

# #1536 Your Food Choices Are Not Your Food Choices

[00:00:00]

## Intro 1-10-22

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** Welcome to this episode of the award-winning Best of the Left podcast, in which we shall take a look at the way unscientific guidelines, government subsidies, corporate propaganda, cultural context, capitalism, community stigma, and a bunch of juvenile fools actively and loudly wallowing in their ignorance, has shaped your personal food choices.

Clips today are from *The Brian Lehrer Show*, *This is Hell*, *Our Hen House*, *Jim Hightower's Radio Lowdown*, *Past Present*, *Downstream*, and *Unf\*cking the Republic*, with additional members-only clips from *Our Hen House* and *This is Hell*.

## 'Healthy' Food, Nutrition and Access - The Brian Lehrer Show - Air Date 10-12-22

**BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW:** I want to stay on the history, 'cause what's in your book in this regard is so fascinating. So you write in your new book, *Slow Cooked*, that at one point you worked for the federal government and you were the project officer in charge of completing the first-ever Surgeon General's report on nutrition and health, and to write the [00:01:00] policy recommendations and oversee the report's release. You write, "I greatly underestimated what a hard time I would have in that office. Looking back on that period, I think of it as my two years in federal prison." Yikes. Yikes. "Because no matter what the research indicated, the Surgeon General's report would not recommend eating less meat as a way to reduce saturated fat, nor would it recommend eating less of specific foods that were sources of sugar or salt. We were part of the industry-friendly Reagan administration. Agencies dealing with food issues had learned to avoid congressional interference by resorting to euphemisms." Huh.

So can you give us an example or two of how you had to resort to euphemisms in the nutritional advice Americans were getting from their government, and if those euphemisms showed up on food labels?

**MARION NESTLE:** Sure. We're still using euphemisms. The Dietary Guidelines for [00:02:00] Americans say eat more fruits and vegetables. So anytime you talk about eating more, you talk about real foods. And then they resort to nutrients when they talk about what you need to eat less of.

So it's eat less saturated fat, sugar, and salt. It's not eating less of the packaged ultra-processed foods that contain saturated fat, sugar, and salt, or the meat that's high in saturated fat. They use nutrients instead of the foods as euphemisms, or as it's sometimes called, it's nutritionism. You use nutrients to stand for the entire food. And we're still doing that. That's what the dietary guidelines say. And the dietary guidelines are the basis of the FDA's new "healthy" claim proposal. If a food is high in saturated fat, salt, or sugar, it doesn't qualify for healthy, but at least they're [00:03:00] requiring that the product have some food in it. Which I thought was a great step forward.

**BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW:** Another example from the eighties that you give in the book, whereas "eat less beef" called the industry to arms -- in other words, they would bark and they wouldn't get away in the government with labeling, "eat less beef," "eat less saturated fat" did not raise that alarm.

You also write, "Sugar producers could live with 'choose a diet moderate in sugar.' Eventually the Surgeon General's report would recommend the uncontroversial 'choose lean meats' and they would suggest limiting sugars, but only for people vulnerable to dental cavities." So Marion, which Americans are those who are vulnerable to dental cavities?

**MARION NESTLE:** How about everyone? Every single one of them. Yeah. I mean, it was an amazing experience to work with that and to try to get the message out. I mean, it was ancient history, it was the late [00:04:00] 1980s. And another federally sponsored report came out a year later, even longer, saying exactly the same things.

This was a moment in time when there was said to be consensus about dietary recommendations. But they did not say, "eat less meat," even though we now know that eating less meat is probably a good idea for most Americans. It would be good for their health and good for planetary health. But planetary health didn't enter into it in the late 1980s.

**BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW:** What is the FDA trying to address by proposing revised food labels right now?

**MARION NESTLE:** Well, this is going to seem like such a stretch, I can hardly say it in a straight face or straight voice. But the big problem -- there are two big food problems in American society right now: not having enough food or not having a regular supply of food, what we're now calling food insecurity; and then [00:05:00] diet influence chronic diseases, like type two diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and COVID-19 for that matter. Diseases that are related to over consumption of food, to obesity, and to diseases for which obesity is a risk factor.

So this is a big problem in our society. Three-quarters of American adults are overweight or obese by CDC standards. It's become normal. And that means that three-quarters of the American population is at either small to increasing risk of all of these chronic diseases. They cost a lot. They're terrible to have for individuals then and they're not very good for society either. And we're seeing it in younger and younger children.

So the FDA wants to make it easier for individuals to make healthier food choices. I think there are two approaches to doing this. They have picked the approach, the personal responsibility approach. [00:06:00] The assumption is that if you knew what a healthy food product was, you would choose it. If you didn't know, if you're ignorant of it, then you can't be blamed. This way you can be blamed. So the idea is to label food products, and to indicate which ones are good for you, taking a positive approach. Not which ones you should avoid, because that will get the food industry upset. But which ones you can choose because they're healthy. So that's what it's trying to do.

Will it work? I have no idea. I don't think it'll work. I'm dubious about the whole thing. I don't think that having individual food choices is the way to achieve public health objectives. We need policies. How about regulating the food industry so it can't market junk food, especially to children? Or how about setting up some restrictions on food companies getting involved in public policy and influencing the dietary guidelines and doing [00:07:00] all the other things that food companies are doing? It seems to me that would be a much better approach.

What I always like to explain is that food companies are not social service agencies. They're not public health agencies. They're businesses, with stockholders to please. Their first and only priority is to make money for their stockholders. That's what they're in business to do.

**BRIAN LEHRER - HOST, THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW:** Right, but the government is in business to regulate them. And you did write that the new proposed labels would be a lot better than the labeling anarchy that currently exists. So how would the new proposed labels be an improvement?

**MARION NESTLE:** Well, they're an improvement because they will only allow food products to put a healthy claim on the package label if they contain real food. What a concept! And if they are below certain upper limits of saturated fat, salt, and sugar.

So the improvement is [00:08:00] that they will, they have exceptions made for -- I can't even say this with a straight face -- they have exceptions made for real foods. So foods like avocados or nuts that are high in fat that used to be forbidden to claim themselves as healthy, can now have healthy labels on them. And maybe we're going to start seeing these healthy stickers on real fruits and vegetables in the supermarket.

But the whole issue is to discuss what the deal is on packaged foods. These are the foods that are most profitable for food companies. They're the ones that are considered to be ultra-processed, which is a relatively new term that describes foods that are industrially produced, don't look anything like the foods they came from, can't be made in home kitchens and are clearly shown to encourage people to eat and eat and eat. [00:09:00] You can't eat just one. They're the ones that you just can't stop eating. And so they induce people to take in more calories. The food industry loves them because they're enormously profitable. And that's what we're up against from a public health standpoint. So it's public health against food industry profits.

## **The Meat Merchants Feeding Climate Catastrophe: Spencer Roberts and Jan Dutkiewicz Part 1 - This is Hell! - Air Date 11-29-22**

**CHUCK MERTZ - HOST, THIS IS HELL!:** The article starts just by saying this simple sentence: "For years meat producers have worked furiously behind the scenes to keep meat reduction out of discussions on climate policy."

