

Vegetarian Validation

Herbivorous students and teachers explain their reasons for choosing meat-free lifestyles

Cafeteria Cuisine

The cafeteria offers a variety of foods that make vegetarian-friendly meals

On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, the cafeteria offers whole grain pasta. Students can opt for meat-free marinara sauce on top. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, options such as waffle sticks and macaroni and cheese are offered.



Juice is a popular beverage among vegetarians and vegans. The cafeteria offers a wide variety, including fresh apple juice.

Fresh fruit is a healthy addition to any meal. The cafeteria has a fruit bar with options ranging from grapes to apples.

As a good source of carbohydrates, the cafeteria provides whole grain bread to complement a pasta.

Students who are craving something salty can grab a bag of chips. The cafeteria has a variety of healthy, baked snacks.



Pizza is a daily staple in the BV West cafeteria and in students' lunches. Pizza topped with vegetables is a safe choice for vegetarian students who still want their Pizza Hut fix.

Vegans typically avoid drinking milk, but this calcium-rich beverage is a nutritious choice for many vegetarian students.



The cafeteria's salad bar provides a large range of fresh vegetables for students craving something healthy. Students have the ability to build their own salads based on their unique tastes.

MEGAN KETCHAM Scetion Editor

In a country full of hamburgers, fried chicken, and steak, meat has become a prominent component in the American stomach. Yet, 7.3 million Americans have cut meat out of their diets completely. Although it is not a new concept, vegetarianism has been growing in popularity in the United States and is a lifestyle that many BV West students choose to live.

Vegetarianism is more than just another diet. It is a way of life that is based upon a decision to abstain from meat for ethical, health, religious, or personal reasons. Junior Sonia Kumar decided to make the switch from meat as well as to become a member of the People for the Ethical Treatment of animals (PETA) because of the influence of a friend and knowledge of animal cruelty.

"As I got older, more toward 11 and 12 [years old], I started hearing about animal rights and I really got into PETA because I had an older friend who was a vegetarian too," Kumar said. "He was really into it, and so I got it from him. I started learning about animal testing and all the animal cruelty that can happen. It was devastating to me that I was using products that were tested on animals."

It is popular among vegetarians to embrace the lifestyle for ethical reasons. Senior Danielle Sartain took up the vegetarian lifestyle nearly five years ago after reading information provided by PETA.

"At first it was probably because I read a bunch of the PETA pamphlets and propaganda that PETA puts out," Sartain said. "That's why I immediately became a vegetarian, because I saw the slaughterhouse stuff. It was mostly because of the cruelty."

Like Sartain, many vegetarians are influenced by literature to begin the vegetarian lifestyle. Communication Arts teacher Kristin Wilson became a vegetarian three years ago after learning the health benefits of vegetarianism.

"I read a couple of books by Michael Pollan and one was *In the Defense of Food: Omnivore's Dilemma*," Wilson said.

"It got me thinking about what things go into our food in general. Though, it was more because of health reasons that I started thinking about it."

While many chose the vegetarian

lifestyle, for Junior Bharadwaj Thirumalai it has always been a part of life.

"I had never really eaten meat since I was born because my parents were vegetarians," Thirumalai said. "I was a vegetarian up until the point where I could decide to eat meat if I wanted to. It's kind of like a weird stigma that something else's body is going inside me. It kind of just stuck with me and I don't really feel like I'm missing out on too much."

Religion also plays a role in Thirumalai's vegetarian lifestyle. Although it is not a compulsory dogma, vegetarianism is popular in Hinduism because of beliefs of nonviolence toward animals.

"I think it's probably easier to be a vegetarian in some Indian cultures because Hinduism kind of influences that," Thirumalai said. "In Hinduism, every life is sacred, especially since there is stuff about harming things that can't think for themselves. That influences the culture, and so there are a greater number of vegetarian Hindus than there are [vegetarians] in other religions."

With a growing number of people removing meat from their diets, it has become easier for vegetarians to find meals that accommodate their diet, because there are more people conscious of those who choose not to eat meat.

"A lot of Indian food really caters to the vegetarian diet, which is nice because there are so many Indians that are vegetarians," Kumar said. "My family is really into it, and they are really accepting of it. A lot of my friends and their families are really accepting too and are able to provide me with my own special menu, which is really nice of them."

As the number of vegetarians increases, awareness about the lifestyle spreads as well. Thirumalai finds that even in the BV West lunchroom vegetarian-friendly food is not limited.

"At school, you have veggie pizza," Thirumalai said. "There are a few options other than that, but usually I just stick to the veggie pizza. The majority of meals have meat in them, but there's still a fair enough variety of things you can eat."

While restaurants and school lunchrooms seek to add vegetarian-approved options to their menus, many vegetarians have personal limits about how far their vegetarianism can go. Sartain, like many vegetarians, takes a relaxed approach to vegetarianism and only avoids foods that directly have meat in them.

"I'll eat like marshmallows and stuff like that, but I wouldn't eat a soup that had meat in it," Sartain said.

Marshmallows contain gelatin, which is a substance drawn from the collagen inside of animal skin and bones. A few vegetarians will read labels to find every possible source of meat in a product, but many vegetarians are willing to set limits to save themselves the stress of label-reading.

Each vegetarian sets his or her own cutoff point. Although it is a meat, many vegetarians choose to include fish in their diets but rule out other forms of meat. Meat often provides many key nutrients and vitamins necessary to the body. With decreased amounts of nutrients going into the body, many vegetarians take dietary supplement pills, or supplement their diets with enriching foods. Wilson chooses to add fish to her diet to supplement missing nutrients.

"I have started trying to [eat fish] a little bit, because I

was worried about the Omega 3 that they say you need," Wilson said. "Occasionally, I will try to supplement my diet with salmon or something."

However, not all vegetarians resort to eating fish and taking pills to keep healthy. Many simply eat other foods enriched with vital nutrients.

"I try to eat beans and that kind of food group to make up for it," Kumar said.

For many vegetarians, the losses are small in comparison to the gains made by animal rights' activists. PETA is a major influence for many vegetarians and the ethical issues presented by PETA keep vegetarians committed to staying meat-free. Sartain, although not an official member of PETA, advocates animal rights through her vegetarianism.

"I do have some stuff from PETA," Sartain said. "I order stickers and stuff from them and give them out to people, but I'm not like an official member or anything. They go a little far, which is why I support the vegetarianism part but I still have Uggs boots."

Vegetarians are often known for being PETA members; however, this is not true in all cases. A few vegetarians disagree with some of PETA's commercials and propaganda.

"In my mind, PETA used to stand for something like 'don't hurt animals unnecessarily'," Thirumalai said. "Now, it's just like hot girls covering themselves with broccoli. PETA has changed into something weird."

Although many doubt that the contributions PETA and other vegetarians are making a difference in the lives of animals, Sartain firmly believes that she is helping the fight against animal cruelty.

"Even though people think that just because you are one person and you are not eating meat doesn't make a difference, but it does because you tell other people about it," Sartain said. "It's really stupid when people think that they shouldn't become one because animals are going to be killed anyway because that's definitely not the case."

Whether it is for ethical, health, or religious reasons, vegetarians have embraced this lifestyle to make a positive change in their lives.

"I think for the most part I feel better with the change," Wilson said. "It's something that in the long run benefits your health. Overall, it's been a good change for me."