Vol. 45, Issue 4, 2026

Vegan Journal

Health, Ethics & Environment since 1982

Sheet Pan Cheat Sheet

page 6



Breaking Bread

page 16

VRG's Scholarship Winners • page 22
Calcium, The Vegan Way • page 28
VRG Poll Results • page 30

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Nutrition Hotline

Chronic Kidney Disease Risk Factors

by Reed Mangels, PhD, RD



QUESTION: What is known about vegan diets and the risk of having chronic kidney disease?
R.F., via email

ANSWER: Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is a common problem worldwide. More than one in 10 adults in the United States has CKD.[1] That number increases to more than one in three U.S. adults age 65 years and older.[1] In CKD, the kidneys become damaged over time and do not function as well. Ultimately, CKD can progress to kidney failure. CKD also increases the risk of heart disease and stroke.

There is some evidence that vegan or mostly vegan diets are associated with a reduced risk of CKD or compromised kidney function. For example, results from the Adventist Health Study-2 suggested that vegan diets (defined as never or rarely eating animal products), compared to nonvegetarian diets, were associated with better kidney function.[2] One study from Taiwan reported that CKD was significantly less common in vegans (defined as never eating animal products) than in lacto-ovo vegetarians or nonvegetarians.[3] There has been little research looking specifically at 100% vegan diets.

There is more research on CKD and plant-based diets. These studies consistently report that greater consumption of vegetables, fruit, legumes, nuts, and whole grains, along with lower consumption of red and processed meats, is associated with a lower risk of CKD.[4-7] One study found that replacing one serving per day of red or processed meat with a serving of legumes or nuts was associated with a reduced risk of CKD.[5] The reduced risk of CKD associated with plant-based diets may be related to a lower risk of chronic inflammation and a lower dietary acid load.[8] Both chronic inflammation and high dietary acid load can damage the kidneys. Plant-based diets also are associated with improved blood pressure, blood lipids, and insulin sensitivity.[8] Hypertension, heart disease, and diabetes are key risk factors for CKD.

The quality of the plant-based or vegan diet also appears to be important. Healthy plant-based diets were associated with a lower risk of CKD; unhealthy plant-based diets (higher in foods like fruit juices, sugary desserts, sugar-sweetened beverages, refined grains) were associated with a higher risk of CKD.[7] Diets higher in fiber are associated with a reduced risk of CKD.[7] Healthy plant-based diets typically contain generous amounts of fruits and vegetables that supply antioxidants, thereby reducing the overall risk of chronic low-grade inflammation.[7]

The National Kidney Foundation says that diets focused on whole grains, fruits, and vegetables may benefit kidney health.[9] It is likely that a vegan diet based on whole plant foods could reduce the risk of CKD, although other factors such as family history and health status also play important roles.

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2026 Issue 4
Features

6 · Sheet Pan Cheat Sheet



22 · Scholarship Winners



16 · Breaking Bread

28 · Calcium, The Vegan Way
30 · VRG Poll Results

Departments

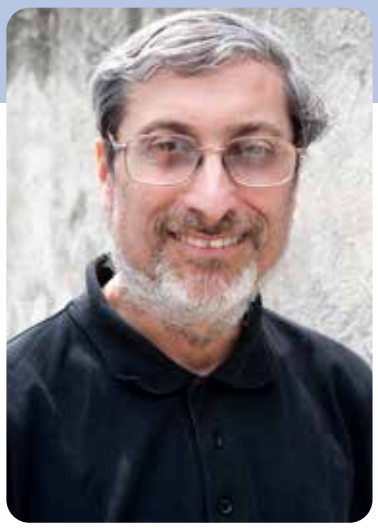
2 · *Nutrition Hotline:* Chronic Kidney Disease Risk Factors
4 · *Note from the Coordinators*
5 · *Letters to the Editor*
12 · *Scientific Update:* Growth of Vegan Babies and more
14 · *Veggie Bits:* Sipping Broths, Seaweed Toppings, and more
21 · *Purchase a Gift Subscription to* Vegan Journal
21 · *Notes from The VRG Scientific Department*
33 · *Book Reviews*
34 · *Vegan Cooking Tips:* Natural Colors and Flavors by Nancy Berkoff
35 · *Vegan Action:* Vegan Museum Founder Kay Stepkin by Amy Burger
Back Cover · *Bequests to VRG* and *VRG's 2027 Scholarship Program*

Vegan Journal is one project of The Vegetarian Resource Group. We are a nonprofit that educates the public about veganism and the interrelated issues of health, nutrition, environment, ethics, and world hunger. To join VRG and receive *Vegan Journal* in the U.S., send $25 to The Vegetarian Resource Group, P.O. Box 1463, Baltimore, MD 21203, or go to vrg.org/donate Additional donations support our outreach and research.

vrg.org

Note from the Coordinators

Vegan Past, Present, and Future





It's VRG scholarship time once again! Every student who applied for our college scholarships was amazing, especially considering they're only high school seniors. Though every contest is limited in awards, they are all winners to us. See this year's finalists on pages 22-27. Thank you to all our readers and donors who support these remarkable youth. If you would like to help read essay submissions next time, please email Whitney at vrg@vrg.org

Over the years, different themes have been prominent in the scholarship essays. When we first started our kids' essay contest in the 1980s and the college scholarship contest in 2003, animal rights was a predominant topic. The young writers always mentioned health impacts, but it felt as if they were saying this as an expected answer to adults. Lately, environmental concerns have risen to a place of primary importance. In the most recent batch of submissions, a common thread was working on expanding veggie school meal options. Students often indicated they were the only vegan, or perhaps there was one other vegan in their class. Classmates who were vegetarian often didn't eat meat because of religious reasons. We assume these people are Hindus, Jains, or Seventh-day Adventists. When we asked the winners whether there were activists of any kind at their school, often the answer was that, after the pandemic, students have been focused on catching up on their academics and getting into a good college, leaving little time for outreach or advocacy. Extracurricular activities are often a vital component for their college résumé, rather than commitment to a cause.

As Vegan Museum founder Kay Stepkin says on page 35, "The more people know about our history, the stronger the vegan movement will become." Be sure to read results from VRG's 2026 poll on pages 30-32. Past VRG polls dating back to 1994 can be found at vrg.org/nutshell/faq.htm#poll

We've increasingly heard that there are people in the movement afraid to use the word "vegan," or that we should promote "humane" meat, since not enough people have become vegan. Yet, recently, we've seen several mainstream TV commercials and television shows featuring vegan characters or products. On the other hand, there are militant vegans in the movement who scare people away because of too much criticism or treating the word "vegan" like a litmus test or religion. Starting when veganism was totally unknown, we're amazed that roughly two to three percent of the U.S. population is now vegan, and 13 percent always or usually eat vegan meals.

Thank you to all who continue to work in a positive and supportive way towards a better world for all.

Debra Wasserman & Charles Stahler
Coordinators of The Vegetarian Resource Group

VRG's MEMORIAL and HONORARY GIFT PROGRAM

How often have you wanted to make a gift in honor of a loved one or friend but weren't sure which charities are vegan-friendly, pro-environment, or pro-animal rights? Please remember The Vegetarian Resource Group. You can make a gift in memory of a loved one or as a living tribute to honor someone you care about on a special occasion, such as a wedding or birth. We'll send an acknowledgment to you and to the recipient(s) you choose. Your gift will support educational outreach programs and help promote veganism.

Memorials & Honorary Gifts

In memory of: _____

_____

In honor of: _____

_____

Please send acknowledgment to:
Name: _____
Address: _____
_____

My name and address:
Name: _____
Address: _____
_____

Make checks payable to The Vegetarian Resource Group and mail to P.O. Box 1463, Baltimore, MD 21203, or donate at vrg.org/donate

Thanks to Beit Tikvah Synagogue for their very generous donation.

Special thanks to these volunteers for writing notes to VRG's 2026 Scholarship entrants: Tony Bruffy, Sasha Clark, Julie Covington, Natalie Evans, Carole Hamlin, Julia Hart, Karen Lazarus, Amanda Lietman, Reed Mangels, Wendy McPherson, Justin McVerry, Whitney McVerry, Julie Neild, Patrick Reilly, Marcia Schveibinz, Betsy Shipley, and Cheryl Van Beek.

Appreciate VRG's Comments to the USDA and FDA to Help Develop a Definition of Ultra-Processed Foods

Thank you for writing to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Food and Drug Administration, commenting on how to define 'ultra-processed' foods. I hope that the USDA and FDA will make note of your valid points and define that class of foods accurately based on the scientific papers you mention. Your letter was very impressive.

I also encourage the USDA and FDA, as well as Congress, to eliminate all subsidies to the animal industries in the next Farm Bill. Without subsidies, animal products would likely become so expensive that most people would eat vegetarian out of economic necessity.

Nick K., via email

Looking for Cloth Belts and Vegan Kibble for Dogs

Two questions: I'm having a hard time finding vegan belts that don't look like leather knock-offs. Can you suggest a place that sells nice-looking cloth belts?

And secondly, we want to ensure we are feeding our dog, Ellie, properly. Although we routinely feed her what we eat, she also likes kibble—mostly V-Dog and Natural Balance. Are you aware of any other kibble brand we should try for variety?

Jim D., via email

Editor's Note: We noticed that llbean.com offers a variety of cloth belts. There are many great options for vegan dog food now. Some dogs have been really happy with Wild Earth, and others enjoy Halo and Petaluma.

