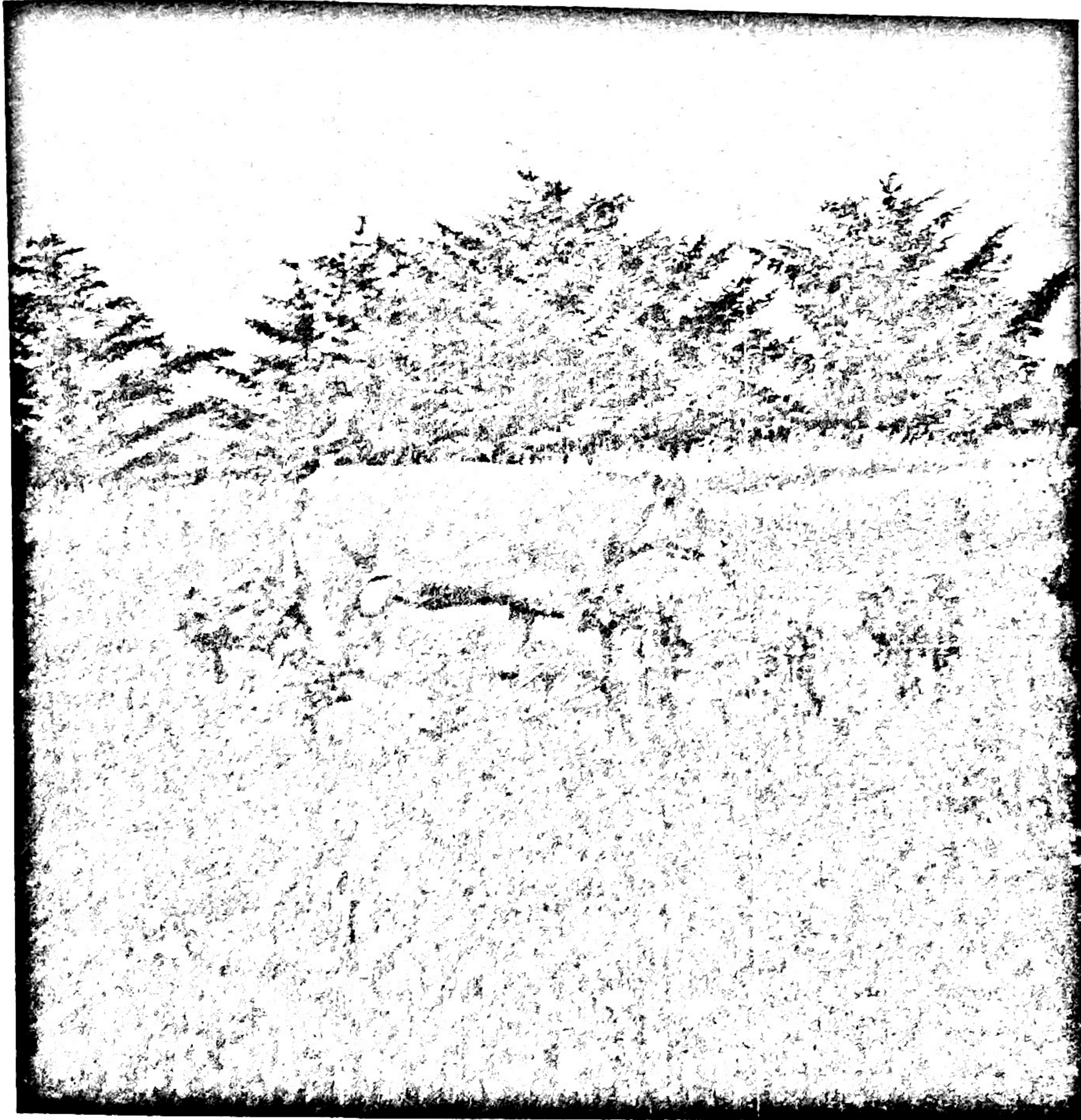


# Sustainable Living, Food Production, and Animal Welfare



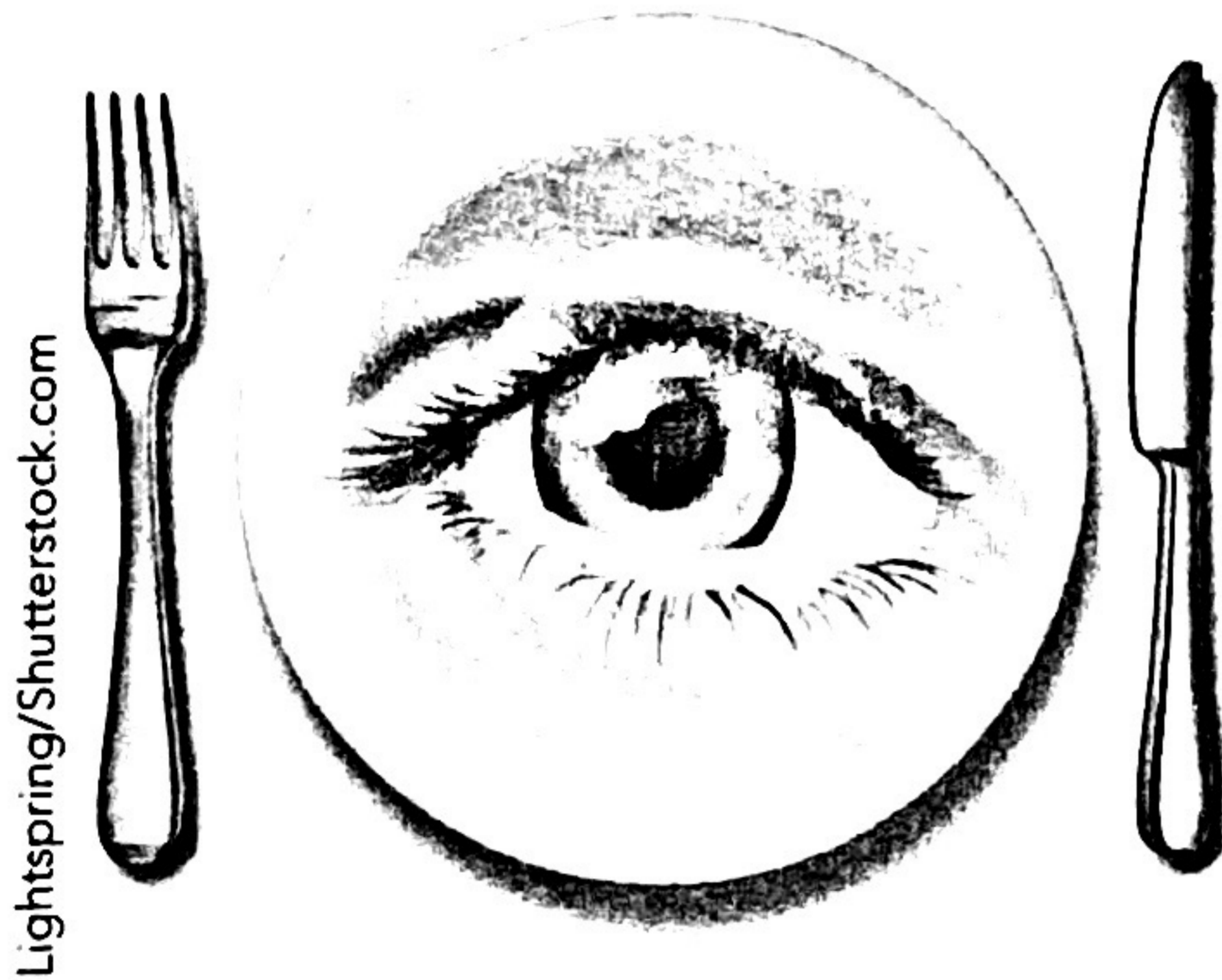
Courtesy of Maria Napoli

*I am mindful of what I eat  
Where I purchase my food  
Where and how my food is grown  
I am determined to give my body and the environment  
The respect it deserves today and everyday*

(Napoli)

"We love dogs and eat cows not because dogs and cows are fundamentally different—cows, like dogs, have feelings, preferences, and consciousness—but because our perception of them is different" (1).

## CHOICE OR HABIT



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Have you ever thought about the food choices you make on a daily basis? Eating is a habit-driven activity, and the choices