So, Jan, how much does the public recognize meat producer's role in fomenting opposition to anti-climate change reforms? I mean, I can understand that they would recognize their impact on deforestation and how deforestation can have

an impact on climate change, but how much do you think people recognize that meat producers are actively furiously working behind the scenes to have an impact on climate policy?

**JAN DUTKIEWICZ:** Well, I don't think people actually know this. In fact, I think that, in part because of what Spencer and [00:10:00] I wrote about in the article, I don't think that many people actually connect food production in general and meat production specifically, to anthropogenic climate change. In a sense, this is the political story we're trying to tell in the article, which is that since, for decades, but especially since the release of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization's *Livestock's Long Shadow* report, it's been clear that there's a direct link between emissions from animal agriculture and global warming.

So, the statistics of course differ a little bit based on the calculations. The sort of standard number that's used is that livestock contribute about 14.5% of total anthropogenic gases. And so you've got an industry that is, well, whose product is consumed by the vast majority of people on the planet, that's consumed in massive quantities, especially in the global north, places like the United States, where the average consumer eats about 220 pounds of meat every single year.[00:11:00]

And you've got most people being complicit in some degree of anthropogenic climate change because they buy the products that's produced by this industry that all of a sudden now there's emerging scientific proof -- and I would say that now we're pretty much at a scientific consensus -- that this industry is a contributor to anthropogenic climate change.

And so I'm sure you have questions about this coming up. And so this is the question: Why don't people know this? Why isn't this top of mind? And I think part of the reason, and part of the reason that Spencer and I try to explain in the article and that both Spencer and I explain in our separate bodies of work, is that the meat industry has looked at "best practice," if you will, from the past -- which is primarily looking to the tobacco industry and the fossil fuel industry -- to see how they can try to mitigate both public knowledge about their links to climate change as well as all kinds of other environmental harms, but also mitigate people [00:12:00] changing their habits or becoming involved politically to constrain or regulate the industry in the name of mitigating climate change. Right? And so that's the story we're trying to tell.

But to answer your initial question, I think for most people, this isn't a top of mind issue, and it's absolutely in the industry's interest to ensure that it stays not a top of mind issue.

**CHUCK MERTZ - HOST, THIS IS HELL!:** Well, before we get to Spencer, Jan, let me just follow up on that.

You said that this has to do with meat production. But in general, this has to do with the way that we produce all of our food stuffs throughout all of agriculture. Is this not just limited to meat production? Can this actually, can there be contributions to climate change that's done by agriculture that is focused on non-meat production, that can focus on vegetable production, for instance?

**JAN DUTKIEWICZ:** Yeah, absolutely. So there was a paper recently that came out in *Nature Food* that estimates that if you look at full life cycle, so behind the farm gate through consumption, through transportation, through consumption, through waste, and so on and so forth, [00:13:00] that the agricultural sector makes up about a third of total global GHG emissions.

But the meat industry just happens to be the largest contributor to that, and this is for two primary reasons. The first reason is that ruminants raised for meat -- so, cows, sheep and so on and so forth -- due to the nature of their digestion, they emit methane in their burps. So they emit a very potent, very rapid, very rapidly warming gas when they burp. So those creatures, the animals themselves, are contributors to climate change.

Moreover, you have to feed animals, especially animals who are grazing animals, but in order to feed them, you have to have land available to feed them, which often involves land clearing, which is to say potentially doing things like getting rid of wetlands or deforesting, thereby both emitting carbon and killing potential sites of carbon [00:14:00] storage, in order to allow grazing animals to graze, or in the case of animals raised in concentrated animal feeding operations, so CAFOs, or what we call factory farms. So this would be 97, 98% of all the chicken eaten in the US for instance, well over 90% of the pigs. You have to grow crops and feed crops to those animals, which has its own set of emissions. Then those animals, of course, have to digest those crops as they're digesting them while they're still alive. Those animals, of course, create feces, right? Those feces are kept in what are known as manure lagoons, which are exactly what they sound like: giant lagoons full of animal manure. And then when that manure decomposes, it also emits methane. And then those animals are slaughtered and fed and so on and so forth.

So just due to the nature of animal production and due to the relative inefficiency of having to keep animals alive for a certain amount of weeks when it comes to chickens, months when it comes to hogs, a year [00:15:00] and a bit when it comes to cattle, you've got these cumulative emissions that don't exist in other forms of producing protein calories.

## The Politics of Meat ft. Jan Dutkiewicz Part 1 - Our Hen House - Air Date 8-28-21

**MARIANN SULLIVAN - CO-HOST, OUR HEN HOUSE:** We all know that there are gazillion reasons to reduce, they're actually a gazillion reasons to eliminate consumption of meat, and we're gonna get into all of those and your views on them, but it still seems to be a political no-go zone. And, of course, that is because people are just still horrified by the idea. Just nevermind why people don't go vegan, why is this such a difficult issue that it's even hard for politicians to broach it?

**JAN DUTKIEWICZ:** Well, I think that the question of meat reduction, as you said, there are a number of cases. There are ethical cases. There's a very strong environmental case. Now, in the wake of COVID, there's a very strong case that has to do with preventing the risk of future zoonotic pandemics. But basically the question of meat reduction, despite having such a strong case for it, runs into two problems.

The first is the sort of cultural and political role of meat in our [00:16:00] society and as that relates to politicians. And second is the question of individual choice, and the fact that individual choice, individual consumer choice is viewed as so important by so many people. And so when you talk about meat reduction, even though the rational case for it, if you will, seems so obvious. You run into this dual problem that a lot of people, and of course if any vegan has tried to convince a meat-eater to go vegan, they run into all these justifications for why people can't go vegan or don't want go vegan and so on and so forth, but you also run into this political problem where there are very few politicians who are willing to stick their neck out for something they perceive as so politically unpopular.

So it's very easy for politicians to score points saying, " how dare anyone suggests that you reduce your meat consumption. You have a right to make whatever choices you want in the market. How dare anyone tell you what to eat? This is government overreach and they're literally taking the meat outta your mouth." And, [00:17:00] given that for a lot of politicians—and this is not

just conservative politicians, but it seems to be becoming a conservative political talking point, both in the United States and in other countries—it's very easy for conservative politicians to rile people up with this sort of culture war idea of combining meat reduction with political correctness, with eco consciousness gone too far, and so therefore, to say that there's absolutely no way they're supporting meat reduction because it's everything that's wrong with the "woke environmental left" or however you wanna phrase that.

And I think a really good example of this is what just happened in Spain. So, the Spanish Minister of Consumer Affairs, Garzón, he basically put up this video on Twitter that I really urge people to watch, which is it's really a masterclass in political communication. He walks people through all the peer reviewed science of why meat should be reduced. He talks about meat reduction and not elimination. He says, you can still have your barbecue with your family, just have less of them. [00:18:00] He talks about the fact that a lot of people can't access meat cause of income and access issues. He talks through all the policies that the government can implement. It's really a masterclass. This is how we should be talking politically about meat reduction.