VRG's Upcoming 45th Anniversary Celebration

Editor's Note: The Vegetarian Resource Group will be celebrating our 45th anniversary in 2027. Please share your favorite VRG experience, activity, or most treasured *Vegan Journal* recipe to possibly include in Issue 3, 2027. Send to vrg@vrg.org

Letters to the Editors can be sent to: Vegan Journal, P.O. Box 1463, Baltimore, MD 21203. You may also email letters to vrg@vrg.org or send a message to us on Facebook: facebook.com/thevegetarianresourcegroup

Coming in the next issue...

BOLD BREAKFASTS!

Plus: *Family-Friendly Favorites, Vegan Leather Made from Persimmons, Plant Milks for Vegan Toddlers, and more!*

Sheet Pan Cheat Sheet

by Hannah Kaminsky

Sheet pan meals are the ultimate kitchen shortcut, bringing everything together on one tray for maximum flavor with minimal effort and cleanup. Simple to prep and endlessly versatile, they make it easy to turn everyday ingredients into memorable meals. Drawing inspiration from cuisines around the world, the possibilities feel endless.

A reimagined three-bean salad takes on deeper flavor as green beans, peppers, and fennel roast until caramelized, then finish with burst tomatoes and a bright, Greek-inspired vinaigrette. Chickpea Pan Pie delivers everything you love about pot pie, with a flaky, buttery pastry and a hearty vegetable filling, but without the fuss. Crispy chickpea fries, also known in France as *panisse*, emerge golden on the outside and custardy within, made irresistible with a dip in whipped tahini.

For a quick escape, bring a taste of the islands straight to your table with crispy smashed plantains paired with spicy jerk seitan. When the occasion calls for something special, a vibrant "tagine" piled high with spiced chickpeas and roasted vegetables over fluffy couscous is generous enough to feed a crowd.

No matter the mood or moment, sheet pan meals prove that great cooking shouldn't be complicated. The best meals are right at your fingertips, once you start preheating the oven.

Greek Three-Bean Salad

(Serves 6)

1½ cups (6 ounces) fresh green beans, cut into 1-inch lengths
½ medium red onion, thinly sliced
1 medium red bell pepper, deseeded and cut into 1-inch strips
2 cups (10 ounces) cherry or grape tomatoes
1 small bulb fennel, fronds removed, halved, and thinly sliced
2 cloves garlic, minced
3 Tablespoons olive oil
Salt, to taste
¾ teaspoon dried oregano
½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
One 15-ounce can red kidney beans, rinsed and drained
One 15-ounce can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
One 14-ounce can quartered artichoke hearts, rinsed and drained
½ cup pitted and sliced Kalamata olives
3 Tablespoons fresh dill, roughly chopped
2 Tablespoons red wine vinegar

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. On an 18- x 13-inch sheet pan, toss green beans, onions, bell peppers, tomatoes, fennel, garlic, olive oil, and salt. Once combined, spread them out in an even layer.

Roast on the top rack of your oven for 25-30 minutes, until the fennel is tender and the tomatoes have burst. Remove from the oven and sprinkle with oregano and red pepper flakes.

Meanwhile, in a large bowl, mix kidney beans, chickpeas, artichokes, and olives. Transfer the hot vegetables from the sheet pan to the bowl, and add dill and vinegar. Mix to incorporate.

Serve right away, while hot or at room temperature. This salad can also be prepared up to a day in advance and served chilled for a more refreshing experience.

Total calories per serving: 260	Fat: 10 grams
Carbohydrates: 32 grams	Protein: 9 grams
Sodium: 251 milligrams	Fiber: 8 grams



Chickpea Pan Pie

(Serves 6-8)

2 Tablespoons olive oil
1 small yellow onion, diced
2 medium carrots, peeled and diced
3 stalks celery, diced
Salt, to taste
½ teaspoon ground black pepper
2 cups low-sodium vegetable stock
¼ cup chickpea flour or 3 Tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 Tablespoon low-sodium soy sauce
½ teaspoon dried thyme
½ teaspoon dried rosemary
Two 15-ounce cans (3 cups cooked) chickpeas, rinsed and drained
1 cup frozen green peas, thawed
1 sheet (half of a 17.3-ounce package) frozen puff pastry, thawed

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Coat the bottom of an 18- x 13-inch sheet pan with oil and distribute the onions, carrots, and celery on top. Season with salt and pepper and roast for 14-16 minutes, stirring halfway through, until golden, aromatic, and tender.

Meanwhile, whisk together vegetable stock, flour, soy sauce, thyme, and rosemary. Make sure there are no lumps before pouring evenly all over the cooked vegetables. Add chickpeas and green peas, stirring well to incorporate and distribute throughout the mixture.

On a lightly floured surface, roll puff pastry into a large rectangle approximately the same size as your sheet pan. Cut the dough into ½-inch strips. Arrange the strips in a lattice pattern on top of filling, trimming to fit and pressing gently press to seal.

Return the sheet pan to the oven and bake until the pastry is golden brown and the filling is thick and bubbly, about 20-25 minutes. Enjoy hot.

Total calories per serving: 383	Fat: 17 grams
Carbohydrates: 47 grams	Protein: 13 grams
Sodium: 418 milligrams	Fiber: 7 grams



Falafel Panisse

(Serves 5)

Falafel Panisse

2 cups chickpea flour
1 Tablespoon ground cumin
2½ teaspoons ground coriander
1½ teaspoons garlic powder
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
Salt, to taste
3½ cups low-sodium vegetable stock
3 Tablespoons olive oil, divided
1 cup fresh parsley, minced
½ cup fresh cilantro, minced

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly oil a 13- x 9-inch sheet pan and set aside.

In a large bowl, whisk together chickpea flour, cumin, coriander, garlic, paprika, and salt. Add vegetable stock and 1 Tablespoon oil while stirring constantly. Switch to a spatula, then add parsley and cilantro, mixing well.

Smooth batter into the prepared sheet pan in an even layer. Bake for 20 minutes, until set and lightly crackled on top. Let cool before chilling in the fridge.

Whipped Tahini

½ cup tahini
1 Tablespoon fresh parsley, finely minced
1 teaspoon garlic powder
Salt, to taste
2 Tablespoons lemon juice
⅓ cup water

In a medium bowl, combine tahini, parsley, garlic, salt, and lemon juice. Slowly drizzle in the water, whisking constantly. Chill until ready to serve.

Once the *panisse* mixture has cooled and solidified, turn it out onto a cutting board and slice it into fingers about ¾ x 3 inches.

Increase oven to 425 degrees. Place *panisse* on 18- x 13-inch sheet pan lined with parchment paper, spaced about ¼-inch apart. Brush with 1 Tablespoon oil. Bake for 15 minutes, until lightly browned. Flip, brush with remaining oil, and bake an additional 10-15 minutes, until browned and crispy. Serve with whipped tahini.

Total calories per serving: 227	Fat: 22 grams
Carbohydrates: 8 grams	Protein: 5 grams
Sodium: 122 milligrams	Fiber: 3 grams



Jerk Seitan with Tostones

(Serves 6)

Jerk Seitan

6 Tablespoons orange juice
¼ cup organic dark brown sugar, firmly packed
¼ cup coconut aminos
2 Tablespoons white vinegar
2 teaspoons ground ginger
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon dried thyme
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground allspice
1 habanero pepper, deseeded and minced
24 ounces seitan, roughly chopped
2 scallions, thinly sliced (for garnish)

In a medium bowl, whisk together orange juice, brown sugar, aminos, vinegar, ginger, garlic, thyme, cinnamon, allspice, and habanero. Add the seitan and toss to coat. Set aside and let marinate for about 20 minutes, tossing again halfway through.

Smashed Plantains

4 medium plantains
2 Tablespoons olive oil or melted coconut oil
Salt, to taste

Preheat oven to 425 degrees and line two 18- x 13-inch sheet pans with parchment paper.

Peel the plantains by chopping off the ends with a sharp knife and then making a shallow cut lengthwise just through the peel, not the fruit itself. Insert your thumb into the slit and gently coax the peel off.

Slice each plantain into ½-inch coins and spread them out onto one of the prepared sheet pans. Drizzle with oil and sprinkle evenly with salt.

Spoon the seitan out onto the second sheet pan, reserving the excess marinade.

Bake both sheets for 10 minutes, until the plantains begin to look a bit brown and dry around the edges. Remove the sheet, flip the plantains, and use the bottom of a flat measuring cup or drinking glass to press them out flat, as thinly as possible.

Drizzle half of the remaining marinade over the seitan before returning the pans to the oven. Bake for an additional 10-15 minutes, until the plantains are golden brown and the seitan is crisp around the edges. Let cool before dividing onto plates and topping the seitan with scallions.

Total calories per serving: 397	Fat: 6 grams
Carbohydrates: 60 grams	Protein: 29 grams
Sodium: 833 milligrams	Fiber: 4 grams

Harvest Tagine with Golden Couscous

(Serves 8-10)

Harvest Tagine

1 medium green apple, peeled, cored, and sliced
1 medium red onion, quartered and sliced
1 medium zucchini, sliced
1 small (1¾-2 pounds) kabocha squash, halved, deseeded, and sliced
1 cup baby carrots
4 Tablespoons olive oil, divided
Salt, to taste
4 cloves garlic, minced
2 teaspoons smoked paprika
1¼ teaspoons ground cumin
1 teaspoon each ground coriander and ground ginger
¼ teaspoon each ground cinnamon and crushed red pepper flakes
One 14-ounce can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
¼ cup raisins
¼ cup capers, drained
3 Tablespoons lemon juice
3 Tablespoons tomato paste
½ cup water
½ cup fresh parsley, roughly chopped (for garnish)
¼ cup toasted pine nuts (for garnish)

Preheat oven to 400 degrees and lightly grease two 18- x 13-inch sheet pans.

