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Going Vegan Or Vegetarian: Motivations & Influences

Faunalytics

Jo Anderson
Faunalytics

Marina Milyavskaya
Carleton University

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**Going Vegan Or Vegetarian: Motivations and Influences
(Report #2 from Faunalytics' Longitudinal Study)**

December 2021

Authors: Jo Anderson (Faunalytics) &
Marina Milyavskaya (Carleton University)

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Background

When it comes to vegan and vegetarian (veg*n) diets, people's reasons for adopting them are among the most studied. For instance, studies have shown that health, environmental, and animal protection motivations are the most common in the U.S. ([Faunalytics, 2014](#))—though they are not necessarily the same in other countries (e.g., [India](#); [Vietnam](#); [the Netherlands](#)). Research also suggests that people with ethical motivations tend to stay veg*n longer than those with health motivations ([Faunalytics, 2014](#); [Hoffman et al., 2013](#)). In this study, we investigated the association of these different motivations with success over time. We expected to replicate the findings about the most common motivations and to find, similarly, that people with animal protection motivations would be more successful in their transition.

In addition to these motivations themselves, we can also think about the *source* of a motivation: whether it is self-driven or externally motivated. Past research focusing on health behaviors has shown that people are more likely to attain and maintain goals that they adopt for self-driven (intrinsic) reasons than goals that they adopt to please others ([Williams et al., 1996](#)). In this study, we predicted that the same would be true for going veg*n. For instance, even for two people with the same motivation, such as animal protection, we would expect one who sees that motivation as an important part of who they are to be more successful in their goal than one who mainly wants other people to approve of it.

General motivations such as health or environmental concern are only one way to think about the reasons for going veg*n. Underlying those explicit motivations is a psychological orientation known as speciesism: the belief that humans are worth more than members of other species. Speciesism is associated with veg*nism. For instance, [Caviola et al. \(2018\)](#) showed that vegetarians are less speciesist than non-vegetarians. However, we don't have clear evidence about which comes first. Are people willing to go veg*n because they're not very speciesist, or does going veg*n open them up to anti-speciesist thinking so they become less speciesist over time? This is one of the questions we investigated in this study.

Finally, apart from the general and the psychological, we also need to consider specific occurrences that influence people to go veg*n, from watching a documentary about animal suffering to following a doctor's advice to reduce meat consumption. Researchers have studied a wide range of interventions designed to influence or increase people's motivations to go veg*n for a particular reason (e.g., [Mathur et al., 2021](#)). This is especially true among animal advocates, for whom identifying and encouraging those reasons is a central part of dietary advocacy. In this report, we consider how these specific influences are related to success.

Participants

This study includes 222 members of the general public in the U.S. and Canada, all of whom had started transitioning to a vegan or vegetarian diet within the past two months.

The Level of Commitment section of the [first report](#) shows that more than 90% of the sample said they would probably or definitely continue their new diet change permanently. This sample should therefore be considered most representative of people who have already moved beyond a simple interest or desire to change into the stage where they are ready to actively work toward a veg*n goal. Stages of change are considered in more detail in the General Motivations section on the Conclusions tab.

Key Findings

- 1. Self-driven motivations to go veg*n can be a powerful driver of success.** Self-driven motivations come from within a person, like their personal values or moral identity, while external motivations include things like feeling pressured by others to succeed. People with both sources of motivation tend to be the most successful: For instance, 70% of people who scored high on both self-driven and external motivations at the beginning of the study had met or exceeded their goal level of animal product consumption by the sixth month, compared to 59% of all participants. While this shows that both sources of motivation can drive success, previous research has found external motivations to be worse for long-term goal maintenance, so we suggest emphasizing self-driven motivations when possible, as detailed in the Recommendations section below.
- 2. Participants became less speciesist after going veg*n, and those who were more successful in reaching their veg*n goals experienced the greatest reduction in speciesism.** Over the first six months of a new veg*n diet, people's speciesism decreased significantly. This was particularly true for those who were most successful at their diet. While people going veg*n tended to be fairly anti-speciesist compared to the general population anyway, averaging just 1.8 on a 1 to 5 scale, the average dropped to 1.5 over the six months of the study.
- 3. Exposure to animal advocacy experiences tended to increase people's consumption success on their new diets, regardless of whether animal welfare was their primary motivation or not.** Namely, people who had seen unpleasant or graphic media of farmed animals (42%), watched a documentary (36%), and/or received information from an animal advocacy group (21%) all did better at reaching their goal level of animal product consumption six months later, even taking into account their general motivations and baseline levels of success. In contrast, people who had

received information from a celebrity or influencer (23%) tended to be further from their goal level of consumption than those who hadn't. Other specific influences may also be important although they did not rise to the top in this study.

4. **Learning particular facts could also increase consumption success, but the context matters.** About half of people (51%) had learned about how farmed animals are mistreated, and we found that this experience may *reduce* success if it is the only influence, but that negative association tended to disappear when experienced along with other influences. More than two-thirds of people (68%) had learned about the health benefits of plant-based eating, which we found was *positively* associated with success, but that benefit tended to disappear if they had other influential experiences as well. In contrast, learning about farmed animal sentience (which 31% of people had) appeared to be helpful *only* in combination with other influences—taken alone, it did not have a clear effect on success.
5. **Overall, 42% of people's veg*n journeys were motivated by health, 20% by animal protection, and 18% by environmental concern. However, these general motivations did not have any effect on how successful people were with their diets.** Similar to previous research, health motivations were the most common reason for going veg*n. While [Faunalytics' 2014 study](#) found that people with health as their only motivation tended to abandon their diets, the current study suggests that while those people may have been trying out veg*nism in a noncommittal way, people who have committed to it are fairly unlikely to abandon it regardless of their primary motivation.

Recommendations

- **Encourage people to find and develop self-driven motivations.** Not only are they associated with greater success at following a veg*n diet but also with commitment to stick with the diet, and research from other domains has shown that when a goal is self-driven, it is more likely to be reached and maintained. For instance, you may be able to help people identify which of their existing personal or moral values align with their goal, or why it could make them feel good to achieve it. Try to avoid ideas of looking good to others or to meet others' expectations.
- **Gently encourage people who are already motivated to go veg*n for health or environmental reasons to learn about the benefits of their actions for animals too.** More impactful experiences like those described in Key Finding #3 above are particularly likely to help, and can be framed as additional motivation to help them stick to their goals. This is important because as we know from [Faunalytics' 2014 study](#), many people who try to go veg*n give it up. Helping people maintain the change needs to be part of the support advocates offer.