And his other politicians and policymakers, the very people who should be implementing these policies rather than supporting him or rather than even engaging with any of his empirical claims, all of which are based in peer reviewed science, they just started doing this really juvenile trolling. So the prime Minister of Spain comes out and he says his favorite food is a Steak you have opposition politicians literally tweeting pictures of grills stacked with steaks saying things like to your health or long live steaks, but this is scoring them political points. This is making them culture warriors fighting for individual choice and for traditional culture and so on and so forth. So I think this is a microcosm of what happens in these cases and why it's so hard at the policy level and for politicians to engage with it because it's really dangerous [00:19:00] politically. It's dangerous to their political reputation, their political future.

**MARIANN SULLIVAN - CO-HOST, OUR HEN HOUSE:** I have so much sympathy with them and I'm sure everybody listening to us too. Even when your job doesn't depend on getting a lesson by people just talking to people about why they shouldn't be eating meat, is you just run into exactly that kind of juvenile obstinate behavior, unreasoning behavior. I wish it was just in Spain, but it definitely is not.

The main reason politicians are trying to focus on meat reduction, at least they are in some places, it is because of climate. When we talk about it, we're usually

talking about animals or about the whole gamut of issues, but climate really has... it seems like it's actually rising to be a point of attention now that the world is falling apart, and that attitudes are shifting as the weather disasters mount.

I read a statistic recently that it was rated second among all concerns for American voters, which just like, that's unbelievable. So do you see any promise that the arguments about the connections between animal agriculture and climate are shifting, or is [00:20:00] that still just the one source of greenhouse gases that we just don't talk about?

**JAN DUTKIEWICZ:** That's a very good question, and I think it really depends on what day you ask me, because on the one hand I'm very heartened that in public opinion, environmental issues and especially climate change, have finally started to be recognized as as important as they actually are. And so that really heartens me.

And I think that if you look at the way that plant-based diets or veganism are increasingly discussed, just anecdotally or online or in the press, you're increasingly starting to see the link between food production and especially livestock production and climate. So I think that's a really positive development.

What I see as less positive is the fact that because agriculture, and especially livestock agriculture, contributes relatively less emissions than fossil fuels. So if you look at the conservative FAO figure, it's the 14.5% emissions figure, of which 6% [00:21:00] globally is beef. That's a relatively small part of the climate puzzle, and I've written about this, there's been a sort of reticence among climate scientists and climate scholars and climate activists to really talk about food and especially to talk about meat. And I think it's for the same reason a lot of politicians are scared to talk about it. Because if you want your message to be broadly appealing and to get people on board with fighting climate change, you might not wanna alienate people by saying, "well, this is gonna require you to go vegan or reduce your meat consumption."

And so, A lot of prominent climate scholars and activists have really either shied away from it, or in the case of people like Michael Mann, who otherwise is an extremely important and smart climate communicator, they've even critiqued meat reduction and veganism. Michael Mann has called veganism empty virtue signaling. And I think that these narratives have done quite a bit of harm, because if people already care about climate, then people should be able to make the link between climate and food [00:22:00] production and with meat specifically.

And I think this is a broader point, be it in these conversations, in these political conversations. If meat is gonna be a fight in the culture war, it's gonna have to be had eventually. Eventually you have to deal with the elephant in the room. So I see no point in not having those conversations and not having those fights now, because they have to happen eventually. And why not do it now in the middle of very visible climate change, in the middle of a zoonotic pandemic? This seems like the ideal time to really make those links and really bring those links to the forefront of the climate and environmental and public health conversations.

## **Which food future will you choose? - Jim Hightower's Radio Lowdown - Air Date 11-25-22**

**JIM HIGHTOWER - JIM HIGHTOWERS RADIO LOWDOWN:** America certainly has an abundance of food—even though many Americans do not—yet, we face a momentous choice of whether to pursue a food future rooted in the ethic of sustainable agriculture, or one based on the exploitative ethic of agri-industry. What better symbol of agri-industry's vision of food than that ubiquitous Thanksgiving bird, the Butterball turkey? The Butterball has been [00:23:00] hoisted onto our tables by huge advertising budgets and regular promotion payments to supermarkets. The birds themselves have been grotesquely deformed by industrial geneticists, who created breasts so ponders that the turkeys can't walk, stand up or even reproduce on their own, thus earning the nickname "dead end birds".

Adding torture to this intentional deformity, the industry sentences these once majestic fowl to dismal lives in tiny confinement cages inside the sprawling steel and concrete animal factories that scar America's rural landscape, monuments to greed based corporate husbandry. As the eminent farmer poet activist Wendell Berry tells us, eating is a profound political act. It lets you and me vote for the Butterball industrial model or choose to go back to the future of agriculture, which is the art and science of cooperating with, rather than trying to overwhelm, nature. That cooperative ethic is the choice of a remarkable good food [00:24:00] uprising that has spread across the country in the past 30 years. Now the fastest growing segment of the food economy, it is creating the alternative model of a local, sustainable, small scale, community-based, organic, humane, healthy, democratic, and tasty food system for all.

# The Meat Merchants Feeding Climate Catastrophe: Spencer Roberts and Jan Dutkiewicz Part 2 - This is Hell! - Air Date 11-29-22

**CHUCK MERTZ - HOST, THIS IS HELL!:** Is the answer artificial plant-based meat? Does artificial meat production take any less climate change contributing, any energy consumption than non-artificial meat production? 'Cause that seems to be the way that the industry at least is trying to sell it to us right now, that artificial meat is what's probably -- or what is the way that we can address the problems of meat consumption. And now we just see these reports in the last week that these Impossible burgers and artificial meat that is in the market, those sales are dropping drastically. People were interested when it was first introduced to the public, but it seems like those sales have been dropping.

So aside from the fact that people don't seem to be all that crazy about these products, is just artificial meat [00:25:00] the answer, Spencer?

**SPENCER ROBERTS:** Yeah, so the first thing I'll say is in terms of those drops, so it's the stocks that are really dropping and that's the thing that we're looking at. And whether that's a reflection of people's attitudes is sort of up in the air. I mean there's definitely a backlash. But, even though we have some meat corporations investing in -- whether it's veggie burgers or cultivated meat - - the vast majority of the industry is lobbying against these products. That's something that we should make clear. So, when we look at producing a veggie burger, like a Beyond Burger or cultivating a burger in a lab, we're talking about 90% or more of a reduction in land use, water use, greenhouse gas emissions, and something like half the energy.

So if we can produce meat or meat alternatives in this way, that is [00:26:00] certainly something that a lot of climate scientists and ecologists are promoting, and that's part of the discussion that's going on at the IPCC, and that's being buried in these policy reports.

It's a little bit different when we talk about the consumer factor and how they're adopted. But the big thing to realize, and I think to keep at top of mind, is that we are subsidizing the animal industries to an insane degree. Many of them are not profitable in their own right. And so they're essentially propped up by state planning. So when we look at the dairy industry, for instance, these new

methane renewable energy credits, some of the dairy factories have been running these calculations saying, wow, we're actually making more money off the cow manure now than the milk. And so they're considering milk the byproduct of generating this manure for these renewable energy [00:27:00] credits. And those credits don't really take into account the emissions from the cows in the first place, from the land use, the water pollution from the leaking of these facilities. So scientists are very clear that we need to rapidly and dramatically scale down the meat industry. And whether veggie burgers or cultivated meat are tools to achieve that, or just promoting more whole foods and things like that, which are also a great option and probably more healthy, I think both of those strategies are important and should be pursued.