Place apples, onions, zucchini, squash, and carrots on the prepared sheet pans in an even layer. Drizzle with 2 Tablespoons olive oil and sprinkle with salt. Roast for 30 minutes, rotating the pans about halfway through. The vegetables will be just starting to soften and brown.

Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, whisk together remaining oil, garlic, all spices, chickpeas, raisins, capers, lemon juice, tomato paste, and water. It should look sort of like chunky bean soup.

Pour this mixture all over the vegetables, distributing it as evenly as possible between the two sheets. Stir gently to incorporate, being careful to scrape up any caramelized bits on the bottom of the pans. Continue baking for 20-30 minutes longer, until evenly browned and fork tender.

Golden Couscous
2 Tablespoons olive oil
2 cloves garlic, minced
2¼ cups low-sodium vegetable stock
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
1½ cups dry couscous

After the vegetables have been cooking for about 45 minutes total, coat the bottom of a 13- x 9-inch sheet pan with oil and place it in the oven. Scatter garlic on top and toast for 2 minutes. Whisk together stock and turmeric and carefully pour it in. Allow 5 minutes before sprinkling in the dry couscous. Stir well to moisten and leave the pan in the oven for just 1 minute longer. Remove the sheet pan, cover tightly with foil, and let steam for 5 minutes.

Fluff couscous with a fork before transferring it to the bottom of a large ceramic tagine, platter, or bowl. Top with the vegetable-and-bean mixture, sprinkle with parsley and pine nuts, and serve.

Total calories per serving: 382
Fat: 14 grams
Carbohydrates: 56 grams
Protein: 10 grams
Sodium: 199 milligrams
Fiber: 6 grams

Based in Austin, Texas, Hannah Kaminsky is a recipe developer, food photographer, cookbook author, and Senior Editor of *Vegan Journal*. They focus on bold flavors and simple techniques to make vegan food more accessible and delicious for everyone.



Scientific Update

by Reed Mangels, PhD, RD, FADA

A Review of Recent Scientific Papers Related to Vegetarianism

Health of Vegan Families

Researchers from the Czech Republic compared growth, nutritional status, and other health outcomes in 95 families (47 self-identified as vegan, 23 as vegetarian, and 25 as nonvegetarian). Vegan diets were defined as excluding animal products; vegetarian diets included dairy and/or eggs. In this study, a family was defined as two adults and at least one child under 7 years of age who all followed the same dietary pattern. The study included 187 adults and 142 children, all of whom kept records of the food they ate and underwent physical exams and blood and urine analysis.

No significant differences in growth or bone health were found among children in the different dietary groups. Bone health indicators were similar in adults in all dietary groups. Vegan children and adults had the lowest total and LDL-cholesterol. Vegan children had the lowest urine iodine concentration, but this was not associated with compromised thyroid function. Vegan children and adults had the highest fiber intakes and the lowest intakes of saturated fat. Many vegans and vegetarians used supplemental vitamin B12.

The results of this study suggest that vegan diets can support normal growth and bone health at all life stages and that they are associated with additional health and nutritional benefits.

Heniková M, Ouřadová A, Selinger E, et al. Dietary intake, nutritional status, and health outcomes among vegan, vegetarian, and omnivorous Czech families. *Commun Med (Lond).* 2025;5:538.

Importance of Vitamin B12 for Pregnant Vegetarians

Vitamin B12 is an essential nutrient throughout life. It plays an especially important role in pregnancy when a vitamin B12 deficiency can have negative effects on the development of the infant's nervous system, including the brain. A vitamin B12 deficiency in pregnancy is also associated with an increased risk of pregnancy loss and having a low-birth-weight infant. Some studies have found benefits of vitamin B12 supplements in pregnancy while others have not seen improvements in infant development. These differing results may be due to differences in the amount of vitamin B12 being provided by the supplement being administered.

A recent study in India and Nepal gave 531 vegetarians (or near vegetarians) who were in their first trimester of pregnancy a daily vitamin B12 supplement of either 50 micrograms or 250 micrograms. The vegetarians took the vitamin B12 supplement throughout their pregnancy and up to six months after giving birth. They were not taking a vitamin B12 supplement at the start of the study. The researchers assessed infant development when the infants were 9-12 months old and measured vitamin B12 status in mothers and infants. Study subjects could be vegans, be lacto/ovo/lacto-ovo vegetarians, or eat meat/chicken/fish less than once a month. At the beginning of the study, more than half of the participants were deficient in vitamin B12.

The infants' developmental scores were significantly higher in the group whose mothers received 250 micrograms of vitamin B12 compared to those whose mothers received 50 micrograms of vitamin B12. All infants had blood vitamin B12 levels within the normal range. The vitamin B12 status of both groups of mothers improved with supplementation, with greater improvement seen in the group receiving 250 micrograms of vitamin B12 per day. These results suggest that supplemental vitamin B12 at a level of 250 micrograms per day offers benefits during and after pregnancy.

Nagpal J, Mathur M, Rawat S, et al. Maternal supplementation of vitamin B12 in predominantly vegetarian pregnant women improves their vitamin B12 status and the neurodevelopment of their infants: the MATCOBIND multicentric double-blind randomised control trial. *BMJ Paediatr Open.* 2026;10:e004112.

Growth of Vegan Babies

A recent study from Israel used data collected over a 10-year period, during which more than a million infants were studied to evaluate their growth from vegan, "vegetarian," and nonvegetarian families. The children were measured and weighed at birth, in early infancy, and at two years old. Each infant's caregiver was asked if the family diet was vegan, "vegetarian" (including lacto-ovo vegetarian and those who ate fish but not meat), or nonvegetarian. Approximately 98.5% of infants were from nonvegetarian households, 1.2% from "vegetarian" households, and 0.3% from vegan households. Information was not collected on what the infants ate or on supplement use. The main finding of this study was that, overall, there were minimal differences in average growth among the different households. The growth of infants from vegan, "vegetarian," and nonvegetarian families was generally similar.

Infants from vegan households had a slightly lower birth weight (about 3½ ounces less on average) than infants from nonvegetarian families. The difference between the groups is not considered to be clinically meaningful. When the infants were measured and weighed at ages 2 months and 2 years, there was little difference among the three groups. Infants from vegan families were more likely to be classified as underweight at age 2 months, but by age 2 years, there were negligible differences among the groups. Since this study classified infants based on their family's reported dietary pattern, we can't say for certain that the infants were strictly vegan/"vegetarian"/nonvegetarian. Infants' diets are typically similar to their family's dietary pattern, however. The results of this study suggest that infants from vegan families grow similarly to infants from "vegetarian" and nonvegetarian families.

Avital K, Fliss-Isakov N, Shahar DR, et al. Growth trajectories in infants from families with plant-based or omnivorous dietary patterns. *JAMA Netw Open.* 2026;9:e2557798.

Where Do You Get Your Calcium?

Finnish researchers examined the main food sources of calcium, protein, vitamin B12, and other nutrients in 73 Finnish children (age 2-7 years) and their caregivers who self-identified as vegan, "vegetarian" (pescatarians were included in this category), or nonvegetarian. The families kept records of the foods they ate, which were analyzed to see which foods provided key nutrients.

Regardless of their dietary group, children got much of their protein from cereals/grains and dairy products and/or plant-based milk and yogurt. Legumes, seeds, and nuts provided 25% of the protein in vegan children's diets. Nearly 70% of the protein in the vegan adults' diets came from legumes, seeds, nuts, and cereals/grains. On average, adults and children in all groups met protein recommendations.

Vegan, "vegetarian," and nonvegetarian had similar intakes of calcium and vitamin D. Plant milks and yogurts played an important role in vegan children's diets, since these were the main food sources of calcium, vitamin B12, and vitamin D. The vegan children also all used a vitamin B12 supplement and many used a vitamin D supplement. In Finland, as in the United States, fortification of plant milks and yogurts is voluntary. The plant milks and yogurts used in this study were frequently fortified. For example, 84% provided calcium, 79% had vitamin B12, 77% supplied vitamin D, and 19% included iodine.

Cereals were the main source of iron for all children; vegan and "vegetarian" children had higher iron intakes than did nonvegetarian children. The vegan children had the lowest iodine intake and mainly got iodine from fortified plant milks and yogurt, cereals/grains, and iodized salt. The researchers recommend that more plant milks and yogurt should be fortified with iodine. Vegan children and adults, as well as other study subjects who ate little or no fish, had virtually no omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA in their diet.

This study highlights the importance of fortified plant milks in the diets of many vegans as sources of nutrients, including calcium, vitamin B12, and vitamin D.

Tilli V, Hovinen T, Kettunen E, et al. Food sources of macro- and micronutrients in young children and adults following vegan, vegetarian, and omnivorous diets. *Eur J Nutr.* 2026;65:88.

