Review of 2015; the year of the Vegan

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It has been an extraordinary year for the vegan movement, which exploded onto the mainstream with an array of remarkable events.

Here are just a few of them…

Influential reports

The World Health Organisation published a landmark report which classified processed meat as carcinogenic to humans, on a par with tobacco. Consuming just 50g per day increases the risk of bowel cancer by 18%, they found.

Radio phone-ins and newspaper supplements subsequently debated meat and animal products like never before. The public took note. In the following fortnight, sales of bacon and sausages fell by £3 million.

Meat stole the headlines for all the wrong reasons once again just a few weeks later when leading international affairs think tank Chatham House published a report identifying animal agriculture as the leading cause of climate change, responsible for more emissions than all global transport combined. It recommended a meat tax, and urged ministers to reduce the amount of meat served in schools and hospitals.

Politics

Kerry McCarthy MP, a vegan for over 20 years, was appointed as the Shadow Minister for the Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs by new Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn MP, himself a vegetarian. Following the inevitable initial criticism, McCarthy's commitment to improving the transparency of livestock standards has been met with universal acceptance. Her appointment is increasingly being regarded in non-vegan circles as a refreshing antidote to the soft-touch approach of recent decades.

At the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in November, former Governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger urged people to stop eating meat to save the planet after learning about the environmental destruction caused by animal agriculture; remarkable for someone so closely associated with meat throughout his sporting career. Schwarzenegger also acknowledged the emergence of the vegan movement in bodybuilding.

Food & Drink

Guinness announced that it is going vegan. The brewer conceded that it was time, after 256 years, to change following decades of campaigning against the use of isinglass, the archaic filtration agent made out of fish bladders.

Ikea launched a vegan version of its famous meatball honouring its commitment to sustainability, while Costa brought out a vegan crumble just in time for Christmas. Both products are registered with The Vegan Society's Vegan Trademark. Ben & Jerry's also bowed to public demand and announced that it will soon be producing a dairy-free, vegan ice cream.

Jamie Oliver embraced plant-based food. For the first time, the chef published an extensive collection of entirely vegan recipes, proving to be some of his most popular.

Celebrity

Beyonce launched a 22 day vegan food delivery service, while the Baftas made history by providing a full three-course vegan meal for the very first time.

Singer Miley Cyrus made the switch to being wholly plant-based and so did Hunger Games star Liam Hemsworth, who told Men's Fitness that he found "no negatives to eating like this. I feel nothing but positive, mentally and physically".

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Sport

The world's most vegan sport was uncovered, and it wasn't the one people expected. Snooker, far removed from the boozy, smoke-filled theatres of the 1970s, has embraced veganism. World Champion of 2010 Neil Robertson joined 2002 World Champion Peter Ebdon and four other touring professional in adopting a plant-based diet, going on to win the UK Championship in December.

Women's tennis was dominated by a vegan for another year. Serena Williams ended 2015 as the World number One with three more Grand Slam titles to her name.

The most decorated ultrarunner in history, Scott Jurek, added yet another accolade by breaking the World Record for the fastest 2,000 mile Appalachian Trail.

Public perception

Numerous pieces of undercover footage exposing the realities of animal agriculture were made public. CCTV video from a halal slaughterhouse in Yorkshire shocked the country, as did an exposé of a leather farm in Bangladesh and scenes from a dairy farm in New Zealand.

There was also widespread revulsion to the Yulin dog-meat festival. A petition against the activities in China attracted 4.2 million signatories worldwide, bringing about wider discussion about how and why the Western world welcomes dogs and cats into its homes but eat cows, chickens, lambs and pigs.

A month later, Cecil the lion was killed by Minnesota dentist Walter Palmer. His death captured the world's attention unlike any other animal story in recent years, filling front pages while social media overflowed with outrage and universal condemnation. Out of an awful incident came compassion and empathy, raising the public's consciousness with more people making the connection between trophy killing and animal agriculture, and going vegan.

With so many more reasons to go vegan, why not give it a whirl with The Vegan Society's 30 Day Vegan Pledge (www.vegansociety.com/pledge) to receive daily emails of information, tips and delicious recipes.

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