

A Guide to Vegetarian Living on a Budget

An Independent Learning Project

Presented by

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To

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Vegetarian Living on A Budget

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Abstract

The focus of this thesis is the creation of a resource for individuals on a limited budget who are interested in adopting a vegetarian lifestyle. The lack of such resources reinforces the stereotype of both vegetarianism and activism as reserved for the privileged. The work is designed to suit the needs of people who already interested in vegetarianism, and as a supplementary resource for humane educators, to enable interested parties to initiate dietary changes. To address the barriers to vegetarianism, this project deals with the types of food stores in low income areas, the relative pricing in these areas, strategies designed to cut food costs, price comparisons between vegetarian and meat-based foods, basic vegetarian staple foods and recipes, and strategies to bring more vegetarian foods into neighborhoods where they are not already available. An attempt is made to realistically address the needs of individuals living on a restricted budget but is likely does not completely address the needs of this population. More in-depth information on living as a vegetarian will be useful for any individuals pursuing this lifestyle on a long-term basis.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### Rationale

The purpose of this ILP is to first determine how people with a limited budget have been able to increase their accessibility to vegetarian foods and then use this information to create a guide to affordable vegetarian<sup>1</sup> living that I can distribute to humane educators, vegetarian activists, and individuals interested in vegetarianism on a limited budget. My hope is that the guide will be passed to students and those to whom activists advocate, to help those in the vegetarian movement reach out to an underserved population.

While trying to live a compassionate life, I have become frustrated that vegetarianism is consistently associated with the consumption of expensive and specialized foods by vegetarian writers, publications, and non-profit groups. Portraying vegetarianism as a diet that relies on expensive and hard-to-find foods marginalizes vegetarianism by subtly dissuading members of lower socio-economic levels from adopting vegetarian diets. My own experience has shown me that a vegetarian diet can be economically feasible for a wide range of people. I seek to create a guide that offers a variety of ways for vegetarian and vegan diets to become accessible to a wide variety of people.

In teaching about vegetarianism, which often includes discussions about social justice, environmental, and animal issues, I am often at a loss when my students ask me what they can

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<sup>1</sup> The word “vegetarian” will be used throughout this project with the intent of being as inclusive as possible. The specific dietary choices outline are, in fact, vegan (free from animal products of all kinds) as it is the lowest common denominator and more fully addresses the environmental, and ethical issues related to diet.

eat, buy, or do to help solve the problems we discuss. I know that if I pass on most existing vegetarian guides, the students may be put off by the lack of availability and accessibility such resources outline. A few students may make some sense of existing resources and develop some solutions that work for them, given their economic constraints, their neighborhoods, the transportation available to them, and their commitment to the issues. Most, however, end up feeling that the changes they would have to make are unreasonable. Without a guide to help individuals in their particular situations, otherwise willing individuals may turn away from vegetarian food choices. The changes that are within their reach will not appear to be so.

Individuals coming from lower economic brackets are often ignored by vegetarian advocacy literature but are the first to be affected negatively by the health problems related to an animal-rich diet (Iyer, 2007). Health aspects of vegetarianism are relevant and significant because the long-term economic advantages to good health resulting from a vegetarian diet are crucial to a population that often struggles to find adequate healthcare and insurance coverage. Further, many low-income individuals interested in adopting vegetarianism initially do so because of health-related motivations. There are new solutions to be discovered and I hope my research begins opening doors for people to consider new ways of taking care of themselves, their families, their communities, and the world at large.

I am interested in finding a way to empower individuals to be part of meaningful change through their own actions and I seek to use the guide to do just that. Many existing vegetarian guides work from the assumption that their audience enjoys the privileges of capital, transportation, and unlimited time to shop and cook. Coming from such privilege myself, it is important for me to stay focused on the needs of my anticipated audience without asserting any of my own assumptions onto my audience. The assumptions that go hand in hand with privilege

are the very reason why the needs of marginalized groups continue to be under-represented (McIntosh, 1989). I am weary of using my own privilege to “enlighten” people without understanding the power dynamics of such interactions (Iyer, 2007). I would like to learn a way to appeal to individuals in a respectful and effective way. I also would like to quantitatively analyze various consumption choices to have an honest look at the obstacles relating to vegetarian food choices.

Not only will this project allow me to have a better understanding of some of the practical barriers to the choice to become vegetarian, but it will also allow me to have a valuable resource to offer others. It will fill a gap in the literature and will directly address some of the needs of the population I teach.

## Goal

My goal is to develop a booklet that will provide people (both adults and teenagers) with information that will make vegetarianism more accessible. The booklet will be basic and will be intended for individuals who are new to vegetarianism. The booklet itself will consider the types of foods and products typically available in low-income areas, transportation costs, use of food stamps, and typical time available for individuals to shop and prepare food. Special attention will be paid to the accurate comparisons of costs of various types of choices available. As a way to encourage vegetarianism, it is important to be realistic with the types of products available in low-income neighborhoods. This booklet will offer ways to use existing food suppliers (like corner stores and groceries already in their neighborhoods), but will also teach the reader to encourage new types of affordable, vegetarian food to be carried locally by the existing markets.

