

## WSCF-EUROPE AND VEGETARIANISM



At the European Regional Assembly of WSCF Europe in 2011 the delegates approved a proposal, that at all WSCF-E events should have vegetarian diet only. This decision was re-evaluated and upheld at the ERA in 2013. Our experience with this policy has shown that for some participants at our events, having to go for a week without non-vegetarian food can seem challenging and also unnecessary and undemocratic: the personal choices of a certain group of people – vegetarians – seem to be forced on a majority of meat-eaters. It is the goal of this text to outline how the decision of a vegetarian diet is something that goes beyond purely subjective personal choices: it reflects concerns about ethical living in today's world and our common responsibility for ecological sustainability and economic justice.

The basic rationale behind the argument that we would like to make is simple: the resources of agricultural land and water at our disposal are limited; therefore, we have to be mindful about how we use these resources. The production process for meat, in this context is one step more complex than the one for meat: grain is grown and then fed to animals.

### **WHAT DOES THIS DO TO OUR LAND?**

It not only takes much more resources (to produce meat takes 10-20 times more land than to produce grain) but it causes its actual devastation. Meat consumption drives deforestation as forests are cut down to create new space to grow animal fodder as well as new pastures for livestock, especially in South America. Also, the 2006 report of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN shows that the livestock sector produces a much larger carbon footprint than all exhaust gases from transportation (cars, air planes etc.) combined (cf. pp. 79-101). This means that air pollution and the greenhouse effect are worsened disproportionately by the production of meat.

### **WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON WATER?**

The same UN report shows further that the livestock sector pollutes the water and is "among the most damaging sectors to the earth's increasingly scarce water resources." Apart from the use of large amounts of water to feed them, animals also produce a large amount of waste, which needs to be disposed. This has massive effects on the environment as ground water is polluted in the process, often with an impact on whole communities depending on it. (cf. *ibid.*: pp. 135-162)

In this way, meat is environmentally unsustainable compared to a meat-free diet. The resource intensity of the meat production process also means that the level of meat consumption that Europeans enjoy is out of reach for the majority of the world's population. It is too expensive and too resource intense. Therefore our vegetarian policy aims to promote a lifestyle of solidarity with the poor and those suffering most from the effects of environmental degradation.



Thus WSCF-E, by this decision of the ERA 2011, would like to encourage a meat-free diet as we see it as a key way to address contemporary issues of environmental justice and sustainability. We would like to use our events as a space, where participants can experience what a meat-free diet feels like.

We do respect the fact that meat is a part of all European food cultures and we do not intend to question the legitimacy of anyone's cultural background. Still, we feel that, as Christians, we need to be open to change in order to promote justice and to counter the destruction of creation. Therefore, we would like to offer our events as a space in which to experience and explore, what a vegetarian diet means in practice and that eating less meat (or even none at all) is a sacrifice that is possible and constructive.

*The Regional Committee of WSCF Europe*

October 2013