

What's Natural?

No meat for you! By Jim Steele

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio recently announced a New Green Deal and his plan “to save our earth.” He stated that NYC will reduce beef purchases by 50 percent and phase out *all* purchases of processed meat by 2030. It’s not clear how he defines processed meats, but the World Health Organization defines it as “meat that has been transformed through salting, curing, fermentation, smoking, or other processes to enhance flavor or improve preservation.”

Processed meats evolved before the era of modern refrigeration for good reason. Salting, curing, fermenting, and smoking meat increased the shelf life of a limited food supply, and thus increased human survival. But now processed meats are demonized. Certainly, some chemical additives are unhealthy, but demonizing all processed meats is just wrong. With good labeling people can freely choose what foods they trust.

But de Blasio’s edict would mean any institution run by the city will no longer serve chicken nuggets, hotdogs, sausages, bacon, pastrami, ham, baloney, salami, pepperoni, corned beef and jerky. Fresh beef meals will be cut by 50 percent to “save the planet’s climate” from cow farts. How far will these government actions go? Dairy cows fart too. Will milk, whipped cream, cheese, yogurt and ice cream be next on the hit list? Will they later extend their ban to all of NYC? What if Mayor de Blasio ever became America’s president? Fortunately, de Blasio’s authoritarian actions are why so many Americans rightfully argue that we need limited government!

There is no place for authoritarian diet control. We all experiment with our best personal diets. I went vegetarian for a few years. I liked learning to make tastier vegetables. But eventually I reverted to carnivorous ways. Most studies suggest our bodies evolved to eat both plants and meat, so I resent those who try to shame me for naturally eating meat. However, one PETA article did argue that if you see dead animals on the side of the road and are not tempted

to stop and snack on them, then you are naturally a herbivore. Really?

Nonetheless, vegetarians make a very valid point. Overgrazing is bad for the environment. Studies of temperatures in Arizona and Mexico determined that lost vegetation from overgrazing caused soils to dry, raising regional temperatures by as much as 7°F compared to ungrazed adjacent lands. Overgrazing converts biologically diverse grasslands into barren deserts. But, counterintuitively, without grazing animals, grasslands still convert to deserts. Grasslands benefit from natural grazing, and “holistic grazing” has been shown to prevent “desertification.” Unfortunately, overzealous radical vegetarians don’t understand that holistic grazing is a win-win for the environment and for meat eaters.

Grasses do not decompose immediately. Nutrients get locked up for years while the accumulating “thatch” blocks the sun and inhibits the growth of new grasses. Accumulated thatch also enhances wildfires. Grazing animals not only remove thatch, their manure freely fertilizes the soil and promotes the next year’s growth. Holistic grazing has demonstrated that by mimicking the natural migrations of huge herds, as in Africa’s Serengeti, we can prevent desertification. Overgrazing typically happens when herds are confined to pas-

tures too small to support the cattle’s needs.

I encourage everyone to google Allan Savory’s hope-filled TED talk, “How to Fight Desertification and Reverse Climate Change,” at ted.com. Savory is originally from Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and did a lot of work in southern Africa. There, cattle were removed from lands destined to become national parks and he was charged with analyzing the results. His studies revealed that park grasslands continued to degrade into desert despite removal of all cattle. The “only” remaining explanation pointed to elephants. Regrettably he recommended culling elephants to sustainable levels. Such a recommendation was blasphemous, so government experts initiated another study. Unfortunately, its experts agreed—too many elephants were ripping up vegetation—so thousands of elephants were slaughtered. The result? The land continued to degrade from grassland to desert.

Savory eventually understood holistic grazing was the only solution. If cattle were managed to imitate natural grazing, the land could be restored because cattle would remove thatch, freely fertilize the ground, and supply a protective layer of moisture-holding mulch. Holistic grazing reversed desertification and stopped excessive warming of surface temperatures caused by overgrazing. And holistic grazing increased the storage of carbon in the soil.

The anti-meat-eating crowd often argues eating meat is a shameful, immoral and inefficient use of calories. They argue meat provides only a small fraction of the calories we would otherwise obtain by directly eating the grains fed to cattle. But that is a narrow perspective. By raising cattle holistically on grasslands, we efficiently obtain calories and protein that we could never acquire otherwise from inedible grasses. Globally there are huge swaths of land unsuitable for growing edible plant food and where human populations must rely on grazing animals for survival.

So, feel no shame! Meat eating is not the ticket to climate hell. Holistic grazing is a win-win for both meat eaters and the environment. ■

Jim Steele is director emeritus of San Francisco State University’s Sierra Nevada Field Campus and author of “Landscapes and Cycles: An Environmentalist’s Journey to Climate Skepticism.” Contact: naturalclimatechange@earthlink.net.