Veggie Bits

MyForest Foods MyBacon and MyPulledPork



Conscious consumers can finally bring home the bacon, and pulled pork, too. These incredibly authentic lookalikes rely on oyster mushroom mycelium to evoke the very same meaty textures you'd expect from animal protein. Sold in strips that can be pan-fried as-is or cut into smaller bits, MyBacon takes a bit of finessing to achieve the ideal crispy texture, teasing with a richly smoky aroma the whole time. These revolutionary meat alternatives truly could fly under the radar of a standard omnivore. For anyone that misses that unmistakable breakfast experience, though, it's entirely worth the wait. MyPulledPork is effortless and almost instant to prepare, ready to slather with your favorite BBQ sauce and stuff into sandwiches. Certified gluten-free, kosher, and soy-free. Available at Giant, Hannaford, Natural Grocers, Whole Foods, and more. Find more stores plus cooking tips at myforestfoods.com

Millie's Sipping Broth



Straddling the line between savory tea and conventional consommé, Millie's Sipping Broth is the umami warm beverage you didn't know you craved. For anyone who loves soup so much they could drink it all day, four distinctive flavors allow you to do all that, but in a more socially acceptable format. Delight Pho, Spicy Tortilla, Thai Lemongrass, and Tomato Basil taste exactly like their namesakes, only lighter. Simply steep one cloth sachet in hot water for a few minutes to unlock an impressive depth of flavor, enlivened with herbs and spices that taste as bright as anything picked fresh. You could even use these as the base of your next meal, if you're not so keen on drinking hot broth. Just add vegetables, noodles, and/or beans, and you've got an instant entrée. Certified gluten-free and kosher. Available in many stores such as Amazon, Big Y, Food City, select Walmart locations, and milliessippingbroth.com

Kindling Protein Pretzels



For a simple, savory, packable snack with benefits, look no further than Kindling Protein Pretzels. Wheat and chickpea protein are responsible for the impressive nine grams of protein per serving, eclipsing many high-calorie energy bars. The key to their success is that they're indistinguishable from conventional pretzel twists. Crisp, crunchy, boasting a hint of malted wheat and just the right amount of coarse salt for seasoning, the Sea Salt pretzels could seamlessly slip into lunchboxes without anyone being the wiser. The same could be said of the Dill Pickle variety, aside from their distinctive tang and bright herbaceous finish. Balanced, familiar, and designed to offer a satisfying eating experience, they're a smart choice for the whole family to enjoy, including picky eaters. Certified kosher, non-GMO, and nut-free. Available through Amazon, Hy-Vee, Safeway, Wegmans, and kindlingsnacks.com

Kooshy Croutons



Croutons are often a second thought at best, employed as a thrifty way to salvage stale bread and add texture to an otherwise forgettable salad. Kooshy puts them front and center, starting with crispy cubes of tangy sourdough that are good enough to snack on out of hand. The Almost Naked variety lets that simple toasted flavor shine, seasoned lightly with sea salt and black pepper for emphasis. Chili Lime is infused with a bright, complex heat reminiscent of fresh salsa, building in intensity with each subsequent bite, perfect for spicing up a boring bowl of greens. Light without being at risk of dissolving under dressing, these substantial cubes can stand up to heartier dishes, topping baked potatoes, casseroles, soups, and more with equal finesse. Unlike other shelf-stable pouches, there are no preservatives or questionable ingredients keeping them fresh, yet they still taste as good, if not better than, homemade. Certified non-GMO. Available at Big Y, HEB, Sprouts, Target, Whole Foods, and other mainstream retailers, as well as Amazon and kooshy.com

Veggie Bits

Veggie Confetti Pickled Veggies and Veggie Slaws



Add a pop of color and a tangy, invigorating bite to any meal with the wide array of ferments from Veggie Confetti. Whereas desserts are embellished with sugary sprinkles, savory dishes can benefit from a saltier sort of adornment. Pickled Cabbage, Pickled Carrots, Pickled Cucumber, Pickled Jalapeños, and Pickled Onions make up the core collection, each one highlighting their respective individual veggies with simple, subtle seasonings that can meld easily into your favorite meals. For a bolder approach, Pickled Rainbow Slaw combines a whole picnic's worth of crisp salad fodder into a compact condiment, notable for its cumin and peppercorn undertones. Spice lovers should pick up the Pickled Kimchi Slaw which is milder than a full-fledged Korean version but still packs a punch, and became a fast favorite for weeknight stir fries. Remarkably crisp, lightly tangy, refreshing, and never overbearing, a small serving goes a long way to liven up any dish. Gluten-free, soy-free, and nut-free ingredients. Available at HEB, Safeway, Shoprite, Wegmans, and many others. Read more at veggie-confetti.com

Gimme K-Crisps Seaweed Topping



Stop crumbling seaweed snacks over your meals; Gimme has a better seasoning solution. K-Crisps are their take on *gim-jaban*, crispy shredded seaweed sprinkles. Though it's tempting to compare them to Japanese *furikake*, these are much larger, fluffier flakes with a prominent sesame flavor. Umami, oceanic, balancing a subtle sweet and salty undertone, they are a rice bowl's best friend but also shine as a topping for tofu to make a plant-based fish facsimile. Sea Salt sticks to the basics while Chili Crisp, my new go-to, finishes with a bold punch of red chili pepper. Certified gluten-free and organic. Available from Amazon and Whole Foods. Read more at gimmeseaweed.com

True Dates Flavored Dates



Dates have long been known as "nature's candy" for their inherently sweet, caramel-like flavor. Now, True Dates is helping them live up to that promise by mimicking genuine confectionery, minus added processed sugars. Soft and chewy, it's a satisfying way to quell cravings. I couldn't get enough of the Cookie Dough; despite looking like a dried fruit, the eating experience was of pure unbaked batter, complete with notes of buttery brown sugar and vanilla. Creamy Peanut Butter is another top pick, cutting out the middleman for anyone who enjoys a nut butter-stuffed date. Sour Cola and Sour Watermelon ar e bolder, evoking the flavors of cola gummies and Jolly Ranchers® candies, respectively, though the sourness is quite tame. Certified gluten-free. Available at Sam's Club and Sprouts. Find more flavors and info at truecompany.com

Wildbrine Fermented Chickpea Salads



Wildbrine, best known for their fermented condiments like sauerkraut and kimchi, have applied their pickling prowess to everyone's favorite beans: chickpeas. As if the one-two punch of protein and fiber weren't enough for the little legume, these new chickpea salads are naturally imbued with probiotics, just like yogurt, tempeh, and kombucha, giving them a distinctive yet satisfying subtle funk. Kimchi Style replaces the typical cabbage with chickpeas and infuses them with *gochugaru* (Korean red chili flakes) and pungent garlic and ginger. Bold enough to serve as a topper or seasoning that carries an entire dish, these beans bear a mild yet lingering heat. Mediterranean, the sleeper hit that turned out to be my favorite, takes a gentler approach, letting herbaceous oregano take the lead, followed by a sunny parsley and lemon finish. Remarkably creamy, not mushy, the texture of the beans alone is reason enough to keep a jar on hand. Certified BPA-free, gluten-free, non-GMO, and no added sugar. Available exclusively at Whole Foods. Read more at wildbrine.com

Photos and reviews by Hannah Kaminsky

Breaking Bread

by Philip Gelb

Homemade bread is a staple in my kitchen, and each dough is as unique as the memories and experiences that inspired it. Bialys are a childhood favorite straight from Brooklyn, NY, where this lesser known cousin of the bagel was always around. Multigrain Seed Rolls are invited to every dinner party, easily adapted to use anything in the pantry. Pumpernickel is another favorite of mine, with a dark, flavorful, and complex crumb unlike anything else on grocery store shelves. Rosemary Walnut Bread is an understated loaf I first made in college and still enjoy to this day. Onion-Caraway Rye Bread makes incredible sandwiches, if you can restrain yourself from eating every last slice plain.

If you do not have a baking stone, the best alternatives to achieve a crispy crust are to use a heavy, preheated baking sheet or a cast-iron skillet.

Bialys

(Makes 12 bialys)

1 Tablespoon olive oil
2 large yellow onions, diced
1¼ teaspoons salt, divided
3 Tablespoons poppy seeds
1¾ cups water
1½ teaspoons active dry yeast
3 cups all-purpose flour
1 cup whole wheat flour

In a large skillet over medium-low heat, add oil, onions, and ¼ teaspoon salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 30 minutes, until golden. Add poppy seeds, stir to incorporate, and set aside.

Heat water to 105 degrees. In a large bowl, combine water and yeast. Let stand 5 minutes or until frothy. Add remaining salt.

Add flour one cup at a time, using a food processor or stand mixer to knead on low speed for about 20 minutes. By hand, it will take 25-35 minutes. Do not add more flour; the dough should remain very moist and sticky.

Cover dough tightly and let stand at room temperature until tripled in size, about 2 hours.

Place a baking stone in your oven and preheat to 500 degrees.

Flour hands and work surface thoroughly. Divide dough into 12 equal parts. Roll each piece into a ball, flatten, and stretch into a small circle about 6 inches in diameter. Stretch the center thinner than the outsides. Equally divide the onion-poppy seed filling among the pieces in the indentations.

Bake about 8-10 minutes or until lightly browned.

Total calories per bialy: 181	Fat: 3 grams
Carbohydrates: 34 grams	Protein: 5 grams
Sodium: 245 milligrams	Fiber: 3 grams



Multigrain Seed Rolls

(Makes 12-15 rolls)

2 cups water
2 teaspoons blackstrap molasses
2 teaspoons active dry yeast
2 teaspoons salt
⅓ cup buckwheat flour
⅓ cup oat flour
⅓ cup coarse yellow cornmeal
⅓ cup dark rye flour
⅓ cup brown rice flour
3 cups all-purpose flour
1 Tablespoon olive oil
3 Tablespoons poppy seeds
3 Tablespoons pumpkin seeds
3 Tablespoons sunflower seeds

Heat water to 105 degrees. In a large bowl, combine water, molasses, and yeast. Let stand 5 minutes or until frothy. Add salt.

Add flours and cornmeal, one at a time, incorporating each fully before adding the next. After adding the all-purpose flour, use a stand mixer to continue kneading for about 20 minutes, or knead by hand for 25-35 minutes. Drizzle dough with oil, cover tightly, and let stand at room temperature for 90 minutes or until roughly doubled in size.