- **When advocating for veganism, vegetarianism, or reduction, do not use health messaging alone, but do use it alongside animal protection and/or environmental messaging.** Health is the most common primary motivation for going veg*n, so mentioning the health benefits may encourage more people to try veg*nism. But at the same time, health motivations alone are not good for veg*n diet maintenance, so use those messages in conjunction with information about the benefits for animals and the environment—and keep that up as they take the first steps on their veg*n journey. Suggesting that they seek out media about factory farming, documentaries, or other animal advocacy materials may be particularly effective.

Other Reports From This Study

The purpose of this study is to provide solid data for advocates about how to help new veg*ns maintain their change of lifestyle. This is the second report in a three-part series that will come out of this study.

- The [first report](#) focused on overall levels of success and described the variety of ways that people transition to veg*nism.
- The third report, coming in a few months, will focus on the crucial question of the effectiveness of various strategies for overcoming barriers to staying veg*n.

This project has produced a huge amount of data, all of which will be posted on the Open Science Framework once we have completed our own analyses and publications. In the meantime, if you have additional research questions that you would like us to consider, please contact info@faunalytics.org.

Research Team

The project authors are Jo Anderson (Faunalytics) and Marina Milyavskaya (Carleton University). However, this project was a massive undertaking and could not have happened without the support of multiple individuals and organizations.

We are very grateful to Faunalytics volunteers Renata Hlavová, Erin Galloway, Susan Macary, and Lindsay Frederick for their support and assistance with this work, as well as Carleton student Marta Kolbuszewska and the dozens of animal advocates who helped with recruitment. We are also very thankful to VegFund, Animal Charity Evaluators, and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for funding this research. Finally, we thank all of our survey respondents for their time and effort.

Method Overview

This project focused on the experiences of new veg*ns and vegetarians (for simplicity referred to collectively as veg*ns in this report) in the U.S. and Canada. Participants were asked to complete a survey when they signed up to participate, as well as six follow-up surveys that were sent monthly over the next six months.

Participants' demographics were quite representative of the general population, but we also weighted the descriptive results to be even closer to the U.S. population. For more details about the study method, see the [first report](#).

Representativeness, Weighting, And Attrition

The sample for this study was 222 participants, which a [pre-registered power analysis](#) showed is more than sufficient to detect significant effects in the regression analyses that we used to investigate our main research questions. While the sample is smaller than you may be used to seeing in many Faunalytics studies, larger samples are generally for studies where one of the main goals is to estimate population statistics. A sample of about 1,000 people provides a 3.1% margin of error, while this current study has a margin of error of 6.6%. While this wouldn't be great if estimating population statistics were our main goal, a smaller sample is necessary for our key research questions, as noted above. You can read more about margin of error in the [Research Advice section](#) of our website.

To ensure that this sample is as representative of new veg*ns as possible, we followed a [pre-registered plan](#) of comparing them against the larger sample ($n = 11,399$) of veg*ns from [Faunalytics' 2014 study](#). We were pleased to find that the current sample matched most of those demographics well already, but to maximize the representativeness, we weighted the descriptive results to match.

Overall, 65% of participants completed the entire study. We examined the characteristics of people who left the study and found no evidence of significant differences between the people who did and did not complete it (differential attrition). This examination is described in detail in the [first report](#).

Results

This study's pre-registration, survey instruments, analysis code, and data are available on the [Open Science Framework](#).

For graphs with error bars, the error bars represent the 95% confidence intervals.

Success Measures

The measures of dietary success that we used in this study are described in far more detail in the [first report](#), but in short, we looked at how successful people were with their new diets in three ways:

1. **Consumption Success:** How close people's actual diet was to their goal diet each month, in servings of animal products. (For instance, someone working toward a vegan goal intends to eat 0 servings of animal products per month, so if they are still eating 3 servings, their consumption success is worse than someone who has cut down to 1 serving per month.)
2. **Felt Success:** How successful people felt with their dietary goal each month, on a scale of 0 to 100.
3. **Diet Maintenance Vs. Abandonment:** Whether participants maintained or abandoned their new veg*n diet during the six months of the study.

Dietary Motivations: Why Go Vegan Or Vegetarian?

Participants in our study told us about the various reasons they decided to make the transition to veg*nism. In this report, we consider four aspects of motivation and influence, described in the sections below. These are:

1. **Sources Of Motivation:** Whatever a person's reasons for adopting a veg*n diet, those reasons may be self-driven or externally motivated, or both. These are referred to as the sources of motivation.
2. **Speciesism:** This refers to a belief that humans are worth more than members of other species. People differ in their levels of speciesism.
3. **Specific Influences:** By this, we mean specific occurrences that may (or may not) influence people to go veg*n. Examples include watching a documentary about animal suffering or receiving advice about reducing meat consumption from a health professional.
4. **General Motivations:** Probably the most familiar type of motivation when discussing animal product consumption. These include the high-level motivations of animal protection, health, environmental concern, and others.

Sources Of Motivation

Participants were asked to complete a standardized, 12-item scale known as the Treatment Self-Regulation Questionnaire ([TSRQ](#); [Williams et al., 1996](#)). The TSRQ assesses the degree to which a person's motivation for a behavior is more self-driven or externally motivated. Past research has shown that people are more likely to attain and maintain goals that they adopt for self-driven (intrinsic) reasons than goals that they adopt for external reasons, to please others.

The first table below shows the six items representing self-driven motivation, as well as the average of those six items. The second table shows the items representing external motivation and its average score. The averages, on a 1-to-5 scale, represent how self-driven (in the first table) or external (second table) participants' desire to go veg*n was when they began.

As you can see, our participants were very self-driven. More than 80% of them agreed with each statement, and they averaged 4.5 out of 5 on the self-driven motivation scale overall.

For the most part, they were much less externally motivated, scoring 2.5 out of 5 on average. While more than half indicated that they would feel bad or guilty if they did not follow through with their veg*n intentions, few people put a lot of stock in others' perceptions of them.

Based on what we know from past research about the benefits of self-driven motivation, this pattern—of being highly self-driven and with little reliance on external sources of motivation—is likely another indicator of why our sample was so successful in their dietary goals.