It will also contain a few more long-term and involved solutions encouraged to allow this population access to affordable, vegetarian food including farmers markets, improving transportation to allow residents to access a wider variety of stores, adding public markets, adding mobile markets (where healthier foods actually come to the residents), creating co-operative grocery stores, utilizing farm-to-school initiatives, and creating community gardens. Each section will provide a very brief explanation of why these issues are important and relevant and then offer simple and useful suggestions.

I seek to create a booklet that is positive and welcoming as well as useful. This booklet is intended to be a starting point and will offer further resources to individuals interested in learning more and going further with their understanding of food choices. I will attempt to respect both the circumstances of the population (personal, social, political, and emotional) (Evans & English, 2002) and the reality of the issues the booklet seeks to address (oppression of animals and the environment, and health).

The essential questions guiding this research are:

- What are the obstacles to individuals at a lower income level making vegetarian food choices?
- What options and resources are available to this population that will allow them to access vegetarian foods in their daily lives?

Research regarding food availability, lifestyle and accessibility issues involving low income individuals, and ways in which individuals and communities have been successful in accessing vegetarian foods will help answer both questions. The expected gains are more informed consumers, better communication between storeowner and consumer, improved health of the consumer, and a more positive impact on the animals, environment, and workers tied to the

choices of these consumers because meat production has been linked with violating human, animal, and environmental rights (Vegan Outreach, 2006).

## Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this project is the lack of literature available to low-income individuals who are interested in adopting vegetarian diets. This project will offer resources for eating a vegetarian diet while remaining mindful of the complex social and political issues that affect the audience.

## Population

The population that will benefit from my project includes any individual who would like some guidance on reducing the negative impact of their daily choices on animals, the environment, their own health, and other individuals via their patterns of consumption. This includes, but is not limited to, low-income individuals. From a wider perspective, the environment, animals, and laborers involved in the meat and dairy industries are also populations who could benefit from this project.

## Methodology

After I have reviewed the literature regarding the obstacles facing low-income individuals who are interested in consuming vegetarian products and some of the solutions that have worked elsewhere, I will survey various corner/grocery storeowners in low-income areas to try to understand the rationale behind the food they choose to sell in the store and the potential of

increasing the amount of vegetarian-friendly foods in these markets. I will ask the following questions to the storeowners in a written survey:

- How do you decide which products to carry?
- If customers request specific products, are you able to carry them?
- How do you decide which new product requests to accept?
- How do you think products like soy milk, vegetarian mock meats, and whole grains would sell in your store?
- Would you ever consider selling these products? Why or why not?

I will assess the availability of basic staples of a vegetarian diet in five markets, located in low-income neighborhoods by using a list of staple vegetarian foods that will indicate whether or not these basic food items are available.

I will have a cost/ounce section to determine the pricing of comparable non-vegetarian foods. Using this rubric, I will rate five different stores in various low-income areas around the city. I will also use it at a supermarket and a health food store to compare the prices and availability. This checklist of staple foods combined with the survey given to the store managers will explore whether or not these foods are available for low-income individuals and what it would take to make them available. In other words, I will create a list of staple vegetarian foods and then determine which stores stock such food and how affordable these items are in each store. Using what I learn from the survey of storeowners in low-income areas, I will also outline what customers can do, if anything, to increase the availability of the desired products in their own neighborhood stores.

Using the cost of a standard market basket, I will also attempt to create a vegetarian market basket from a minimum of five stores that are located in low-income neighborhoods. This will be a market basket based on the USDA's thrifty food plan, using the most current limits for food spending. I will attempt to buy enough vegetarian food to nutritiously feed one adult male for a week (because the calorie needs are higher and receive more spending allowance). I will make sure that all the food in the basket is eligible for food stamp purchase and will meet the nutrition needs for that person. This information will tell me if I need to add more focus in my guide to using food that already exists in the neighborhood stores or if I need to focus more on utilizing community supported agriculture (CSA), community gardens, or other ways of encouraging new types availability in these neighborhoods.

For the foods that are not available, I will explore various options for obtaining these foods and will outline the costs of these foods (including time spent and transportation costs). I will also outline several alternative and more long-term options for individuals seeking to improve access to healthier, more humane food options in their neighborhoods. Long-term options refer to the CSAs, community gardens, and other efforts that would not yield food availability in a short period of time. The shorter term options involve educating individuals to choose healthier foods from what is already available and encouraging their grocers to carry the desired foods. I will offer contacts and background information for people to use to help them find or facilitate farmers markets, community supported agriculture products, mobile food programs, and other similar programs.

