



reduce, replace, refine  
leads to healthier, more thoughtful food choices



# The Three Rs on Your Plate

**What's for lunch? Where's my dinner?** For most of human history, these age-old questions were based solely on taste and tradition, cost and availability.

Yet in recent years, food choices have become more complex—and for good reasons. Undercover investigations by The HSUS and other organizations have exposed the harsh conditions in today's industrial farms. Rising meat consumption rates in recent decades have made cholesterol-lowering drugs and quadruple-bypass surgeries commonplace in the Western world. And the connections between factory farms, environmental degradation, and world hunger have never been clearer.

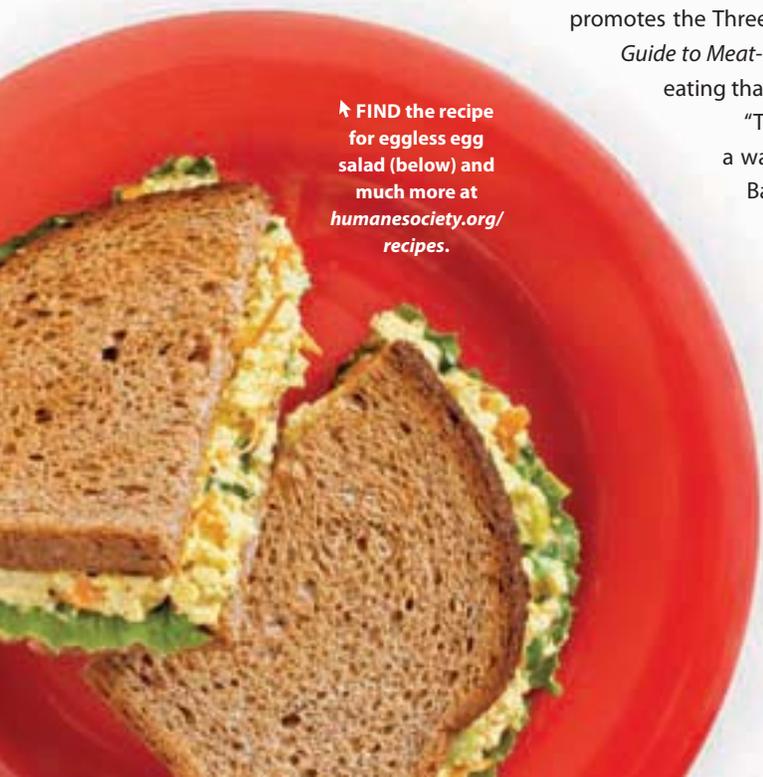
Some respond to this knowledge by reducing their meat consumption. Such was the experience for food columnist and cookbook author Kim O'Donnel. Others, like best-selling author and wellness expert Kathy Freston, close their wallets to animal agribusiness altogether and opt for a vegan diet. And some people seek products from traditional family farmers like Bill Niman, a rancher who carved out a market for more humanely and sustainably produced meats.

Together, O'Donnel, Freston, and Niman exemplify the Three Rs of humane eating—*reducing* the consumption of meat and other animal-based foods, *replacing* meat with plant-based alternatives, and *refining* the diet by choosing foods produced under higher welfare standards. While pushing for animal agribusiness reforms in the legislative and corporate arenas, The HSUS also promotes the Three Rs through Meatless Monday e-newsletters, the recently published *Guide to Meat-Free Meals*, and other tools that help consumers transition to a way of eating that's better for them, the animals, and the environment.

"The Three Rs allows people to make positive changes in their diets in a way that fits where they're currently at in their food choices," says Josh Balk, outreach director for The HSUS's Farm Animal Protection Campaign.

"It's easy and hopefully will lead to people making lasting lifestyle changes."

In the following essays, O'Donnel, Freston, and Niman describe how awareness has shaped their food choices—and what eating with conscience means to them.



↑ FIND the recipe  
for eggless egg  
salad (below) and  
much more at  
[humanesociety.org/  
recipes](http://humanesociety.org/recipes).



# Kim O'Donnel

## The Reducer

Health and environmental concerns help food writer find a “new normal”



**Sitting on my desk** is a black-and-white Polaroid from 1967. It's me, about 8 months old, parked in a high chair and smiling wide, a few of my new choppers on display. The source of my joy is the steak bone lying before me, my mother's idea of a teething ring. My cheeks and stubby little arms glisten with grease.

As with any photograph, a moment in my life was captured. But in this case, a cultural zeitgeist was, too. From bacon and eggs with Captain Kangaroo to pork chops and applesauce with Walter Cronkite, meat defined the post-WWII American diet, and my well-meaning baby boomer parents were no exception.

