

Devang V Khakhar
Director, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay

8 February 2018

Dear Director Khakhar,

I am writing to you on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and our more than 1 million members and supporters. We read about IIT Bombay's seemingly apologetic clarification in the media that it has not banned non-vegetarian food. But we are writing to ask, why not? Everyone can eat vegan foods, and it doesn't hurt anyone to do so. By contrast, the production of meat, eggs, and dairy "products" causes the suffering of billions of animals each year, contributes to antibiotic resistance and world hunger, damages the environment, and compromises the health of those who consume animal-derived foods. Serving vegan-only meals would help students consider that their own health, the environment, non-human species, and looking out for others matter – all invaluable lessons.

Today, some 77 billion land animals are farmed a year – more than 10 times more than the number of humans on the planet, most of them in severely crowded, restricted systems which deny them normal movement. In addition, trillions of fish are killed. Meat addicts claim their habit – and really, it is nothing but a habit that can be broken with a little effort and good will – is a matter of "personal choice", but what choice does it give these animals, who are thinking, feeling beings?

Consider what chickens are currently made to endure. The beaks of female chicks to be used for eggs are painfully seared off with a hot blade while they're still just babies in order to prevent them from pecking each other in frustration when they're moved to cages so small that they can't even spread a wing before they're taken to slaughter. Male chicks – considered worthless by the egg industry – and other chicks who are weak or otherwise deemed "garbage" are typically killed shortly after birth in various horrific ways, such as being drowned, burned, suffocated, or ground up alive. Chickens deliberately bred to be unnaturally top-heavy for extra breast meat are typically crowded by the hundreds or thousands into sheds that reek of ammonia from the accumulated waste in which the animals are forced to stand. These birds often never see the light of day and are denied everything that is natural and important to them. They are then thrown into vehicles for slaughter in ways that often break their bones and cause many to die en route. At slaughterhouses across India, workers typically hack at the birds' throats with dull blades while they're still conscious.

Other animals do not fare better – for instance, fish suffocate or are cut open while they're still alive, pigs are often stabbed in the heart as they scream in pain, and calves are commonly torn away from their mothers within hours of birth so that humans can steal the milk that was meant for them. At slaughterhouses across the country, animals are often killed in full view of one another and dismembered while they're still conscious.

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If this were being done to dogs and cats who are chopped up and sold in your canteen, there would be an uproar. But cows, buffaloes, pigs, chickens, sheep, goats, and fish have the capacity to feel pain and to suffer, too, and do not want to die any more than you or I do.

Because two out of every three animals these days are kept in severely crowded, filthy conditions to meet the demand for animal-derived foods, they are susceptible to illnesses. The meat, egg, and dairy industries therefore commonly pump animals full of antibiotics, which are also used to promote unnatural growth in animals.

Poultry farms in India have been found indiscriminately feeding animals antibiotics critical for treating everything from pneumonia to lethal bloodstream infections in humans, including those which are prohibited for use in poultry abroad. Recently, *The Hindu* reported that colistin is also regularly given to chickens in India. As that paper described, "Doctors call it the 'last hope' antibiotic because it is used to treat [human] patients critically ill with infections that have become resistant to nearly all other drugs." The article also says, "The World Health Organisation (WHO) has called for the use of such antibiotics, which it calls 'critically important to human medicines', to be restricted in animals and banned as growth promoters. Their continued use in farming increases the chance of bacteria developing resistance to them, leaving them useless when treating patients." Yet reckless antibiotic use remains common in India.

It's no surprise then that India has one of the highest rates of antibiotic resistance in the world. A study found that more than 58,000 infants died in just one year in India because they were born with bacterial infections that are resistant to most antibiotics.

India is home to hundreds of millions of ruminant animals such as cows, buffaloes, and goats bred predominantly to be used for meat or dairy production. According to satellite data from our space programme, these animals transfer almost 12 million tonnes of methane – which traps 25 times as much heat as carbon dioxide does – into the atmosphere via flatulence every year. In fact, a widely publicised report published by the *Worldwatch*

Institute in 2009 estimated that 51 per cent of worldwide greenhouse-gas emissions that contribute to climate change may be attributable to agriculture, specifically to businesses that raise cattle, buffaloes, sheep, goats, camels, and pigs for food.

This is occurring while India is already suffering from some serious effects of climate change, including a warming climate, changing rainfall patterns, droughts, melting glaciers, and rising sea levels. What this means in real terms for people in India is that they have to cope with problems such as extreme weather (including heatwaves, cyclones, and floods), a drop in crop production, a resurgence of several vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever (caused by temperature fluctuations), and an increased risk to food, energy, and water security. Meat production is also the world's leading consumer of freshwater: according to a 2015 report in the *Stanford Environmental Law Journal*, it uses an average of 55 trillion gallons per year. What's more, it's responsible for more water pollution than all other industrial sources *combined*.

Raising animals for food also gobbles up land and food resources. According to Global Footprint Network, it takes 14 times as much biologically productive land to produce 1 tonne of beef as it does to produce 1 tonne of grain. And while India has the world's

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largest population of undernourished people – more than 194 million – a staggering 60 per cent of the world's grain supply is used to feed farmed animals. It takes up to 10 kilograms of grain to produce just 1 kilogram of meat, but 925 million people around the world don't have enough to eat.

A 2010 report by the United Nations Environment Programme's international panel of sustainable resource management points out that as the global population surges towards a predicted 9.1 billion people by 2050, the current rate of consumption of meat and dairy foods is unsustainable. The report further claims that a global shift towards a vegan lifestyle is vital in order to save the world from hunger, fuel poverty, and the worst effects of climate change.

Eating animals also wreaks havoc on human health. India now tops the list for many serious health ailments. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in India while strokes are also a main cause of death and disability in the country. India is also the world leader in diabetes, its cancer rate is out of control, and childhood obesity has reached the crisis point. The consumption of meat, eggs, and dairy foods has been conclusively linked to an increased risk of suffering from heart disease, strokes, diabetes, obesity, and cancer. Studies have shown that compared to meat-eaters, vegans are 50 per cent less likely to develop heart disease, are up to 50 per cent less prone to suffering from cancer, and live an average of six to 10 years longer.

The nation needs esteemed institutions like yours to make decisions beneficial to society based on science, even if it generates debates and discussion and even if it would temporarily "offend" meat addicts. Of course, there has never been positive social change without causing at least some offense to vested interests, but the damage caused by meat, egg, and dairy production and consumption should matter far more. Protecting the health of the public, animals, and the environment is absolutely the right thing to do.

That's why schools and colleges across the globe are putting vegan foods on their menus, and some have gone completely vegan. For example, the German International School in Chennai is the first 100 per cent vegan school in India.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We at PETA India stand ready to help IIT Bombay should it consider transitioning to all-vegan menus. Please feel free to contact me anytime.

Sincerely,



Nikunj Sharma
Lead, Public Policy

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