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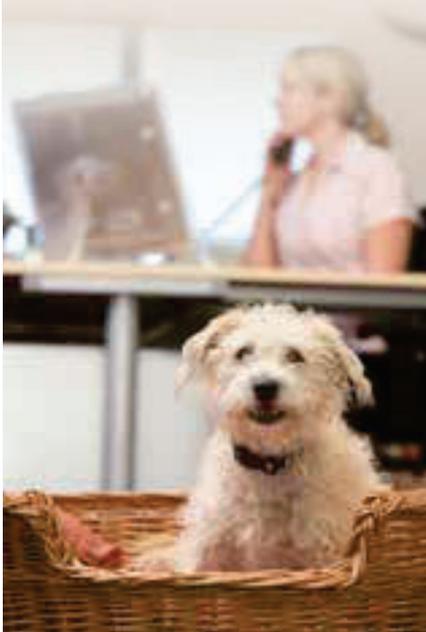
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CHLOE FALKENHEIM

FOUNDER, VEGETARIAN
AND VEGAN YOUTH
// BY MICHAEL SHARP

NEW TUNE: Before she founded an international organization as a high school junior, Chloe Falkenheim poured herself into music. She played the flute, and day after day, she would come home from school and practice for hours. They were formative afternoons, playing scales and long tones in her room. "Music," she says, "was kind of what gave me more of a work ethic."

Reading, too, is a common thread throughout the Virginia resident's young life—be it reading music or the time when she was 6 and grabbed a book about fun pig facts off a library shelf. Later she read *Charlotte's Web*, and her love for pigs was sealed. At the age of 9, Chloe decided to stop eating meat. And three years later, after reading an article about the cruelty some animals face on egg and dairy farms, she began to mull further changes. Truth be told, though, it was learning that *Glee* star Lea Michele followed a vegan diet that officially made her mind up to do the same.

But as with so many things in middle school, reaction to her new diet wasn't always kind. For the first year, she just told people: "I'm allergic to milk and eggs."

GROWTH SPURT: So Chloe decided to create a website to help others interested in changing their diets. She won a grant from The Pollination Project, a program founded by longtime animal advocate Ari Nessel. And drawing from the challenges she had faced, and the lessons she had learned in starting a club at Yorktown High School to promote vegetarian eating, Chloe spent the summer of 2013 writing as many articles as she could for her new site, *VegYouth.com*.

She spread the word. An online community began to grow. And with more and more volunteers signing up, an organiza-

tion was born. Today, just one year later, VegYouth has members across the United States as well as New Zealand, Mexico, the United Kingdom and Iceland. They have two principal aims: help those who want to reduce their meat consumption, and inspire, empower and mentor youth who want to become advocates for animals.

One of her core pieces of advice: "Understand where people are coming from and genuinely be nice to them. ... And realize that you're not perfect yourself."

SUMMER SCHOOL: Chloe interned this summer with the HSUS Farm Animal Protection Campaign, assisting primarily with Food Forward events, which help cafeteria and dining service directors incorporate more plant-based dishes. When possible, she also spent time learning a bit about accounting, media relations, fundraising, online communications and even public speaking—skills to help her with VegYouth.

"There are so many amazing activists who are my age," she says. "I'm just the one who realized there had to be some way to bring us all together to improve our effectiveness. I didn't anticipate that it would be so big a year ago, and I just dream even bigger as I continue to work on this."



KATHY MILANI/THE HSUS