we make are shaped by early exposures to certain foods, belief systems about types of food choices, and cultural practices (2). Many of our habits surrounding food and eating go unexamined throughout our lives, unless a health crisis finds us. We may be forced to intentionally think about changing from eating unhealthy foods such as processed and convenience foods, or foods high in saturated fat (3). We live to eat, unless we are jolted into mindful awareness following the recognition that our lifetime patterns of eating have not served us well.

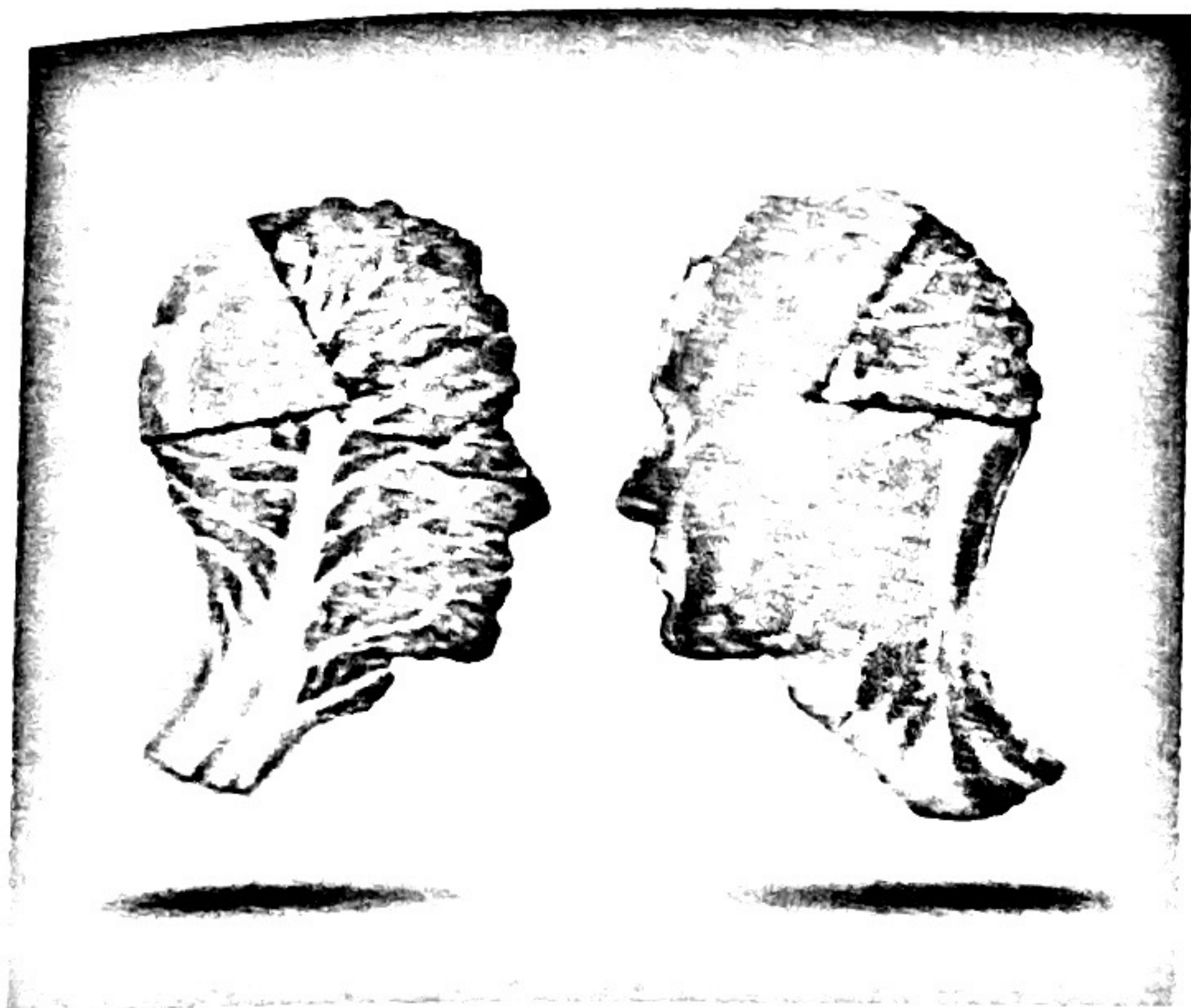
Why do we eat the foods we do? Biologically we eat in response to hunger. Hunger encourages us to make a food choice. However, hunger in our culture of plenty is not