Table 1. Self-Driven Versus External Motivation When First Going Veg*n

Self-Driven Motivations

Self-Driven Motivation Items	% Who Agree or Strongly Agree
Because I have carefully thought about it and believe it is very important.	94.8%
Because I personally believe it is the best thing to do.	94.2%
Because it is an important choice I really want to make.	93.2%
Because I feel that I want to take responsibility for my own choices.	89.4%
Because it is consistent with my life goals.	88.7%
Because it is very important for becoming the person I want to be.	83.7%
Average Self-Driven Motivation (95% Confidence Interval)	4.5 (4.4 - 4.6)

External Motivations

External Motivation Items	% Who Agree or Strongly Agree
Because I would feel bad about myself if I did not follow this diet.	67.5%
Because I would feel guilty or ashamed of myself if I did not follow this diet.	56.4%
Because I want others to see I can do it.	40.8%
Because I want others to approve of me.	16.8%
Because I feel pressure from others to do so.	10.3%
Because others would be upset with me if I did not.	9.1%
Average External Motivation (95% Confidence Interval)	2.5 (2.4 - 2.7)

Sources Of Motivation And Success

We examined how the source of a person's motivation was associated with success: the extent of their internal, self-driven motives on the one hand and the extent of their external, other-driven motives on the other. Note that these two sources are not mutually exclusive: it's also possible to have both. We looked for any differences at the end of the six months (i.e., at the final follow-up) in consumption success, felt success, and/or diet maintenance vs. abandonment for people with self-driven and external sources of motivation.

Both self-driven and external sources of motivation were significant predictors of consumption success, but neither predicted felt success or diet maintenance vs. abandonment (all $ps > .10$).

Specifically, people who were highly self-driven—ones who wanted to go veg*n because it is important to them as a personal choice—were 4.3 animal product servings closer to their goal after six months than people who were low on self-driven motivation. In addition, people who were high on external motivation—ones who wanted to go veg*n because of other people—were 3.0 animal product servings closer to their goal after six months than people who were low on external motivation.

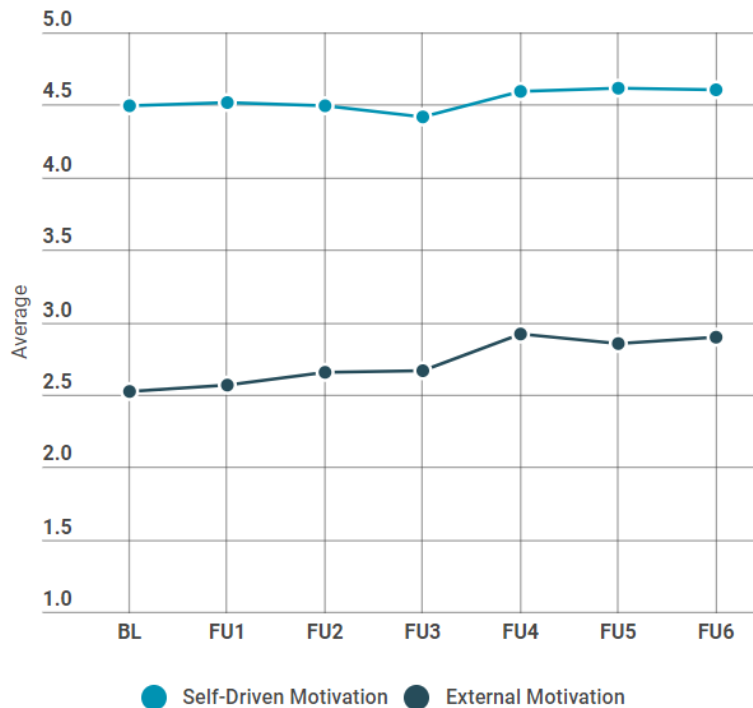
Methodological note: For the previous paragraph, “high” and “low” were defined as one standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively, with the exception of high self-driven motivations. In that case, the scale maximum (5) was used because +1 SD would have been outside the range of the scale. Self-driven motivations: $M = 4.57$, $SD = 0.57$; external motivations: $M = 2.62$, $SD = 0.77$.

This association suggests that while knowing that one *should* go veg*n (external motivations) may be helpful, encouraging people to find the reasons they actively *want* to do it (self-driven motivations) may be more so.

Sources Of Motivation Over Time

The next figure below shows how self-driven vs. external participants' dietary goals were over six months. As you can see, sources of motivation did not change a lot on average.

Figure 1. Source Of Motivation Over Time



BL = Baseline Survey
FU = Follow-Up Survey

Speciesism

This section describes participants' baseline levels of speciesism, which we measured on a five-point scale using [Caviola et al.'s \(2018\) Speciesism scale](#). As noted previously, speciesism refers to the belief that humans are worth more than members of other species, and is related to other prejudices like racism and sexism.

The table below shows respondents' speciesism scores when they first started their new veg*n diets. Specifically, it shows the percentage who agreed or strongly agreed with each of the six items on the scale, followed by the average speciesism scale score. Higher scores indicate that respondents are *more* speciesist.

Table 2. Speciesism When First Going Veg*n and Six Months Later

Speciesism Items	% Who Agree or Strongly Agree	% Who Agree or Strongly Agree Six Months Later
Chimpanzees should have basic legal rights such as a right to life or a prohibition of torture.	77.1%	78.6%
Morally, animals always count for less than humans.	15.4%	9.5%
It is morally acceptable to perform medical experiments on animals that we would not perform on any human.	13.6%	8.7%
It is morally acceptable to trade animals like possessions.	8.8%	9.4%
Humans have the right to use animals however they want to.	6.2%	2%
It is morally acceptable to keep animals in circuses for human entertainment.	5.8%	2.9%
Average Speciesism* (95% Confidence Interval)	1.8 (1.6 - 1.9)	1.5 (1.4 - 1.7)

Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.
 *Please note that responses to the item "Chimpanzees should have basic legal rights..." are reversed before averaging.

As you can see in the bottom row of the table above, average speciesism was already quite low (1.8 out of 5) at the beginning of the study, which makes sense for a group of people who had decided to go veg*n. This score (which is 1.83 standard deviations below the neutral point on the scale) is substantially lower than has been found in general population samples. For example, the average speciesism score of in [Everett et al., 2019](#), was just 0.68 standard deviations below neutral.