All of this information will be organized in a booklet that will serve as Chapter 3 of this ILP. The booklet is the "product" of the research and work. I will intentionally keep the booklet as simple and straightforward as possible to make it accessible to the broadest section of the

population as possible. It will contain some of the relevant information from the surveys performed, the foods in the market basket, food options/recipes, tips on how to encourage neighborhood stores to carry desired items, tips on accessing food that is unavailable in the neighborhood, and the how-to guide of potential organizing/long-term food options. I will also work to make it visually appealing, to encourage readers to utilize it.

### Limitations

There are several limitations to this study:

- This guide is based on food availability in a large, urban area. Low-income food availability is likely different in rural settings. Also, public transit is also not likely as available in less urban environments and so the guidelines I present may not be generalizable.
- The responses of the storeowners may differ from their actual willingness to carry new products.
- The staple foods are based on a guide to low budget vegetarianism and basic vegan nutrition guidelines but are not intended to be finite or universal.
- The guide uses the word “vegetarian” but does so only to be more welcoming to people who are considering vegetarianism but who are not fully prepared to consider veganism. Nonetheless, the suggestions and foods in the guide are entirely animal-free, thus are useful to both vegans and vegetarians. This is a limitation in that the language is potentially misleading.
- The recipe section is not intended to be complete, but merely a starting point.

- The section on organizing and working with local food stores, similarly, is not meant to be sufficient for an individual seeking to carry out such actions. Instead, these sections are meant to be a source of inspiration and knowledge that individuals can use as a springboard into more in-depth resources.
- This guide does not seek to explain the “why” behind the choice to be a vegetarian. There are mountains of statistics, arguments, testimonials, accounts, and images that can do that work satisfactorily. This guide is intended for the individual who is considering making changes but does not yet know how to go about it.
- Some books do exist that address vegetarian eating/cooking on a budget. The nature of these books, however, is such that the population addressed in this project does not have access to them. The idea of the brochure is that it is a resource that can be widely distributed and *given* away, rather than sold, thus this guide is admittedly less complete than other existing resources.

## Literature Review

### Chapter Two

#### Introduction

As more and more consumers become aware of the effects of their food choices on their own bodies, animals, and the environment, the demand for and interest in vegetarian choices increases (Ginsberg & Ostrowski, 2002). Most food guide resources assume that the consumer has access to expensive and difficult-to-find products. The effect of such literature further marginalizes those living on a limited income. This review contains information that can be used to create a guide to combat this marginalization and to empower individuals to align their actions with their ethics.

A wide variety of references were consulted to begin the project. It was important to understand recent statistics about poverty, food consumption, food availability, health in low-income communities and ethical consumerism. Each of these elements, although they do not speak directly to the topic of creating resources for aspiring vegetarians or vegans who are on a budget, are useful to frame and better understand the issue.

This literature review is divided into four main categories:

- The motivation for and economic feasibility of vegetarian diets
- Some of the realities and obstacles relating to food in low-income communities (including availability, affordability, proximity to food stores, and transportation concerns)

- Some alternatives and success stories from such communities and
- Basic information on how to live on a low-budget vegetarian diet

### The Motivation for and Economic Feasibility of Vegetarian Diets

Throughout history meat consumption has served to divide classes with the higher classes consuming the most meat (Lewis, 1994). Lewis explains that,

Poverty makes quick work of diet and nutrition concerns, because if you are hungry, you eat what you can get. As poverty becomes more widespread, the arguments of a more sensible diet are lost because so many do not hear the message. (p. 1100S)

It is important to understand to what extent poverty is limiting food choice in order to understand the audience to which this guide should be geared. To understand the spectrum of food choice and the varying levels of poverty that determine this food choice, The United States Department of Agriculture's definitions of food security will be utilized. Food security is when all individuals in a household have consistent access to enough food to lead healthy, active lives (USDA, 2001). According to the USDA, in 2005 89% of U.S. households were food secure. The remaining 11% were food insecure at some time throughout the year. Only 3.9% of households experienced "very low food security," which means that food intake was disrupted or reduced due to a lack of money or resources needed for food (USDA, 2007). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2005, 12.6% of the United States was living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). These statistics suggest that a sizeable number of people, even those who are living in poverty, have the resources to obtain sufficient food for themselves and their families. Thus, the dire situations in which "poverty makes quick work of diet and nutrition

concerns”(Lewis, 1994, p.1100S) in the U.S. mainly apply to the 3.9% of food insecure households. In all other households basic nutrition needs are met and food intake is never disrupted. This is not to say access to healthy foods is fairly distributed but that 96.1% of households in the U.S. have the resources to purchase, at the very least, the bare minimum of nutrients needed to keep their families nourished. This project seeks to address the needs of the individuals who are on a limited income but who still have some choice in the food that they consume. Some individuals who could benefit from this guide may not appear in the 3.9%-12.6% of individuals living below the poverty line but may still have limitations on their food budgets for any number of reasons. This guide will seek to meet the needs of those living below the poverty line but will be appropriate for anyone with a restricted food budget, even if they do not fall, statistically, within the 3.9%-12.6% of individuals defined as impoverished.