**CHUCK MERTZ - HOST, THIS IS HELL!:** We are speaking with politically economist Jan Dutkiewicz, and science writer Spencer Roberts, who co-wrote *The New Republic* article, "How the Meat Industry Undermines Effective Climate Policy."

I want to follow up on what Spencer was just saying with you, Jan. You were saying, and Spencer was as well, it's a political non-starter when the government comes in and steps in and says, this is what you can and can't eat. [00:28:00] This is what you can and can't drive. Those are political non-starters. Why do we not recognize that those subsidies are the government telling us what we can and can't eat, what we can and can't drive? Why don't we recognize subsidies as a way in which the government interferes with our personal consumer choices?

**JAN DUTKIEWICZ:** The short answer is that a lot of people don't quite know exactly where most of the commodities -- I mean, this goes for everyone -- it's very difficult to pin down exactly where the commodities that you consume come from or where exactly their price comes from, how their price is determined. And with things like subsidy -- so Spencer mentioned subsidies, and people say this a lot and it's not wrong, but it's also very difficult to identify specific subsidies that achieve specific ends. So it's very difficult to, for instance, say, alright, like pork costs X because of X amount of subsidies, because there are different forms of interventions and subsidies throughout the entire agricultural value [00:29:00] chain, right? So for instance, a lot of government, quote unquote, "subsidies" come in the form of crop insurance for crop producers, which ends up being, if those crop producers sell to meat producers, a sort of indirect subsidy for meat. But you can't get rid of that crop insurance without doing considerable harm to the nature of American crop production. Or for instance, counties or municipalities where concentrated animal feeding operations or industrialized slaughterhouses are cited, might give tax breaks or environmental enforcement breaks, be it explicit or tacit ones,

to those companies. Again, how do you monetize that? And then how do you, downstream, figure out exactly to what extent that affects pricing? Or how do you price in decades of publicly-funded research at land grant institutions designed to create more efficient or higher yield animals for meat or crops.

And so I could keep talking about this and give you [00:30:00] examples. What I'm trying to get at is that there is a very complex assemblage, if you will, of factors going into this. So it's very difficult to then, for the average consumer, to say, oh the government is *de facto* making this chicken I'm eating extremely cheap because of 70 years of very diffuse and diverse and complex subsidies and support for agricultural R&D and siting of production facilities and so on and so forth.

So, I mean, the short answer is, it's complicated.

## **Black, Brown, and Diverse Plant-Based People for Equity w/ Lisa Dumas Part 1 - Our Hen House - Air Date 10-29-22**

**LISA DUMAS:** Well, the problem with Rochester, so you and I are both in Rochester, like you were just saying, is that there is a high level of poverty here. So, when you have high levels of poverty in underserved communities, which are mostly Black and Brown communities, there are a lot of negative outcomes, such as lack of access to healthy foods and information about health and wellness. And in Rochester in particular, which you probably also [00:31:00] saw from some information that I sent, it's surprising because it's the home of Wegmans, which is a large supermarket chain, one of the largest in the country, yet there, we're just surrounded by food deserts. So, not only can you not get to plant-based items, you can't really get to any items other than whatever's overpriced in your corner store or your local Family Dollar Store. Dollar stores are on every corner and you have to try to make your way out to the suburbs to get to an actual grocery store. So those are just some of the basic problems.

**JASMIN SINGER - CO-HOST, OUR HEN HOUSE:** I have so many questions. I wanna ask about Wegmans, but I'll hold off for a second. What does research show about the willingness of people in these communities to shift their diets in a plant-based direction, if it is made more accessible?

**LISA DUMAS:** Research does show that people are open to it, and actually diverse groups of people, they more healthy and they wanna shift their

[00:32:00] diets, but there's a certain stigma surrounding it in their communities, which can hold them back. And there's also that lack of access that we're talking about, and also affordability, that ties into many other things. It even ties into plant-based companies and foods, you know, hopefully one day being able to bring their price down. So, to me it's just, you know, it's kind of a complex issue. It's a combination of things that can keep people from being able to actually access those items, even if they wanted to.

**JASMIN SINGER - CO-HOST, OUR HEN HOUSE:** Mm. So true. Ugh. There's a lot going on here, and it's issues that I think a lot of people, even vegans, don't really think about nearly as much as it should be not only thought about, but directly addressed. You've cited research which shows that more than half of Latinx and Black respondents strongly or somewhat agree that there is a stigma in their culture around people who eat [00:33:00] plant-based foods. Have you found this to be the case? And, if so, how do you overcome it? I mean, that's a big question. Like, I'm basically asking you to solve everything.

**LISA DUMAS:** Right? If only I could. Yeah. I definitely find that to be the case. I have to approach it very specifically and not in a pushy kinda way. Also understanding when people might say, you know, I might wanna eat this, or I might wanna, but I need to still be able to have a bacon or something like, you know. Because when certain things are staples in certain communities... so, I like to approach it by just saying, you know, Maybe even trying to meatless Monday, you know, or telling people that there are things that are accidentally vegan that they're eating that they might not even know that are vegan, like Oreos. So you, you know, you're not aware, the Captain Crunch cereals are vegan, and if you approach it in that way, then people realize that they don't have to lose out on things that they like, which is something that people often think. I think that's with anybody when it comes to veganism as well. [00:34:00]

**JASMIN SINGER - CO-HOST, OUR HEN HOUSE:** Totally true. Yeah. And it is of course the opposite, it's like a very abundant way of eating. But it does, you know, I'm saying that also from a place of privilege. I'm saying that in an area that is not underserved and I am not part of an underserved community. How would you say plant-based food companies are failing these communities?

**LISA DUMAS:** Oh goodness. Well, I have many opinions, Jasmin.

**JASMIN SINGER - CO-HOST, OUR HEN HOUSE:** Alright. I love it. Let's bring it.

**LISA DUMAS:** I just, I think I'll just kinda start with whatever comes to my brain, like, in a basic supermarket, so you have organic produce, I know we need to use chemicals, well, they use chemicals when things are not organic so that they can make more and have more for the people, for the large population that we have globally in this country or whatever. But if these are better for you organically, I don't understand why it's not just made that way. We have so many, um, grants and scientists, science [00:35:00] today, in my opinion, they could probably come up with something that would still allow them to have the crops grow and be abundant for everyone without poisoning people. And when it comes to plant-based food companies, I mean, even I, who may not live in, you know, real abject poverty, you know, I look at some of these items and I just think that the prices are high. And I would think that if you would lower your prices and come down that that would, that difference would make up in the quantity that you're able to sell. So I don't understand, you know, because they're high and now with meat prices going up, there should be a switch inevitably to more plant-based items on a broad scale anyway. And it should, I dunno if I'm correct about this, but it costs less to make if you're not using animal products, so why is it that they're so high? I mean, if they were cheaper, because that's another thing that can also be a barrier. I don't wanna offend anyone, but I sometimes get a little bit, you know, annoyed at things like that. And I even think about [00:36:00] organizations like PETA, because I wish that PETA would spread their message in these communities as well. Like I, and I see them talking about animal rights and things like that, but I don't think that they necessarily get to those communities either. So I think people have to make a more concerted effort to reach people in those ways. I don't necessarily know that that's being done.

