



Recipe for Success
Activist Offers Food for Thought

By Mark Hawthorne
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While America's taste for trendy diets continues to grow in pace with our expanding waistlines, an increasing number of people are learning that vegetarian eating is the best way to maintain a healthy body weight while also being compassionate. Still, one of the biggest challenges for vegetarians and those trying to relinquish their penchant for meat, eggs, and dairy is learning how to transform the amazing variety of plant-based ingredients into delicious and nutritious meals. It's one thing to toss a salad; it's quite another to create meals satisfying enough to make the average omnivore forget his craving for cheeseburgers. No one wants to feel shortchanged.

Vegan cooking instructor and animal activist Colleen Patrick-Goudreau couldn't agree more. "Food is so incredibly personal," she says, "and we're very habit-oriented creatures." She founded San Francisco Bay Area-based Compassionate Cooks to help people make informed food choices and debunk myths about vegetarianism. "People are so confused about what to eat and are bombarded by advertising campaigns masked as public service announcements."

So Patrick-Goudreau began teaching a monthly cooking class to demystify foods like tofu and tempeh, demonstrate that vegan foods are already familiar and can be prepared quickly and easily, and even guide home chefs through what are traditionally meat-based holiday meals, which hold a lot of meaning for people.

"Some of our earliest memories are centered on food," she says. "As children, we're praised and nurtured when we eat, while we are being held and supported by our parents. Part of the resistance people have about moving toward a vegetarian or vegan diet is based on their fear that something is being taken away. But when they realize the choices they have, they realize that eating vegetarian is about abundance and feel very empowered. They experience a kind of awakening."

Ethically Enlightened

Empowered, abundance, and awakening are words the 35-year-old activist uses a lot, emphasizing the expansive nature of experiencing total awareness and the power to make life-affirming choices about your health, the planet, and animals. "What most people don't know is that it is an absolute joy to live fully awake,"

says Patrick-Goudreau, who embraced veganism six years ago, about the time she arrived in California from New Jersey. Having gone vegetarian at age 21 after reading *Diet for a New America*, it was *Slaughterhouse* by Gail Eisnitz that advanced her own awakening and convinced her to give up eggs and dairy. It was a major turning point in her life, but she was not prepared for the negative reaction from people who had been so supportive of her as a compassionate child. "Children are very sensitive toward animals," she says. "And adults encourage that. But when we bring that sensitivity into adulthood, people get crazy. The support we had as children becomes animosity when we're adults." She attributes this phenomenon to people being confronted by their own ignorance about the way animals are treated or their own guilt about eating them. "But the truth is so hidden from us. People just have no idea."

With a passion for animal advocacy and teaching, Patrick-Goudreau is right at home conducting workshops or screening PETA's *Meet Your Meat* video on a busy Berkeley street, which she does most Friday nights. "People are desperate to feel they're making an impact, and isn't it amazing to have so much influence on so many issues just by changing the way we eat? People make such a huge difference just by leaving meat, dairy, and eggs off their plates," she says. "For me, just being vegan isn't enough. My activism is a natural response to the hidden and never-ending suffering of billions of animals."

That natural response led her to found the Oakland chapter of Unitarian Universalists for Ethical Treatment of Animals in 2001. "I saw that most people are moved to become vegetarian or vegan but don't know how," she says. So she took it upon herself to demonstrate just how easy vegan cooking is. Her classes at the church were so successful that she was able to establish Compassionate Cooks (www.compassionatecooks.com) and devote even more energy to teaching.

She describes the classes as very safe for students who have a variety of eating habits. While all the recipes are vegan, the emphasis is on the benefits of a plant-based diet rather than criticizing meat eating. When questions about animals come up, she addresses them with candor, and each student receives a folder with nutritional information and details about factory farming. "The response to the classes has been remarkable. It's such a joy to watch people get excited about the kinds of food they may have once resisted. They learn that it's not the flesh of an animal they crave but rather flavor, texture, and aroma. And when it's a particular nutrient they think they lack, they can easily find it in plant-based foods. Fat, salt, sugar – these are the things people crave, and there's no lack of them in vegetarian foods."

Fired Up

Inspired by the popularity of the classes, Patrick-Goudreau recently created a DVD called *Vegetarian Cooking With Compassionate Cooks* (see sidebar). "In every class, someone would raise her hand and ask when we would be on TV or

have a video," she says. "I realized thousands – even millions – of people could be reached by creating a DVD. It's remarkable that in the days when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention attributes two-thirds of worldwide deaths to diseases associated with diet, no other product like this existed." Among the aspects of her class she enjoys most is dispelling the many misconceptions about a vegan lifestyle. "It is such a pleasure to watch people's perceptions and experiences change when they realize that 'vegetarian food' is food they're already familiar with – vegetables, fruit, nuts, grains, seeds. In fact, a lot of what we eat is actually vegan – we just don't call it that."

An energetic voice for farmed animals, Patrick-Goudreau seems like an unstoppable force of nature. In addition to classes in cooking, she also teaches nutrition courses, conducts private supermarket tours, brings groups to Farm Sanctuary once a month, speaks to youth groups about animals and animal activism, and continually writes essays and letters to mainstream publications to help raise awareness about animal rights. "Once people learn the unnecessary pain, suffering, and death inflicted upon animals just to satisfy our taste buds, they are compelled to make a difference. When they ask, 'Now what do I eat?' I feel like I am able to empower them and help animals at the same time. It just doesn't get any better than that."