Despite being low from the start, participants' speciesism also declined from the beginning of the study to six months later. This drop was statistically significant ($t = 4.2, p < .001$). (*Methodological note: This analysis was conducted as a paired t-test using five imputed datasets to account for missing data.*)

Anti-Speciesism And Diet Change

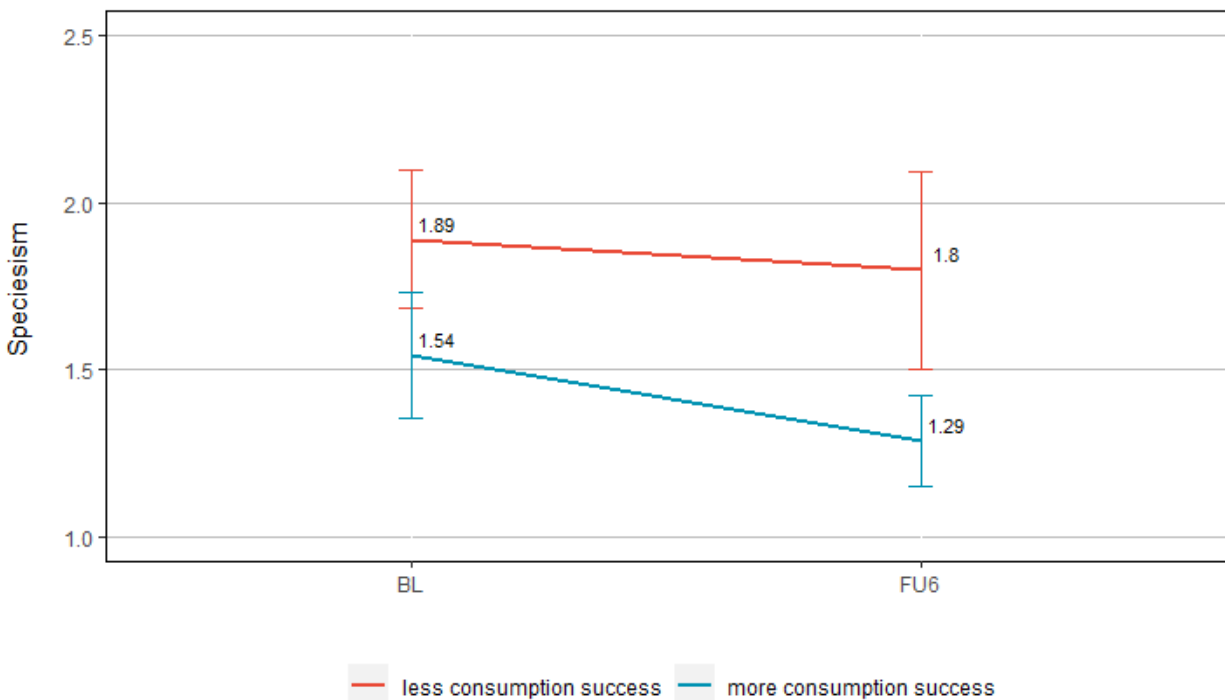
So which comes first, anti-speciesism or diet change? The above findings suggest it's both, but we also [pre-registered](#) a research question looking at whether people who were less speciesist at the beginning of the study would be more successful in their dietary goals, and whether people who were more successful throughout the course of the six months would be less

speciesist at the end. We had predicted that both of these things would be true (known as *mutual causation*).

However, we found that initial levels of speciesism at the beginning of a new veg*n diet did not predict any form of success six months later (consumption success $p > .17$; felt success $p > .85$; diet maintenance vs. abandonment $p > .36$). This held true even when we controlled for baseline levels of consumption success or felt success in their respective analyses; estimates and significance levels were almost unchanged.

However, average consumption success over six months *did* predict speciesism at the end of the study ($p = .001$), controlling for initial levels of speciesism. That is, people who got closer to or reached their goal diet reduced their speciesism more over the course of the study than people who were less successful with their consumption of animal products. This pattern can be observed in the figure below: while people who would experience more success were non-significantly less speciesist from the beginning, the difference was heightened by the end of the study period.

Figure 2. Speciesism & Consumption Success Over Time



BL = Baseline Survey
 FU6 = 6th Follow-Up Survey
 Note: Consumption success was median split for this visualization.

In conjunction with the analysis in the previous section, this indicates that the first six months of a new veg*n diet produced declines in speciesism, and that this decline was larger for participants who were more successful in reaching their goal level of consumption.

The meaning of this finding will be considered in the Conclusions section of the report.

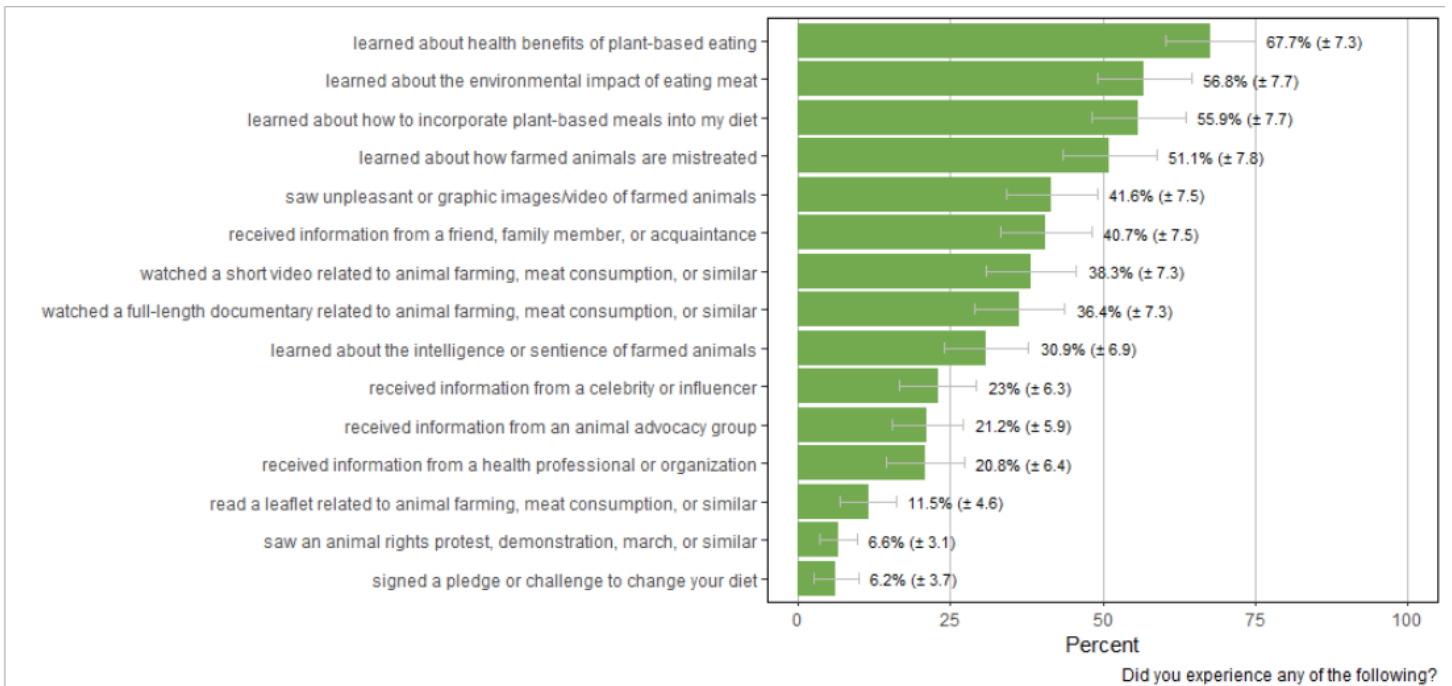
Specific Influences

The figure below shows specific experiences that participants had in the month before they began transitioning to a veg*n diet.

