

Host: I am particularly pleased to have a nutritionist with us today because we are going to talk about veganism. This weekend is the sixth edition of the Montreal Vegan Festival, and it comes at the same time that – I don't know if you've seen it on the subway – there is an advertising campaign that makes people talk. So since last week, there are posters from the Be Fair Be Vegan campaign that was designed in the United States, which occupies all the space at the Berri-UQAM subway in Montreal. You can see big plans of animals that are used on farms, those that are hunted, those that are fished, and the slogan is different but equal. I don't know how you react to that. I'll start with Mikel. You often put fried chicken pictures on your Instagram, often jokingly, but you are a carnivore. How do you react when you take the subway and see that?

Mikel: Every time I meet someone who says he's a vegan, I always ask him if it's for health reasons, or political and social reasons. For me, it's two things that can go together, but are very different. People often say, "Go to a slaughterhouse to see, it will take away your taste". As a young boy, I went to a slaughterhouse and I was happy to see how things were going, and then I just felt more happy to eat my baby back ribs because I saw all the work behind it.

Host: You may have gone to the right slaughterhouse as well.

Mikel: There's that too, and here we fall into ethics. Can I eat ethically, and this is all over the place. But no, I don't feel guilty about eating meat. If I eat less meat, it's for health reasons, it's not for political reasons. I have a problem when we put animals on an equal footing with humans. I often joke that the lion in the savanna doesn't care that you have a wife and two children. If he wants to eat you, he will eat you.

Host: Like you, Catherine, you also often say that.

Catherine: I'm listening to you (Mikel) and I feel like you're in my head, and that's exactly it. I am aware that this is a delicate subject and that we must nuance our thinking, but I too am like you. That does not make me feel guilty. Maybe it's just awakening a need for information in me, but I also think that in the food chain the human stands at the top. I understand that these can be parallel thinking/values. We may want to respect animals because they too raise families. But for me, there are so many subjects and injustices in relation to humanity – one does not go without the other – but for me, it is so much humans first. I will try to encourage a plant that does not farm children before stopping eating eggs and beef and bacon.

Josée: It affects humans, because we're dying of heat on this planet. The Amazon is burning because of the consumption of meat. A carnivore occupies 5 to 7 times more land than a vegan. We weren't two billion humans 100 years ago. We are heading toward 8 billion, how are we going to manage that?

Host: How long have you been a vegan Josée?

Josée: I'm not a vegan [I think she is, she is simply refusing the label]. I decided to get involved in this eight and a half years ago. Back in the days, they didn't ask, "Do you feel guilty of eating meat?" It was the opposite: "Do you feel guilty of being a vegetarian?" So I decided at some point, "That's it." I know what the future is for my son. I decided for environmental, ethical, political, social, cultural and educational reasons, that I will make him remember good memories. The body is emotional. I wanted to give him memories where he wouldn't say, "Oh my god, I need turkey for Christmas." So that's it. It's a construct.

Host: But, do you eat meat?

Josée: I don't eat it. And for all kinds of reasons. I like meat. I'm a cook. I learned how to cook meat. When I run in Saint-Lambert and it smells like a barbecue, it smells good.

Host: This is a family thing right? Your grandfather invented the Habitant pea soup? [Habitant is a company of canned soup here]

Josée: Wow, you did your research. No, we weren't vegetarians back home. My father was a hunter. I spent my university eating deer and moose. It has nothing to do with that. It's out of conviction. That is the easiest thing we can do. We wonder what we can do for the planet? Well, we can do that.

Mikel: That annoys me.

Josée: Yes, very annoying (sarcasm)

Mikel: When we talk about ecology, I get it. But what bothers me about this is the distribution of food, and how it's being wasted. Almost 40 percent of the food produced in industrialized countries is wasted.

Josée: One doesn't go without the other. Just because we are vegetarians does not mean that we should stop worrying about waste. We are straying from the subject.

Mikel: To me, it's a bigger problem than, "Are we producing too much meat or not enough?" Yes, we eat too much. Yes, we pollute too much. But we waste too much.

Host: And Hélène (nutritionist), what do you think of all this?

Hélène: I find this fascinating. I am not a vegan. In fact, I very much appreciated your invitation to the program, because I rarely have the opportunity to express my opinion on it. I am not a vegan, and I am not ashamed of not being a vegan. When I look at the campaign, I find that the use of the word or equality (without being speciesist...) is a bit intense. It is difficult to draw the line. Is the life of an insect less important? It is useful in nature. It can pollinate, it can do all kinds of things, I understand. That being said, I would feel guilty as a human being in 2019, with the climate crisis, not to ask myself this question. We know we can do things that are pretty simple [like stopping eating meat]. Mikel, I heard you earlier with your fried chicken. What is your origin?

Mikel: haha, no! My mother is against fried chicken. She's going to hear me and call me and say, "You're not paying attention to your health." Yes, it's cultural.

Hélène: We agree, we eat too much meat. We go to a restaurant and everything is defined by the meat. What are we going to eat? Ribs raised, fried chicken, sushi? We always define what we eat with animal protein. Nobody says, "I have a beautiful cauliflower, what would I do well tonight?"

Mikel: It's happening at my hope.

Hélène: Maybe, but for the general people. In omnivores homes.

Josee: We can't stop talking about proteins and are obsessed with it. There are athletes who are vegan.

Host: Did you know that from 2012 to 2019 there was a 257% increase in demand in vegan products in grocery stores. Now, I talk to the fisherman and the hunter. To Gemaux [our "Oscar/Golden Globe" kind of ceremony] on Sunday, you said, "I went hunting before I got my trophy."

Hunter: Yes, it [the campaign] talks to me. Animal welfare, I'm really careful about it. What I find positive about a campaign like that is that it reminds us that pork is a pig. And chicken is a chicken [in french, the "meat" and the "animal" have 2 different words, a bit like "beef" and "ox"]. At the grocery store, I wouldn't put

a little chicken pictogram, or a little beef pictogram. I would put a picture of chicken and a picture of an ox. That's first and foremost. We have forgotten that it is meat and that it is an animal. If we just remind ourselves of that, we already have a different relationship with what we eat. After that, whether you pick it up or wherever you buy it. The New York Times recently talked about vegans becoming butchers, because they realized they had a better impact there. By being a vegan, they only had an impact on themselves [what the hell? How about the animals?]. By being butchers, they're taking meat that they think is ethical. There are more who are affected by their actions. It seems to me that we have to remember that it is an animal.

Ending music...