

## ENCOURAGING A PLANT-BASED LIFE

### A RESOLUTION OF WITNESS

*(Drafted by Rev. Dr. Deborah D Conrad and submitted by 14 voting delegates for consideration by United Church of Christ General Synod 34, July 2023, Indianapolis.)*

#### **SUMMARY**

Animal consumption damages the earth, fosters violence in families, exploits workers, poisons neighbors, diseases our bodies, misuses land and water. The effects of animal consumption are worse for People of Color and Communities of Color; the work to raise and process animals for consumption is exploitative of the labor of immigrants, people in poverty, and People of Color.

Yet our faith begs us to live in harmony, in covenant with the earth and one another.

This resolution asks the Church to take steps toward understanding, advocating, and in ways within its purview implementing, plant-based consumption.

#### **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL RATIONALE**

The United Church of Christ has stated its commitment to the earth and its animals, immigrants, laborers, people living in poverty, and all who eat from its tables. We are an anti-racist church, a labor- and immigrant-supporting church, an economic and environmental justice church. <sup>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26</sup>

In the creation stories of Genesis, we read that we are to exercise dominion— care for the well-being of earth and animals. *“As the image of God, human beings should relate to the non-human as God relates to them.... God as a giver provides vegetation to human beings and animals to sustain their lives. (W)e discover that human beings were intended to be vegetarians.”*<sup>27</sup> Further, we learn that God created animals as companions for the human and instructed them all to eat the garden’s luscious vegetation. Eden was vegan.

Isaiah’s vision of the new creation implies a plant-based diet: cows and bears grazing, lions eating straw. The story of Ruth and others describes our call to care for laborers. Daniel’s response to his undesirable assignment to the Court of Nebuchadnezzar was to forego meat in favor of vegetables and water as an act of resistance, a dietary means of disrupting empire.

Jesus broke Sabbath laws to protect and care for animals, and taught regularly of economic justice.<sup>28</sup> And he said that we should treat others the way we want to be treated. Wrote one Black pastor: *“While humankind may have been granted dominion over animals, I don’t believe we were also given the right to be cruel, brutal, heartless.... Animals are part of creation, just as humans. Treating them so callously is symptomatic of a general disregard for anything our culture defines as inferior and expendable.”*<sup>29</sup>

Surely we face challenges which the biblical writers could not conceive. Minimally, we must concede that the biblical writers could not have imagined our inhumane animal industry – the Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) and concomitant slaughterhouses.

Spiritually, theologically, biblically, the animal industry is a source of dis-ease. Faith requires in all things we seek to build equitable community, to be repairers of the breach and restorers of streets to live in. We are called to mend the world.

### **SUPPORTING STATEMENT**

Animal agriculture is related to racial, immigrant, environmental, labor and economic injustice, and health care disparities. It has been called “a leading cause of everything,”<sup>30</sup> including pandemics: *“The majority of all human infectious diseases and pandemics have originated through the cross-species transmission of microorganisms from animals to humans,”* including COVID-19, HIV, SARS, ebola, swine flu, the 1918 flu, mad cow, hepatitis E.<sup>31</sup>

Large-scale animal agriculture has pushed the Earth beyond capacity. Use of land and water is out of balance as we grow food for animals instead of people. We are draining wetlands, clearing rainforests, pouring CO<sup>2</sup> and methane into the atmosphere. Growing animals in confined operations requires high doses of antibiotics, which make their way to land and waterways, contributing to strains of bacteria resistant to known antibiotics. *“Without meat and dairy consumption, global farmland use could be reduced by more than 75% – an area equivalent to the U.S., China, the European Union and Australia combined – and still feed the world.... Since livestock production is the single largest contributor of emissions around the globe (more than planes, trains and cars combined), removing it from our food system could allow the planet to regenerate.”*<sup>32</sup>

Animal agriculture affects labor, immigrant, racism and economic justice, “People of color, immigrants, and people in relatively low-income families are disproportionately employed in meat-packing plants,” and experience high rates of physical and psychological disorder and death. Workers are exploited by the industry, “denied health care, exposed to hazardous chemicals, and required to operate dangerous machinery.... commonly sustain severe injuries and suffer from respiratory illnesses and infections by antibiotic-resistant bacteria.... Work at factory farms and slaughterhouses often ... leads to domestic violence, social withdrawal, anxiety, drug and alcohol abuse, and PTSD.”<sup>33 34 35</sup>

