

Animal-rights activists attempt to get people to abandon meat with smaller steps and subtlety

The Vegan Crusade

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When it comes to weaning people off meat, animal-rights activists are finding that the soft touch yields better results than clubbing people upside the head like seals.

Activists' tactics have evolved during the past decade, as groups have broadened their focus from areas like fashionable furs and scientific vivisection to the food supply. At the same time, they've embraced incremental progress by working through the government at all levels, with fewer shocking stunts meant to spur immediate change à la PETA, aka People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

They've had successes here in Arizona, with last year's overwhelming approval of Proposition 204, or the Humane Treatment of Farm Animals Act. That initiative will amend the state criminal code in 2013 to prevent farmers from confining calves and pigs in pens that don't permit them to turn around or extend their legs.

"Working on Proposition 204, we saw people young and old, and from all sections of society who were active on this issue," said Kari Nienstedt, Yes on Prop 204 campaign manager and Arizona director for the Humane Society of the United States.

Opponents, such as farmers, had a hard time scoring points with the public, often sounding as mean as Cruella de Vil in their attacks against what they dubbed "out-of-state" animal-rights interests.

The Prop 204 success was an indicator of how important it is to be realistic when reducing animal suffering, said Matt Ball, executive director of Tucson-based Vegan Outreach—a tacit recognition that not everyone will swear off meat, at least in the near future.

"The main point is to try to have as much impact in the world as possible, instead of promoting one specific diet or one specific philosophy," Ball said. "So obviously, the same message isn't going to work with all the different crowds that advocates face every day. What might work well for a high school group ... might not work for leafleting at an adult event, like an Air Supply concert or a Barry Manilow concert."

Ball said that since the mid-'90s, animal-rights activists in the United States have come to realize that the overwhelming majority of animals being killed by humans are being killed for food.

"So more of our focus in the United States has turned toward farmed animals," he told the *Weekly*. "The broad spectrum of advocacy is necessary, given that animals are so widely abused for food in this country, and that we have so much work to do until we reach a time when animals are no longer used for food."

It's helped that the focus on the human food supply has coincided with numerous scares



Cha-ching: Business is booming for Peggy Raisglid, owner of Lovin' Spoonfuls Vegetarian Restaurant. "I had a number of people say there was no way that Tucson could support a vegan restaurant. It's just not going to happen, they told me. I did it despite their advice," she says.

over food safety, as well as studies showing that cattle-rearing produces more greenhouse gases than transportation.

"I think that more people are taking into consideration what happened to the animals before they ended up on their plates," Nienstedt said.

Meanwhile, young people have shown an increased interest in animal rights. Last year, PETA trumpeted the fact that they were voted the No. 1 nonprofit that teens and adults ages 13 to 24 would choose to volunteer for, beating out the Red Cross and Habitat for Humanity.

Ball said the young are often angry when they realize that modern agribusiness treats animals like commodities to be produced at the cheapest cost.

"The animal industry in this country—agribusiness in this country—is built on a lie," he said. "It's built on a lie that animals are treated well, and there isn't this overt cruelty."

But it's not just hip, young people sporting faux-hawks, tattoos and piercings who are interested in vegetarianism, according to Peggy Raisglid, owner of Lovin' Spoonfuls Vegetarian Restaurant, 2990 N. Campbell Ave.

"There's definitely a younger set that's interested, but it's not limited to the younger people," she said. "The thing I find most gratifying is the range of ages and backgrounds of people—from

yuppies to old ladies—who come into a vegan restaurant and also inquire about the literature that's there."

No meat has been good business for Raisglid, who gently educates customers about vegetarianism with pamphlets near the cash register. She estimates that as many as half of her customers eat meat.

"I had a number of people say there was no way that Tucson could support a vegan restaurant," Raisglid said, noting that her establishment has been open nearly two years now. "It's just not going to happen, they told me. I did it despite their advice."

Raisglid recently rolled out a vegetarian kielbasa cart doing business downtown, with discussions underway to bring kielbasa to the Wild Oats on Speedway Boulevard in the future. The cart operator warns potential customers that the kielbasa they're about to buy contains no meat.

"Most of them are still willing to try it, and most of them are coming back," she said.

Raisglid believes presenting people with information on vegetarianism—without appealing to their emotions—is a recipe for success in getting people to ditch meat.

"I've always thought that the soft sell—presenting people with the facts and letting them speak for themselves—was the way to go." **TW**