## **High-End Veganism and the Rise of Plant-Based Eating - Past Present - Air Date 10-5-21**

**NICOLE HEMMER - CO-HOST, PAST PRESENT:** I also think that there is a component of this where in popular culture, I think veganism particularly is often seen as a white, middle, upper class diet. That it is something that's associated with Gwyneth Paltrow and to a certain extent with orthorexia, with the idea that you're just trying to get the most healthy diet in order to exert a kind of unhealthy control over the food that you eat. And there was this really great piece on Eater about Black veganism and the Black radical political tradition of veganism that [00:37:00] I found so interesting, particularly because, like the Iman Ismail piece, it came back to the issue of pork -- the issue of pork and the issue of history. Because soul food, particularly the soul food

that develops during the period of enslavement, is very much rooted in pork, because pig being one of the cheapest kinds of meats available was something that enslaved people had access to. So there is this traditional food way in Black American culture that is very rooted in pork.

And then there is this kind of historical development, both among Black Muslims, but also among Black radicals who are choosing a no-pork diet, specifically because they see pork as rooted to slavery and capitalism. But it also talks about Rastafarians and that as a traditional Black vegetarian food way. It's really fascinating because I think that especially as veganism and vegetarianism become more popular, some [00:38:00] of these traditions are becoming more visible, both in Indian food, in Black food. It's interesting to see these different histories be incorporated in what is often seen as a particularly White way of eating.

**NATALIA MEHLMAN PETRZELA - CO-HOST, PAST PRESENT:**

Yeah, absolutely. One of the things in my various histories of wellness courses that students are always surprised by is, this whole Black Panthers project around health which included vegetarianism, yoga, Alontra Nelson's work, who we've drawn on in this podcast before, really makes a big point of that.

And I think it's very surprising for exactly the reason you've said that we have such a -- I don't know who the "we" is there -- but many have such a whitewashed kind of sense of this history when it is not so.

## **Animal Agriculture is the New Oil w/ George Monbiot - Downstream - Air Date 6-8-22**

**AARON BASTANI - HOST, DOWNSTREAM:** We talked briefly about fertilizer. I don't think we mentioned pesticides.

**GEORGE MONBIOT:** No, no.

**AARON BASTANI - HOST, DOWNSTREAM:** What is going on with pollinators and bees and, how bad of a problem is this?

**GEORGE MONBIOT:** It's really frightening. So, there's one study which suggests that farmland in the US in 25 years, it's become 48 times more toxic to bees.

And of [00:39:00] course, it's not just bees. What's mostly driving this is a class of pesticides called neonicotinoids, which are ostensibly banned in the EU and still so far in the UK, but they keep getting all these exemptions, you know, so, oh, while sugar beets not doing very well, we need some neonicotinoids, then go and slap them on.

And these shouldn't be called insecticides. They should be called biocides because they take out entire ecosystems. So there was an interesting study in Japan in an area where they'd never been used. It was in the farmland around Lake Shinji in Japan. And after the first year of use there, the weight of plankton in the lake fell by I think 83%. And the fish catch for local fisher people fell by 90% just with one year of use. And they weren't spraying it into the lake. This was just bottom of the catchment. It was everything was flowing off the land into there and had taken with it anything which stood in its [00:40:00] way on the way.

So it's not just the above-ground insects which are being wiped out at horrifying speed by this class of pesticides. A lot of the soil animals too are being killed by them. Then the fresh water creatures in the rivers and in the lake, and who knows what happens when it gets into the sea. The work hasn't been done yet. But it's probably lethal.

**AARON BASTANI - HOST, DOWNSTREAM:** And the same route applies here, which is industrial factory farming, try to maximize yields using chemicals which have no place near food.

**GEORGE MONBIOT:** So again and again, what we see happening is new farm chemicals are developed, they are scarcely tested. They get approval before there's been any effective testing at scale individually, let alone in concert with the other farm chemicals which are being deployed. And so often it's a cocktail of toxins, which is dangerous. And then they're deployed and then afterwards you suddenly start finding out all these effects which weren't on the can.

[00:41:00] And of course, once they're being widely used, then it's much harder to put them back in their box.

**AARON BASTANI - HOST, DOWNSTREAM:** You talk about an uninhabitable planet. You talked about a tipping point with regards to the Amazon a few moments ago. What does an uninhabitable planet mean? Because I think there's something of a debate here with regards to climate change. People say, well, look, it's not an existential threat. It's a civilizational threat. So clearly

the world we live in today wouldn't be able to carry on in a century or two from now if we don't act. Where do you stand on that? Do you think this is a genuine threat to *homo sapiens* or to just market capitalism or ?

**GEORGE MONBIOT:** It's hard to know because we haven't seen the other side of it. But the crucial thing to understand here is that what we're looking at in just about everything important on earth is a complex system, right? And complex systems, that means a very particular thing. These are systems which are created by billions of decision points acting randomly, but in concert, which have these [00:42:00] weird self-regulating properties.

So you bring together all those decision points, whether it's the global financial system, whether it's an ice sheet, whether it's the soil, whether it's the atmosphere, whether it's the oceans, a forest, the human brain, the human body, these are all complex systems. And they're sort of randomly self-organized. It's a really weird, counterintuitive property that they have. And through feedback loops, they maintain an equilibrium state within a certain range of stress. But if you push them out of that stress, those feedback loops, far from damping down any shocks which that system is subject to, amplify and transmit those shocks.

And if it goes too far and too much stress is applied, instead of there being gradual change, those systems reach a tipping point. Once they pass a tipping point, they collapse into a completely different equilibrium state.

Now, [00:43:00] the current sort of generalized equilibrium state of these systems of systems, the earth system, which comprises all those different systems, often acting in concert, they can't be meaningfully separated from each other. We separate them to study them. We say, oh, this is the ecosystem, this is the atmosphere, this is the ocean, this is the soil. They're totally interlinked and there's a sort of gigantic system of systems called the living planet. The equilibrium state that we live in at the moment is the one that we evolved to live in, and most of life on earth evolved to live in that equilibrium state.

If it flips into a very different equilibrium state, as it has done during previous mass extinctions, it could become hostile to most forms of multicellular life, as indeed has happened. I mean, the classic case being the permotriassic extinction 251 million years ago where, on one estimate, 90% of species disappeared, and nearly [00:44:00] all large vertebrate species went -- and large vertebrate species is an animal with a backbone. We are a large vertebrate species.

