A Dozen Rules for Eating Ethically

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Rules about what to eat

RULE #1. **Avoid animal products**. "Vegans are living demonstrations of the fact that we do not need to exploit animals for food" (Singer, 279). Consumption of animal products (edible and non-edible) is unethical because it is unnecessary and it causes harm to others. In fact, it has even been considered "a driving force behind virtually every major category of environmental damage" (Singer, 240). The current states of the environment and the global food situation are appalling and immediate action must be taken to resolve these problems. Therefore, we should not only avoid consuming animal food but also non-food items that depend on the rearing of animals. By boycotting these products, there will be less demand to grow animals so producers will grow less of them, thus saving resources which can be reallocated to alleviate important world problems.

RULE #2. **Avoid industrial food.** Industrial food production, especially of sugar, corn, and soy, is based on a capitalist ethic of profit. It encourages personal benefit at the expense of others. Robert Albritton agrees: "Because of its short-term profit orientation, I believe that capitalism is not consistent with a human right to food or with sustainable agriculture" (122). Industrial food production has led to unfair and unsafe working conditions, unsustainable farming practices, and unhealthy eating habits. It also encourages deceptive marketing and exploits human physiology and nature by encouraging physical and emotional addictions. Avoiding industrial food is a way to say "no" to these unethical practices.

RULE #3. **Avoid tobacco.** Though not a food, similar to animal products, tobacco is an unnecessary agricultural product and its production wastes scarce resources. "Land that is utilized to grow tobacco is land taken away from growing food" (Albritton, 86). Worse, however, is the fact that there are absolutely no positive effects of tobacco. It's not even food! Rather than giving us energy and nutrients, tobacco gives us emphysema and cancer. It epitomizes unethical agriculture.

RULE #4. **Avoid low cost food.** "The deepest problem that local-food efforts face… is that we've gotten used to paying so little for food" (McKibben, 89). This is a problem because more often than not cheap food comes at a high cost to those involved in its production. Buying it is a way of saying we don't think their work is worth our dollar. Furthermore, cheap food exploits our ingrained capitalistic desire to save money in the short term at the cost of our long-term goals like health and environmental sustainability. Don't believe the lie that a 12-pack of Trix yogurt for $2 is a good deal. Those products rely on the unsustainable subsidies of corn and soy, which

are processed into "food" that do little if anything to benefit human health. Finally, investing financially in our food makes us more aware of our purchases.

Rules about how to make food choices

RULE #5. **Plan your food consumption.** Do your best not to waste food. Already, "more than 40% of the food grown in the United States is lost or thrown away" (Singer, 268). Food is a precious resource, and by wasting it we are denying its importance. Buy only as much fresh food as you can consume before it goes bad. Always refrigerate or freeze leftovers, and take home extra food from restaurants. This will also save money that would otherwise be spent buying new food.

RULE #6. **Avoid traditional act analysis**. Traditional act analysis judges morality based on intentions and ignores unintended consequences. "Moral responsibility in these cases is simply a phantom: none of the individual moral agent's actions causing these problems is wrong, so there is no negative moral responsibility to assign" (Graham, 45). Instead, we should be far-sighted and think of all the consequences of our actions, including social implications. When we begin to constantly reflect on our food choices, we will be able to make decisions that rightly express our morals.

Rules about how to think about and treat food

RULE #7. **Be grateful for food.** "Many Christian ethicists regard gratitude as one of the basic, enduring sensibilities that should characterize Christian existence and our lifelong response to God" (Graham, 9). Food allows you to live, so appreciate it! This will humble us and keep our focus away from personal gain. Say thanks to local farmers, say grace, and use food for what it is for—good health. Graham notes that part of gratitude is proper use of a gift, which in this case means keeping our bodies healthy. Plus, we will respect food more when we are using it as a tool for good health.

RULE #8. **Grow your own food.** "Smaller farms produce far more food per acre" (McKibben, 67). You save a lot of time and resources by getting to know a spot of land and growing a small garden of your own. Gardening is the most efficient form of agriculture and, when you grow local plants in season, has the lowest environmental footprint. Growing your own food—even just a basil plant in your kitchen—will also help you appreciate and think about what food really is.

RULE #9. **Take part in food production.** "Most of us, including most of the farmers who raise food animals, do our very best to avoid thinking about, let alone having anything directly to do with, their slaughter" (Pollan, 226). Instead, visit farms and form relationships with the people who provide you the stuff of life. This will foster a great love and appreciation for the food you eat and the people who grow it. It will also encourage transparency and honesty about how food

is grown. Plus, it will be much easier to choose local ethical food when you've put a face to it. Also, take some initiative and learn about farmers' practices. This will help you determine if they are supporting ethical food production practices.

RULE #10. **Eat in community.** Food is important for physical and emotional health, and eating in community benefits both of these. "We want our food not just to replenish our muscle tissues and blood cells but to lift our spirits and gladden our hearts" (McCormick, 10). Sharing food with others keeps food a major part of our lives, which it should be, since without it, we would die! Eating in community is a great way to get people together in a relaxed, enjoyable atmosphere. Plus, if you share your thoughts on food while you are eating together, you can promote a positive food ethic that will be easy to maintain when others may hold you accountable.

RULE #11 **Learn to cook.** Investing time in your food is an excellent way to appreciate it more. Pollan notes this when he makes his "perfect" meal: "…no meal I've ever prepared or eaten has been more real" (392). Even if you just learn to cook one or two meals, cooking will help you remember the importance of food in your life. It will also help keep you away from unethical processed food, and encourage community eating since cooking is very visible and often pungent.

RULE #12. **Vary your diet.** "Many of us have forgotten our hunger, and go long stretches without remembering the hunger pangs of neighbors who struggle for scraps to supply their daily bread" (McCormick, 26). While fasting can be a useful mental and spiritual exercise, simply restricting certain foods or making an effort to eat differently can have a positive effect on our concept of food. By feeling hunger, we won't forget the importance of our food and that we are blessed to have it. Set a date when to lift the restriction and when you reach it, that food item will seem so much more glorious!