**Headline:** Animal-Free Agriculture Is Key to Restoring Biodiversity

**Teaser:** We all have a moral obligation to do the least possible harm to our planet, and that ethos has a name: veganics.

By Jimmy Videle

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**[Article Body:]**

Nature is complex. Her underground web is as intricate as her above-ground diversity. Below our feet, bacteria, microorganisms, mycorrhizae, and roots of perennial plants work symbiotically, absorbing and moving nutrients to wherever the need arises. Science has defined ecosystems and family groups, constantly updating our knowledge bank based on the most recent discoveries.

However, this is the human interpretation of the natural world, but the way other animal species interpret it is likely different. While all species tend to follow the rhythms of nature, there is one that seems to go against her: *Homo sapiens*.

Our unsustainable exploitation of nature’s resources to meet our own needs is destroying the ecosystem. The global food system, for instance, is the leading cause of biodiversity loss. “Biodiversity loss will continue to accelerate unless we change the way we produce food,” states a 2021 [report](https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/our-global-food-system-primary-driver-biodiversity-loss), “Food System Impacts on Biodiversity Loss.”

The need to produce more food at lower costs, especially in the last decades, has increased the usage of “fertilizers, pesticides, energy, land and water” in agriculture, the [report](https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/our-global-food-system-primary-driver-biodiversity-loss) points out. This has led to the global food system becoming a leading cause of climate change as well.

There is a growing and urgent need to explore alternatives to these destructive agricultural practices, otherwise, “[f]urther destruction of ecosystems and habitats will threaten our ability to sustain human populations,” [warns](https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/our-global-food-system-primary-driver-biodiversity-loss) the report.

Veganic farming is a way forward toward repairing the damage done to the ecosystem. Veganic growing not only seeks to cultivate food for humans but also attempts to do it in a way that benefits all floral and faunal biodiversity, as much as is humanly possible.

Veganic farming is the growing, gardening, cultivation, and production of food and fiber crops with a minimal amount of exploitation of animal and plant species. It does not use any animal products or byproducts, adhering to the main philosophy of cultivating for the benefit of all beings.

Adopting this approach has become increasingly important given the [negative impact](https://goveganic.net/what-is-veganic/introduction-to-veganics/) large-scale animal farming has on our [environment](https://www.downtoearth.org.in/factsheet/how-livestock-farming-affects-the-environment-64218).

**The Dark Side**

I became a professional veganic farmer in 2004. Quickly along my growing path, I realized the horrors of industrial-scale agriculture. Besides the huge cost to the environment—[about $3 trillion every year](https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/10-things-you-should-know-about-industrial-farming)—industrial agriculture encourages the use of pesticides on a large scale, which has adverse health impacts on human beings.

The agrochemical and agricultural biotechnology corporation Monsanto introduced the herbicide Roundup—containing the active ingredient glyphosate—to the market [in 1974](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/earth-and-planetary-sciences/glyphosate). In 2015, glyphosate was [classified](https://www.iarc.who.int/featured-news/media-centre-iarc-news-glyphosate/) as a probable human carcinogen by the World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

In 1996, Monsanto [came out](https://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2015/roundup-ready-crops) with the “Roundup Ready” soybean, which was genetically modified to withstand Roundup. In 2017, about [105 million hectares](https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/plant-science/articles/10.3389/fpls.2022.900318/full) were planted with genetically modified soybeans and around “272 million metric tons of seeds were produced,” according to an [article](https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/plant-science/articles/10.3389/fpls.2022.900318/full) in Frontiers, which constituted 80 percent of worldwide soybean production—the majority of which was fed to livestock animals in concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs).

In addition to the vast herbicide usage, crops like soy and corn are grown in a method known as monoculture—cultivating a single crop across thousands of acres of agricultural lands—which [negatively](https://planetwild.com/blog/monoculture-green-deserts-and-5-ways-you-can-help) impacts biodiversity and leads to soil degradation, along with other adverse environmental implications.

Another toxic pesticide, DDT, was used during World War II. After the war, it was sold as a pesticide for home gardeners and used on commercial-scale farms, even though there was already evidence to show that it killed many beneficial insects.

When it was learned that DDT [thinned](https://www.epa.gov/caddis/case-ddt-revisiting-impairment) the shells of bird eggs, especially bald eagles and peregrine falcons—and killed bees outright—it sparked a [war](https://www.audubon.org/news/the-real-story-behind-war-against-ddt) against the usage of this pesticide. The eye-opening 1962 book *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson led to an [awareness](https://www.nrdc.org/stories/story-silent-spring) about the dangers of DDT usage at home and on the farm. It still took the United States until [1972](https://www.epa.gov/ingredients-used-pesticide-products/ddt-brief-history-and-status) and the Canadian government until [1985](https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/management-toxic-substances/list-canadian-environmental-protection-act/dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane.html) to ban it.

The outcry following Carson’s book pushed the [idea](https://www.nrdc.org/stories/story-silent-spring) of sustainable agriculture to the forefront. Organic agriculture, which had been around since the [late](https://www.epa.gov/agriculture/organic-farming) [1940s](https://www.epa.gov/agriculture/organic-farming) in the United States, became the beacon of hope. It did not make use of conventional manure, chemical herbicides, fungicides, insecticides, or chemical fertilizers and changed the face of agriculture.

