

Plant Forward: making the impossible happen for a more compassionate future
From Pei Su, Founder, ACTAsia.org
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I am proud to announce the first ever Plant Forward event on 17 September, organised by the Compassionate Choices (CNN) network in six Asian countries.



The CNN [Compassionate Choices Network] is a community of non-profit organisations and social enterprises in Asia, collaborating on social change and working to reduce consumer demand for products and services that cause harm to our planet.

We promote solutions in Asia, for Asia, by building a movement of compassionate consumers in the region.

Plant Forward is the first event of its kind and our aim is to increase understanding of plant-based eating and to explain why plants are a vital part of a sustainable future.

Between now and 4 October, anyone across the world who would like to learn more about a plant-based lifestyle and making compassionate choices can sign up and watch the live sessions online.



A vital new campaign

The campaign is so important to ACTAsia – and to everyone trying to create a more compassionate world.

Through the Plant Forward events, we are providing education to help consumers make compassionate choices, increasing their understanding of food production methods – and the impact they have on all who share our planet.

It's true that in many cultures, the concept of eating only food that comes from plants has become more widely understood in recent years.

In countries like the UK, USA and Australia, for example, there are campaigns like Veganuary and Meat Free Mondays, which are now familiar to most people.

There are also support networks including nutritionists and specialist psychologists to help people who are new to plant-based lifestyle.

Unfortunately that's not the case in Asia. This knowledge and support just doesn't exist – there's a yawning gap.

So I want Plant Forward to be the start of something: I want to help people in Asia learn that the food we eat has an impact on the environment and animals, as well as our own health.

Our compassion to human beings should extend to animals and the environment, so we need to support more Asians to help them learn that farming is responsible for more than 80% of biodiversity loss. Our future is determined by the food we decide to eat.



Overcoming many challenges

I'm the first to admit that it hasn't been easy to get the project off the ground – no one has run a multi-country campaign like this before.

But we've been determined and have made the impossible happen.

When planning our event we knew we had to start from scratch as Western-style campaigns wouldn't translate effectively, culturally or linguistically.

For example, in some Asian languages the words don't even exist to describe what we're trying to achieve.

We found that when you translate the words 'plant-based' directly into Chinese, it means 'fake meat', so things like vegetarian burgers and sausages.

This wasn't what we're trying to say, so instead of 'plant-based lifestyle' we've chosen words that translate as 'plant type of life'.

It was also very difficult to find medical doctors who could speak at our Plant Forward events in Asia who are also vegan, pro-vegan, or understand that our food choices have an impact.

There was no pool of specialists supporting the cause like there is in Western countries.



Stronger together

Not only are we introducing most people to new ideas, the organisations involved are working in different languages, across different time zones.

We have to put in extra work to support this, and it all contributes to the challenges we're facing. The reality is that there's never enough time or money available, including for this event.

But I've pushed through, supporting colleagues around the world – and we've made it happen anyway. It might not be perfect, but it shows we can do it and what we could achieve if we did have the funding we really need.

We're small organisations with little money and few resources – but we're passionate, have big dreams and can achieve more together than we ever could working alone.

I hope the first ever Plant Forward event is another step towards a more compassionate, sustainable world – and that with more funding and support we'll be able to achieve even more in future.