Animal consumption is linked to obesity, impotence, cancer and type-2 diabetes,<sup>36</sup> kidney and heart disease, stroke, high cholesterol, digestive disorders, lower life expectancy.<sup>37</sup> Cancers affecting women are more prevalent among non-vegans.<sup>38</sup> (The most-often named concern is lack of B12 in a plant-based diet, but nutritionists assure this is exaggerated.<sup>39</sup>) The disparate harm to People of Color in all areas of health is well-documented. As many as 90 percent of People of Color are lactose intolerant. Hence among new vegans, People of Color outpace white vegans, and the NAACP is working to legislate plant-based diets in schools and prisons.<sup>40</sup>

Further, CAFOs destroy communities, and are more likely to be located in poor communities and Communities of Color. Animal waste causes harm to vulnerable populations by damaging air, water and land: 2,500 dairy cows produce the same annual waste as a city the size of Tampa; <sup>41</sup>these operations lower life expectancy of people in neighboring communities.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, farming animals is bad for animals: more than 70 billion slaughtered yearly, by barbaric and inhumane methods<sup>43 44</sup> raised in cages too small for natural movement, never touching dirt or seeing daylight; inseminated against their will, forced to bear offspring they will not be al-

lowed to raise; fattened for maximum profit and slaughtered young. Chickens debeaked, piglets' testicles and tails cut off without anesthesia by untrained laborers; male chicks ground up alive. Days-old male calves sent to veal farms for slaughter. Cows pushed into reproduction as soon as they are physically capable; when their bodies are worn out from yearly calving; they are sent to slaughter. <sup>45</sup>

Animal consumption is unnecessary, unhealthy, and unjust.

### **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

**WHEREAS** Jesus devoted his life to manifesting a world honoring all creation, tending to the well-being of all creatures, and attuned to the life coursing through the earth itself; and

**WHEREAS** our most often and fondly quoted scriptures call us to be caring stewards of creation, but creation is dying on our watch; and

**WHEREAS** consumption of animals has been linked to almost every serious threat facing creation, including climate crisis, poor physical and mental health in people, environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, food injustice, economic and labor injustice, the water crisis, colonialism and resulting wars; and causes trauma and immense physical and psychological pain for sentient beings bred in abominable conditions for exploitative purposes; and People of Color and people living in poverty bear the brunt of animal agriculture's harmful effects on humans; <sup>46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64</sup> and

**WHEREAS** there is no function of animal agriculture that cannot be served by plant- or synthetic-based replacements, including fortified plant-based milks and cereals;<sup>65</sup> and

**WHEREAS** animal-based products would not be affordable or widely available if not for government subsidies;<sup>66</sup> and

**WHEREAS** UCC General Minister and President John Dorhauer called the UCC in 2017 to the mission emphasis of “The Three Great Loves” and invited every setting of the UCC to make a commitment to “discover ways in which you can engage the members of your faith community in mission that ... honors the call to be good stewards of God's creation;” <sup>67</sup> and

**WHEREAS** General Synods has passed dozens of resolutions decrying environmental degradation, racism, worker exploitation, world hunger and our responsibility to feed the planet, and has adopted measures related to global migration, noting that food and water are often at its root, each time urging UCC members to adopt new behaviors to lessen the impact or reverse the causes of economic, environmental, climate and immigration injustice; to become an anti-racist church, a labor- and immigrant-supporting church, an economic and environmental justice church, <sup>68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93</sup>

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Thirty Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ

1. **endorses** movement toward a plant-based diet as a means of mending the world;
2. **requests** appropriate ministries provide resources and opportunities for education;
3. **encourages** congregations and affiliated ministries to begin to take steps toward reduction

in animal consumption;

4. **requests** the United Church Board to add November as World Vegan Month to the yearly calendar of observances;
5. **encourages** that, in any meeting of the Church and its boards, bodies and committees, meals and snacks provided are plant-based; and
6. **calls upon Congress, the White House and state legislators:** 1) to redirect farm subsidies to plant-based agriculture; 2) provide resources to help animal farmers and ranchers transition to plant crops and markets; and 3) ban factory farming of animals.

