

Our Response to Claims of Disparagement and “Agri-Bashing”

From [BeFairBeVegan](#)

November 2022

BeFairBeVegan addresses its critics in open letter to journalists and the public: The “uncomfortable truths” exposed by the BeFairBeVegan advertisements have been greeted with the exact reception one would expect: open-minded curiosity from one side, thoughtful and considered commentary from another, and outright contempt and ridicule from yet another.

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Alongside an outpouring of gratitude from [those who recognize the messaging](#) to be both carefully-considered and socially significant, there have also been a barrage of hate-filled messages from furious critics, some calling the campaign ‘bullying,’ ‘intimidation,’ and ‘shaming,’ and some even engaging in outright vandalism of the ads.

The BeFairBeVegan campaign is not an attack on anyone and irrefutable facts cannot be described as bashing, by any coherent definition of the word. By contrast, disparaging vegans on the air by calling us ‘terrorists,’ ‘hypocrites,’ ‘completely crazy,’ and telling us to ‘eat cow sh*t,’ is textbook bashing.



Katia Gagnon  @katiagagnon · Sep 16

Début la semaine dernière d’une chronique hebdomadaire de ma part à Drainville PM. Tous les lundis, 13h!



Bernard Drainville @drainvillepm

Campagne des #Vegan radicaux dans les stations de Métro Berri-UQAM, McGill...

Des panneaux publicitaires signés «Be Fair Be Vegan»...



[Listen here \(in French\)](#)

In addition to the unfavorable segment on Quebec’s 98.5 fm, and several other opinion pieces, official complaints have been filed by members of the public over the ads shown in Toronto and Montreal.

We do want to thank some of our critics for acknowledging the beauty of the animal portraits featured in our ads, and we do want to emphasize that it is indeed the campaign’s goal (and signature) to show the public that, far from being the vacant, interchangeable ‘units of production’ we reduce them to, each of

the animals we use is an irreplaceable individual — someone with a mind, a heart, a memory, a language, and a life that matters to them as much as our lives matter to us.

These ads are “incredibly offensive, disingenuous and inappropriate in a public space. It’s outrageous.” official complaint (Toronto)

Whatever our detractors say, our ads are neither disingenuous, nor inappropriate. They are simply telling the truth. It may be inconvenient to confront, but it’s the truth nevertheless.



What is offensive, disingenuous, and inappropriate is to hide the truth by depicting dismembered animals as beneficiaries of “humane” treatment, grieving mother cows as contented, and caged animals as protected, as well as to erase any reference whatsoever to the suffering individuals who are lumped into the ugliness of “meat,” “leather,” “research subjects,” and other tragic remnants of a life once cherished. Not only do such dishonest depictions disregard and degrade the innocents who have been irreparably harmed, but in addition, by irresponsibly shielding consumers from the truly dire consequences of their actions, they disempower them as well, while perpetuating the massive injustice that is animal exploitation in all its forms.



Meanwhile, we can't help but wonder if the same viewers who take issue with our ads would complain if the stations were plastered with ads for burgers, dairy products, leather shoes, or aquariums? Do they find ads such as those “incredibly offensive, disingenuous and inappropriate in a publicly funded space”? There are far more than several of us who find ads that depict other animals as objects of our appetites and preferences to be extremely offensive and inappropriate, and we are forced to come face to face with such depictions all the time.

If respect, honesty and propriety are truly important to our viewers, they might want to reflect on why some of them find it to be so offensive, inappropriate, outrageous, and even “chilling” to simply be exposed to a truth they would rather ignore.