Interestingly enough, a European study entitled *Consumer Concerns About Animal Welfare and the Impact on Food Choice* shows that people already concerned about animal welfare rate cost as the least important barrier to consuming animal-friendly products but that even when consumers state that they are willing to pay more for improved animal welfare, “such statements rarely translate into practice” (Harper & Henson, 2001, p.11). The report explains that consumers do indeed have high levels of concern about animal welfare but identified four main barriers to consumption of animal-friendly products to account for the discrepancy between concern and actual food choice: availability, cost, information, and perceived influence (Harper & Henson, 2001). These four factors are crucial barriers, potentially preventing many consumers from making consistent and compassionate choices. These four factors are the gap between intention and action that this project seeks to bridge.

There is evidence to suggest that the availability of information regarding how to buy and prepare food (important elements of this project) is tremendously important for those contemplating vegetarianism motivated by health concerns (Feifer, Upadhyia, & Potter, 2003). This 2003 study on the efficacy of an educational intervention to encourage a healthy, vegetarian diet in a low-income, urban environment yielded some interesting information. First, the participants rated “group support” and “food-related content” as the most important aspects of the curriculum, suggesting the significance of information about food availability and preparation (Feifer, Upadhyia, & Potter, 2003, p. 7). The diet was centered around widely available legumes, vegetables, and grains. The participants were familiar with these foods but were considered by some of these individuals to be “poor foods” (Feifer, Upadhyia, & Potter, p. 9). These core foods are available to this population but carry a “poor foods” stigma, despite the fact that they are far healthier and more cost-effective than prepackaged, high fat, animal-rich foods. The historical association of animal-rich foods with affluence and health persists (Lewis, 1994). Feifer. et al.’s (2003) study found that the mean long-term weight loss on this diet was 13 pounds and that most of the participants succeeded in reducing their intake of animal protein and fat but that very few of them successfully eliminated it. It is important to note that the motivation for these changes was entirely health-related. As previously pointed out, long-term diet changes motivated by ethical concerns tend to be more long term and quantifiable (Lamb, 1994).

One study on the ethical attitudes of consumers in relation to meat purchases found that humans are simply inconsistent. The key finding of this research is that “Individuals can hold two views on animal welfare. As citizens they support the notion of animals being entitled to a good life; as meat consumers, they avoid the cognitive connection with the live animal”

(Schroder & McEachern, 2004, p. 168). Likely, the previously mentioned four barriers (cost, availability, information, and perceived influence) come into play here. Feasible, available alternatives to meat consumption for these individuals who are already predisposed to concern for animals is likely what holds this population back from living according to its ethical attitudes and is the aim of this project.

It is important to note that not all consumers are driven by ethical concerns. In attempting to understand “responsible consumer behavior” James Roberts (1996) found that 39% of consumers can be labeled as “non-ethical.” (p. 81). This project is geared toward the other 61% of consumers who already have some desire to lessen the negative impacts of their actions. There are other tools and interventions in place that are more appropriate for those who are currently “non-ethical consumers” but this work is designed to be a functional tool for those who want to be part of the solution but who can not normally afford to be. Roberts uncovered another significant finding, which is that tenancies toward ethical consumerism do not seem to be consistently related to demographics (Roberts, 1996). This finding is useful because it suggests that when alternative products exist and are available individuals from a wide array of demographics will make these so called “ethical” consumer choices (Roberts) reiterating the notion that if this guide illuminates some vegetarian alternatives, individuals will, in fact, choose such options.

One recent article suggests that simple vegetarian diets are actually cheaper because of lower cost of plant-based proteins and long-term costs of health care for those on an unhealthy meat-based diet (McCredie, 2007). It is important to point out that the author specifically warns against prepackaged imitation products (like vegetarian hot dogs and burgers) because of their exorbitant prices (McCredie, 2007). In the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals’

(PETA's) *Guide to Compassionate Living*, not one of the 6 pages dedicated to explaining what a vegetarian *can* eat is free of the expensive, and often hard to find meat or cheese alternatives (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, 2006). Such a guide is focused on making the transition to vegetarianism as simple and seamless as possible and is extremely helpful and beneficial to those with access to such products. For the rest of the population, however, a guide, like PETA's inadvertently suggests that vegetarian dietary choices are out of reach and unobtainable.