driven by biology (4). Other things drive hunger and the quest to eat including seeing, smelling, reading, or even thinking about food (5). Hearing music can remind us of a good meal, evoking the desire to eat. Walking by a place where you once ate something delicious can do the same. Even after you've just had a big lunch, and you are incredibly full, imagining something delicious can start salivation (6). Being genuinely hungry in the sense of physiologically needing food matters little. Desire to eat is different from biological hunger. We may notice that a walk past a doughnut shop can stimulate something we call "hunger", independent of level of fullness. Studies show that rats that have been filled up with rat food are just as eager to eat chocolate cereal as hungry rats are to eat laboratory chow (7). The human animal is very much the same. More often than not, we eat because *we want* to eat—not because we need to. Recent studies show that our physical level of hunger, in fact, shows little correlation with how much hunger we say that we feel or how much food we go on to eat. Most of the time we are unaware of these forces on our food choices, desires, and timing of when we eat (8).

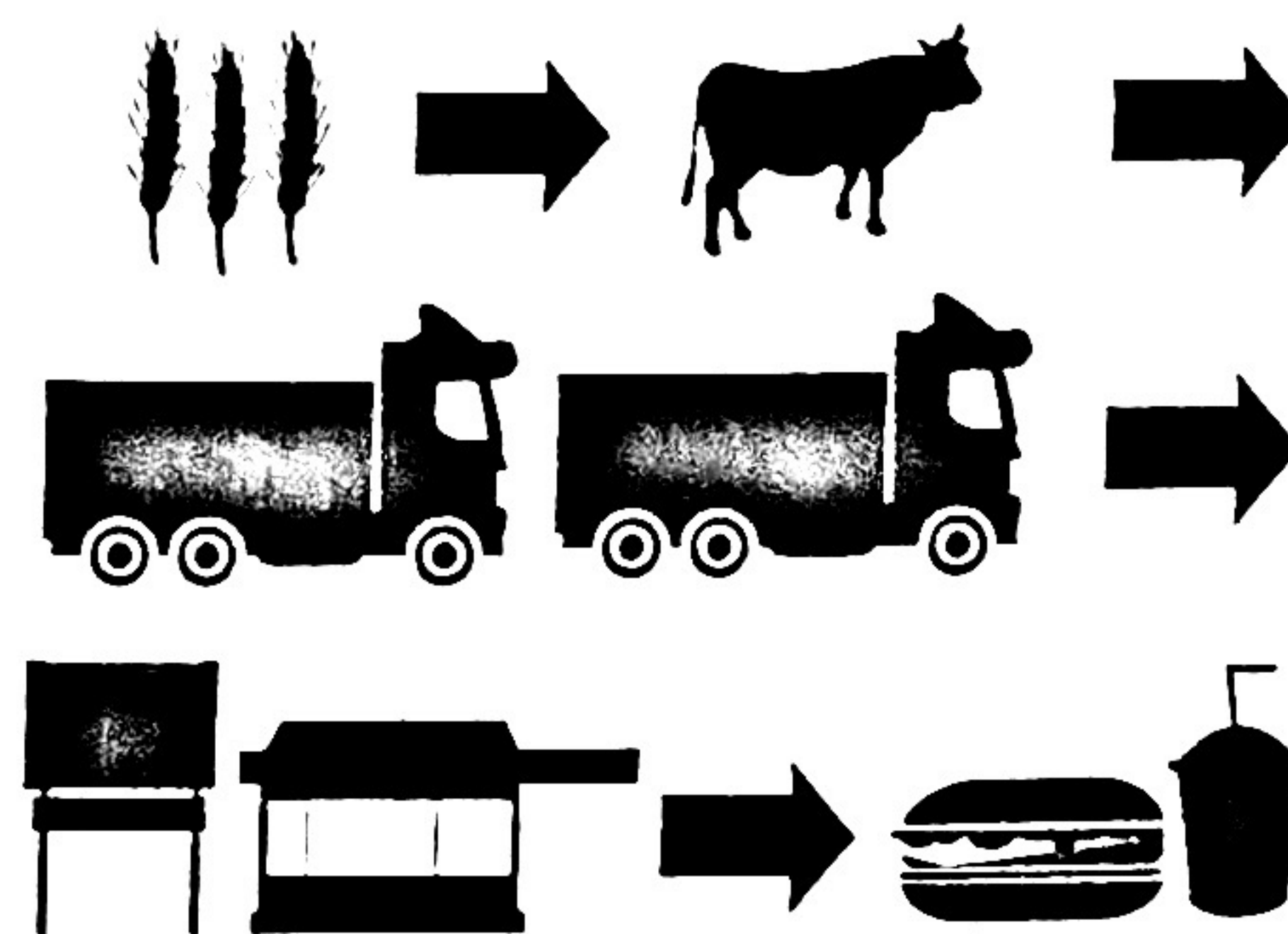
This is because we are surrounded by food, which is cheap, widely available, delicious and easy to obtain. Along with this nearly unlimited access to tasty food choices is a disconnection from where our food comes from, and we rarely think about the implications of the food choices we make and why we habitually make them (9). Our mindless monster (10) takes over, and we seek out, select, and consume foods that may or may not be healthful, and may actually harm us. We even consume foods that harm the environment (11).

## Eating Animals or Eating Plants? Which Is Sustainable?

Consider how common and ordinary it is to eat animal protein in our culture. In the United States, on average, we eat 31 animals per person, each year, or 2,400 animals during an average individual's lifetime (12). This does not include seafood, but does count poultry, which makes up over 95% of the numbers. If we add in fish, we eat the equivalent of about 16 pounds of seafood per year, on top of chicken, cows, and pigs. We eat animals despite of a tremendous body of scientific and nutritional evidence that indicates consuming animal protein is harmful for our health (13), our environment (14), and the planet (15).