The screenshot shows a news article on the website LEDEVOIR. The page header includes the site name, a search bar, and navigation links. Below the header, there are three small article teasers. The main article is titled "Campagne publicitaire végétane et dérive humaniste" and is written by Jacques Lalonde, dated 20 septembre 2019. The article text discusses a recent advertisement campaign at the Berri-UQAM station, mentioning themes of family parody, equality, and nature. To the right of the text is a book cover for "HISTOIRE POPULAIRE DE L'AMOUR AU QUÉBEC" with the subtitle "Quatre siècles de rencontres sentimentales". The book cover features an illustration of a man and a woman in historical attire. Below the book cover is a small promotional banner for "Les essais de la rentrée!" with a Facebook icon and a star rating.

What is truly concerning is that these attempts to discredit our campaign are just the latest efforts to muddy the waters around what the public must ultimately acknowledge as a tremendously urgent social justice issue.

What we're trying to do at BeFairBeVegan is to initiate an honest, and long overdue, dialog around the human relationship with our fellow animals. To the individuals whose lives are at stake, the situation is more urgent than any of us can even try to imagine. And yet, the general public continues to respond to this enormity by ignoring it, trivializing it, or even ridiculing the victims of this abhorrent arrangement and either mocking or pointing a finger of accusation toward those who speak out against it.

*“Agri-bashing, attacking farmers”
98-5 fm, official complaint (Montreal)*

This is a peaceful campaign, and yet it is still perceived as an attack.

Whatever other perceived attacks farmers have allegedly been subjected to in the past, they have nothing to do with this campaign, and they should not be used to silence our message of nonviolence.



At BeFairBeVegan, we are not targeting farmers, we are addressing consumers. Farmers supply a demand. When consumers end the demand for the products of animal misery, and increase the demand for plant-based products, farmers will grow crops instead of exploiting animals. We are not trying to take away the livelihood of farmers. We only aim to redirect their efforts.

Producers are never even alluded to in our ads, much less portrayed as “murderers and torturers,” as one complainant suggests. The only focus of these ads is the living, breathing individuals who, thanks to consumer demand, are reduced to products of consumption.

*“The ads are not telling the benefits of veganism they’re shaming non-vegans”
official complaints (Toronto and Montreal)*

Whether or not veganism would benefit the nonvegan is as irrelevant as whether or not racial equality would benefit the racist.

Veganism is not a question of how *we* (the group with absolute power and privilege over other animals) might benefit from ceasing to exploit them. Veganism is a question of how *they* benefit from not being oppressed by us. Veganism is not a choice we may or may not find personally beneficial to make. Veganism is the respect we *owe* the innocent of any species.



One does not embrace racial equality for its potential benefits to the racist, just as one does not become vegan for its potential benefits to the nonvegan. One opposes exploitation and discrimination as a matter of justice, for its benefits to the ones who are exploited and discriminated against, not for its benefits to the exploiter.



“They convey a sense of hatred towards people with an omnivorous diet.”
official complaints (Toronto and Montreal)

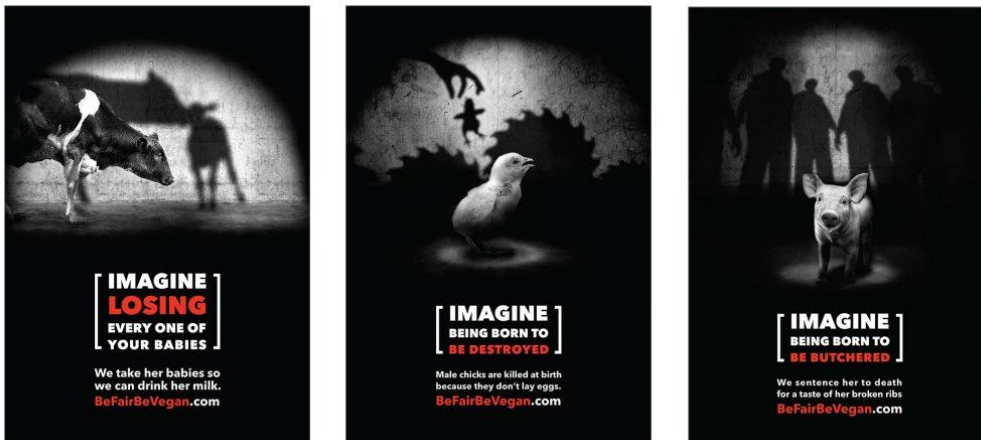
There is nothing in our ads that “conveys a sense of hatred towards people with an omnivorous diet.”

