



## Al Gore's Vegan Diet: The Power of the Individual

World history was favorably changed this past week (November 26, 2013) when the former US Vice President and environmental activist Al Gore declared that he was no longer consuming animal foods. As a former Black Angus cattle rancher and a long-time indulger in all foods fattening, many people doubted that he would ever come to his senses. But he has. [He is now vegan.](#)

Mr. Gore has been grappling with this decision for seven years—at least—since the time I [pointed out the inconsistency](#) of Al Gore being the world's leading spokesperson on climate change and his own high-meat diet. This was the year (2006) that Mr. Gore rose above being a politician to a far more important role as "savior" with the release of the Oscar-winning documentary, [An Inconvenient Truth](#); it was also the year that the World Health Organization released a [groundbreaking study](#) showing that raising livestock (cows, pigs, chickens, etc.) to feed people produces more greenhouse gases than all the transportation (cars, trains, airplanes, etc.) combined. Since 2006 the estimated greenhouse gas contribution from people eating meat, poultry, dairy, and eggs has [ris-en to over 50%](#). Al Gore's public disclosure of his personal change in diet marks a time in history when Big Food is losing ground to humanity, and people's interest in preserving their home, planet Earth, is gaining steam.



### Fighting Big Food for Our Very Survival

"Big Food" refers to multinational food and beverage companies having huge, concentrated market power that is focused on maximizing profits, not human welfare. They sell their brands throughout the world in outlets that range from large supermarkets to gas stations and from restaurants to kiosks. The [revenues of the largest corporations](#) can exceed the annual gross domestic product (GDP) of middle-size countries. Within the food system, [power is concentrated](#) in the hands of a few corporations. In 2008, 10 corporations controlled almost 90% of the global sales of pesticides and 10 companies sold 67% of the global proprietary seed market. In 2005, the top 4 beef packing firms controlled 83.5% of the market in the US and worldwide, and 40% of all groceries were sold by only 100 retailers.

With their massive wealth, intellectual power, and profit-driven motives, these corporations are formidable forces that fight viciously against any meaningful change that might adversely affect their profits. There is not a conspiracy here; this is just business as usual, at its worst acting like Big Tobacco

and Big Alcohol. The [food industry's primary obligation](#) is to drive profit by selling food, and its efforts have been largely unchallenged for almost 30 years.

## Big Food Has Been on a Winning Streak for 30 Years

It has been [almost 30 years since](#) Big Food has been successfully challenged. The McGovern Report, officially known as "The Dietary Goals for the United States" (1977), and the US Surgeon General's Report on Nutrition and Health (1985), by C. Everett Koop, MD, attempted to improve the health of Americans by recommending a major increase in whole grains, vegetables, and fruits in our diet and an economy-shifting reduction in the consumption of meat and dairy products.

As is expected of all good businesses that are responsible to their shareholders and private owners, these animal-food industries fought back with a vengeance, declaring that the anti-meat and anti-dairy efforts by government, headed by a few concerned scientists, would never threaten them again. For these food giants, the battles lost by the tobacco industry, beginning with the 1964 Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health, served as [powerful lessons](#) about the potential consequences of letting the public's interest get in the way of financial gain. So far, any real efforts to change the way people eat have been stopped by Big Food. But industry has no defense against what individuals like Al Gore can do to change the future.

## The Fight Individuals Can Win

Healthier images of Al Gore over the next few months will show how he saved himself from obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, much like those public pictures seen of Bill Clinton after he switched his diet (to vegan, then to almost vegan) in 2010. Both men provide examples of how the food on each person's plate makes an immediate and powerful statement.

Rather than improvement in his own health, Mr. Gore's motivation to give up animal foods was more likely to become consistent with his message on climate change. He can now call himself an environmentalist. Who will be the next example for our future? Russian president Vladimir Putin, actor Leonardo DiCaprio, US president Barack Obama, film producer and explorer James Cameron (too late, he's already vegan)...

Although celebrities have a large platform to speak from, every person has a voice on this matter. Food is the immediate solution to reverse climate change. (Changes in energy sources and modes of transportation will take decades to show environmental effects).