Slowly and surely, however, organics have been undermined by large-scale agricultural corporations and for-profit organic standard certifiers. Non-organic manures containing genetically modified and antibiotic residues have been [allowed](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256502574_The_implications_of_phasing_out_conventional_nutrient_supply_in_organic_agriculture_Denmark_as_a_case) over time. Blood meal, bone meal, and feather meal, which are slaughterhouse byproducts, are also used in organic farming.

Meanwhile, organic ([OMRI-listed](https://www.omri.org/omri-lists)) pesticides have been formulated to be even more potent than their chemical counterparts, with the usage of organic insecticides associated with greater damage to [non-target insects than their synthetic counterparts, according to an article in Phys.org](https://phys.org/news/2022-02-insecticides-non-target-insects-synthetic-counterparts.html).

Any insecticide will [destroy the delicate balance of the ecosystem when it is sprayed](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8402326/). When the symbiosis between flora and fauna is disrupted—chemically or organically—the results to biodiversity are dramatic. As biologists Gerardo Ceballos, Paul R. Ehrlich, and Rodolfo Dirzo write about mass extinction in their 2017 [paper](https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1704949114), “The sixth mass extinction is already here. … All signs point to ever more powerful assaults on biodiversity… painting a dismal picture of the future of life, including human life.”

Habitat conversion, overexploitation, and toxification, mainly from agriculture—primarily from raising animals and the crops grown to feed them in an unsustainable way—are to blame for this. The International Union for Conservation of Nature’s [Red List of Threatened Species](https://www.iucn.org/resources/conservation-tool/iucn-red-list-threatened-species) has ascertained that 28 percent (44,000) of all species that have been assessed are threatened with extinction, [many](https://www.iucn.org/news/species/201712/unsustainable-food-systems-threaten-wild-crop-and-dolphin-species-%E2%80%93-iucn-red-list) due to these agricultural drivers.

It seems that we are at a scale that is beyond repair if we don’t change our ways and move toward more sustainable farming practices.

**Seeing the Light**

Veganic growing may be the most important step to ensure that we break the chain of animal agriculture in our farming system. Soil life can flourish by minimizing tillage, not using toxic manure, and eliminating the spraying of harmful herbicides or insecticides.

When spraying of toxic chemicals is eliminated, predatory insects will corral crop-damaging insects, and plants will build immunity and defense mechanisms. It is what happens in the wild grasslands and forests and will occur in our gardens and farms if this process is allowed to take place in these spaces.

By using plant-based composts, cover crops (green manures), and keeping the ground covered with plant material and living roots holding the soil, the Earth will constantly regenerate. Species determined to be threatened can thrive in our garden and farm spaces, specifically insects, bees, butterflies, birds, and small mammals.

I have seen this at my farm, [La Ferme de l’Aube](https://www.lafermedelaube.com/), where endangered monarch butterflies breed, transform, and flock. Threatened yellow bumblebees accumulate pollen and burrow. Vulnerable eastern whip-poor-wills grace the night skies, dining on the aerial insects that have proliferated on the farm. Eastern wolves howl from the edges and grace us with unexpected visits.

In the quest to understand how to grow our food best, it is imperative that we seek to cultivate as much as possible in the least amount of space. Based on my experience of running a farm, I have already analyzed that veganic farming can be 3 percent and 41 percent more productive than conventional and organic agriculture, respectively. But even more compelling is the fact that the veganic way is more than 4,000 percent more productive than raising animals acre per acre.

In “[Social Movements in the Transformation of Food and Agriculture Systems](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346391418_Social_movements_in_the_transformation_of_food_and_agriculture_systems),” a chapter in the 2020 book, [*Rethinking Food and Agriculture*](https://www.sciencedirect.com/book/9780128164105/rethinking-food-and-agriculture), Nassim Nobari, co-founder of [Seed the Commons](https://seedthecommons.org/), “advocates for a transition to a food system based on vegan agroecology, where nonhuman animals are included in our circle of moral concern.” Referring to her work, Faunalytics [states](https://faunalytics.org/veganic-farming-agroecology/), “[V]eganic farming allows previously farmed areas to be rewilded to form wildlife corridors, regenerate fragile ecosystems, and halt deforestation. This is all thanks to the fact that in such a system, one can grow the same amount of food on less land.”

As we look toward mitigating the looming climate crisis, veganic farming is an important step in the right direction. “Veganic farming promises a climate-friendly approach to food production by eliminating animals from the supply chain entirely. An Oxford University study found that shifting to diets that exclude animal products would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 73 percent,” according to [research](https://online.eou.edu/resources/article/veganic-farming-importance-of-sustainable-agriculture) by Eastern Oregon University.

In trying to achieve the highest ecological farming practices, this method uses plant materials to grow plants. It ensures that the natural world proliferates in our gardens and on our farms and allows plant roots to rest in-ground for as long as possible to nourish the microorganisms of “the living soil.”

We have a moral obligation to do the least possible harm to our planet, and that ethos has a name: veganics.