Gently deflate the dough by pressing down. Add seeds, kneading for 2 minutes to incorporate. Divide dough into 12-15 pieces. Round each piece of dough by rolling it gently in your palm against your kneading surface. If needed, lightly flour your palm but do not flour the work surface. Place each rounded piece on a well-floured board. Cover with a towel and let rise for about 45 minutes or until doubled in size.

Place a baking stone in the oven and preheat to 500 degrees. Place the rolls directly on the hot baking stone, 2 inches apart. Bake rolls for 10-12 minutes or until golden brown.

Total calories per roll: 232
Carbohydrates: 40 grams
Sodium: 394 milligrams
Fat: 5 grams
Protein: 7 grams
Fiber: 4 grams



Pumpernickel Bread

(Makes 2 loaves, about 24 slices)

1 cup stout or doppelbock beer
½ cup coffee, brewed and cooled
½ cup water
¼ cup blackstrap molasses
2 teaspoons active dry yeast
2 cups dark rye flour
2 Tablespoons Dutch-processed cocoa powder
2 teaspoons salt
3 cups all-purpose flour
1 Tablespoon olive oil

In a large bowl, add beer, coffee, water, molasses, and yeast. Mix well and let stand until frothy, about 5 minutes. Add rye flour, cocoa powder, and salt and whisk together. Place dough on a clean surface and slowly incorporate the all-purpose flour.

Knead dough for 20 minutes or until very smooth. Coat with oil and let sit 2 hours, covered tightly, or until doubled in size.

Place a baking stone in the oven and preheat to 450 degrees. Divide dough into two equal parts and shape into round loaves. Slash the tops with a sharp knife. Bake bread for 20-25 minutes, until evenly browned.

Total calories per slice: 113
Carbohydrates: 22 grams
Sodium: 200 milligrams
Fat: 1 gram
Protein: 4 grams
Fiber: 3 grams

Rosemary Walnut Bread

(Makes 2 loaves, about 24 slices)

2 cups water
2 Tablespoons agave nectar or maple syrup
1 Tablespoon salt
1 teaspoon active dry yeast
½ teaspoon ground dried rosemary
2 cups whole wheat flour
2½-3 cups all-purpose flour
1 cup raw walnuts, chopped
1 Tablespoon olive oil

In a large bowl, combine water, agave, salt, yeast, and rosemary and mix well. Add whole wheat flour and mix to combine well. Place in a bowl, cover tightly, and refrigerate overnight.

In the morning, mix in all-purpose flour, ½ cup at a time, then knead by hand for 10 minutes. Add walnuts and knead to incorporate into the dough. Coat with oil, cover tightly, and let rise for about 90 minutes or until doubled in size.

Divide dough in half and shape into 2 loaves, either free form or using two 9-inch loaf pans or proofing baskets. Cover tightly and let rise about 45 minutes, until doubled in size again. Slash the tops with a sharp knife.

Preheat oven to 450 degrees and bake dough for 20-25 minutes on the middle rack. When fully baked, the loaves will sound hollow if you tap the bottom.

Total calories per slice: 124
Carbohydrates: 19 grams
Sodium: 292 milligrams
Fat: 4 grams
Protein: 3 grams
Fiber: 2 grams

Onion-Caraway Rye Bread

(Makes 1 large loaf, about 16 slices)

1½ cups water
1 Tablespoon agave nectar or maple syrup
2 teaspoons active dry yeast
2 teaspoons salt
2 cups dark rye flour
2 Tablespoons caraway seeds
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped
1 Tablespoon olive oil

In a large bowl, add water, agave, yeast, and salt and mix well. Add rye flour and caraway seeds and mix thoroughly to combine. Cover tightly and refrigerate overnight or up to 24 hours.

After resting, add all-purpose flour and onions, mixing well. Turn out onto a floured board and knead by hand for 10 minutes. Coat with olive oil, place in a bowl, cover tightly, and let sit about 90 minutes, until roughly doubled in size.

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees and place a baking stone on the center rack. Shape dough into a loaf using a 9-inch loaf pan or proofing basket. Bake the loaf on the baking stone for 20-30 minutes, until golden all over. When done, the loaf will sound hollow if you tap the bottom.

Total calories per slice: 128
Carbohydrates: 25 grams
Sodium: 293 milligrams
Fat: 2 grams
Protein: 5 grams
Fiber: 5 grams

Photos by Hannah Kaminsky

Philip Gelb is a vegan chef and musician who divides his time between the San Francisco Bay Area, California and Bangkok, Thailand.



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Notes from The VRG Scientific Department

Vegan Education

VRG Nutrition Advisor Reed Mangels, PhD, RD, spoke to the Florida State University graduate nutrition association on vegetarian and vegan diets in the life-cycle and careers in vegetarian nutrition. Reed also did an interview for *Nutrition Action* (Center for Science in the Public Interest) on plant-based protein, protein quality, and anti-nutrients.

Reed was interviewed on *Little Hill Podcast* about VRG and the Santa Cruz VegFest in California. She and Arnie Alper, MD, staffed the VRG booth there.

Cathy Conway, Hannah Kaminsky, Charles Stahler, and Debra Wasserman staffed VRG's booth at the Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo (FNCE) 2026 in San Antonio, Texas. Like other years, our booth was quite busy! VRG also sponsored a vegan networking dinner during this event.

2026 Scholarship Winners

Noelle McMorris—California

Noelle became a vegetarian in sixth grade. By ninth grade, she had co-founded peta2 in Los Angeles County, despite being the only vegan in the club. Noelle spearheaded an event at Santa Monica Pier for Thanksgiving, partnering with Tofurky and other companies to give out dozens of whole vegan turkeys as well as hundreds of samples and recipe leaflets. Her club coordinated with the school district's superintendent and nutrition department to introduce daily vegan lunch options. The menu plan included a veggie burger, bean burrito bowl, and pasta with red sauce and plant-based sausage. This spring, her club is collaborating with the Plant-Based Treaty to organize a plant-based event in Calabasas, CA.

For her AP capstone projects, Noelle created a college-level research project asking "How does an increased awareness of factory farming impact youth perceptions of meat-eating, concerns for animal welfare, and openness to change?" Noelle is also a Girl Scout. As her troop only had Thin Mints as the vegan option, since becoming vegan in eighth grade, she would only sell that flavor. Regardless of that limitation, she still always managed to meet her quota.

At Columbia University, Noelle hopes to continue her research about perceptions of factory farming while expanding her understanding of human-animal relationships and to dive into strategies for social change or nutrition. In five years, she hopes to have a masters degree in social work.



Noelle McMorris
$10,000
Vegetarian Resource Group Scholarship



Support Young Veg Activists!

To send support for additional scholarships and internships, donate at vrg.org/donate, call (410) 366-8343, or send a donation to VRG, P.O. Box 1463, Baltimore, MD 21203.

The Vegetarian Resource Group Awarded More College Scholarships in 2026

Emily Lin—California

Emily said, "How could schools justify requiring medical notes for dietary accommodations when many low-income families in my community lack access to healthcare? The simple solution was home-packed lunches, but how could that be realistic for those like myself, whose parents' time and money was a luxury? Frustrated, I searched for inclusive solutions and discovered plant-based meals could address nearly every barrier I noticed, yet they weren't offered at school. That moment pushed me to contact my district's nutrition director to advocate for vegetarian and vegan lunch options. Over several months, we met regularly as I presented the testimonies I gathered supporting accessible plant-based meals for students.

"My proudest success was the following school year when my relentless advocacy campaign led to new daily vegetarian and vegan entrée options on our campus, as well as the six schools within my district. Examples of new meals include vegan buffalo nuggets, plant-based meatballs, and veggie dumplings.

"…Soymilk has been introduced in my school's lunch line. After my school's rollout of soymilk, it will then soon be introduced to the rest of the sites in my district… Coming from a school predominantly composed of students of color whose demographics experience higher rates of lactose intolerance, I am absolutely thrilled by this success (Soymilk is highly popular at my school, with chocolate soymilk being the first to run out.)… Additionally, I was a student speaker at California's School Nutrition Annual Conference, where I presented at the 'Nutritious and Delicious Plant-Powered Meals' session to nutrition directors and school staff… I was so happy when audience members… said that my experience encouraged them to try introducing veggie meals within their own community… To promote plant-based meals to ensure they remain for years to come, I founded a District Dietary Council, a youth-led coalition featuring student representatives from all six schools in my district.



Photo by YourHS

Emily Lin
$5,000
Vegetarian Resource Group Scholarship

I discovered this scholarship through previous winners Nancy Zhang and Ava Cuevas, both amazing advocates who I met through Plant Powered School Meals Coalition. Ava especially has been an incredible role model to me. She was my youth mentor… In five years, my dream is to graduate with a degree relating to public health and public policy."

Luke Zheltov—South Carolina

Luke became vegan in fifth grade, wanting to do his part to contribute to creating an ethical environment for animals. In eighth grade, he researched feedlots and created a school presentation on his findings. In high school, he founded a plant-based eating club.

For six years, Luke volunteered at AMOR Healing Kitchen in Charleston, SC. There, they cook vegan meals for those with critical health conditions. He also organized his school club's participation in the annual vegan chili competition hosted by AMOR, feeding over 200 participants. Luke's reference at AMOR said, "He understood that every vegetable chopped and every meal packaged carried meaning to someone in need."

Luke was part of a competition team that won first prize in the NASA *Plant the Moon Challenge*, where students conduct experiments to see how vegetables can grow in lunar and Martian soil simulants. The project helps NASA understand how crops can be grown on the moon and Mars. Luke will major in computer engineering at Clemson University Honors College and wants to design technology that aligns innovation with ethics to reduce e-waste and promote sustainable design.