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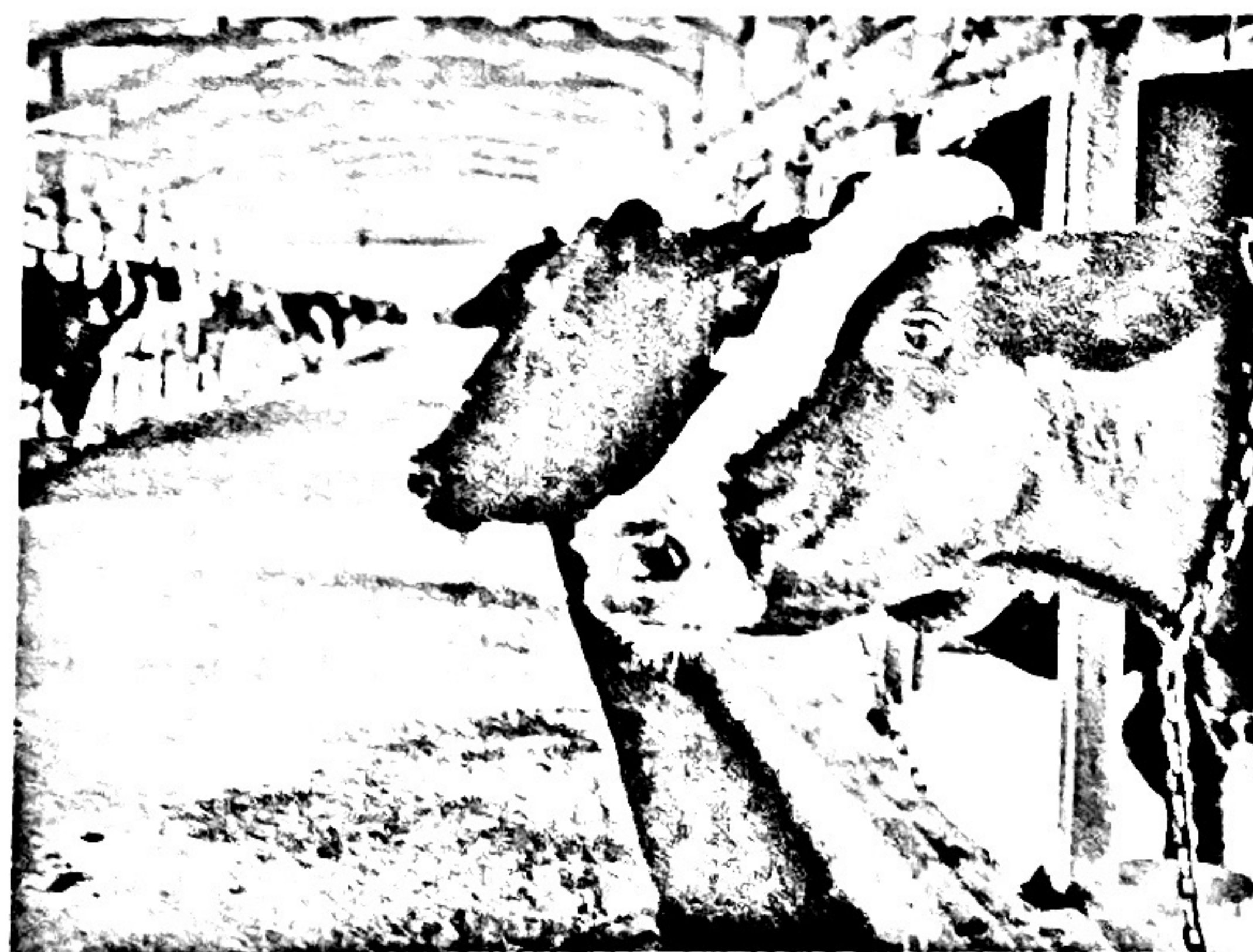
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We know from nutrition scientists and environmental experts that eating animals is a leading cause of some of the most serious diseases in the Western world today, including cardiac disease, diabetes, and cancer (14, 15). According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, eating a plant-based diet is sound nutrition and is more healthful than an animal protein diet (16). In addition to the saturated fat content which animal foods possess, we face other issues with animal foods. Research finds substantial contamination with dangerous chemicals including arsenic, ammonia, and mercury; drugs such as antibiotics and synthetic hormones (which may lead to drug-resistant infections); pesticides; and high levels of fecal matter (17–21).

Far from the idyllic family farm, 99% of the meat, eggs, and dairy that Americans eat come from concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) (22). Not only is eating animal protein harmful to our health and the environment (23), animals are industrially raised for our consumption under extraordinarily inhumane and dangerous conditions. Thinking about eating animals for food goes beyond our own and the environment's health, and takes us, if we awaken to the information, to our own empathy, compassion, and humanity (1).

CAFOs represent the worst in the industrialization and commoditization of the production of animals as food (24). Thousands of animals are crammed together in filthy and unsanitary conditions. Research shows that CAFOs are a leading cause of pandemic flus, avian influenza, mad cow disease, and deadly food-borne illnesses such as *E. coli*, salmonella, and listeria (24).

Here are some facts about confined animal operations (23, 24):