As you can see, in the month leading up to their transition to veg*nism, some of the most common influences were learning experiences. More than half of the participants had learned about the health, environmental, and animal protection advantages of plant-based eating over an omnivorous diet.

Bear in mind that we did not ask participants whether these experiences *caused* them to go veg*n, only whether they had occurred. That is because we wanted to be able to look at their statistical association with success—which is reported in the subsection below—rather than relying on participant self-reports.

Figure 3. Specific Influences Just Before Going Veg*n



Specific Influences And Success

We examined how specific influences (listed in the figure above) were associated with success. We looked for any differences at the end of the six months (i.e., at the final follow-up) in

consumption success, felt success, and/or diet maintenance vs. abandonment for people with different influences.

Altogether, these 15 specific influences explained a statistically significant and substantial amount of the variation in participants' levels of consumption success ($p < .01$), but not their felt success ($p > .18$) or diet maintenance versus abandonment ($p > .27$). Therefore, we followed up by looking more closely at the associations of specific influences with consumption success in particular. The pattern of results was unchanged when we controlled for baseline consumption success, so the rest of the analyses include that to make interpretation easier: It means that we are essentially looking at the association of specific influences with *change* in consumption success, and the associations can't be explained by how successful participants were at the beginning of the study.

The first table below shows the direction of association for the strongest influences (those that were significant at the $p < .10$ level). General impact indicates the association with consumption success when we don't know anything about other experiences the person has had. Impact as sole influence indicates the association with consumption success when that is the *only* experience the person has.

Table 3. Association Of Specific Influences With Success

Direction of Impact

Specific Influence	General Impact	Impact As Sole Influence
watched a full-length documentary related to animal farming, meat consumption, or similar	positive	positive
received information from a celebrity or influencer	negative	negative
saw unpleasant or graphic images/video of farmed animals	positive	positive
received information from an animal advocacy group (e.g., online, at a booth, on the street)	positive	positive
learned about the intelligence or sentience of farmed animals	positive	unclear
learned about health benefits of plant-based eating	unclear	positive
learned about how farmed animals are mistreated	unclear	negative
<i>all other influences</i>	<i>unclear</i>	<i>unclear</i>

Notes. Participants were asked whether they had experienced each of the above in the month before starting their goal diet or transition to it. They were not asked whether it caused them to adopt the dietary goal.

The first table indicates "positive" if people who had experienced the predictor were, on average, more successful than those who had not, and "negative" if the reverse was true. However, the signs (+/-) on the second table are the inverse because consumption success was measured as distance from goal consumption, so smaller numbers indicate more success. The estimates shown are controlling for baseline consumption success.

Estimates & Significance

Specific Influence	General Impact	Impact As Sole Influence
watched a full-length documentary related to animal farming, meat consumption, or similar	-4.9 ($p < .01$)	-3.7 ($p < .04$)
received information from a celebrity or influencer	4.3 ($p < .02$)	6.3 ($p < .001$)
saw unpleasant or graphic images/video of farmed animals	-3.6 ($p < .03$)	-4.5 ($p < .03$)
received information from an animal advocacy group (e.g., online, at a booth, on the street)	-3.9 ($p < .03$)	-4.0 ($p < .04$)
learned about the intelligence or sentience of farmed animals	-3.0 ($p < .08$)	-2.9 ($p < .16$)
learned about health benefits of plant-based eating	-2.0 ($p < .30$)	-3.5 ($p < .10$)
learned about how farmed animals are mistreated	-1.3 ($p < .43$)	5.2 ($p < .03$)
learned about the environmental impact of eating meat	1.5 ($p < .37$)	2.5 ($p < .17$)
watched a short video related to animal farming, meat consumption, or similar	-2.4 ($p < .16$)	0.1 ($p < .98$)
received information from a health professional or organization (e.g., doctor, nutritionist, Canada/USDA food guide)	2.6 ($p < .22$)	2.8 ($p < .20$)
received information from a friend, family member, or acquaintance	-1.1 ($p < .52$)	0.7 ($p < .67$)
read a leaflet related to animal farming, meat consumption, or similar	-1.2 ($p < .60$)	0.3 ($p < .89$)
signed a pledge or challenge to change your diet	-2.4 ($p < .62$)	-1.5 ($p < .74$)
learned about how to incorporate plant-based meals into your diet (e.g., recipes, products, restaurants)	0.5 ($p < .75$)	0.8 ($p < .66$)
saw an animal rights protest, demonstration, march, or similar	0.6 ($p < .88$)	3.0 ($p < .41$)

In most cases, you will see that the results for each specific influence are the same whether we look at general impact or impact as the sole influence. Watching a documentary, seeing unpleasant or graphic media of farmed animals, and receiving information from an animal advocacy group are all positively associated with consumption success. That is, people who are exposed to those things leading up to their veg*n transition are closer to their goal diet by the sixth month. In contrast, people who receive information from a celebrity or influencer tend to be further from their goal diet by the sixth month than those who don't.

The results for the other significant predictors were more nuanced:

- Learning about the health benefits of plant-based eating appeared to have a positive association with success when it was the only influence, but that benefit may be washed out when there are other influences in the mix (which, given how commonly many of them were reported, is likely to be the case).
- Learning about how farmed animals are mistreated appeared to have a negative association with consumption success when it was the only influence, but that too was washed out when there are other influences in the mix (which again is likely to be the case).
- Learning about the intelligence of sentience of farmed animals appeared to be useful, but only in combination with other influences. When it was the sole influence, it did not have a clear effect on success.

Please note that these findings are less certain than those we usually discuss in reports. For analyses like these, we would ordinarily have corrected the significance tests for false discovery rate (FDR). However, doing so meant that the analysis did not yield readily interpretable findings, as only one of the individual predictors (receiving information from a celebrity or influencer) survived the correction process, and it accounted for only a small proportion of the variance explained by the overall model (4% of an overall 25%). In order to make practically useful recommendations, we instead loosened the significance criteria to interpret any results with $p < .10$.