Luke Zheltov
$5,000
Vegetarian Resource Group Scholarship

Tomer Fine—California

After watching a video in seventh grade, Tomer told his parents he would no longer consume animal products. He said, "I later learned that veganism is actually a decision about what kind of person you want to be when nobody is watching." In high school, his club successfully lobbied the Las Virgenes Unified School District to include daily vegan meals five days a week across all LVUSD schools.

Tomer is also a co-founder of peta2 Los Angeles. With Noelle (another scholarship winner), they hosted giveaways of Tofurky, vegan ice cream, vegan meats, and vegan milkshakes. The summer before his senior year, Tomer interned with the Animal-Cruelty Division of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office. Tomer's future goal is to major in political science and then attend law school, building a niche in animal rights law. He will be attending Vanderbilt University.



Tomer Fine
$5,000
Vegetarian Resource Group Scholarship

Do you know an amazing vegan or vegetarian high school student?

Please tell them about our annual scholarship contest! The deadline for the next VRG scholarship contest for high school seniors graduating in 2027 is February 20, 2027. To see scholarship rules and past winners, visit vrg.org/student/scholar.htm

Vegetarian Resource Group Internships

Virtual and hybrid internship opportunities are available with VRG for students from middle or high school through undergraduate and graduate school levels. See vrg.org/student

Livia Aschheim—California

Livia said, "Realizing my school's cafeteria had no food that I, as a vegan, could eat, I met with my district nutrition manager, who stated that adding plant-based options to the menu wasn't possible. Still, I worked tirelessly for over two years to address her concerns, organizing and presenting at events, distributing hundreds of vegan donut holes and wristbands, collecting over 350 signatures, meeting countless times with school administrators, and working closely with Balanced, a behind-the-scenes partner that helps institutions add plant-based meals in a practical, policy-compliant way, who assisted with the intricacies of vendors and regulations. Plant-based options are now offered daily at all five high schools in my district since the first day of my senior year."

Livia worked with Planted Society and talked to over 40 restaurant owners to promote the adoption of plant-based meals. In Livia's 9th grade biology class, they were required to seal fish within bottles containing small amounts of water, without adequate food or filtration. She sent a proposal outlining how they could meet the learning objectives without using fish. The original assignment was eventually removed from the curriculum. She also spent a year and a half to bring a synthetic fetal pig pilot to her school's freshman dissection program. Livia participated in Farm Sanctuary's Youth Leadership Council as well as peta2's Youth Advisory board. She will be attending Santa Clara University.



Photo by Audrey Fox

Livia Aschheim
$5,000
Vegetarian Resource Group Scholarship

Augustus Farrell—Missouri

Augustus said, "Because I live in a rural area, most of my school is connected to the animal agricultural industry. Many students and faculty members are a part of FHA, 4-H, fifth-generation animal farmers, and oftentimes all three. I, too, come from a family that used to raise animals as livestock. Despite these circumstances, I still chose to be vegan. Right now, discussions of morality are in full swing at my school because I recently had a paper about speciesism that was published in a Harvard undergraduate journal, *The Harvard Brain*. My paper, "From Pig to Pork: How Society Rewires Our Empathy" explores biological and social themes amongst the fields of philosophy, neuroscience, linguistics, and many more… Additionally, I write for a student newspaper for the St. Louis metropolitan area, and I have written articles specifically about veganism… I would say the social isolation caused by this large portion of America that knows next to nothing about both vegans and the animal agriculture industry is the hardest challenge I face. When I have a discussion with my German teacher who has lots of experience working in slaughterhouses, we have common ground because we know the reality. Because vegan principles also apply to humans, I hope to become an ophthalmologist, which would allow me to provide life- and vision-saving services to those suffering from extreme poverty." Augustus will be attending Columbia University.

Trisha Choudhary—New Jersey

Trisha became a vegetarian in eighth grade after learning about factory farming, and then vegan because of her "stance of not supporting animal exploitation." In high school, she met with food vendors to advocate for more plant-based options in the cafeteria. A representative for NJveg said, "Trisha has helped NJveg with our educational outreach program, where we answer questions and provide free literature (including some from VRG) on the benefits of going vegan. She was a great asset to us, engaging both adults and children… She is now a contributor to our social media and is learning WordPress so she can start helping with our website." Trisha aspires to work in food policy, potentially pursuing a degree in public policy or law.



Augustus Farrell
$5,000
Vegetarian Resource Group Scholarship



Trisha Choudhary
$1,000
Vegetarian Resource Group Scholarship

Smriti Mehta—California

Smriti said, "As I stared at the chicken curry on my plate, flashes of cramped cages at my grandparents' farm [were] running through my mind. In that moment, my relationship with food changed… I chose veganism because it aligned with my values of minimizing harm, respecting animals as sentient beings, and reducing environmental impacts." Smriti said she joined her school district's nutrition committee and helped introduce overnight oats to the breakfast menu.

"I wrote and illustrated a children's book about nutrition and compassionate eating, then read it in elementary classrooms to more than 500 students… In college and beyond, I plan to promote veganism through systems rather than slogans. I intend to study nutrition and public policy to address structural barriers that make plant-based eating inaccessible for many families."



Smriti Mehta
$1,000
Vegetarian Resource Group Scholarship

Neel Gonugunta—Wisconsin

Neel said, "I stared at the cafeteria line, scanning for something I could eat… Plant-based options were limited to a weekly salad… I took initiative to change that… Soon I was on Capitol Hill, nervously clutching my notes to speak with staff on the Effective Food Procurement Act. I had prepared for a brief exchange, but instead we launched into a 30-minute conversation on the economics of expanding plant-based school meals.

"Back home, I led a campaign at my school, working with my food service director and peers to introduce plant-based options… With support from a Friends of the Earth grant, I helped pilot a plant-based chicken sandwich directly on the lunch line. We are currently working to trial additional items, such as plant-based taco crumbles and tenders to meet students where they are, particularly in my… rural public high school.

"In college and beyond, I plan to promote vegetarianism and veganism by addressing the energy and infrastructure systems that shape how food is produced, distributed, and wasted. I intend to study energy science and engineering." Neel is attending Stanford University.



Neel Gonugunta
$1,000
Vegetarian Resource Group Scholarship

Calcium, The Vegan Way

by Reed Mangels, PhD, RD

The Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for calcium for adults aged 19-50 years and men 51-70 years is 1,000 milligrams per day. The RDA for women over 51 years and for men over 70 is 1,200 milligrams per day. Did you ever wonder if you're getting enough calcium?

You could look up the amount of calcium in all the foods you eat and add it up every day, but there is an easier way. The following list of vegan foods all have about 100 milligrams of calcium per serving.

By choosing eight servings each day if you're a 19- to 70-year-old man or a 19- to 50-year-old woman, you'll be getting about 800 milligrams of calcium. You'll likely get the remaining 200 milligrams from foods not on the list that have lower amounts of calcium.

If you're a man over age 70 or a woman over 51, choose 10 servings of foods from the list. This equals about 1,000 milligrams of calcium. Again, you'll likely consume the remaining 200 milligrams from foods with lower amounts of calcium not on the list.

Eight or 10 servings may sound like a lot of food, but there are many instances where you'll eat several servings at a time. For example, if you eat a cup of cooked collards, that's three servings of calcium all in one bowl. The same goes for a cup of calcium-fortified plant milk.

If you consistently struggle with getting the recommended amount of calcium from foods, consider a low-dose calcium supplement in addition to these calcium-rich foods.

Choose eight (for 19- to 70-year-old men or a 19- to 50-year-old women) or ten (for men over 70 and women over 51 years old) servings per day of any combination of these foods:

- ½ cup cooked bok choy or napa cabbage
- 1½ cups cooked broccoli
- 1½ cups cooked Brussels sprouts
- 1 cup cooked Chinese broccoli
- ⅓ cup cooked collards
- ⅓ cup cooked kale
- 1½ cups raw kale
- Rounded ½ cup cooked mustard greens
- ¾ cup cooked okra
- 8 dried figs
- 6 fresh figs
- 1½ medium oranges
- ¾ cup cooked or canned great northern beans
- ¾ cup cooked or canned navy beans
- 1 cup cooked or canned black beans
- 1 cup cooked edamame
- 1 cup hummus made with tahini
- 1½ Tablespoons tahini
- 2 rounded Tablespoons almond butter
- ¼ cup almonds
- ½ cup tempeh
- 1-3 ounces tofu processed with calcium sulfate *(see note on next page)*
- 5 or more ounces tofu processed with nigari *(see note on next page)*
- ⅓ cup calcium-fortified plant milk
- ½ cup calcium-fortified plant yogurt
- 1 rounded Tablespoon of calcium-fortified plant cheese shreds
- 1 slice of calcium-fortified plant cheese slices
- 4 corn tortillas
- 1 English muffin
- 1 Tablespoon chia seeds
- 1½ teaspoons blackstrap molasses



One Day Example of How to Eat 10 Servings of Calcium-Rich Foods

Breakfast (4 servings of calcium-rich foods):
Oatmeal with 1½ Tablespoons almond butter
1 cup calcium-fortified plant milk*

(*You could add 1 Tablespoon chia seeds to the oatmeal and reduce the fortified plant milk to ⅔ cup.)

Lunch (3 servings of calcium-rich foods):
2 corn tortillas with ½ cup of black beans
⅓ cup steamed kale
1½ oranges

Dinner (3 servings of calcium-rich foods):
3 ounces tofu (with 10% Daily Value; see *Note*)
1 cup cooked bok choy

Note: To calculate how much calcium is in the tofu you buy, look at the label. Calcium content will be listed as percent of the Daily Value. Since the current Daily Value for calcium is 1,000 milligrams, multiply the percent Daily Value by 10 to get the amount of calcium (in milligrams) in one serving. For example, tofu with 10% Daily Value for calcium would have 100 milligrams of calcium in one serving. Three ounces of tofu processed with calcium sulfate generally has 10% DV.