And what happened in that case was the collapse of one Earth system triggered the collapse of others. So it seemed to have happened with atmospheric effects,

a combination of carbon dioxide from volcanoes and acid rain from the same source, that then wiped out a lot of the vegetation, which meant the collapse of the soil, which got stripped off the land. That then caused deoxygenation in the oceans. That then stopped the ocean circulation system. That then prevented the distribution of temperature, of heat around the planet, creating a great polarization of heat and cold. And it just became a hostile place for most of what was there before to live in.

And there was a remnant dwarf fauna there for millions of years before it gradually recovered. And we saw the reformation taking place in the Triassic and then much richer [00:45:00] ecologies in the Jurassic, but that took tens of millions of years.

## **A (Mostly) Vegan World: Plantf\*ckers Can Save Us All - UNFTR - Air Date 1-8-22**

**MAX:** Most are familiar with one of the great agro-villains of the modern era: Monsanto. Monsanto is now part of Bayer after completing a massive buyout for more than \$60 billion. The deal was attractive enough to Bayer to look past the multitude of lawsuits against Monsanto from farmers and stakeholders all over the world, estimated to be somewhere around \$10 billion in payouts and settlements. Imagine being so big and profitable as to withstand that type of expense? Good lord.

Monsanto - I'll keep referring to it as such - has always been a pretty shitty company. Responsible for chart topping hits like DDT and Napalm. The company that started off producing saccharine in the first part of the 20th Century, went on to become one of the largest and meanest agribusinesses in the world. Today, Monsanto's genetically modified seeds cover 80% of farmland worldwide. But it's perhaps best known for producing Roundup, an herbicide that preserves the plants that come from [00:46:00] their seeds while killing the weeds around them. It has also been linked to cancer, killoff of bees, and is believed to be an endocrine disruptor.

According to DNB, Monsanto still employs more than 20,000 people globally. And here's the thing...I'm sure there are those at the company that don't feel right about what they do. But I'm willing to bet that most feel as though they are doing good in the world. And this is where we have to understand the powerful force of both propaganda and the actual results. Crop yields from Monsanto seeds are enormous. And because they've closed the loop on the growing system by supplying the seeds, the fertilizer and the herbicides and

pesticides, it's hard to argue against, because they have effectively eliminated any basis of comparison.

On the manufacturing end of things you have companies like John Deere. In his book, *Animal, Vegetable, Junk* by Mark Bittman, the author provides a complete historical account of food, dissects the issues that plague the modern farm, and warns of the evils of the junk food industry. In speaking of Deere, Bittman says: "Financing tied farmers to equipment, [00:47:00] chemical, and seed producers - and of bankers as well. And while Deere & Co. showed good will toward struggling farmers, its success in financially bonding these farmers virtually ensured that creditors remained profitable in the long term. It's also among the chief reasons why industrial agriculture is so difficult to change today. Today the company's margins are almost four times as great from providing credit than they are from sales."

Most refer to the growth of big agro as the "Green Revolution," a phrase coined by William Gaud in 1968 in the capacity of director for International Development in the United States. He said, "These and other developments in the field of agriculture contain the makings of a new revolution. It is not a violent Red Revolution like that of the Soviets, nor is it a White Revolution like that of the Shah in Iran. I call it the Green Revolution."

Like any Greek tragedy, this is the beginning, the rise before the decline. Scratch below the surface [00:48:00] and we're just now beginning to understand how ugly and devastating the Green Revolution has actually been.

According to Batini's research, "Historically, humans used more than 70,000 plant species for food. With modern, mechanized farming, only 150 species are now under cultivation and only three - wheat, rice and maize - provide nearly 60 percent of all calories that humans consume from plants."

There are a number of problems with this development as corporations have spread and consolidated land, machinery, supply chains and distribution. The first is that our diets are really fucked up. We're missing so many of the core nutrients our bodies need, which results in obesity and malnutrition, that appears to look like people are fed, when they're actually undernourished with empty caloric intake that provides little value to the human body.

In terms of the planet, our emphasis on monoculture has led to extreme overuse of both freshwater and soil, both of which need to regenerate. This goes for the oceans [00:49:00] as well, as both land and sea have been polluted by the industrial chemical applications required to maintain these massive

monocultures that it's beginning to affect yields and quality. So microbes and insects necessary for healthy soil are dying on land and critical breeding systems are rotting in the ocean.

The Green Revolution might have worked on the surface for several decades, but we're now beginning to pay the price for it.

Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the revolution is the clearing of land to make way for crops to feed livestock. And the more people we welcome into the world, the more land is required to increase this cycle of madness.

As Bittman notes, "The truth is that the Green Revolution was never about 'feeding the world.' That was, and remains, the public relations spin. Rather, it was a front for selling American agricultural machinery, chemicals, [00:50:00] and seeds - sales that were aimed mostly at farmers or investors who had the substantial capital needed for land and equipment."

According to the OECD estimates, writes Batini, "subsidies to agriculture in fifty-three OECD member countries amounted to \$705 billion per year."

This needs to end. This money should be shifted toward regenerative fishing and organic farming programs that can scale. And the reason it needs to happen both immediately and over a sustained period of time is that it takes between 3 and 5 years, according to Rodale, to completely convert conventional operations into organic systems before turning a profit. But once these systems convert, as we mentioned earlier, they wind up being far more profitable than the insane fucking systems we currently maintain.

Other policy recommendations from Batini and others she references throughout her collection include:

-Limiting the acreage per country or region that can be dedicated to monoculture crops in relation to polyculture or [00:51:00] rotating crops.

-Strict limits to the number of livestock per farm and per acre.

-Reducing the barriers and costs to converting to organic agriculture.

-Labor market measures to promote farming jobs.

It's true that organic farming requires more labor, but in the larger context of employment that's actually a good thing. Because it means bringing more jobs

back to rural areas that are struggling to convert their economies to match the current economic landscape.

In the ocean, the policy measures should be similar. Granting large tracts of open ocean to farming seaweed might sound a bit nuts but Batini estimates that “If less than 10 percent of the oceans were to be covered in seaweed farms, the farmed seaweed could produce enough biofuel to replace all of today’s fossil fuel use while removing 53 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year from the atmosphere, restoring pre-industrial levels.” This is because seaweed is capable of trapping and storing five times the amount of carbon [00:52:00] dioxide as trees.

All told, the IPCC report claims that such policy reforms and flipping the global intake of food from animal to plant-based could reduce emissions by the amount emitted currently by the United States and India each year. By reducing the amount of food waste we can eliminate another 8–10% of carbon emissions as well. And the procedural changes would effectively halt deforestation and give the earth a fucking break already.

As citizens, we can only do so much. Our job is to create demand. Demand more plant-based and organic products. It’s the government that has the ability to affect change. After all, our food supply today is exactly the result of government programs and interventions. The chemicals used in industrial agriculture were developed for chemical warfare in World War II. Farm subsidies encouraged farmers to create monoculture. Subsidized crop insurance programs and commodity price supports offset risks in the market and [00:53:00] during poor growth seasons. Our trade agreements create advantages for domestic fishing and agricultural producers. This isn’t about free markets. As we have proven time and time again, there is nothing free about our market systems and no industry exists outside the government’s purview.

It’s all about what we have chosen to value, who we choose to elect to leadership, and what we demand of them when they’re in their jobs.