In order to rule out more alternative explanations for the associations described above, we also ran a set of parallel analyses controlling for general motivations: whether a person's primary motivation was animal protection, environmental concern, health, or something else. The pattern of which specific influences were significant at the .10 level was unchanged from the main analysis, indicating that the specific influences people experience are not redundant with their general motivations. That is, it's not only people with primarily animal protection motivations who watch videos about the horrors of factory farming, for instance.

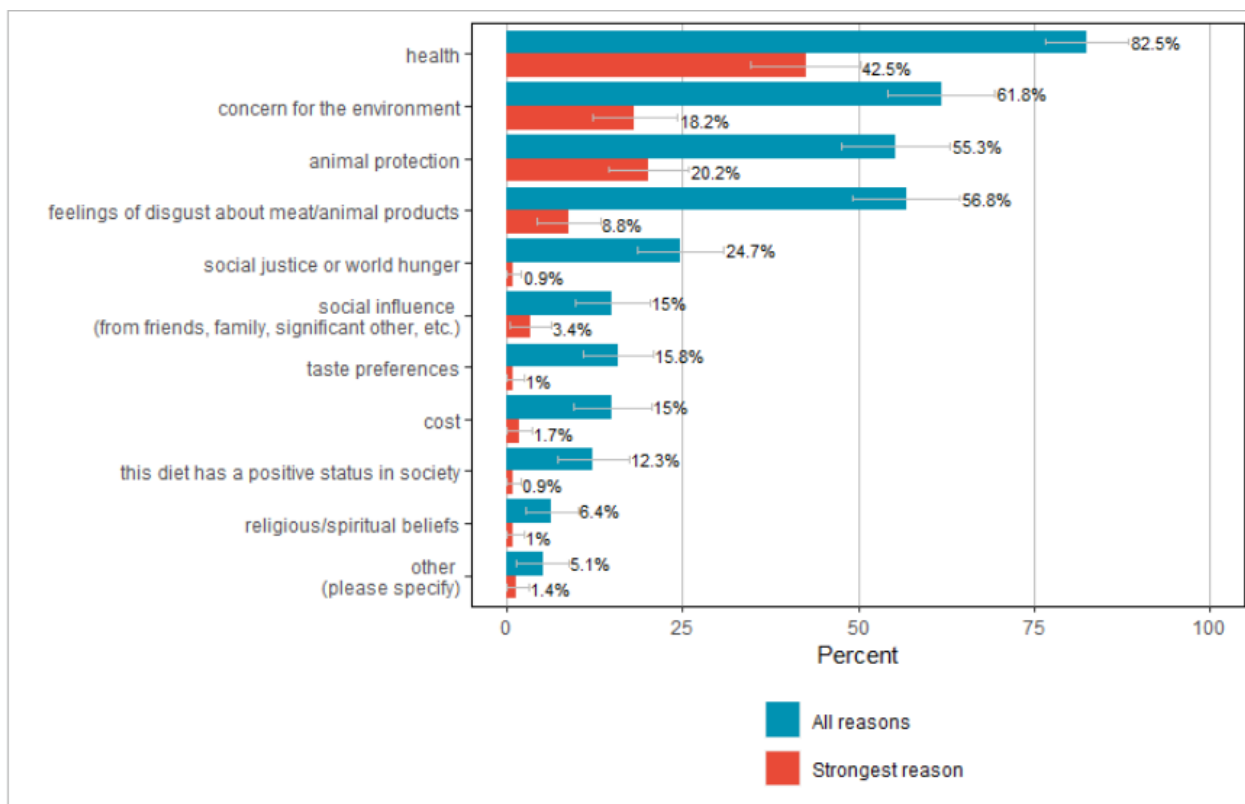
General Motivations

The figure below shows participants' general motivations for pursuing this new diet. They were asked to select their strongest reason and to select everything else that influenced them. The

percentage of people with each reason as their strongest is shown in red in Figure 4, while the percentage of people selecting each reason at all is shown in blue.

As you can see, in this general population sample, health was the most common motivation overall, and the most commonly selected as participants' strongest reason. Animal protection was the strongest reason for about 20% of respondents, similar to concern for the environment (18%). These three were by far the most common primary motivations, which is what we have observed in previous research as well ([Faunalytics, 2014](#)).

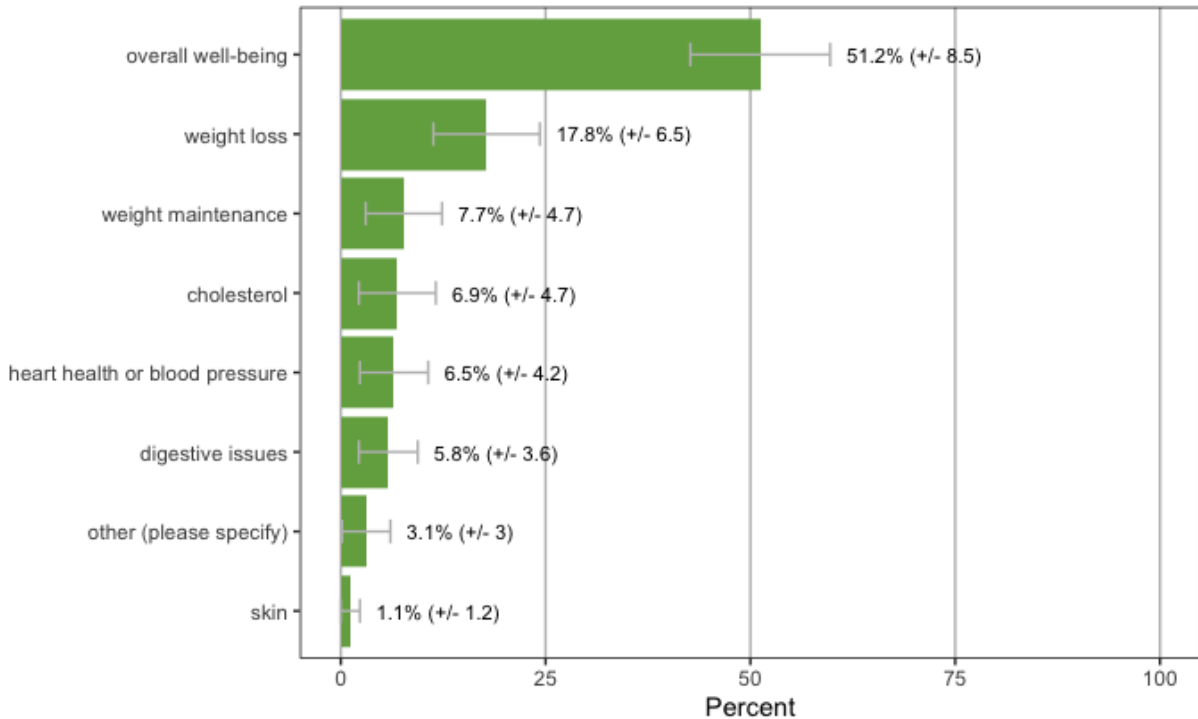
Figure 4. New Veg*ns' General Motivations