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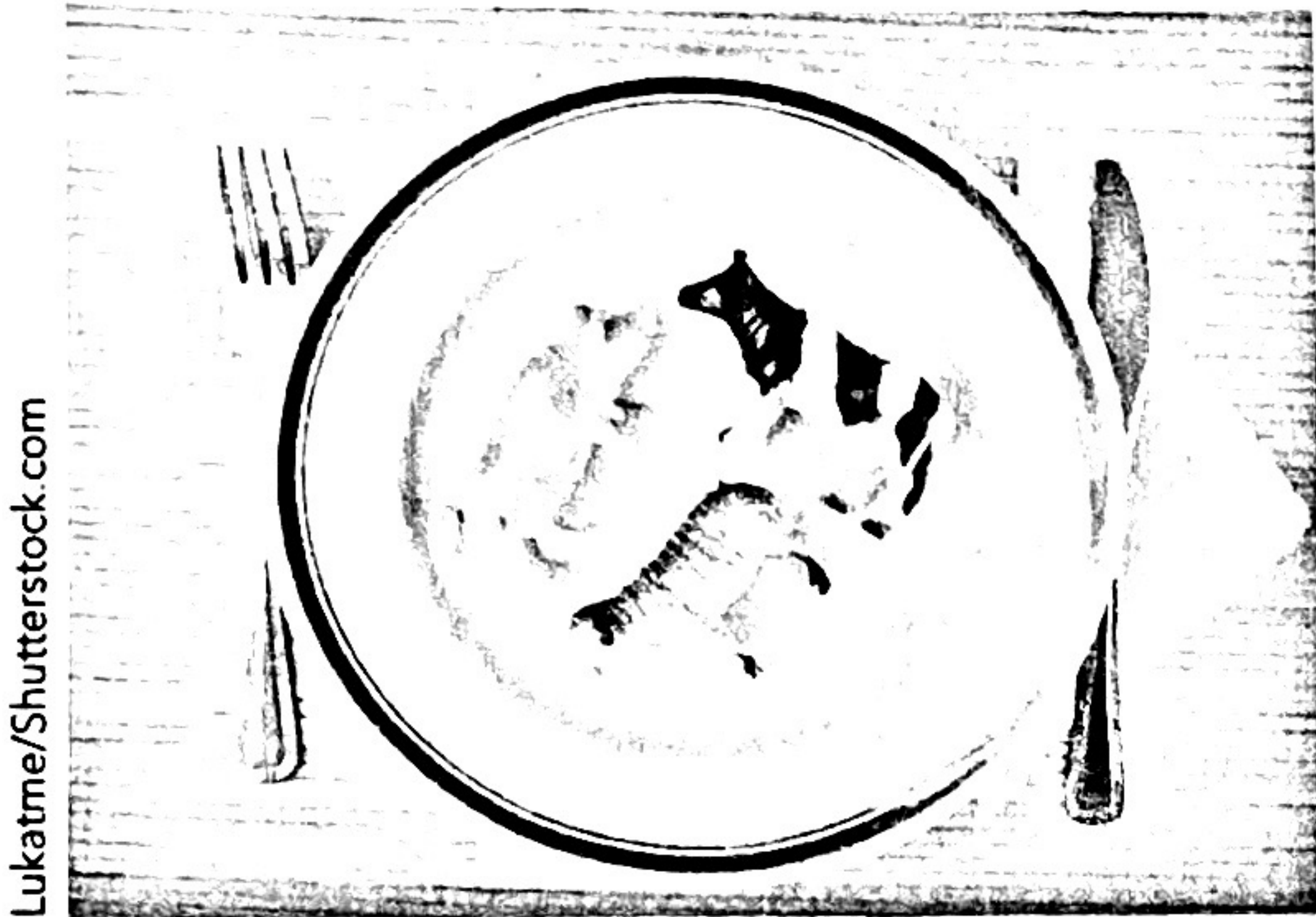
- Animals that are raised in industrial conditions to be consumed live and die in misery. They are born into gigantic, filthy, overcrowded, windowless factories. Taken away from their mothers shortly after birth, they are castrated, debeaked, dehorned, and branded without anesthesia. Female cows are kept pregnant continuously and are forcibly impregnated over and over in a process where they are confined and unable to lay down or turn around. When they are no longer productive, they are slaughtered.
- Animal slaughter takes place in relentless disassembly lines. It is not uncommon for animals to be conscious while slaughtered, since the pace of the line makes errors in stunning animals (knocking them unconscious prior to slitting their throats) common. Animals are hung, shackled, and bled while fully conscious, and sometimes boiled alive. Nearly every animal-based meal comes from a sentient being, who lived and died in agony.

- According to the United Nations, animal agriculture is a significant contributor to some of the biggest environmental problems facing the twenty first century, including water pollution, deforestation, erosion, species extinction, oceanic biodiversity destruction, greenhouse gas emissions, fresh water depletion, and chemical wastes (25).

One Harvard educated psychologist, Dr. Melanie Joy, writes about the emotional costs from eating animals. She notes that in order to eat the flesh or secretions (eggs/milk) of a once-living being, we need to disconnect, psychologically and emotionally, from the truth of our experience.

“We need to numb our authentic thoughts and emotions to block our awareness and our empathy for the animal who became our food—and awareness and empathy are integral to our sense of self” (26).

Take a pause for a mindful moment. What do you notice as you contemplate your own practices and beliefs about animal protein? Notice your body. Do you feel tightness, tension, or other holding? Notice your breath. Breathe into any tightness or tension you feel, allowing your body to soften and expand. Notice your judgments. Allow thoughts to come and go like clouds floating through the sky. Go deeper. Do you sense any emotions, such as sadness, sorrow, or compassion? Allow the feelings of compassion toward yourself, as you courageously face your own beliefs, practices, and habits regarding the food you eat.



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When we wake up and allow ourselves to see eating animals through an emotional lens, it becomes clear that we are only able to participate if we are “mindless” and unaware of what the life of a factory-farmed animal is like. This may be one explanation for why we often do not want to know, or hear about animal welfare. It is another reason why food producers don’t want us to know, and hide the truth of factory farming from us. It is too painful and disturbing.

Psychologists call this “cognitive dissonance”. According to Festinger (27), when we confront a situation that involves conflicting attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors, we experience a feeling of discomfort leading to an alteration in one of the attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors in order to reduce the discomfort and restore balance. Our motives are powerful toward consistency, and because of this we may engage in irrational and sometimes maladaptive behavior. Instead of examining our behaviors and potentially changing them, we reduce our dissonance, reducing tension, by adjusting our thoughts to allow for the maladaptive behavior. This returns us to homeostasis, as our thoughts and emotions remain unexamined. Perhaps, this is a consequence of not critically or compassionately examining our thoughts and behaviors. Perhaps, it is an explanation for mindless behavior. Festinger would suggest that our psychological orientation simply obtains agreement in order to proceed with our potentially disappointing or unhealthy behaviors. We adjust our thoughts in order to proceed with our desired actions, all at the level of the subconscious.



Ignorance is bliss.

As a spiritual family and a human family, we can all help avert climate change with the practice of mindful eating. Going vegetarian may be the most effective way to stop climate change.

Being vegetarian is already enough to save the world.  
—from Thich Nhat Hanh’s 2007 “Blue Cliff Letter” (28)

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This perspective provides a mindful way to approach the decision that can be framed as a choice, to eat animals or to choose to abstain from eating animals. Some choose, instead, to eat a whole foods, plant-based diet. Many of us have never considered how we eat to be a choice; we simply eat the same or similar foods of our childhood, communities, and cultural roots.