#### Food Realities and Obstacles in Low-Income Communities

A 2001 Mintel Consumer Intelligence Report suggested that less than three percent of vegetarian foods are purchased outside of supermarkets and health food stores in smaller food retail stores (Ginsberg & Ostrowski, 2002). Given that low-income areas are three times less likely to have supermarkets than higher-income areas and African-American neighborhoods are four times less likely to have supermarkets than white neighborhoods, there is clearly an availability problem (Access to Healthy Foods Limited in Poor Neighborhoods, 2002). In low-income neighborhoods the vast majority of food outlets are smaller grocery and convenience stores which tend to have less variety, less healthy food, and actually cost more (Access, 2002). It has been found that lower-income individuals actually pay more per item because they cannot access the discounted prices typically offered by the larger chain stores (Chung & Meyers, 1999). Some individuals living on a low income, due to strategic practices, do end up spending less on total food purchases even though the purchase prices are higher (Access, 2002). The general ways such individuals economize are by shopping in discount food stores, purchase and consume less food, purchase lower priced (and possibly lower quality food), and a combination

of the three strategies (Liebttag & Kaufman, 2004). This project will test whether or not using these strategies, combined with other strategies, can offer low-income individuals a realistic vegetarian alternative.

The health of low-income communities is suffering, in part, because of the combination of factors that lead to the types of food actually consumed in such areas. In low-income areas energy dense foods (those high in fats and refined sugars) are cheaper and so are consumed more than the healthier alternatives (Drewnowski & Barratt-Fornell, 2004). Such foods “fail to trigger psychological satiety mechanisms-the internal signals that enough food has been consumed” (p. 165), thus offering a link between obesity of individuals on a low income and food prices. Drewnowski et al. argues, “continuing to recommend costly [as is the trend in vegetarian literature as well] to low-income families as a public health measure can only generate frustration among the poor and less well-educated” (p. 168) because the food pyramid itself is based on costly and often inaccessible foods echoing the sentiment behind this project.

Although there is a serious dearth of research related to availability of vegetarian foods in low-income areas, there has been a great deal of research on increasing the consumption and availability of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and non-processed foods. These definitions of “healthy” foods closely correlate with the diet that will be recommended in the booklet for this project. For this reason, research investigating “healthy” foods, as the term is used in the research, can be considered in this project to help understand ways in which others have increased the availability and consumption of such foods<sup>2</sup>. Socio-economically disadvantaged individuals are less likely to buy high-fiber, low-fat, low-salt, and low-sugar items and low-

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<sup>2</sup> Although not all vegetarian foods are “healthy,” the foods recommended in this guide will generally fall into the high-fiber, low-fat, low-salt, and low-sugar categories. This is partially because these foods are more advisable for health but also so that the existing research can be applied to this project.

income households purchase fewer types of fruits vegetables (Turrell, Hewitt, Patterson, Oldenburg, & Gould, 2002). A food basket study (based on the USDA's "Thrifty Food Plan" which will be referenced later in this section) showed that a healthier two-week supply of groceries (as determined by whole grains, fat content, and other standard indicators) cost \$230, while a standard market basket cost only \$194 (Jetter & Cassady, 2006). The authors cite a lack of availability of healthy, diverse foods from small grocery stores in low-income areas as well as the higher costs of healthier foods (Jetter & Cassady, 2006). Simply introducing stores with healthier foods into low-income neighborhoods has been shown to improve eating behaviors of low-income individuals (Policy Link, 2005). Even when price and availability of fruit and vegetable do not change, educating WIC mothers on choosing and storing produce results in an increased consumption of plant foods; this research suggests that the lack of basic food education is a significant barrier (Birmingham, Shultz, & Edelefsen, 2004). "Self-efficacy" was found to be the major factor related to increased fruit and vegetable consumption; again, suggesting that education which empowers consumers is also key in encouraging healthier food consumption (Van Duyn, Kristal, Dodd, Campbell, Subar, Stables, et al., 2001). This finding is significant because empowering consumers is exactly what this guide seeks to do.

Research shows that chain supermarket retailers' avoidance of low-income, neighborhoods does not make sense for their bottom line. In some instances, chain stores in low-income areas are the highest grossing of any of their stores (PolicyLink, 2005). Most low-income communities are still only offered small grocery stores with limited options.

The USDA has created a "Thrifty Food Plan" on which to base food stamp allotment. It is based on the notion that all foods are purchased and prepared at home and takes into account dietary recommendations, actual consumption patterns, food composition data, and food prices

(United States Department of Agriculture, 2006). In May 2007, The USDA budgeted \$125.30/week for a family of four and \$35.90/week for a male between ages nineteen and fifty and \$32.20/week for a woman between ages nineteen and fifty (United States Department of Agriculture, 2007). This offers the food expenditure guidelines for a person on a limited budget. The challenge will be to create a healthy, vegetarian market basket with items available in low-income areas. It is worthwhile to point out that food eaten out of the home (not home cooked) is estimated to be between thirty-five to fifty percent of all food consumed in the U.S. (United States Department of Agriculture, 2007), suggesting that altering the eating and food preparation patterns will be essential if one is to live within the USDA's guidelines for sustenance within USDA budget guidelines. The guide will focus on purchasing and preparing food at home as a way to maximize the quantity and quality of food per dollar spent.