During my bone-gnawing days in the high chair, Americans were eating about 179 pounds of meat per person per year. When my father died of a heart attack in 1982, our per capita annual consumption had spiked to nearly 190 pounds. (Today, we're at more than 205 pounds per person.)

My father and grandmother's deaths from heart disease did spark some change. My brothers and I were put on a so-called low-fat diet that replaced butter with margarine and bologna sandwiches with slices of deli turkey. Bacon and eggs were verboten, but we still ate chicken ad nauseum. There was no understanding of dietary moderation, and it took me and my roller-coaster lipid levels two decades to wake

up and smell something other than a Philadelphia hoagie.

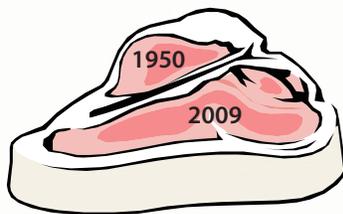
There would be another man to enter my mother's life, also with a history of arteriosclerosis. When she called one afternoon some four years ago to report that Jim had suffered another heart attack, all I could think about was his endless appetite for meat, from burgers to sausages, bacon to ribs, and every bit of gristle in between.

I don't mean to single out Jim, whom I began to refer to as “Mister Sausage,” but as

a bystander to his experience I woke up to a few realities: 1) that diet and health are inextricably linked; 2) Mister Sausage has a lot of company in this great country of ours; 3) the Mister Sausages of America may

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56.3 lbs.



Increase in Americans' per capita annual consumption of red meats and poultry from 1950 to 2009

Source: USDA Economic Research Service

laugh at (or ignore) any attempt to take away their beloved meat, even if it means saving their lives; 4) but baby steps such as one meatless day a week may cause them to pause and consider the unimaginable.

The incremental approach advocated by the Meatless Monday campaign is how I started making more room for plants on the plate. One meatless day out of seven translates into a 15-percent reduction and feels like a win-win; we meat-loving folks still get our fix, but we're inching away from our old habits and creating a new normal.

What helped cement my resolve is the environmental piece of this conversation. I got my first earful from U.N. climate expert Rajendra Pachauri, who in 2008 delivered a speech that went something like this: The best thing that regular folks can do to help the planet is eat less meat.

Fast forward three-plus years: I remain an omnivore, but the plant-based days outweigh the meaty ones. I have penned a vegetarian cookbook speaking directly to the Mister Sausages, with another one on the way later this year. I have created a new normal for the way I cook and eat, with permission to expand and contract as need be.

In exploration of my own relationship with meat, I've learned that no one-size-fits-all approach exists, and to appreciate the importance of doing what works for my body and the rhythm of my life, one crumb at a time.

Seattle-based Kim O'Donnel ([kimodonnell.com](http://kimodonnell.com)) is the author of *The Meat Lover's Meatless Cookbook*, *The Meat Lover's Meatless Holiday Table* (available in October 2012), and a cooking column in *USA Today*.

# Kathy Freston

## The Replacer

Little by little, wellness expert finds comfort for body and spirit in plant-based diet



**Why vegan?** Well, I got to a place in my life when I had to ask myself what I really believed in, and if I was living in a way that was aligned with my values. I'm always pushing myself to become more open-hearted and connected to life, to expand my awareness, and to reduce suffering wherever I can. I think we all do that, don't we? Isn't it human nature to evolve and try to be a positive force?

But one day, it struck me like a lightning bolt that I wasn't really applying my values and intentions to the thing I do most regularly. All I had to do was mentally trace my lunch or dinner back a few steps, and I could imagine what the pig or chicken or cow went through so that food could end

up on my plate. It was a devastating awareness, and one that I wasn't sure how to move on from; I was from the South, after all, and loved chicken-fried steak and barbecue ribs. But instead of beating myself up for not being able to give up all those animal foods, I saw an opportunity. I could challenge myself to move away from eating animals.

I believe in leaning into change; it's the only way that's ever worked with me for anything. By giving up one animal product at a time over the course of a couple of years, I lost my old taste cravings and at the same time discovered unbelievably delicious new foods.

I found that I could have a veggie burger instead of a beef burger, pizza with non-dairy cheese, and barbecue chicken made from plant protein. I started drinking milk made from nuts or soy or coconut and was elated to find that I could have just about any treat that I grew up loving, just healthier versions of it.

To keep my motivations front and center, I watched undercover videos of

slaughterhouses and factory farms. It became clear that my hankering for a piece of chicken or a strip of bacon wasn't worth the pain and fear that an animal goes through to become food. I could never look into the eyes of another creature and declare that my appetite was more important than her suffering. It was a gradual process that became a certainty: In my soul, eating animals doesn't sit right with me.

What is good for my soul has also been good for my body. When I eat food that is grown in the ground or on trees, I feel energetic and clear, and my weight is exactly where it should be. Studies have shown that after just a few weeks of eating vegan, blood sugar and cholesterol levels drop significantly. That's a pretty huge personal win within a short amount of time.