Our ads simply advocate respect for the individuals whose lives and families are stolen from them, as a result of the industries that exploit them.

When one considers the extremely violent nature of the acts that a nonvegan participates in every day, acts which are directed at the most defenseless and oppressed group on earth and which are carried out with impunity, it’s truly bizarre that we, those who oppose such acts of violence and oppression, should be accused of engaging in intimidation, when what we are actually doing is to expose and challenge the routine and systematic violence against the innocent that is inherent in the enterprise of degradation known as animal agriculture.

We are not asking people to feel ashamed.

Rather, in our installation at St George, Toronto, we are explicitly asking people to *imagine* what it’s like to be one of our victims, and we are explicitly asking people to *act* on their existing values by withdrawing their support of violent practices and products: BeFairBeVegan. We can’t control how each viewer feels when they are reminded of their participation in, and support of, practices that inflict horrendous harm on the most vulnerable members of society. However, we hope that, armed with that information, consumers will feel empowered to reject the violence inherent in owning, using, and killing sentient individuals, and in the act of paying others to do so.



“Extreme ideology, religion, dogma, violence, terrorism, propaganda, ideology of prejudice”

98-5 fm, official complaints

Veganism is not propaganda, nor is it an ideology of prejudice.

Veganism is based on fact and reason, as is always emphasized by the messaging of our displays. Speciesism, on the other hand, *is* based on the irrational belief that violence against innocents who happen to be of another species is a human right, not a human wrong. There’s nothing more extreme and dogmatic than the ideology of human supremacism manifested as speciesism.

“Vegans are hypocrites”

98-5 fm

The vast majority of ordinary people would agree that we need to respect the sentience of nonhuman animals, and yet the vast majority of people continue to make use of the products of the animal industry, even in 2019, when the facts about the nature of the industry are becoming more and more widely known. What could be more hypocritical than claiming to care about the interests of nonhuman animals, and then to not only participate in their exploitation, but to ridicule those who strive to end it as a matter of fundamental justice?



“Attributing human qualities to animals”

98-5 fm, *Le Devoir*, complaint (Montreal)

It bears repeating that we *are* animals. To paraphrase biologist Culum Brown, if we feel, think, and suffer the way we do, it’s because we’ve inherited it from the non-humans along whose sides we have evolved:

“Just about every aspect of human cognition has been observed in other animals... The reason that humans suffer the way that they do is we inherited it from our fishy ancestors.”

We do not attribute human qualities to other animals.

We recognize and respect that sentience — and the wide range of subjective experiences it entails — is not exclusively human.

We are not the only animals who feel pain, fear, love, joy, hope, despair, or sadness.

We are not the only animals who are capable of empathy, sacrifice, devotion, innovation, or imagination.

We are not the only animals who value their lives — which is to say we are not the only sentients whose lives have intrinsic value.



This is why the campaign’s slogan is Different but Equal. Even though other animals are genetically different from us, they are equally deserving of life, liberty, and justice. As such, reducing them to objects to be owned, used, and killed is not a human right but a human wrong.