### Alternatives

A non-profit organization called Policy Link in its 2005 booklet entitled *Healthy Food, Healthy Communities* attempts to outline potential solutions to address food accessibility problems facing low-income communities. This organization's research yielded ten basic solutions: adding new grocery stores which will stock fresher and healthier foods, stocking different foods in existing grocery stores (by working with the owners to enrich the selections offered), adding farmers markets (by coordinating food growers and organizing a consumer base to support these food growers), improving transportation to allow residents to access a wider variety of stores (which can range from carpools to desired food outlets to vans and busses that make runs to a wider variety of food outlets), adding public markets (where a wide range of vendors can offer their food and non-food items), adding mobile markets (where healthier foods

actually come to the residents), creating co-operative grocery stores, utilizing farm-to-school initiatives, and creating community gardens (PolicyLink, 2005).

### A Low-Budget Vegetarian Diet

In a book entitled *How to Survive as a Low Budget Vegetarian*, Obert (2004) suggests that a healthy diet is based on grains, vegetables, and legumes. A low-budget vegetarian shopping list, according to Obert, will include some grains (rice, bread, hot grain cereals, bulghar wheat, barley, quinoa, pasta, oatmeal, and buckwheat), some vegetables- in order of how often they will be used (onions, carrots, cabbage, ginger, celery, scallions, diced tomatoes, parsley, garlic, tomatoes, parsnips, turnips, bell peppers, zucchini, beets, radishes, frozen corn, frozen peas, collard greens, mustard greens, chard, squash, and any other seasonal vegetables), basic spices and condiments (olive oil, canola oil, peanut oil, sesame oil, and sea vegetables) and some legumes (lentils, black beans, chick peas, split peas, pinto beans, fava beans, kidney beans, and aduki beans). He considers other, more vegetarian-specific foods “convenience foods.” These convenience items include: tofu, tomato paste, lemon juice, brown sugar, wheat gluten, soy milk/rice milk, miso, tempeh, and soy sauce. His recipes involve a basic pattern of heating the oil, adding vegetables, salt, and spices; adding the compliment (beans, tofu, seitan, or tempeh); stirring in the grain; and adding final condiments or garnishes. He also explains basic salad recipes involving similar ingredients of vegetables, grains and beans. These basic guidelines will be offered as healthy, economical ways to reduce the animal-derived calories in one’s diet and replace them with healthy, vegetable-sourced foods.

Vegan Outreach’s “Guide to Compassionate Living,” (2005) suggests that meals are also comprised of the three basic elements of protein, carbohydrate, and vegetables but the guide

focuses on foods that are less likely to be available in low-income areas like nutritional yeast, seitan, tofu, tempeh, mock meats, egg and dairy alternatives, vegetarian broths, and textured vegetable proteins. Neither Vegan Outreach nor PETA's "Guide to Compassionate Living" has any substantial discussion of the expense or availability of the suggested foods. Vegan Outreach attempts an explanation with a short paragraph tacked on to the end of its booklet that reads,

Isn't being vegan expensive? There is nothing inherently more expensive about a vegan diet. Trying to replicate the standard American diet with mock meats and dairy products can be costly. But pasta, beans, potatoes, and breads are all generally less expensive than animal products of similar nutritional value. (p.30)

## **Conclusion**

Even though people living on lower incomes may be interested in making ethical food choices, most guides and resources are created for those with extra money, time to shop, and access to specialty grocers and markets. The existing vegetarian guides do not take into account the limited availability of food in low income areas, the prices of food, or any of the other concerns that people living on a fixed income may experience. Furthermore, people on a limited income are actually less healthy and more overweight than those with a larger income (Drewnowski & Barratt-Fornell, 2002). There is a population outside of the upper-middle class who would like to carry out their ethical convictions through the food they eat. They need a guide that speaks to their needs and addresses their concerns. This project aims to create such a reference and to show that anyone, with the will to do it, can exist as a vegetarian.

### **Chapter Three**

“Eat Green, Save Green!: Living Vegetarian on a Budget”  
(*see attached document*)

## **Chapter Four**

With the driving goal of developing a booklet to provide information that will make vegetarianism more accessible I have created a twenty-four page booklet, entitled “Eat Green, Save Green: Living Vegetarian on a Budget”. When I began work on this project I did not know if a guide could be created that would adequately address the obstacles of obtaining vegetarian food on a budget while still respecting the real issues facing people living in poverty. What I found through my work on this project was both enlightening and heartening. This chapter will offer a summary of the process as well as some of my conclusions.