And to bring this all the way back around, this starts with getting money out of the system so the corporations that currently run the world no longer have the means and ability to access and influence the political system. The For the People Act in the United States is still the first, most important step to making all of this a reality, which is why it’s so important for us to connect these dots here together in this show.

The bottom line is that capitalism is not built for this type of planning, which is why aspects of the economy that align with human imperatives require

centralized planning or, at a [00:54:00] minimum, strict regulations and incentives to manufacture a positive outcome. The one negative thing I'll say about a vegetable today is that carrots don't work when you need to shift the corporate economy. Fuck the carrot. Use a stick.

We need to beat our government and the corporations that control it into submission and take back control of our food supply. And it starts with robbing them of their source of funding and access to control the levers of power and installing progressives in office who believe in science. They understand what's at stake and are willing to legislatively control the narrative going forward.

## **The Politics of Meat ft. Jan Dutkiewicz Part 2 - Our Hen House - Air Date 8-28-21**

**JAN DUTKIEWICZ:** So I think the best part of this for me to talk about, which is the one I know about and I've written about and I've published about is using seaweed as a feed additive to reduce cows methane emissions. So I'll talk about the study first and then I'll talk about the reception and how it was promoted by the media and why I think that's wrong.

So basically there's a study done by scientists. It's good research, it's solid research. I don't wanna impute any [00:55:00] sort of ill intention to the scientists. Basically they found that if you feed a certain red seaweed or if you use a tiny bit of that seaweed and mix it in with processed feed, the cattle's methane emissions can be reduced, and they can be reduced by, on a feed lot in that experiment as much as 80%.

And so this is the finding of the study. And this study takes on a life of its own. There's coverage everywhere. There's coverage in the Guardian. There's coverage in Wired, there's coverage in the Washington Post saying, "We can fix the cow climate problem, so we don't have to give up our hamburgers, we just have to feed all these cows, seaweed."

And this is reported on very uncritically. All these outlets are basically running the press release from the scientists who did this research. There was some of this research at UC Davis, some of it was done at CSIRO in Australia. And then this becomes this taken for granted thing that sort of runs up the food communication value chain. So you have John Kerry, who's the US Climate Envoy, he's talking about, oh, we have all this technology that we [00:56:00] can use to reduce cow's methane.

And this is an extremely dangerous narrative for one, because these experimental findings have to be treated on their own terms, which is, sure, on a feed lot you can reduce methane by up to maximum 80% if you use this seaweed. Sure, but the average cow doesn't actually spend its entire life on a feed lot. Most cows graze for between a year and a year and a half, and then they're fated on a feed lot before they're slaughtered. And it's when they're grazing that they're eating roughage and digesting all this difficult to digest stuff, and that's when they're emitting most of their methane.

So, if you look at just the life cycle of a cow, you're now reducing 80% of emissions, but you're doing it during the three or four months when cows already emit less emissions. So the real number is maybe like 10% of emissions over a cow's life. And then, this was done in experimental settings. There are 1 billion cows in the world. How are you gonna grow enough seaweed and incorporate into the diet of enough cows globally for this to have [00:57:00] any effect, any real effect?

So these are the questions that we have to ask ourselves. I don't think any of that is economically or logistically feasible, but to read the reports and to read the way the media covered it, it was as if the problem was completely solved. And I think what this has to do with is a real desire on the one hand, for people to not talk seriously about meat reduction or meat elimination for one, and for two, a real obsession, especially in the media with quick technological fixes to entrenched problems that are difficult to overcome.

And so I think the seaweed problem really is exemplary of the media wanting to put a positive spin and pretend that we can tech our way outta the meat climate problem. And if your listeners are interested, Matthew Hayek, who's a professor at NYU, and I wrote a long analysis of this issue for Wired.

## **The Meat Merchants Feeding Climate Catastrophe: Spencer Roberts and Jan Dutkiewicz Part 3 - This is Hell! - Air Date 11-29-22**

**CHUCK MERTZ - HOST, THIS IS HELL!:** Jan, you and Spencer also write that in 2017, industry [00:58:00] finance overtook public grants to fund the majority of research in the United States for the first time in almost a century. The corporate long game to supplant public science has succeeded in transforming not only the output but the culture of academia.

You then cite a Science.org story, which states that this flies in the face of conventional wisdom, which paints US companies as so focused on short-term profits that they have all but abandoned the pursuit of fundamental knowledge. By extension then, Jan, has the US abandoned the pursuit of fundamental knowledge for short-term industrial policies or profits? Can this abandoning of the pursuit of fundamental knowledge by handing over the majority of scientific research grants in industry to industry finance be undone? After all, this is a 2017 policy under the Trump administration.

So first, has the US abandoned the pursuit of fundamental knowledge for short-term industrial policies or profits, Jan, and can this be undone by the Biden administration?

**JAN DUTKIEWICZ:** Sorry, I've got some noise [00:59:00] in background, so hopefully that doesn't get in way too much here.

So look, you've got a really unfortunate situation in academia where people who work, especially on questions related to issues related to industry -- this isn't just in food -- often you need funding to run studies. And often it's possible -- there's that noise I mentioned -- often it's possible to get funding from industry in order to pursue research that is both academically valid, but that also benefits industry. The problem, however, is when industry starts looking for particular research outcomes or particular research findings that compromise the academic enterprise. And so Marion Nestle, who's a really foundational food scholar, she's at NYU, she's written about this in the case of, for instance, nutrition studies.

But then the second problem is when [01:00:00] industry funds not just research, so not just for instance, attempts to reduce the methane from cattle, but *de facto* starts funding communications groups or starts treating research and researchers and research centers they fund not just as research centers, but as communication centers that are disseminating industry-funded research and messages that are beneficial to industry. And I think that that's where we start seeing a lot of these problems. Because the question then becomes, are the researchers doing this research just disinterested researchers who happen to be taking money from industry because they need that money in order to do their research? Or are they basically becoming talking heads for the industry, which is exactly what we saw with fossil fuels.

And there's actually a phenomenal book by the historians Erik Conway and Naomi Oreskes called *Merchants of Doubt*, specifically about this sort of

capture of researchers and public intellectuals by the fossil fuel industry, in the case of the debate over fossil [01:01:00] fuel's contribution to climate change.

The question of "Can it be reversed?" is a tricky one. I mean, it would require the government to step in much more with much more funding for basic science and more funding for public universities, but also, presumably, it would require regulations or university policies that would vet corporate donations for research much more strongly. But of course, that flies in the face of the fact that corporate donations look good and a lot of universities rely on them. So, yet again, we have a wicked problem.

**CHUCK MERTZ - HOST, THIS IS HELL!:** Yet again, it's complicated.

Spencer, you and Jan write that "when the science became unequivocal, that cigarettes in their secondhand smoke were a carcinogenic, the tobacco industry sought to challenge these findings, funding its own research and lobbying to cast out by the emerging and scientific consensus. This delay in meaningful regulation likely caused millions of avoidable deaths. These tactics of delay and agnotology, deliberate ignorance rather than the organic absence of knowledge, were picked up [01:02:00] by the fossil fuel industry, which has regularly employed lobbyists and scientists that challenged the consensus on the role of fossil fuels in driving climate change."