“By most measures, confined animal production systems in common use today fall short of current ethical and societal standards.”—Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production



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What is the true price we pay in order to consume a cheap hamburger? (29). The giant corporations who have industrialized the processing of animal protein work tirelessly to conceal the release of any information regarding how meat, chicken, turkey, and pork products are made in the United States. We only know what we do about animal welfare thanks to heroic efforts of activists and journalists who go undercover in CAFOs. Corporate interests are trying harder than ever to prevent *any* information on how our meat is produced to reach consumers. They’ve even taken legal steps to silence anyone who tries to reveal the truth about where our food comes from. Called “Ag-Gag” laws (30), anti-whistleblower bills seek to criminalize whistleblowing on factory farms, keeping consumers in the dark about where their food is coming from. Despite the fact that whistleblowing has played a vital role in exposing animal abuse, unsafe working conditions, and environmental problems on industrial farms, the agribusiness industry-written anti-whistleblower laws effectively block anyone from exposing animal cruelty, food-safety issues, poor working conditions, and more in factory farms. These bills could do this by:

- Banning taking a photo or video of a factory farm without permission,
- Essentially making it a crime for an investigator to get work at a factory farm, or
- Requiring mandatory reporting with impossibly short timelines so that no pattern of abuse can be documented.

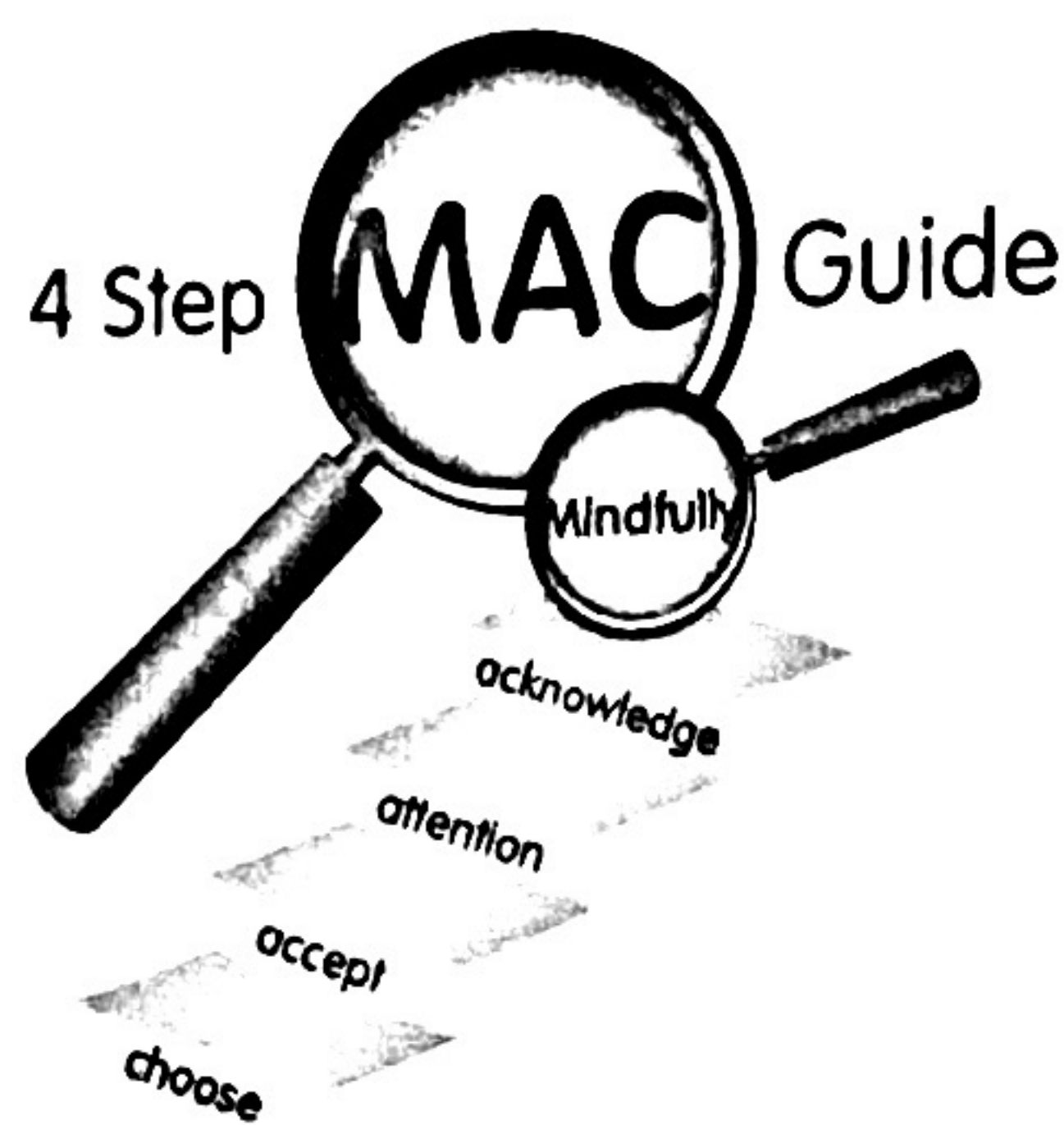
In 2013, 15 anti-whistleblower bills were introduced in 11 states: Arkansas, California, Indiana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Wyoming, and Vermont. So far, none have passed.



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## SUSTAINABLE LIVING MINDFULLY EATING: A SOLUTION?

In order to make conscious choices, we embrace mindfulness as a practice to help us be awake, aware, and alive. How might we mindfully frame a philosophy of eating that aligns with our developing mindful awareness?



## Eat Conscientiously

Since nearly all the animal products available in supermarkets and restaurants (meat, seafood, eggs, and dairy) come from factory farms or destructive, inhumane fishing methods, we may wish to examine our own beliefs and values to see if we wish to revisit the unquestioned and unexamined practice of eating animals.

## The Foods We Eat

The egg and chicken industries are among the most abusive to animals (31). In light of this, some conscious eaters choose to eat beef, but boycott poultry and eggs. Some skip eating meat when eating out, but at home where there is more control eat as a selective omnivore. Some choose to eliminate animal products out of their diets entirely.