To read more about calcium for vegans see:
vrg.org/nutrition/calcium.php
vrg.org/nutrition/foods_calcium.htm
vrg.org/journal/vj2009issue4/2009_issue4_calcium_indian.php
vrg.org/journal/vj2015issue1/2015_issue1_nutrition_hotline.php
vrg.org/journal/vj2021issue4/2021_issue4_scientific_update.php

HOW MANY ADULT VEGANS ARE IN THE U.S.?

HOW OFTEN DO AMERICANS EAT VEGETARIAN MEALS?

The Vegetarian Resource Group asks in a 2026 National Survey Conducted by The Harris Poll

by Reed Mangels PhD, RD; Charles Stahler; and Debra Wasserman

Food companies, marketers, researchers, students, and media for years have been asking The Vegetarian Resource Group about the number of vegetarians and vegans. To help answer this question, VRG commissioned The Harris Poll to conduct a nationally representative online poll of 2,096 U.S. adults aged 18 and over. We asked:

Which one, if any, of the following best describes your eating behavior? Please select the option that best applies.

1) I never eat meat, fish, seafood, poultry, dairy, or eggs
2) I never eat meat, fish, seafood, or poultry
3) I sometimes eat meals without meat, fish, seafood, poultry, dairy, or eggs
4) I sometimes eat meals without meat, fish, seafood, or poultry
5) I usually eat meals without meat, fish, seafood, poultry, dairy, or eggs
6) I usually eat meals without meat, fish, seafood, or poultry
7) None of these

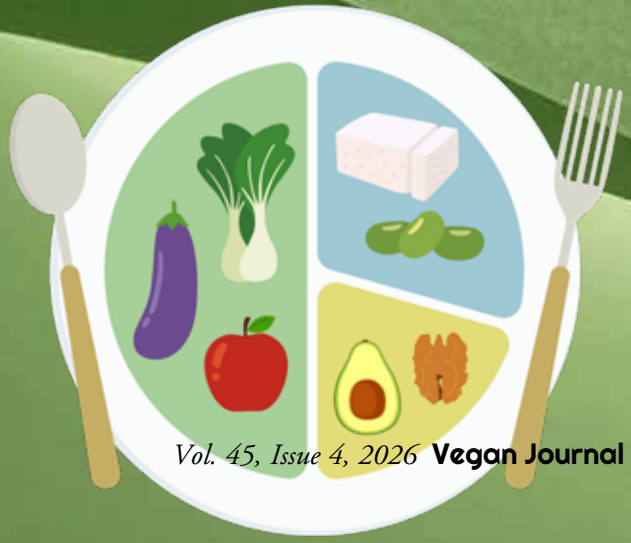
We considered those who never eat meat, fish, seafood or poultry; plus those who never eat meat, fish, seafood, poultry, dairy, or eggs, as vegetarian. We classified that second category of vegetarians who don't eat dairy or eggs also as vegan. Because we use the word "never" and don't just ask if a person considers him/herself vegetarian or vegan, our numbers may be lower than those reported in other polls.

Sixty-seven percent of adults in the United States always, sometimes, or usually eat vegetarian meals (including vegan), while 33% presumably never have vegetarian meals or vegan meals. Thirty-three percent of adults always, sometimes, or usually eat vegan meals. Five percent are vegetarians, with over half (3%) also being vegan.

This has strong implications for food companies, food services, and restaurants, who have to cater to different audiences.

HOW MANY AMERICAN ADULTS EAT VEGETARIAN AND VEGAN MEALS?

5% Vegetarians including Vegans
2% Vegetarians who are not Vegans (never eat meat, fish, seafood, poultry)
3% Vegans (Never eat meat, fish, seafood, poultry, dairy, eggs)
8% Usually eat vegetarian meals (not including vegan meals)
10% Usually eat vegan meals
13% Always or usually eat vegan meals
10% Always or usually eat vegetarian meals (not including vegan meals)
23% Always or usually eat vegetarian meals (including vegan meals)
23% Sometimes eat vegetarian meals (not including vegan meals)
21% Sometimes eat vegan meals
33% Always, Sometimes, or Usually eat vegan meals
67% Always, Sometimes, or Usually eat vegetarian meals (including vegan meals)
33% Presumably never eat vegetarian or vegan meals



PEOPLE WHO NEVER EAT MEAT, FISH, SEAFOOD, OR POULTRY

(Total percentage of vegetarians, including vegans, of U.S. adult population)

5% Total
5% Male
5% Female
7% Ages 18-34—significantly higher than those ages 65 plus (2%)
5% Ages 35-44
6% Ages 45-54—significantly higher than those ages 65 plus (2%)
4% Ages 55-64
2% Ages 65 plus—significantly lower than those ages 18-34 (7%) and ages 45-54 (6%)
6% Northeast*
5% Midwest
5% South
3% West
5% Hispanic—no significant difference compared to White or Black
8% Black (non-Hispanic)—significantly higher than White non-Hispanic (4%)
4% White (non-Hispanic)—significantly lower than Black non-Hispanic (8%)
6% Less than $50,000 annual household income
4% $50,000-$74,999 annual household income
4% $75,000-$99,999 annual household income
5% $100,000 or more annual household income
4% Homeowner—significantly lower than renters (7%)
7% Renter—significantly higher than homeowners (4%)
4% Married
6% Not Married
6% Urban
5% Suburban
3% Rural

The demographics for those more likely to be vegetarian include adults ages 18-34 (7%) and 45-54 (6%) compared to older adults ages 65 plus (2%), as well as renters (7%) vs. homeowners (4%). Black (non-Hispanic) adults are twice as likely as White (non-Hispanic) adults to be vegetarian (8% vs. 4%).

PEOPLE WHO NEVER EAT MEAT, FISH, SEAFOOD, POULTRY, DAIRY, OR EGGS

(Total number of vegans as percentage of U.S. adult population)

3% Total
3% Male
3% Female
4% Ages 18-34
2% Ages 35-44
4% Ages 45-54
1% Ages 55-64
1% Ages 65 plus
4% Northeast*
3% Midwest
2% South
2% West
1% Hispanic—significantly lower than Black (non-Hispanic) (6%)
6% Black (non-Hispanic)—significantly higher than both Hispanic (1%) and White (non-Hispanic (2%)
2% White (non-Hispanic)—significantly lower than Black (non-Hispanic) (6%)
3% Less than $50,000 annual household income
2% $50,000-$74,999 annual household income
1% $75,000-$99,999 annual household income
3% $100,000 or more annual household income
2% Homeowners—significantly lower than renters (4%)
4% Renter—significantly higher than homeowners (2%)
2% Married
3% Not Married
3% Urban
2% Suburban
2% Rural

The demographics of those more likely to be vegan include Black (non-Hispanic) adults who are significantly more likely than both Hispanic (1%) or White (non-Hispanic) adults (2%) and renters who are twice as likely as homeowners (4% vs. 2%).



PEOPLE WHO ALWAYS, SOMETIMES, OR USUALLY DO NOT EAT MEAT, FISH, SEAFOOD, POULTRY, DAIRY, OR EGGS
(Total number of vegans plus people usually and sometimes eating vegan meals, as percentage of U.S. adult population)

This would appear to be the main market for companies selling vegan items, though there can be crossover from other groups. For example, individuals or families choosing plant milks because of lactose intolerance may be eating other animal products. Anecdotally, you may observe this at the supermarket checkout line.

33% Total
32% Male
33% Female
38% Ages 18-34—significantly higher than those ages 55-64 (28%) and 65 plus (29%)
34% Ages 35-44
34% Ages 45-54
28% Ages 55-64—significantly lower than those ages 18-34 (38%)
29% Ages 65 plus—significantly lower than those ages 18-34 (38%)
38% Northeast*
31% Midwest
33% South
31% West
29% Hispanic
37% Black (non-Hispanic)
33% White (non-Hispanic)
31% Less than $50,000 annual household income
31% $50,000-$74,999 annual household income
31% $75,000-$99,999 annual household income
34% $100,000 or more annual household income.
32% Homeowner
37% Renter
35% Married
32% Not Married
35% Urban—significantly higher than rural (28%)
34% Suburban
28% Rural—significantly lower than urban (35%)

The demographics more likely to be eating vegan meals are 18- to 34-year-olds compared to those ages 55 plus (38% vs. 28% ages 55-64 and 29% ages 65 plus), and those living in urban areas compared to those living in rural areas (35% vs. 28%). Though there isn't as much difference between all groups as people might expect. So they all seem to be potential markets, depending on your product and marketing strategy. Price of the product may have different influences for various categories. For example, an expensive meat analog or restaurant meal may be affordable for one group but not another. A large package of food may be suitable for one family unit but not a smaller family or single person. Thus, some individuals consuming vegan meals may be looking for meat analogs while others may be seeking inexpensive and less processed beans.

*The Northeast includes CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, and VT. The Midwest includes IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, and WI. The South includes AL, AR, DC, DE, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, and WV. The West includes AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA, and WY.

With U.S. adults 18 and over numbering about 267 million**, we can estimate the number of vegetarians in the U.S. adult population, 5% based on this poll, to be approximately 13 million adults. Vegans included in the vegetarian figure (3%) would be around eight million adults.