But Spencer, in the end, the tobacco industry was revealed to have willfully misled the public, purposely injecting disinformation into the debate. They were then heavily fined for their purposeful misrepresentation that killed millions of people who would not have died if the industry had not engaged in a campaign of lying to the public. While the industry was massively fined, no individual was ever prosecuted.

Spencer, as the tobacco industry took a huge financial hit from lying to the public and Congress and were forced to pay for an anti-tobacco information campaign, you would think that would be a deterrent to future industry lies to the public.

Spencer, are fines, even those as big as the ones that big tobacco forced to pay, are they just not a deterrent? And if someone from Big Tobacco had been prosecuted and even was jailed, do you think that would have any more of an impact on future lying by industry? [01:03:00]

**SPENCER ROBERTS:** Yes, absolutely. Fines are very famously worked into the books these days of massive corporations. Whether it's in the case of meat

production, whether it's water pollution, air pollution, things like that, whatever. And to be clear, all slaughterhouses in the US are exempt from the Clean Water Act. The fines -- you think about the BP oil spill, right? A fraction of their annual profits, they made more money drilling in the Gulf than they were fined. So, what's the deterrent? It's really just another cost to mark onto the books. So yeah, it sort of goes into the "sticks and carrots" analogy. But of course we don't really use sticks on fossil fuel either, or tobacco for that matter.

But certainly I do believe that there are people at the highest echelons of these companies, executives that have committed crimes against [01:04:00] humanity and could be tried under those auspices. And we could talk about the millions of deaths caused by tobacco. If we could make an analogy with meat, whether it's from the deaths from cardiac-related dietary illness, pandemics, burning of the Amazon, the genocide of the Amazonian people, or just the climate chaos engulfing low-lying nations and cities, there's certainly a culpability with unnecessary death in the meat industry, not to mention the animals.

So I do think there's a case to bring against the executives.

## Final comments 1-10-22

**JAY TOMLINSON - HOST, BEST OF THE LEFT:** We've just heard clips today starting with *The Brian Lehrer Show* discussing government nutrition guidelines dating back to the business-friendly Reagan administration. *This is Hell* looked at the climate denial of the meat industry. *Our Hen House* explored the reasons why it's so hard to talk about reducing meat consumption. The *Jim Hightower Radio Lowdown* highlighted the choice between agriculture and agribusiness through the lens of the famous Butterball turkeys. [01:05:00] *This is Hell* looked at veggie meat production and the government subsidies artificially lowering the prices of real meat. *Our Hen House* discussed food deserts, affordability, and community stigma around veggie diets. *Past Present* brought up the tradition of veganism among some Black radicals and Black Muslims. *Downstream* looked at the impact of insecticides and the broader pattern of stress on natural equilibriums leading to tipping points and collapse. And *Unf\*cking the Republic* dug into the deception of the green revolution and the positive paths forward we need to demand.

That's what everybody heard, but members also heard bonus clips from *Our Hen House* highlighting the way media gets excited over quick fixes based on usually misleading data to basically avoid talking about the problem of meat. And *This is Hell* looked at how the meat industry, similar to the cigarette

companies before them, is funding the doubt about the harm they are causing.[01:06:00]

To hear that and have all of our bonus content delivered seamlessly to the new members-only podcast feed that you'll receive, sign up to support the show at [bestoftheleft.com/support](http://bestoftheleft.com/support) or shoot me an email requesting a financial hardship membership because we don't let a lack of funds stand in the way of hearing more information.

And finally, a very quick thought about the cost of talking about food choices in the media. It \was talked about today, on the show, the types of reactions that people get, you know, politicians or otherwise, if they were to try to bring up, uh, food choices in general or, you know, concerns about meat consumption in particular. And, uh, I have absolutely experienced that myself, and you may have even noticed that I haven't done a show on food choices in a while and it's actually been much longer than I would've thought or hoped or intended, but [01:07:00] I just thought I would share that that is actually a response to the type of feedback that people in the media, but I'm a person in the media, so the type of response that I get when I do food episodes. And I'm particularly lucky as a person in the media that I get very little negative feedback about the show. People very rarely write angry emails to me. The food episodes are the one topic where I may, and maybe Israel, the food topic and Israel, just to give you a sense of the level of emotional energy that goes into these topics. Telling someone that, uh, they may want to reconsider their food choices is tantamount to insulting Israel in people's minds and making them think that you're [01:08:00] anti-Semitic . Like that's sort of the level of emotional response that we get. And so what often happens is there's a sort of emotional word vomit that ends up being directed at people who bring up this topic and so it gets sent by email or social media or whatever else. And that simply comes from the fact that food is such a deeply emotional topic that people really don't know how to handle it well. And this goes far beyond the meat versus veggie debate. The same goes for what picky eaters are willing to eat. What qualifies as comfort food in your mind? And, you know, what food brings about the feeling of home to you, right? Like, these are all emotional connections that we have to food and, so, our perception of food and our own food choices is deeply influenced by emotion, but we tend to think that our emotions are actually facts [01:09:00] and that we base our opinions on facts and the line between fact and emotion gets blurred a lot of the time, never more so, I think, than when talking about food.

And so my point is that, you know, nearly all of us are deeply irrational about food, myself, absolutely included. And all I ask is that we start by

acknowledging that. Just be aware of that as a fact about humans. We are emotional about food, and so you probably have strong opinions about food. So do I. Some of my opinions are based on fact, but not all. And I hope that if you find yourself having a strong reaction to a discussion about food, you just take an extra moment to figure out if your reaction is based on emotion or something more concrete. I mean, at least do that before you send me an angry, emotional word vomit email. [01:10:00]

As always, keep the comments coming in. You can leave a voicemail or you can now send a text message through SMS or WhatsApp or the Signal messaging app, all with the same number, 202-999-3991. Or keep it old school by emailing me to [jay@bestoftheleft.com](mailto:jay@bestoftheleft.com).

That is gonna be it for today. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Deon Clark and Erin Clayton for their research work for the show, and participation in our bonus episodes. Thanks to the Monosyllabic Transcriptionist Trio, Ben, Ken, and Brian, for their volunteer work helping put our transcripts together. Thanks to Amanda Hoffman for all of her work on our social media outlets, activism segments, graphic designing, webmastering, and bonus show co-hosting. And thanks to those who support the show by becoming a member or purchasing gift memberships at [bestoftheleft.com/support](https://bestoftheleft.com/support), through our Patreon page, or from right inside the Apple Podcast app. Membership is how you get instant access to our incredibly good bonus episodes, in addition to there being extra content, no ads, [01:11:00] and chapter markers in all of our regular episodes, all through your regular podcast player. And if you want to continue the discussion, join our Best of the Left Discord community to talk about the show or the news, or to yell at me about food choices, or whatever you like. A link to join is in the show notes.

So coming to you from far outside the conventional wisdom of Washington, DC, my name is Jay and this has been the Best of the Left podcast coming to you twice weekly thanks entirely to the members and donors to the show from [bestoftheleft.com](https://bestoftheleft.com).