### **Summary**

To begin this project I first worked to narrow the direction and the focus of the booklet. I refined the focus of my efforts in hopes of creating a usable and meaningful document. To begin, I reviewed the literature that exists to help guide individuals interested in vegetarianism. The vast majority of this work assumes that the readers have access to expensive and specialty food items. I researched some of the consumption patterns of vegetarians as well as people living in poverty. I found that demographics and socioeconomic status were poor predictors of people’s concerns regarding animal welfare and food ethics (Harper & Henson, 2001) but that consumer attitudes do not always reflect these concerns (Roberts, 1996). This realization reiterated the importance of food availability and access for this project. I uncovered a massive (and still growing) body of research regarding food deserts (areas, usually urban, with little or no access to healthy foods) and the health impacts of the scarcity of healthy foods in low-income

areas. Although it was difficult to uncover research regarding what types of programs and interventions successfully empowered low-income vegetarians, there was plenty of research that referenced programs designed to increase fruit and vegetable consumption in low-income households. This data suggested that access to healthier foods (Birmingham, Shultz, & Edelefsen, 2004) and empowering consumers with knowledge about food (shopping, storing, cooking, and health) were the crucial components to successful campaigns (Van Duyn, Kristal, Dodd, Campbell, Subar, Stables, et al, 2001).

To supplement this information, I researched the motivation behind and financial considerations regarding vegetarian and vegan diets as well as some basic guidelines for living as a vegetarian on a low budget. While this research certainly reinforced the need for this type of resource, there was much I still needed to gather to make the booklet relevant and appropriate.

First, I viewed the 2000 census to determine the median income of all of Chicago's neighborhoods. From this list I selected four low-income neighborhoods that offered me a diverse geographic and racial representation. In these neighborhoods I visited stores representative of the types of food outlets that supply low-income areas with food. The types of markets surveyed included: a supermarket, a large chain discount store, a neighborhood convenience store, and an independent grocery store. At these various stores, I used a list of staple vegetarian foods and determined the percentage of staple foods available at each location as well as the cost per ounce of each item. At each of these locations, I interviewed representatives in an effort to better understand the purchasing habits and options. I found that each store reported a willingness to carry products, even specialized ones, so long as at least one shopper would buy it. The manager of supermarkets themselves indicated willingness to special order products in any quantity. The smaller, independent store's managers similarly offered a

willingness to order the products while pointing out that they do run the risk of losing money. All of the above store's managers reported that a major limiting factor (with regard to what types of products that they can carry) involves the suppliers. Many suppliers specialize in a narrow market (such as a low-income, African-American neighborhood) and do not make available specialty products. The flexibility to buy outside of these suppliers varies from store to store. See Appendix A for table of price/ounce comparisons.

For the sake of comparison, I also determined cost per ounce of the same staple shopping list at a health food store. I reviewed the results of the interviews as well as the research I did in order to come up with a continuum of strategies that would allow individuals to access vegetarian food items. I compiled these suggestions in to the sections entitled, "Food Options: Ways to Access Vegetarian Foods" and "Availability and Types of Stores." I also used the prices of the staple foods as well as the Consumer Price Index to compare some conventional products to animal-free alternatives. This data allowed me to create a price comparison of some vegetarian options. I created a section entitled money-saving tips and another called time saving tips to address some of the major obstacles that dissuade individuals from vegetarian diets. To make some tangible resources, I also added a section that discusses vegetarian alternatives, a shopping list, product request forms, and some suggested websites for recipes. I worked to make sure that the language and the visual presentation were simple and appealing.

## Conclusions

When reflecting on the goal of creating a booklet that will provide people with information that will make vegetarianism more accessible, I believe that the final product does meet this goal. Although I would have liked to delve into greater depth with issues of race as a factor in food availability; variations in urban, rural, and suburban availability; and the politics of food distribution companies, I chose to stay focused on information that would be immediately useful to individuals on restricted budgets. This kept the work focused and relevant to the goal of fostering accessibility of vegetarianism.

When I began this project I was not sure what I would find. I wanted to discover if it is possible to live a healthy, vegetarian lifestyle, even when faced with poverty. Truthfully, I did not know if my research would confirm such an idea. Much of what I learned confirmed that it is, indeed, difficult to access healthy, vegetarian foods. Nonetheless, finding soy milk and vegan meat substitutes in one of the poorest neighborhood in Chicago was heartening. The manager of the store (a discount chain in Chicago's Oakland Neighborhood) told me that they were there because people requested them and they stayed on the shelves because people bought them. At a nearby market, when asked if his customers would buy vegetarian products said, "These shoppers only like these unhealthy foods. They don't want the healthy stuff." Perhaps, even those within low-income neighborhoods are falling victim to the same stereotype of a "vegetarian" that drives the existing literature. It appears that it is not the face of vegetarianism that is changing, but rather the voice of vegetarianism is beginning to be heard.

My hope for this brochure is it that brings my students closer to embodying a humane lifestyle. Without instruction that applies to their situation and their needs, humane education is likely to stop when they walk out of the door of the classroom. With the supplementation of this

guide, more students will see that there is, in fact, a way to act on the lessons they are learning; rather than seeing one more facet of life that excludes them because of their financial limitations. Humane education demands a richer interaction between student and teacher. A teacher must not only convey the issue but also the student's potential impact on the issue. If step A is the lesson on an issue and step C is the actions taken by the student to positively affect the issue, step B is the often ignored step that forces the teacher to understand the barriers to action that student faces and to work to address these barriers. This brochure seeks to enrich my teaching by offering my students "step B", allowing a richer and more holistic educational interaction.