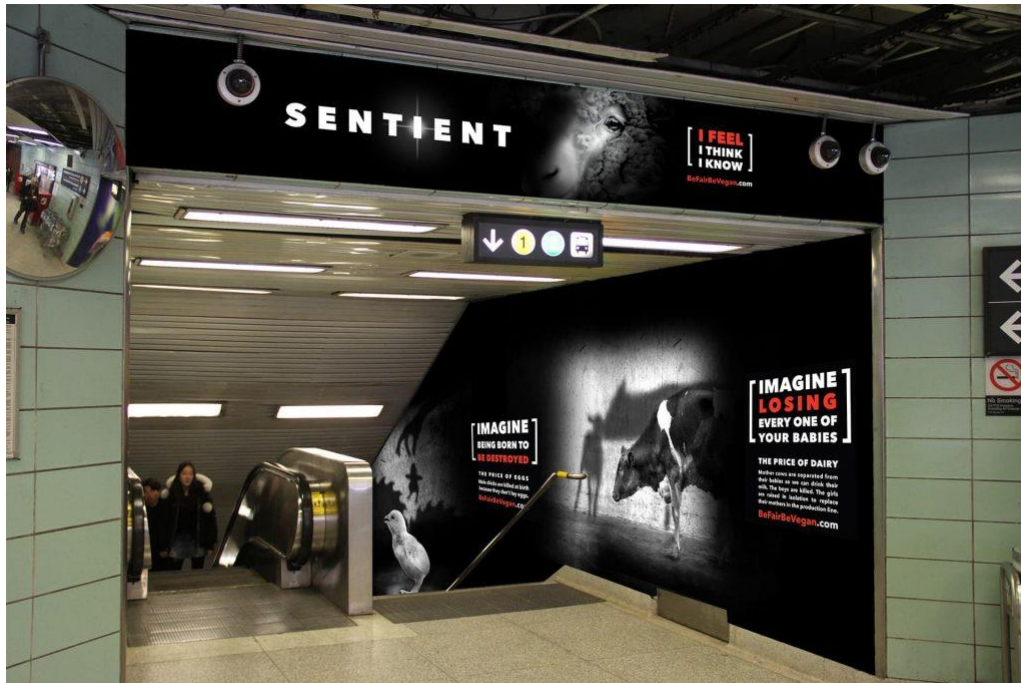
In 2019, surely it is time we internalized the ethic that genetic differences and physical characteristics are not morally relevant criteria for consideration of the interests of a particular group. If they were, we would continue to justify using race, sex, and ethnicity to discriminate against those humans who appear physically different than those who are socially dominant.

“People are starting to eat less meat, but this campaign pushes them to do the opposite”
98-5 fm

We are not asking people to eat less meat. We are asking people to reject the notion that there is anything fair and reasonable about turning a sentient being into “meat” at all.

Just as we would not accept “less” as a solution for the pressing social justice issue of violence against women, children, people of color, our LGBTQ citizens, or any other group of oppressed humans, the cause of anti-speciesism requires a complete cessation of all violence against our fellow animals.

“There are financial means behind this campaign. I’m not sure it’s just \$ 5 or \$ 10 from activists. There are economic groups or lobbies behind this”
98-5 fm



Local Montreal activists have done a tremendous amount of work to raise money to help make this initiative possible in the city in which they live and engage in their advocacy.

With regard to the rest of the financial support provided to BeFairBeVegan, it's abundantly apparent from the scale of the campaign that the people behind it believe this issue to be of tremendous significance, and consider it important enough to warrant serious public discussion.

The fact is that the animal industry has managed to keep consumers largely in the dark about the unfathomable horror show deliberately hidden behind the 'feel-good' PR tactics used to market their products. Cage-free, free-range, grass-fed and organic or natural: these absurd pretenses at wholesomeness intentionally obscure the horrendous reality that is the existence of the individuals whose lives belong to the animal industry.

At BeFairBeVegan, we believe it is our duty as people of conscience to oppose this oppression, to bring to light the extreme rights violations that our species inflicts against the other species we exploit.

We also believe it is our duty to remind our fellow humans that it is you and your friends and family who are the customers of this industry. Those who lay out money for its products might prefer to pretend its crimes don't exist, but the fact is that they do, and they exist for no other reason than that regular people, just like those who are reading this right now, continue to place their orders for the products it provides. Like it or not, it is consumers of these products who are ultimately responsible for the misery and the brutality that they cause.