Health Motivations

Given that most previous research has also shown that health motivations are the most common reason for adopting a veg*n diet, we had anticipated that this would be a common response and asked the 154 participants who selected it as a reason for more details. We asked them which was their strongest health reason for the diet, with results shown in the figure below. As shown, “overall well-being” was the most common goal, with weight loss trailing in second place. Several other reasons were selected by 5-10% of participants with health motivations. These reasons did not differ for people with health as their strongest motivation and those who selected it as an additional motivation ($\chi^2 (7 df) = 5.5, p = .60$).

Figure 5. New Veg*ns' Health Motivations



You said that one of your reasons for your goal diet is health. Which of these is currently your strongest health motivation for it?

General Motivations And Success

To examine the association of general motivations with success, we used regression to analyze whether people were motivated by animal protection, health, environment, or something else and how that was associated with consumption success, felt success, and/or diet maintenance vs. abandonment at the end of the six months.

These general motivations were not significantly associated with how successful our participants were in following their goal diets. This was true for all success measures (omnibus F and X^2 tests; all p s > .07).

We also did an exploratory check to see whether using all reasons instead of just the strongest reasons would make any difference to the findings, but it did not (omnibus F and X^2 tests; all p s > .06). In both analyses, the overall significance test for diet maintenance vs. abandonment approached significance ($.05 < p < .10$), which can sometimes warrant additional consideration, but none of the individual predictors were significant so we do not discuss it further.

That is, for people who have committed to a veg*n diet, as discussed in the [first report](#)—knowing their general motivations tells us little about how successful they are likely to be. We are better off looking at other predictors. This additionally suggests that, while animal advocates tend to think and talk a lot about the general motivations people have for going

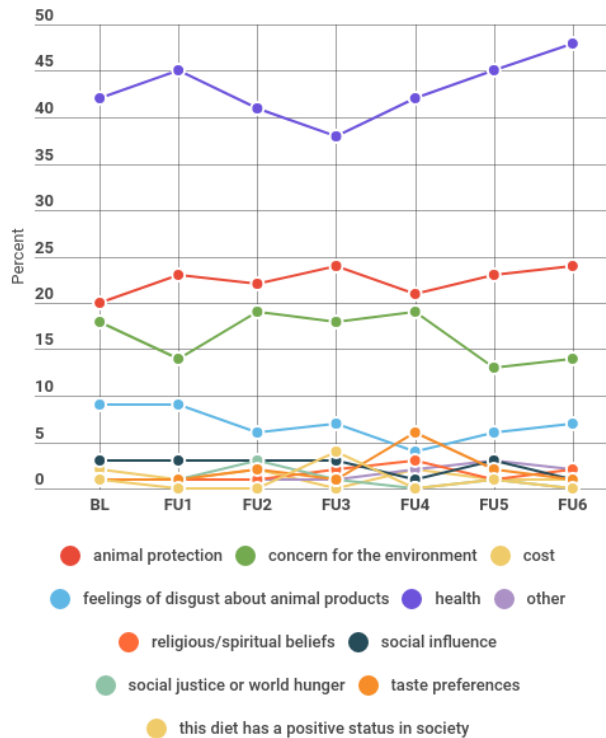
veg*n, it doesn't make a big difference to the degree of success once someone is committed to it.

General Motivations Over Time

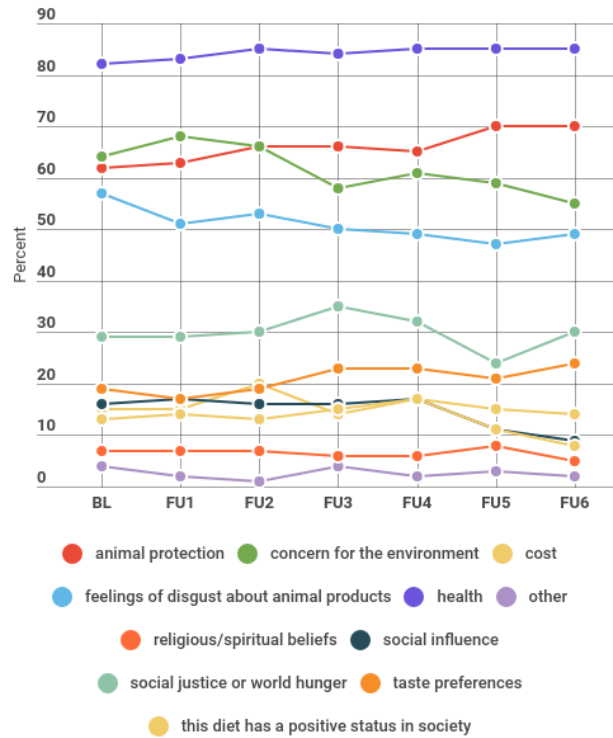
The first tab of Figure 6 below shows participants' strongest reason for their dietary goal at each time point, while the second tab shows all reasons at each time point. As you can see, although motivations fluctuated a bit over time, there were no remarkable changes.

Figure 6. General Motivations Over Time: Strongest Reason And All Reasons

Strongest Motivation



All Motivations



BL = Baseline Survey
FU = Follow-Up Survey

Conclusions

Sources Of Motivation

In addition to the type of motivation driving people to go veg*n, it also matters where that motivation comes from. In this study, we found that both self-driven and external sources of motivation were associated with getting closer to one's goal level of animal product consumption. However, previous research has shown that self-driven motivation tends to be better for reaching and maintaining one's goals ([Williams et al., 1996](#)). So if advocates are looking for a recommendation between the two, we strongly suggest supporting people in the development of self-driven motivations. For instance, you may be able to help people identify ways that their dietary goals align well with values they already hold or how they see themselves. Even if someone is not currently willing to go vegetarian or vegan, helping them see the alignment between reducing animal product consumption and those goals or identities may help them become less speciesist and take their animal product consumption lower in the future.