This booklet, when offered by activist and community groups, will help convey their messages by allowing these messages to reach a broader audience in a more meaningful way. Without this guide, messages promoting vegetarianism seem irrelevant and inapplicable to individuals disconnected from the privilege of financial resources.

On a larger scale this booklet, in attempting to empower consumers, initiates a chain reaction, which ultimately can have some profound effects. As a consumer demands specific goods, the community grocer is the first entity to respond. The grocer then applies this consumer pressure to food distributors, producers, and other entities with more concentrated market power. In a very real way, empowering consumers can affect meaningful changes both globally and locally.

Much oppression sustains itself by marginalizing those who seek to ameliorate it. The more segmented and isolated the struggles for liberation of humanity, the Earth, and for animals are, the less influential those entities are in addressing this oppression. Any effort to unify these struggles, either conceptually or in practice, increases the momentum of the movement. As long as vegetarianism is allowed to be marginalized and effectively "owned" by a narrow socio-

economic segment of the population, the likelihood of widespread recognition of the merits of a vegetarian diet is low. The vegetarian movement itself inadvertently supports this marginalization when we distribute literature that is only accessible to persons with economic privilege. Although small, this booklet attempts to bridge issues of poverty, ethics, environment, and health (among others) rather than isolate them from one another, offering a tangible way of finding common ground.

To distribute this booklet, I will offer it in conjunction with my humane education presentations, lessons, and conversations. I will keep the guide at my disposal in order to distribute it when anyone (with in a formal or informal humane education setting) expresses an interest in vegetarianism. Another avenue of distribution for this guide involves giving hard and electronic copies of it to local animal advocacy groups including the Animal Defense League and Mercy for Animals. I will offer it to restaurants and stores in low income areas already seeking to provide vegetarian foods to these neighborhoods. Further, I plan on taking my digital copy and sending it to other humane education and vegetarian outreach groups, suggesting that they modify it, so as to have something to offer an even broader section of the population.

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## Appendix A

### Staple Foods With Cost per Ounce Information

*\*Items with no price did not have the food available.*

*\*\*most economical products highlighted*

Staple food type	Store #1 Independently owned market	Store #2 Convenience Store	Store #3 Discount Grocery Chain	Store #4 Supermarket	Store #5 Whole Foods
Rice	3.4c	33.4c	2.7c	3.2c	8c
Pasta	7c	14c	6.2c	10c	9c
Oatmeal	6c	19c	4.3c	7.7c	4.9c
Bread (with no animal ingredients)	13c		12c	17.5c	12c
Quinoa					12.4c
Barley				16.8c	5.5c
Onions	99 each		2.9c	8c	6.1c
Carrots	8.6c		2.9c	6c	6.1c
Lettuce			20c	61.5c	50c
Cabbage	3c		3c	6.1	10.5c
Tomatoes	9c		6.1c	22c	19c
Celery	.99c/stalk		1.59/stalk	\$1.99/stalk	37c
Mushrooms			22	28.7c	\$1.14/oz
Garlic	9c			18.7c	37c
Bell Peppers	6c		6.1c	14c	16c
Collard Greens	5c		16c		18.7c
Frozen corn	13c	7c	6.2c	18.1c	11c
Frozen peas	10c		6.2c	11.2c	12c
Ginger				25c	31c
Potatoes	1.19		3.4c	5.6c	6.1c
Apples	5.6c		4.4	9.3c	12.4c
Oranges	5.7c		4.7	6.2c	4.9c
Bananas	4c		3c	4.3c	6.1c
Grapes	31c		19c	37c	--16c
Watermelon			2.49/melon	5.5	25c

Pineapple		14c		12.4c	5.99/each
Olive oil	21c			39c	24c
Canola Oil	7c	12c	5.1c/oz	8.3c	17c
Margarine containing no animal ingredients				18.7c	17c
Lentils	6c			6.5c	12.4c
Black beans			3.2c	7.5c	7c
Chick peas				6c	9c
Split peas				4.1c	9c
Pinto beans	5c	9.3c	3.6c	7.4c	7c
Kidney beans	5c	9.3c		6.4c	8.9
Tofu				19c	10c
Soy/rice/nut milk	6c		4.7c	5.8c	5c
Tomato paste	8c	15c	5.8c	11.4c	17c
Lemon juice	5c		4.3c		21c
Brown sugar	6c	7c	3.1c	5.7c	12.4c
Wheat gluten				32.8c	25c
Miso					58c
Tempeh					34c
Soy sauce	17c			16c	28c
Dairy-free cheese					34c