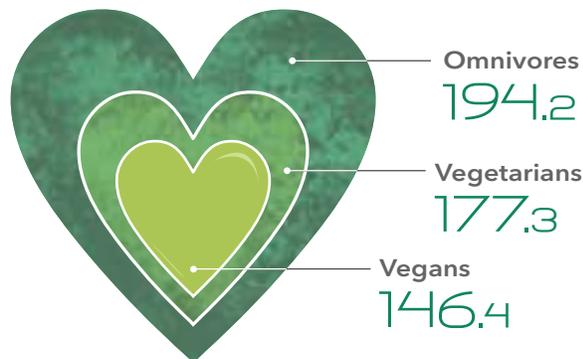
It makes me feel good to practice kindness through my food choices. I'm on track with my best self because I'm exercising my muscle of compassion, and I think it affects the way I relate to the world around me. More than anything, fewer animals suffering is a really good thing, and I'm happy I can be a part of that.

*New York Times* best-selling author Kathy Freston ([kathyfreston.com](http://kathyfreston.com)) has talked about healthy living and conscious eating on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Ellen*, *Good Morning America*, and more. Her books include *Veganist: Lose Weight, Get Healthy, Change the World; Quantum Wellness*; and *The Quantum Wellness Cleanse*.

“By giving up one animal product at a time, I lost my old taste cravings and discovered delicious new foods.”

People who eat lower on the food chain have lower total cholesterol levels:

Source: [veganhealth.org](http://veganhealth.org); averages from five U.S. studies.





## Bill Niman The Refiner

Rancher stakes out a middle ground for mindful omnivores

**I grew up the son** of a Minneapolis grocer, with a mother who cooked every meal from carefully chosen ingredients. Caring about what I eat comes naturally. But I didn't give much thought to how farm animals were raised until I began raising my own. And I never thought about how much meat I was eating until I fell in love with a vegetarian. Together, she and I have found a healthy way of eating that respects animals and the earth.

As a young man I moved to California to teach school in a poor rural farming community. Living among farmers got me thinking about growing my own food.

On an 11-acre parcel, my late wife and I tended a large vegetable garden, planted fruit trees, and kept chickens, dairy goats, and a few pigs. We came to know our animals individually, learning about their habits and needs. We followed our instincts about what was right, and we were mentored by traditional farmers who hadn't bought into the industrial mindset that was coming into vogue.

Slaughtering our first animal was a difficult experience and one I've never forgotten. But it helped me fully understand the gravity of taking an animal's life for food. Never again did I take meat, cheese,

or eggs for granted.

Neighbors were soon asking if they could buy some of our pork. Eventually, I started raising cattle. I began networking with like-minded farmers who were also raising their animals on pasture without hormones, drugs, or other chemicals. This became the company Niman Ranch, which today is a network of about 700 farmers and ranchers. (I left the company in 2007.)

Along the way I met environmental lawyer Nicolette Hahn, who was working full time fighting factory farms with the



**Imagine spending months on end trapped in an airline seat. The average breeding sow in a U.S. factory farm spends 87% of her life in a cage so small she can't even turn around.**

Waterkeeper Alliance. She also happened to be a vegetarian triathlete. At the time, she was re-examining her own diet, which included eggs and dairy products from industrial operations, along with a fair amount of sugar, processed and prepared foods, and loads of pasta.

In recent years, I served on the Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production and toured numerous industrial egg, poultry, pig, and dairy operations. I was well aware of modern agricultural practices, but it was shocking to see first-hand the animals' crowded, depressing living conditions. It was deeply troubling to see animals raised and slaughtered without ever experiencing the simple pleasures of breathing fresh air or feeling sunshine on their backs. It strengthened my resolve to be an advocate for changing the way America raises farm animals.

Nicolette and I have now been married for more than eight years, and our family includes our 2½-year-old son, Miles. We eat simply but well. Meat has been moved to the side of my plate. Most of our dinners and almost all of our breakfasts and lunches are vegetarian. We eat tons of fruits and vegetables, and lots of beans and lentils, and try to source all of it locally.

Nicolette has learned efficient scratch cooking. She also cans and freezes things so that we have good organic produce year round. All of our animal-based foods come from our own ranch; other local, pasture-based farms; or local fishermen.

Nicolette is still a vegetarian. Miles and I are mindful omnivores. Our meals together are a great joy. They are the foundation of our daily life.

“It was deeply troubling to see animals raised without the simple pleasures of fresh air or sunshine.”

Bill Niman currently lives in Bolinas, Calif., where he and Nicolette own and operate BN Ranch, raising grass-fed cattle, heritage turkeys, and goats.