

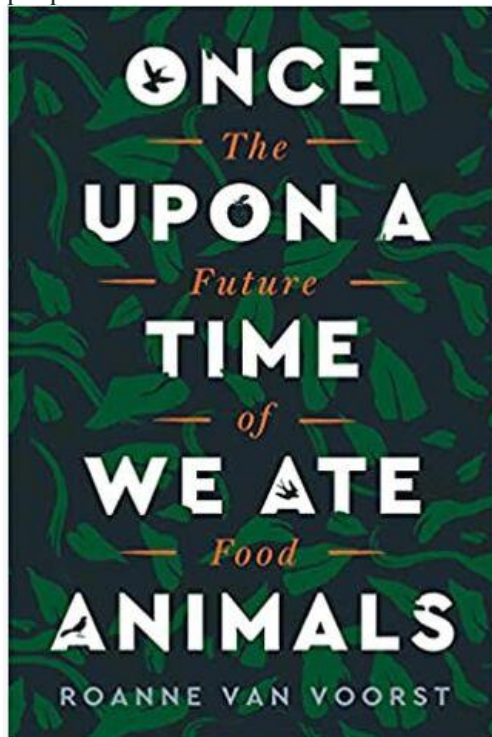
Will the Future of Food Be a World Without Meat?
From [Marc Bekoff, Psychology Today / Animal Emotions](#)
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Who and what we choose to prepare for our meals consumes a large part of our daily rhythms. Meal plans vary enormously, but many focus on other animals. Eating other animals raises enormous ethical issues around how the animals themselves are treated as well as the damage that industrial food production does to the health of the planet. But what if meat-eating became a thing of the past?

In her challenging new book, *Once Upon a Time We Ate Animals: The Future of Food*, futures-anthropologist [Roanne van Voorst](#) "offers a clear and compelling vision of what it means to live in a world without meat."^{1,2} Here's what van Voorst had to say about her penetrating insights into future-think.

Marc Bekoff: Why did you write this book?

RvV: As an anthropologist, I'd done fieldwork all over the world—mostly in places where the impacts of climate changes were already clear. I could see social conflict increasing; I saw the amount of people having to flee from floods rising when I lived in a flood-prone slum in Indonesia for over a year. Over the course of years, I realized that much of this drama was created by the food industry, most particularly big industrial farming—a topic that drew my attention, as I wanted to understand whether there could exist a realistic, alternative future scenario: What if we'd change the business of farming? Could that save many people's lives — and the lives of the next generations?



MB: Who is your intended audience?

RvV: People who are just like me, who feel, somewhere deep down, that they want to change their consuming and eating behaviour, but find it hard to do so. People who feel overwhelmed by all the myths and untested 'facts' online about both meat, and veganism, and who want to understand what is real; who

seek information they can trust. Most particularly, people who are sick of all the negative stories, and are longing for hope—not naive hope, but a genuine hope that we can change things for the better, and that a different, kinder world is possible. And people who love to laugh. Although the overall theme is serious, a lot in this book is light, whether I talk about vegan-influencing cultures, or the weird, unexpected popularity of kale, or the phenomenon of vegansexuals.

MB: What are some of your major messages?

RvV: That the way in which we eat now is only a relatively recent habit, meaning that we can change this habit again. That many of the lessons we were taught about what is healthy, or ethical, or just, were untrue, and that it is time we define new ideas of what it means to lead a good life. Most importantly, that consuming and eating is a form of voting, of creating the future, and that by investing in one type of food, you essentially build a certain future scenario: one with more animal suffering, or one with less; one with more damage to the planet, or one with less.

We all play a role in history and we are at a pivotal point now — one about which our children will confront us, later on: What did you do, when you already knew about this impact of the food industry on the planet and animal well-being? It's up to us how we can answer that question. And I'm hopeful that many of us are starting to see this. I talk about farmers who I interviewed, who already gave up their livestock and now produce beans, because they foresee that this is the future of food. I talk about world-famous chefs who own restaurants in which all they cook is plant-based; about the best athletes of the world who are fueled 'by what elephants eat': plants. I talk about lab-grown meat and other cruelty-free dishes, about dating apps for vegans, and about other trends that are already occurring. The world is changing, and it goes quicker than we can imagine.

MB: How does your book differ from others concerned with the same general topic?

RvV: This book doesn't attack people who still eat meat and dairy. In my opinion, it's only logical that we find it hard to not do that, and we shouldn't blame ourselves: We were born and raised in a society in which the eating of animals is not just normalized, but deemed necessary for your health. That this is untrue has only been discovered more recently; just as the fact that, unlike what most of us were taught to believe, humans have not 'always' eaten animals. There have been long periods in human history where we ate merely plant-based. The idea that we have always been hunters is false: We were scavengers, eating the leftovers of animals killed by other animals. With our non-pointed teeth and our shaped jaw, we did not stand a chance of killing big animals without weapons.

MB: Are you hopeful that as people learn more about the amazing lives of so-called "food animals" they will treat them with more respect and dignity?

RvV: Absolutely. More and more research shows how intelligent and social pigs and cows are.³ We know that, if you take their offspring away, their brains show exactly the same stress responses as when this would be done to human parents: Both we and they panic. The same goes for octopuses, for whales, for dolphins, and many other creatures who, so far, we believed to be stupid, or insensitive. They experience pain, pleasure, stress or happiness—just like we do. Therefore, we have the responsibility to change their lives for the better, and by doing that, also the lives of so many people around the world, in this and next generations. For anyone who finds that an intimidating idea, I'd say think back to when slavery was a worldwide, dominant system. It was widely believed that it was impossible to change this system: The economy would collapse! But within 100 years, after a small group of activists started to counter the system, slavery was made illegal in most parts of the world. That's within one lifespan! If they could do that, we can do this.

References

In conversation with Dr. Roanne van Voorst.

1) Roanne's book made me think of some other reviews/interviews I've done on similar topics: [The Broad Relevance of Vegan Ethics in Everyday Life](#); [Should Sentient Insects Be Farmed for Food and Feed?](#); [The Effects of Food on Ecosystems and Biodiversity](#); [Are Plants Intelligent?](#); [The Clean Pet Food Revolution Will Change the World](#).

2) [Dr. Roanne van Voorst](#) is a futures-anthropologist, writer and (Tedx)speaker. She is president of the Dutch Future Society. Rosanne obtained her PhD in 2014 (cum laude/with honors) as an 'anthropologist of the future'; her core research focuses on what she calls 'sustainable humanity': how do we stay humane, in times of robotification, polarization and industrialization?

3) For more information about what we know about sentience in a wide-ranging group of nonhumans see: [Is Dairy Farming Cruel to Bright and Emotional Cows?](#); [The Mistreatment of Female "Food Cows" Includes Sexual Abuse](#); [What Would a Mother "Food" Cow Tell Us About Her Children?](#); [Cows: Science Shows They're Bright and Emotional Individuals](#); [Pigs Are Intelligent, Emotional, and Cognitively Complex](#); [The World According to Intelligent and Emotional Chickens](#); [It's Time to Stop Pretending Fishes Don't Feel Pain](#); ["Baby Hers": All Babies Belong With Their Mothers](#).