

# A Vegan Diet is Part of Our Intentional Lifestyle

*Jeff Arndt and Mary Barrett*

**Mary:** Jeff and I were both mostly vegetarian our entire adult lives, so we had that in common when we first met. I had never really liked meat, so it was easy to be vegetarian. However, I did consume a lot of dairy. We both also ate some fish and poultry before we became vegan together about 5 years ago.

**Jeff:** I've always had a natural preference for fruits, vegetables, beans and grains. And my mom was health conscious (in some ways, anyway) and introduced us to wheat germ and yogurt. I understood that some foods are better for you than others. So, when I was 15 years old, I announced to my family, "I'm not going to eat meat anymore." My dad responded, "I can't afford the hospital bills if you go vegetarian on me!" So, I didn't actually become vegetarian at that point, but when I grew up, I did make that choice.

**Mary:** I bought into the myth that it's hard to get enough protein if you're vegetarian, so I added milk to a lot of recipes. For instance, I'd add powdered milk to bread and other baked goods. I didn't drink it that much, but added it to things for the protein.

**Jeff:** We lived in Chickaloon for nearly 20 years. We wanted to produce as much of our own food as possible, so in addition to our garden, for awhile we raised chickens for eggs and meat and turkeys for meat. It bothered both of us a lot to kill these animals and we decided we didn't want to do that anymore. But I still think if someone wants to eat meat, they should take responsibility for killing the animals themselves.

**Mary:** Jeff and I were both mostly vegetarian our entire adult lives, so we had that in common when we first met.



**Mary:** In January of 2007, I took the [Food for Life Classes](#) and read [The China Study](#), by T. Colin Campbell and [The Food Revolution](#), by John Robbins. Jeff read the books, too. With this additional information, we both decided it made sense to become vegan. I'd had breast cancer in 2004, so learning about the connection between animal protein, including dairy protein, and cancer was a motivator for me to give up dairy. I feel confident that I'm doing the right thing to prevent a recurrence of cancer. But as important as the health considerations are to me, my biggest reason to be vegan is to avoid supporting cruelty to animals. I don't want any part of it, and I don't want my consumer dollars supporting it.



**Jeff:** Animals are important to me, too. But it's bigger than that. Agribusiness is unhealthy, immoral, amoral, and unethical. When things are done on a really large scale, there are too many things you just can't control, so quality and safety suffer. So besides not eating animal products, we rarely buy vegetables, either. We have a large garden and freeze our vegetables for winter. We eat things in season as much as possible. However, we do buy grains. And I love sweet potatoes.

**Mary:** It's a lot of work, but we divide it up and each do the part we enjoy. Jeff does the vegetable gardening and I prepare the vegetables for the freezer. I also do most of the cooking, and make almost everything from scratch. I bake our bread and make soy milk, and I've learned to really

**Jeff:** We wanted to produce as much of our own food as possible.

enjoy vegan baking.

We freeze enough of our own strawberries, honey berries, and raspberries to last through the winter. We also freeze broccoli, cauliflower, Brussel

**Mary:** My biggest reason to be vegan is to avoid supporting cruelty to animals.

sprouts, green beans, and kale. And we store beets, carrots, onions, Hubbard squash,

potatoes, and celeriac in our version of a root cellar, our garage.

**Jeff:** I'm now 58 and the vegan diet helps me maintain my abilities and do the things that allow me to be who I am, without the typical losses of aging. I run 30 - 50 miles each week, and when training for races I run 70 - 100 miles per week. I'm not really competitive, except to do my personal best, and I usually participate in races anywhere from 2 to 8 times per year. I prefer distance running, so I'll race any-thing from half marathons to 100 mile races. This year, I'm racing two 100 mile races. Most people my age can't keep up with me, which in part I

attribute to prematurely declining health due to poor diet. I also do yoga and strength training for my upper body.

**Mary:** I'm also very active and am on the Valley Women's Running Team. I run

**Jeff:** We rarely buy vegetables. We have a large garden and freeze our vegetables for winter.

to and from work 3 days per week, which is 7 miles, round trip. And I do that year round! I also ride my bike, mow the lawn, garden, knead bread by hand, and just generally stay active. I love to eat and appreciate that my vegan diet isn't calorie dense, so I can eat as much as I want without gaining weight.

I work as a Nurse Practitioner and find it frustrating that more of my patients aren't willing to change their diets.

**Jeff:** Health, the environment, and social justice are all important to me and a vegan diet helps satisfy my internal logic and live in alignment with it as much as possible.

Read the rest of the [Newsletter](#)

Read more [Vegan Stories](#)