**https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/6538-adult-population-by-age-group#detailed/1/any/fale/1096,2545,1095,2048,574,1729,37,871,870,573/2803/13515,13516

SURVEY METHOD: This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of The Vegetarian Resource Group from January 6-8, 2026, among 2,096 adults ages 18 and older. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to plus or minus 2.5 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. For more information, contact The Vegetarian Resource Group at vrg@vrg.org or (410) 366-8343.

To see other vegan and vegetarian polls, go to vrg.org/nutshell/faq.htm#poll

For more information on veganism, vegan recipes, ingredients, vegan college scholarships, and vegetarian restaurants in the U.S. and Canada, see vrg.org

Book Reviews

Vegan Made Easy

by Dr. Joanne Kong and Dr. Camila Perussello



Vegan Made Easy is written by Dr. Joanne Kong, an international vegan advocate, and Dr. Camila Perussello, a food engineer. Their collective goal is to make it effortless for anyone to become vegan by introducing all the reasons why one should make the switch and then by providing recipes to further motivate long-term, lasting change.

One reason for going vegan is social justice. The authors state, "While violence and discrimination are still commonplace in today's society, no other group of individuals on the planet is treated with more disregard than nonhuman animals. Trillions of living, breathing beings are exploited and killed every year in the food industry alone. Farmers and fishers have the legal right to genetically modify, forcefully impregnate, catch, imprison, confine, exploit, buy, sell, mutilate, kill, dismember, profit from, and discard animals like broken machines. Yet, animals are not objects." Other reasons given for going vegan are the health benefits and environmental benefits.

Another chapter in this book is geared towards motivating people to make compassionate lifestyle choices. Practical tips, such as suggesting that readers first list all the foods they already eat that are naturally vegan, make the process approachable. This section features a list of dairy and meat alternatives as well as suggestions on how to deal with non-vegan situations.

The "Plant-Based Food Shopping Guide" chapter teaches readers how to live within their budget, how to stock their vegan kitchen, how to store vegan food properly, and which kitchen gadgets are worth investing in. This chapter also offers useful guidance on how to read food labels.

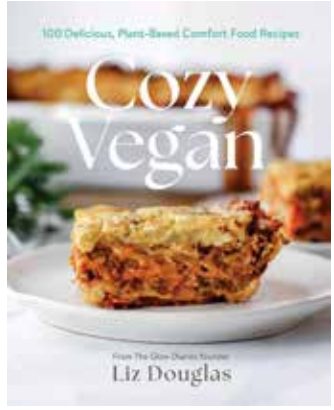
Next, the book covers topics beyond food-related to becoming vegan. This includes shopping for cruelty-free products, avoiding leather, wool, and other common materials. There's also a handy Frequently Asked Questions section covering a wide range of topics encompassing nutrition basics, what to do if a partner is not vegan, tips for traveling as a vegan, and much more.

The recipe chapter features a wide variety of dishes contributed by many individuals including French Toast Bake, Vegetable & Tempeh Wellington with Shiitake Gravy, Refried Bean Tacos with Caramelized Plantains, Chickpea & Artichoke Salad, and Oatmeal Walnut Cookies. All the dishes are creative and tasty; however, it might have been helpful to have incorporated more basic recipes for readers just switching to a vegan diet. The book concludes with a list of resources, as well as a lengthy list of references.

Vegan Made Easy (ISBN 978-1-5905-6749-4) is a 258-page book. It is published by Lantern Press and retails for $29.95. *Debra Wasserman/ VRG Co-Coordinator*

Cozy Vegan

by Liz Douglas



Cozy Vegan offers 100 plant-based comfort food recipes. Along with the classics, you'll find many unique dishes including Green Banana Bread (using spinach for color), Shakshuka (a North African dish made with tofu instead of eggs), Sausage Rolls (a beloved Aussie snack), Tofu Schnitzel (using tofu instead of chicken), and Sticky Date Pudding (a sweet crowd pleaser). The accompanying photos are exquisite.

Liz Douglas has penned glow-diaries.com since 2019. She resides in Australia and used to work for large corporate retailers as a food buyer and product developer. When she was laid off from her last job, she started producing vegan podcasts and videos to share online.

Cozy Vegan (ISBN 978-1-6682-0975-2) is a 240-page hardcover book. It is published by Simon Element and retails for $32.50. *Debra Wasserman/ VRG Co-Coordinator*

Vegan Cooking Tips

DIY Natural Vegan Colors and Flavors

by Chef Nancy Berkoff, EdD, RD



Like an artist with a palette, you can use natural ingredients to bring vibrant color and flavor to foods. When using natural colorings and flavorings, experimentation is key, as each ingredient reveals its own character differently depending on the recipe.

Vegan Natural Colors

Red: Beet juice, mashed or puréed cooked beets, or the cooking water from beets; pomegranate juice; puréed roasted red bell peppers

Pink: Mashed or puréed fresh or frozen raspberries

Orange: Mashed or puréed cooked carrots or carrot juice; puréed mango; mild, hot, or smoked paprika; puréed roasted red peppers mixed with a small amount of vegan sour cream or cream cheese

Yellow: Powdered or fresh, grated turmeric; saffron steeped in water or just enough vegan milk to dampen and reduce any bitter taste

Green: Puréed fresh spinach; puréed fresh parsley (leaves only); matcha; puréed avocado with a small amount of lemon juice to prevent browning

Blue: Powdered butterfly pea tea or steeped petals

Purple: Cooking water from steamed red cabbage; puréed fresh or frozen blueberries; puréed fresh purple carrots

Brown: Instant coffee powder; cocoa powder; melted dark chocolate; roasted almond butter; soy sauce or coconut aminos

Vegan Natural Flavors

Eggy: Powdered vegan egg substitute powder (such as Bob's Red Mill Egg Replacer); black salt (known as *kala namak*, found in South Asian stores and online); nutritional yeast plus onion powder; *asafoetida* (used in Indian cooking)

Cheesy or buttery: Nutritional yeast; ground or puréed raw cashews; tahini; miso paste; vegan yogurt or sour cream; vegan butter

Smoky: Smoked paprika; liquid smoke (produced from tree bark); chipotle powder or chipotles canned in adobo; black cardamom; smoked salt; grilling on charcoal; *lapsang souchong* (black tea)

Meaty: Mushrooms (shiitake, porcini, and maitake mushrooms have the most concentrated umami flavors); nutritional yeast; soy sauce or coconut aminos; miso paste

Seafood: Old Bay seasoning; vegan fish sauce; nori; kelp granules or flakes; capers; olive brine; rice vinegar or white wine vinegar



Kay Stepkin

Vegan Museum Founder

By Amy Burger



Kay Stepkin is the founder of the Vegan Museum, a traveling exhibition dedicated to vegetarian history. The Chicago-area museum, founded in 2017, consists of 12 portable wooden panels, a TV screen, and a five-minute video presentation on vegetarian history by author and speaker Victoria Moran. Rather than occupying a fixed location, it moves among Chicago-area public libraries every few months. So far, the museum has been in over 50 Chicago institutions. Sixty inspiring programs, including food demos, documentary films, panel discussions, story map presentations, and children's events, have been held. Stepkin says, "The more people know about our history, the stronger the vegan movement will become."

Before launching the Vegan Museum, Stepkin was one of Chicago's earliest vegan entrepreneurs. In the early 1970s, when she was unable to find a bakery making whole-grain bread nearby, Stepkin started her own: The Bread Shop in Lakeview. There, she baked alongside a team that shared equal wages and equal decision-making power. After four years, Stepkin opened a full vegetarian restaurant right across the street.

Years later, Stepkin emailed the *Chicago Tribune* to correct a vegan cookie recipe, only to discover that the reporter "had been a loyal customer" of The Bread Shop. This chance connection led to Stepkin writing a regular column for the paper called *The Veggie Cook*.

Stepkin's philosophy is to be patient and pragmatic. Rather than urging people to overhaul their diets overnight, she encourages finding one beloved vegan recipe and building from there. She recommends trying "no-harm parm," a vegan take on Parmesan cheese and kale chips as recipes that are easy for beginners to make and tasty enough to win over skeptics. Such individual choices, she believes, add up. Stepkin says, "When we reach the right people, we will not only bring them over, but they will then influence others."

More information on the Vegan Museum, which is part of a nonprofit organization, can be found at veganmuseum.org

Amy Burger is a former VRG intern who writes for *Vegan Journal* as a volunteer. Amy lives in Georgia, where she works as a college librarian and part-time teacher. Her hobbies include cooking and traveling.



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The VRG depends on the generous contributions of our members and supporters to continue our educational projects. Though the world may not become vegan in our lifetimes, we realize that we are planning and working for future generations.

- Your will and life insurance policies enable you to protect your family and also to provide a way to give long-lasting support to causes in which you believe. Naming The Vegetarian Resource Group in your will or life insurance policy will enable us to increase our work for veganism.
- One suggested form of bequest is: *I give and bequeath to The Vegetarian Resource Group, Baltimore, Maryland, the sum of _____ dollars* (or if stock, property, or insurance policy, please describe).
- To be sure your wishes are carried out, please speak with your attorney specifically about writing the correct information in your will.



Apply for The Vegetarian Resource Group 2027 Scholarship Contest for High School Seniors

Thanks to the generosity of anonymous donors, The Vegetarian Resource Group awards college scholarship money each year to graduating U.S. high school students who have promoted veganism in their schools and/or communities. Vegetarians do not eat meat, fish, or fowl. Vegans are vegetarians who do not use other animal products such as dairy or eggs.

At least one award of $10,000 and four awards of $5,000 will be given. Entries may be sent only by high school students in the U.S. who are graduating in **SPRING 2027.**

Deadline is FEBRUARY 20, 2027
For details see:
vrg.org/student/scholar

See the 2026 winners on pages 22-27.

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