## Labels

The mindful consumer can, with care, selectively eat products from animals raised outside the factory system. This is thanks to labeling laws, however, most labels are misleading or meaningless. Those who are interested in labels that are accurate as opposed to advertisements need to review labeling guides from reputable sources (32). Here is a condensed guide to the most commonly used terms you may find on animal products:

<p><b>Certified Organic</b></p>	<p>The animals must be allowed outdoor access, with ruminants (cows, sheep, and goats) given access to pasture. Amount of outdoor time is undefined. Animals must be provided with bedding materials. Use of hormones, antibiotics prohibited. Surgical procedures (e.g., castration) are permitted without anesthesia. Compliance verified through third-party auditing; requirements through USDA's National Organic Program (33).</p>
<p><b>Free Range Chickens, Turkeys</b></p>	<p>Birds "should" have outdoor access. No requirements on stocking density, frequency or duration of outdoor access, nor quality of the land accessible to the animals is defined. Surgical procedures without pain relief allowed. Producers submit affidavits to the U.S. Department of Agriculture that support animal production claims in order to receive labeling approval.</p>
<p><b>Grass Fed</b></p>	<p>Ruminant animals fed a diet solely of grass and forage, with the exception of milk fed before weaning. Animals have access to the outdoors and can engage in some natural behaviors like grazing. Must have continuous pasture access during growing season. Surgery without anesthesia permitted. Producers submit affidavit to USDA supporting their animal production claims in order to receive approval to use the label.</p>

<b>Cage Free</b>	Unlike birds raised for eggs, those raised for meat are rarely caged prior to transport. As such, this label on poultry products has virtually no relevance to animal welfare. However, the label is helpful when found on egg cartons, as most egg-laying hens are kept in severely restrictive cages prohibiting most natural behavior, including spreading their wings.
<b>Certified Humane</b>	Must keep animals in conditions that allow for exercise and freedom of movement. Crates, cages, and tethers are prohibited. Outdoor access is not required for poultry or pigs, but is required for other species. Stocking densities are specified to prevent the overcrowding of animals. All animals must be provided with bedding materials. Hormone and non-therapeutic antibiotic use is prohibited. Pain relief must be used for physical alterations (castration and disbudding) for cattle. For other mammals, anesthesia and analgesia must be used over 7 days of age, but not earlier. Poultry may have parts of their beaks removed without painkillers, though not after 10 days of age. The program also covers slaughter methods. Compliance is verified through auditing by the labeling program. Certified Humane is a program of Humane Farm Animal Care (34).
<b>5-Step Animal Welfare Rating System</b>	Animals rated according to different levels of welfare standards, from Step 1 to Step 5+. Program is audited and certified by independent third parties. Step 1: no cages/crates; Step 2: environmental enrichment for indoor production systems; Step 3: outdoor access; Step 4: pasture-based production; Step 5: animal-centric approach with all physical alterations prohibited; Step 5+: entire life of animal spent on same integrated farm, all transport disallowed. Hormone, sub-therapeutic antibiotic use is prohibited (35).
<b>Hormone Free, rBGH Free, rBST Free, and No Hormones Added</b>	These labels on dairy products mean the cows were not given with rBGH or rBST, genetically engineered hormones that increase milk production. Hormones are commonly used to speed growth in beef production, and their use by both the beef and dairy industries are associated with animal welfare problems (31). Chicken and pig producers are not legally allowed to use hormones. These claims do not have significant relevance to the animals' living conditions. Painful surgical procedures without any pain relief are permitted. There may be some verification of this claim, but not necessarily.

## Where We Shop

Never underestimate the power of the purchaser to drive changes. Where you shop can make a difference. Progressive independent grocers or the Whole Foods chain of supermarkets (who have driven tremendous changes in labeling of humanely treated animals) (36, 37) tend to source many of their animal products from local producers or operations with higher animal welfare and sustainability standards. Too expensive to purchase sustainably raised meat? Commit to one meal a week of humane meat, or switch a meal to a plant-based one. Notice how you feel when you make this change with only one step forward. If you notice a difference, physically, mentally, or emotionally, make another. Explore local farmers markets or food coops, too, as alternatives to your traditional shopping patterns.

## SIGNS OF POSITIVE CHANGE

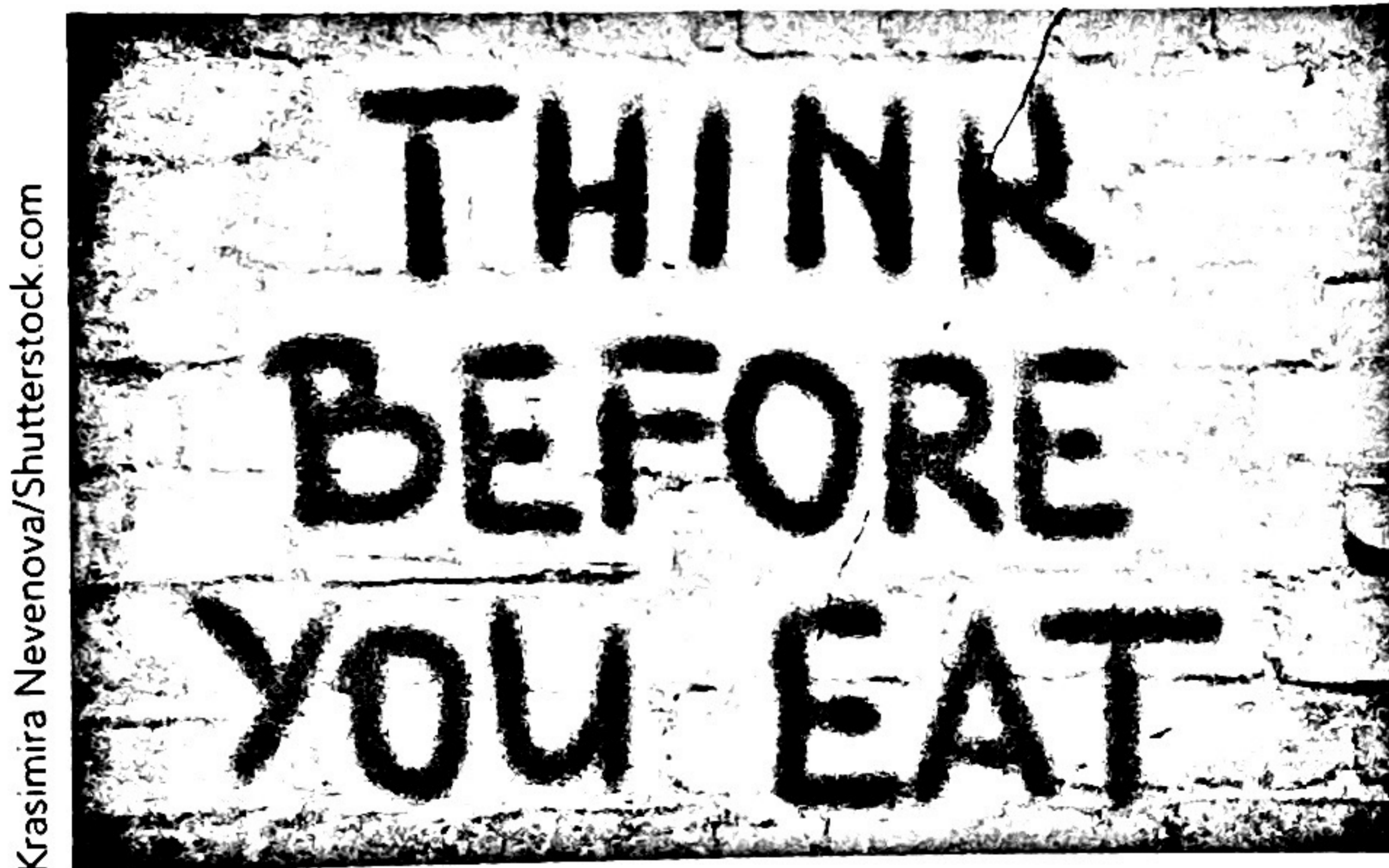
There is a revolution happening on our plates! Not only does what we purchase matter, and where we buy our food, but also significant are the political changes that improve standards for farms. Pending state and federal legislation may improve conditions for farm animals (32). Other legislation addresses the effects of farms on our environment (37) and communities (38).

