



Fresh Faces Young Voices

## Behind the cage Victoria Brown

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# An animal lover can still eat meat

As long as their five freedoms are respected and guaranteed by law, farming livestock can be ethical.

I HAVE a confession to make. I love meat. And I feel bad about it.

As an animal lover and a columnist who writes about animal and environmental issues, I'm often met with a quandary over whether it is hypocritical of me to be eating meat.

I'm a huge foodie, and I enjoy a good steak and ribs, which are very meat-centric meals. But mind you, meat is not all that I eat! I also love my share of fruits, greens and grains.

To get an idea of what my friends thought, I posed the question on whether animal lovers should be vegetarian on my Facebook page.

My friend and colleague Martin Vengadesan said that he stopped eating chicken when he was six after witnessing the gruesome spectacle of a chicken being slaughtered at a wet market.

He then decided to give up meat completely after he unwittingly ate what he thought was cat meat in Senegal, and then wrestled with why cats and dogs were accorded one status, while pigs and cows were treated inhumanely.

"I wrestled with the issue for

about three years before finally making that move 23 years ago," said Martin.

"The sad thing is that a lot of our food comes from mistreated animals. *Foie gras*, shark's fin and veal are some of the more celebrated causes but 'ordinary' battery farming is by far the biggest killer," he said.

"It seems incompatible to be both an animal lover and a consumer of battery farming produce," said Martin.

His concern over the mistreatment of animals is something that I agree with, and that is why I do not eat shark's fin, veal or *foie gras*.

But I know that there are many other unethical farming practices in operation today.

I am not comforted by the clean and tidy meat packaging we find in supermarkets. I know where meat comes from, and sadly, the high demand for meat has resulted in farms churning out meat as cheaply and quickly as possible.

This intensive farming is sometimes referred to as factory farming, where animals live in dirty and overcrowded spaces, and their

well-being is not taken into account.

There are cases where pregnant pigs are kept in crates barely bigger than they are and baby cows are tied up and confined in small stalls.

However, this problem isn't solely due to the meat-eating population.

In Malaysia, for instance, we don't have adequate laws that take the treatment of animals and their welfare into account at farms or slaughterhouses.

But I feel that it is possible for animals to be treated and slaughtered in an ethical manner.

I believe that animals have the right to their five freedoms: which is the freedom from hunger or thirst; discomfort; pain, injury or disease; freedom to express normal behaviour; and freedom from fear and distress.

Farms and companies that deal with animals should treat animals with respect, and governments should make this obligation a law.

If I had the choice between ethically sourced meat and one that is not, I would go with the former – even if it costs a bit more.

My friend Trinity agrees that

being vegetarian or vegan does not solve animal cruelty, and that the answer is with sustainable and humane farming.

"Does that mean we need to reduce our meat intake on a global level? Most likely yes.

Does that mean we should go off meat entirely? I don't think so," she said.

"But if we advocate for better treatment of farm animals, technological advancement that allows meat to be produced without killing/harming animals and push for the creation of alternative protein to meat – these things could make a difference," said Trinity.

I agree with Trinity wholeheartedly, we should all aim to improve the welfare of animals rather than give up meat entirely.

Furthermore, there are advances in technology that enable us to create cultured meat (or in vitro meat) where meat is grown in cell culture rather than inside animals. This will let consumers continue to eat meat without harming any animal.

After much reflection, I don't think that eating meat is cruel. It is part of the cycle of life and it has

been an essential part of human evolution for 2.5 million years.

The inclusion of meat in our diet also provides us with all the essential amino acids, healthy saturated fats and nutrients like iron, zinc and vitamin B12. Although it is possible for plant foods to provide us with these nutrients, a single serving usually does not provide adequate levels.

I respect those who made the decision to be vegetarian/vegan, whether it is for personal or religious reasons. But I don't think people should be judged just because they eat meat.

I know so many animal lovers who are not vegetarian and are doing so much for the animal population in Malaysia.

Someone who loves and cares about animals should not be discredited just because they eat meat.

You can still love animals, whether or not you eat meat.

Online reporter Victoria Brown's Behind The Cage tackles the pressing issues of animal rights and environmental awareness. She can be reached at [victoria@thestar.com.my](mailto:victoria@thestar.com.my).