

Cowspiracy Conversation

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The recent documentary *Cowspiracy*, and the follow-up book *The Sustainability Secret*, have been powerful forces in waking people up to the fact that the animal food industry is the main driving force behind climate change and destruction of the environment. These two projects are the work of Kip Andersen and Keegan Kuhn, who recently talked about these developments with *American Vegan* Environmental Editor, Dale Lugenbehl.

Dale: Kip, you recently returned from the climate talks in Paris. What is your analysis of the climate talks and the agreement reached?

Kip: It was extremely frustrating in that animal agriculture as a cause of climate change was not being discussed in any of the main talks or conferences. What was exciting, though, was that in the hallways everywhere we went, people would constantly come up to us and want to talk. *Cowspiracy* and the facts of animal agriculture are being talked about a lot informally, and it's clear there has been a real shift in perception. In a year, it will be a big part of the center-stage discussion. The Paris conference this year seemed like a marketing gimmick, patting people on the back and thinking that they're doing something when they are not really doing a thing.

Dale: What led you to decide to make *Cowspiracy* and write the follow-up book *The Sustainability Secret*?

Kip: What motivated me most was calling the environmental organizations out for deliberately nontalking about animal agriculture. They already know about this information, but these organizations are more concerned about their own survival than the survival of the planet. Rather than risk their donor base, they are telling people what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear--the truth about how animal agriculture is destroying the planet. They garner hundreds of millions of dollars world-wide in the name of the environment and then focus attention on other issues that aren't as urgent as animal agriculture.

Dale: It's stunning—this information has been out there at least since 1970 when Frances Moore Lappe wrote *Diet for a Small Planet*. It strikes me that environmental organizations that say nothing about animal agriculture are simply enabling people's

dysfunctional behavior. It allows people to say: “If this stuff about animal agriculture and the environment were true, we would be hearing about it from Greenpeace and 350.org and we’re not, so it can’t possibly be true.” So the question then becomes: What can we do to get major environmental organizations to address the issue of animal agriculture in connection with climate change and environmental degradation?

Keegan: Members of these groups can call, email, write, and speak out at events and demand that their donations be used towards properly addressing animal agriculture as the single most destructive industry facing the planet. Organizations have an obligation to listen to donors. Otherwise donors can e-mail these organizations and tell them they are removing their donor money and why. It’s that simple.

Kip: Another thing we can do is use social media and infiltrate the messaging—almost half allow you to cross over to animal agriculture. If, for example, the online conversation is about fracking, add something to the thread like “Yes fracking is detrimental, but look at how it is compared to animal agriculture—the water consumption—the water pollution....” Constantly tag in the comments, so it’ll link the conversations back to animal agriculture so people know the entire truth. And if we constantly keep doing this, it will force them to have to talk about it. Also insert information about websites where they can get more information. A third strategy is to use the same tactics that they use against corporations or the government--go to Greenpeace, or Sierra Club, or 350.org rallies with other people and hold up signs whether, it’s “Cowspiracy” or “Speak the whole truth about animal agriculture.” People are actually doing these things, and it is working.

Dale: What can we do to get government to address the issue of animal agriculture in connection with climate change and environmental degradation?

Keegan: Many of the statistics in our film *Cowspiracy* and book *The Sustainability Secret* come directly from US government agencies such as the EPA, USDA, or USGS. The government is already aware of the issue but cannot act without the support of the population. I don’t believe the government will ever truly address this issue or has any power in mandating industry or behavior changes until a much stronger percentage of the population is behind this information. I think our focus should remain on educating enough people before we try to get the government to do anything.

Kip: That’s a tougher one; it’s a grassroots thing--and it’s building fast! There’s some exciting stuff happening—like in the U.K. where they’re proposing a meat tax because of environmental destruction.

Dale: What suggestions do you have for things people can do to raise the state of consciousness of the general population?

Keegan: People around the world have been using our film and book as tools to create conversation. We want to continue to see people sharing our film, showing up to environmental

and climate events with signs and banners about animal ag., posting on all their social media about the harmfulness of this industry.

Kip: Social media is so powerful; that's why this is happening so fast—I think ten or fifteen years ago this couldn't happen. The technology has provided a perfect opportunity so we need to speak up—on Facebook and other social media of environmental organizations—infiltrating the comments page with facts about animal agriculture. It's the most powerful, immediate, and cheapest way to spread information and raise the state of consciousness.

Dale: Have you received any threats of legal or other action, or intimidation tactics because of the film and the book?

Keegan: As yet, the industry's response has been limited. If the animal ag industry is smart, they will ignore us. Coming after us with litigation or harassment will only bring more attention to the issue. It still remains a concern, but we feel that this information is too important to remain silent in fear.

Kip: I think animal agriculture and the environmental organizations are hoping that the film will just go away—and it's really only getting bigger. Greenpeace recently put out two pages on their website acknowledging *Cowspiracy* and claiming that they do talk about these issues. It's time for all of us to be persistent and speak up so that not only do they talk about it, but also make animal agriculture one of the top focuses of their entire campaign. Any real threats would just blow up in their faces.

Dale: What obstacles or problems did you need to overcome in your transition to being vegan?

Keegan: I was raised vegetarian and became vegan when I was twelve years old, so that's a better question for Kip.

Kip: My difficulties centered around things like the protein myth and the idea that you have to have animal products to be healthy. I was very naïve about nutrition, but I knew that I didn't want a trail of blood and destruction leading to my grave, so I had to learn to eat differently. In one or two months, I felt better than I ever had, and I started realizing all these obstacles were just illusions because so much information about our food and health is hidden from us. It's simply a myth that we need animal protein and the calcium in dairy—these were the big things that I had to overcome.

Dale: In the book it is mentioned that the use of animal by-products (such as blood or bone meal,

fish emulsion, manure, etc.) is unhealthy. However, there isn't anything relating to the fact that the sale of those by-products, including leather, is said to make up forty to forty-five percent of the industry's profits. Shouldn't avoiding purchase of these products also be an important part of the strategy for phasing out animal agriculture?

Keegan: Yes, it was something we wanted to focus more on. All of the environmental reasons to be vegan also apply to the ethical side to be vegan. If we are vegan for the environment, then we should be against animals in captivity and entertainment because those animals play an intrinsic role in their ecosystems and belong in the wild. We should be against the use of animals in experiments because it is a tremendous waste of resources and using computer models is vastly more efficient and accurate. We should be against the use of animal skins and hair because of the huge environmental cost of producing them.

Kip: It's a huge topic that isn't being talked about. We had a whole section on leather but we wanted to keep Cowspiracy at ninety minutes—it was just unfortunate. All the same things are happening in the leather industry that are happening in the animal foods industry. We want to do a five to ten minute video that will focus on leather and how destructive it is.

Dale: People have asked about the reliability of the statistics used in your film and book.

Keegan: All of the stats used in the film can be seen at our website www.Cowspiracy.com/facts. The resources primarily came from government and intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. The book has extensive footnotes as well.

Kip: If anything, most of the numbers are conservative. When Leonardo DiCaprio became executive producer we took nearly an entire year to solidify our sources and consult with his attorneys so that he could be assured that his reputation would be protected. The result was that every single stat is completely locked down and bullet proof.

Dale: Are you feeling more optimistic or pessimistic after making the film?

Kip: In the year or two since making the film, I have grown increasingly optimistic seeing how fast this shift is happening. It's really that next step of evolution; it feels so good to be on the right side of history.

Dale: Much thanks to you both. Keep up the good work!