External sources of motivation—like going veg*n to improve one's physical appearance or to meet others' expectations—were still associated with consumption success, so you don't need to actively steer people away from them. However, as noted above, external sources may be less helpful for reaching and maintaining goals ([Williams et al., 1996](#)). It is particularly easy to see how this could be the case for a goal like appearance-based weight loss, where veg*nism is just a means to an end and could be easily substituted with other diets or approaches to reach the same end. If there is no self-driven reason to pursue veg*nism, it is easier to abandon it in favor of a competing strategy.

Speciesism And Moral Circle Expansion

In this sample of people who were committed to the idea of going veg*n, initial levels of speciesism were already low compared to the general population and got even lower over the first six months or so of transitioning to their new diet. Further, people who were more successful in eliminating animal products experienced the greatest reduction in their level of speciesism over the six months.

This suggests two things: First the obvious, that thinking of animals as more equal with humans may make people more likely to eliminate animal products from their diet. The problem is that getting people to think of animals as more equal with humans is a difficult task, and one that has yet to be answered with research. However, the second point is a step toward that answer.

Researchers and advocates often refer to the *meat paradox*: the idea that many people eat meat and enjoy it, but do not enjoy the thought of animals being killed for food. Faunalytics has



written about this phenomenon and the ways that people rationalize their paradoxical behavior many times (e.g., [Benningstad & Kunst, 2020](#); [Earle et al., 2019](#); [Kunst & Hohle, 2016](#); [Piazza et al., 2015](#); [Tian et al., 2016](#)).

A probable reason that it's hard to convince people to expand their moral circle to include non-human animals is because of the meat paradox. In short, meat-eaters are very strongly motivated to believe that non-human animals are less important than humans, because they want to continue eating them. The results of this study suggest that even if a person decides to go veg*n for reasons unrelated to animal ethics—which describes the 80% of our participants who said their strongest motivation was health, the environment, or something else—making a successful transition away from animal products means they no longer need to rationalize it and can therefore become even less speciesist. Put another way, we suggest that advocates encourage people to go veg*n for *any* reason and help them stay that way, because once they do it for a while, they are more likely to embrace anti-speciesist thinking.

Specific Influences

Getting specific is important. The data from this study demonstrate the importance of not just having a reason to go veg*n but of having multiple specific influences all pointing toward veg*nism. The most notable positive influences were watching a documentary, seeing unpleasant or graphic media of farmed animals, and getting information from an animal advocacy group, while getting information for celebrities and influencers appeared to reduce success. More generally, this suggests that advocates should encourage people who are already motivated to go veg*n to keep researching, particularly if animal protection isn't their primary goal. They can bolster the motivation they already have with additional sources of information, which can be explicitly framed as an evidence-based recommendation for keeping them motivated toward their goal.

It may feel less effective to keep working with someone who is already actively pursuing a veg*n diet rather than focusing on finding new people to influence. But as we know from [Faunalytics' 2014 study](#), many people who try to go veg*n give it up, and helping people maintain the change needs to be part of the support advocates offer. In the near term, this can be presented as practical and feel-good information, providing additional motivation and showing that one's choice is helping in more than one way. In the longer term, it is designed to reinforce the decision and keep people veg*n.

General Motivations: Animals, Environment, Or Health?

General motivations for going veg*n—like animal protection, environmental concern, or health goals—get a lot of attention from advocates. Previous research suggests that people with ethical motivations tend to stay veg*n longer than those with health motivations ([Faunalytics, 2014](#); [Hoffman et al., 2013](#)). However, in this study, which focused on people who had

committed to their dietary transition, we found that general motivations were not a significant predictor of individuals' degree of success at following a veg*n diet.

If we look at the transition to veg*nism through the lens of the Transtheoretical Model ([Bryant et al., 2021](#)), an individual passes through several stages: from precontemplation (when they don't even know veg*nism is an option), to contemplation (considering going veg*n), to preparation (deciding to go veg*n and trying it out), action (actively trying to be veg*n), and maintenance (working to avoid backsliding). Individuals in our study were recruited during the preparation or action phases of transitioning to veg*nism—either about to start or having recently done so.

Our current and past research on the subject of veg*n maintenance and abandonment suggests that a person's general motivations matter more in the contemplation and preparation stages of change than in the later action and maintenance stages. That is, when you read a headline saying that some percentage of people who go veg*n for health reasons give it up, it matters a lot whether we are talking about people who have “gone veg*n” to the extent of trying it out (the preparation stage) versus people who have “gone veg*n” to the extent that they are committed to being and staying veg*n (the action stage).

[Faunalytics' 2014 study](#), which found that 84% of veg*ns abandoned their diets, defined veganism and vegetarianism so that anyone who had tried one of those diets for any period of time was included. The current study, which estimated a rate of abandonment between 9% and 43% ([see first report](#)), was described as a six-month study from the beginning. This description likely discouraged people who were only “trying out” the diet from participating, as they never intended to necessarily pursue the diet for six months or more. In other words, the percentage of people who abandon veg*nism is much higher when we include those who are in the preparation stage rather than just those who have reached the action stage.

What does this mean for people advocating plant-based diets? In short, using health messaging alone is probably not a good strategy, but it can and should be used along with animal protection and/or environmental messaging. “Should” because health is the most common primary motivation for going veg*n and health messaging may therefore encourage more people to try veg*nism. However, Faunalytics' 2014 study found that health as a sole motivation is not good for diet maintenance so if you focus on health alone, many of the people you convince to try veg*nism may not stick to it long-term.

As a result, we suggest that you use health messaging in conjunction with information about the benefits people's veg*n choices have on animals and the environment—and keep that up as they take the first steps on their veg*n journey. As noted in the section on specific influences, videos about the unpleasant realities of factory farming, documentaries, and talking to animal advocates, in general, are among the most effective ways of helping people succeed, regardless of their primary motivation for going veg*n.

Caveats & Limitations

As with all studies, this one has some important caveats and limitations to bear in mind.

Most notably, this study is not an experiment: We did not randomly assign people to be high or low in speciesism (as that's impossible), to see persuasive materials focusing on animal protection versus health, or anything else. Therefore, all reported findings are correlational.

The longitudinal nature of the study improves our ability to draw causal conclusions compared to one conducted at a single timepoint—like [Faunalytics' 2014 study](#) of current and former veg*ns—but the reader should still bear in mind that there may be alternative explanations for the findings discussed.

We try to call out these alternative explanations in the text, but it is always possible to overlook something and we encourage readers to think critically about what you read—not just this report, but everywhere. If you have particular questions about the methods or results—like how or why an analysis was done—please consider attending Faunalytics' [Ask A Researcher](#) office hours.