Political action matters, too. Tell Congress that you want to support alternatives to factory farming (39). Talk with the people who produce your food. Ask them to tell you where your food comes from. If you aren't allowed to see where it originates, you might reconsider whether you should eat it. Stay informed on current issues regarding more humane and sustainable farming. Two great sources are Farm Forward (39) and the Humane Society of the United States (32).

Here is a short list of some of the organizations advocating for a change in Sustainable Living and Mindful Eating:

- Farm Forward—[www.farmforward.com](http://www.farmforward.com)
- Farm Sanctuary—[www.farmsanctuary.org](http://www.farmsanctuary.org)
- Food and Water Watch—[www.foodandwaterwatch.org](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org)
- Food Democracy Now!—[www.fooddemocracynow.org](http://www.fooddemocracynow.org)
- Humane Society of the United States—[www.hsus.org](http://www.hsus.org)
- People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals—[www.peta.org](http://www.peta.org)
- Sierra Club—[www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org)
- Sustainable Table—[www.sustainabletable.org](http://www.sustainabletable.org)
- Waterkeeper Alliance—[www.waterkeeperalliance.org](http://www.waterkeeperalliance.org)

“So tenacious can our habits of life and mind be that even today, despite everything we know and the genuine alternatives we have for a nutritious diet, less than 1 percent of U.S. adults have turned away from factory-farmed meat for ethical reasons” (40).



As humans, we possess an incredible capacity to look the other way when things are inconvenient or dissonant. In one respect, it is part of our humanness. Ancient wisdom might suggest that looking the other way is a hindrance to mindfulness. Any time we allow our awareness to rest in the past or the future and away from the present moment, we miss out on only what we are guaranteed, this very moment. A mindfulness practice offers us the capacity to change, by examining with curiosity, compassion, and kindness our habits of mind and body. We can notice how we feel when we look at the ways we habitually act, and in so doing; can choose

to intentionally take more skillful action. Habits of life and mind are tenacious. So are hindrances to mindfulness. Hindrances cloud the clear water of awareness, and keep us from moving toward insight. As we develop compassion toward others, we develop compassion for ourselves, and for all living things. From a mindfulness perspective, every action (speech, thought, and behavior) has a result or subsequent reaction. Wholesome actions will cause results or effects, and unwholesome acts will cause results and effects. It is up to each one of us to decide for ourselves whether the actions we take are wholesome or unwholesome. As we develop a greater sense of inner and outer awareness fostered through our

mindfulness practice, we can recognize our synergistic connection to all living things (41). With greater awareness, comes greater responsibility. As you approach your own mindfulness practice, with gentleness and curiosity, you may find yourself changing habits in ways that provide excitement and surprise.

Even eating one plant-based meal a week can make a difference. It's not necessary to give up eating meat; experiment with easy, delicious, and satisfying ways to try plant-based meals. Shifting gently can be easy and delicious. Try this excellent veggie burger with a bite that will make you forget about beef!

## Buckwheat Burgers with Sesame Gravy

### Ingredients

1 cup cooked buckwheat  
 ½-teaspoon thyme  
 1½ cups cooked garbonzo beans  
 ½-cup sourdough breadcrumbs  
 1 stalk celery, minced fine  
 1 green onion, sliced  
 ½-teaspoon marjoram  
 2 tablespoons finely minced parsley  
 1-teaspoon tamari soy sauce  
 Approximately ½-cup water  
 ½-teaspoon sesame oil

Mash the beans until smooth. Add all the other ingredients, and just enough water to moisten so the mixture is stiff and not too sticky. Shape into slightly flattened patties. Bake on an oiled cookie sheet at 375°F for 25 minutes, or until the top is a little crispy. Serve with sesame gravy.

## Sesame Gravy

### Ingredients

1 cup water  
 1 heaping tablespoon kuzu\*  
 3-tablespoon sesame seeds  
 2–3 teaspoons tamari soy sauce

Roast the seeds by stirring in a skillet over medium heat until they smell nutty and crumble easily between thumb and forefinger. Grind into butter in the blender or suribachi. Dissolve kuzu in cool water, then combine all ingredients and heat. Stir until it thickens.

Kuzu is a natural thickening agent you can use to give the gravy a nice texture and consistency. Made from a plant that is common in the South, it is a starch that is commonly used as a food ingredient. In some countries, it is dissolved as a beverage. It is an alkaline food, and in ancient traditions was used for treating digestive issues.