tomato and basil sauce, which are great over rice, to 'chick'n strips' perfect in a wrap, pasta or salad. And if you're craving something to dip in your BBQ sauce, check out the freezer section for animal-free nuggets, wings and strips by brands such as Boca, Morningstar and Health is Wealth (be sure to check the label as some brands make both vegan and non-vegan products). Both Health is Wealth's vegan breaded patties and Morningstar's Grillers Chik'n Veggie Patties are perfect for chicken-free burgers.

Remember, if your local market doesn't carry your favorite vegan products, be sure to request them.

