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The Ethics Of What We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter



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Why Our Food Choices Matter

PETER SINGER
AUTHOR OF *ANIMAL LIBERATION*
and JIM MASON

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Synopsis

Peter Singer, the groundbreaking ethicist whom *The New Yorker* calls the most influential philosopher alive teams up again with Jim Mason, his coauthor on the acclaimed *Animal Factories*, to set their critical sights on the food we buy and eat: where it comes from, how it is produced, and whether it was raised humanely. *The Ethics of What We Eat* explores the impact our food choices have on humans, animals, and the environment. Recognizing that not all of us will become vegetarians, Singer and Mason offer ways to make healthful, humane food choices. As they point out: You can be ethical without being fanatical.

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Customer Reviews

There are several books lining the shelves that contain information on animal rights, vegetarianism, and organic and fair trade food items. However, none seem quite as well-rounded, or nearly as objective and succinct as Peter Singer and Jim Mason's *The Ethics of What We Eat*. These two authors have put together an incredibly well-crafted and unbiased argument regarding making ethical choices at the grocery store, and "voting" with one's diet and wallet. The book begins by taking the reader to the grocery store on a routine shopping trip with a few different families. The first family is what one might consider your stereotypical "meat and potatoes" American consumers. The second family, in contrast, are "conscientious omnivores" who pay fairly close attention to their purchases, buying certified organic and fair trade items, and eat little meat. The third family is vegan. The authors even foray into "dumpster diving" with a few people who contend that ethical eating involves not letting disposed of edibles go to waste. The day-to-day purchases (or

scavenges) of each of these families are dissected and analyzed. Which one of these families is truly making the most ethically sound decisions when it comes to their daily food choices? What lies behind that "Certified Organic" label? What does it mean when something is labeled "free range" or "fair trade?" Is it worth paying extra money for something with the aforementioned labels? While focusing quite a bit on factory farming, this book also discusses the ethics of buying locally grown food, sustainability of marine ecosystems, environmental impacts of food production (including water and gas use), and the global economy.

Like the school bully who gets in his hardest kicks once you're down on the ground and have essentially given up, this book drives home a message in powerful, painful punches. "For modern animal agriculture, the less the consumer knows about what's happening before the meat hits the plate, the better... one of the best things modern animal agriculture has going for it is that most people in the developed countries are several generations removed from the farm and haven't a clue how animals are raised and processed." (p.11) With this, Peter Singer lobs the ball in the air and then proceeds to light the court on fire. Some of it is hard to read. "For ten hours we grabbed and wrestled birds, jerking them upside down, facing their pushed-open [%&@], dodging their spurting [%&@], while breathing air filled with dust and feathers stirred up by panicked birds." (p.29) I think I threw up in my mouth a little bit. The dairy cow section was hard to read too, and I admit to my ignorance here. I suppose I thought dairy cows just made milk. I've thought that to be a humane way to farm with cows, and you can imagine a gawky 8-year-old boy straddling a three-legged stool in some ancient barn as the sun rises over the meadow, milking the lone family dairy cow before heading out to school. My quaint image was shattered when Mason informed me otherwise, painting a picture of a cow bellowing for the calf taken from her, and then we're told the calf is dead within a few days, "his body was lying on the farm's compost pile." (p.58) Oh, do I HAVE to keep reading?! I didn't believe the part about the "drop kicking" of chickens (p.27) so I looked it up on the Internet. Not too hard to find the Pilgrim's Pride video...

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