**FUNDING:** The funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

**IMPLEMENTATION:** The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/AFFIRMING-GOVERNMENT-S-ROLE-TO-PROTECT-THE-COMMON-GOOD.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/accra-confession.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/economic-justice.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/ANOTHER-WORLD-IS-POSSIBLE.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/CALLING-FOR-A-MORE-JUST-HUMANE-DIRECTION-FOR-ECONOMIC-GLOBALIZATION.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/CALLING-THE-UNITED-CHURCH-OF-CHRIST-TO-BE-AN-ANTI-RACIST-CHURCH.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/CALLING-UPON-THE-UNITED-CHURCH-OF-CHRIST-TO-INITIATE-A-JUBILEE-FOR-JUSTICE-FOR-THE-RURAL-UNITED-STATES.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/Christian-Faith-Economic-Life-and-Justice.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/climate-change-final.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/A-FAITHFUL-RESPONSE-CALLING-FOR-A-MORE-JUST-HUMANE-DIRECTION-FOR-ECONOMIC-GLOBALIZATION-AND-PLAN-OF-ACTION.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/The-Family-Farm-1985.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/FOR-THE-COMMON-GOOD.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/FOR-THE-COMMON-GOOD.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/Resolution-on-Mindful-and-Faithful-Eating.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/pdf/gs29-2.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/Pron-on-Justice-and-Internat-Dev.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/RACIAL-JUSTICE-Seeking-Liberation.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/Racial-and-Economic-Justice-Statement-1975.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/REDISTRIBUTING-TAX-REBATES-TO-THE-POOR.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/tar-creek-superfund-final.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/Report-and-Issue-Statement-on-World-Hunger.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/Resolution-on-Mindful-and-Faithful-Eating.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/pdf/gs29-6.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/global-food-crisis.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/TO-EXPLORE-THE-IMPLICATIONS-OF-OUR-DIETARY-CHOICES.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/THE-UNITED-CHURCH-OF-CHRIST-THIRTY-YEARS-OF-FAITHFUL-ACCOMPANIMENT-WITH-FARM-WORKERS.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Fretheim, Terence. *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 1, p 346.

<sup>28</sup> See especially: Obery Hendricks, *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted*. Doubleday, 2006, and Walter Brueggemann, *Tenacious Solidarity: Biblical Provocations on Race, Religion, Climate, and the Economy*. Fortress Press, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> *Thinking and Eating at the Same Time*. Sistas Vegan: black female vegans speak on food, identity, health and society. A. Breeze Harper, ed. 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Michigan Journal of Environmental and Administrative Law. [t.ly/6zzg](https://t.ly/6zzg).

<sup>31</sup> US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, [t.ly/lALb](https://t.ly/lALb) and [t.ly/KF5U](https://t.ly/KF5U).

<sup>32</sup> [t.ly/Tc3U](https://t.ly/Tc3U)

<sup>33</sup> US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, [t.ly/lALb](https://t.ly/lALb) and [t.ly/KF5U](https://t.ly/KF5U).

<sup>34</sup> [t.ly/Z5FW](https://t.ly/Z5FW); [t.ly/nBNi](https://t.ly/nBNi).

35 [t.ly/sz8I](https://t.ly/sz8I)

36 [t.ly/u8LS](https://t.ly/u8LS)

37 animalaid.org.uk, citing various health and medical related sources.

38 [t.ly/bwI2](https://t.ly/bwI2)

39 [t.ly/PLvp](https://t.ly/PLvp). See also [t.ly/lptr](https://t.ly/lptr); [t.ly/q6a4](https://t.ly/q6a4); [t.ly/3bVr](https://t.ly/3bVr).

40 Resolutions ratified by the NAACP National Board of Directors at its October 2019 Board of Directors Meeting, p 55. [t.ly/vGqI](https://t.ly/vGqI).

41 See EPA report at [t.ly/\\_OzF](https://t.ly/_OzF)

42 Dr. H. Kim Lyerly, at [t.ly/fJm6](https://t.ly/fJm6); See also [t.ly/g2bl](https://t.ly/g2bl).

43 [t.ly/4AkH](https://t.ly/4AkH)

44 <https://www.fao.org/3/t0279e/T0279E04.htm>

45 [t.ly/rt83](https://t.ly/rt83), [t.ly/1CMK](https://t.ly/1CMK), [t.ly/a4H2](https://t.ly/a4H2)

46 [t.ly/Tc3U](https://t.ly/Tc3U)

47 US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, [t.ly/lALb](https://t.ly/lALb) and [t.ly/KF5U](https://t.ly/KF5U).

48 Center for Economic Policy and Research, [t.ly/pUFE](https://t.ly/pUFE)

49 [t.ly/sz8I](https://t.ly/sz8I)

50 [t.ly/b22W](https://t.ly/b22W)

51 [t.ly/u8LS](https://t.ly/u8LS)

52 [t.ly/bwI2](https://t.ly/bwI2)

53 [t.ly/PLvp](https://t.ly/PLvp). See also [t.ly/lptr](https://t.ly/lptr); [t.ly/q6a4](https://t.ly/q6a4); [t.ly/3bVr](https://t.ly/3bVr).

54 Resolutions ratified by the NAACP National Board of Directors at its October 2019 Board of Directors Meeting, p 55. [t.ly/vGqI](https://t.ly/vGqI).

55 Boston Children's Hospital. [t.ly/ysP9](https://t.ly/ysP9)

56 Dr. H. Kim Lyerly, at [t.ly/fJm6](https://t.ly/fJm6); See also [t.ly/g2bl](https://t.ly/g2bl).

57 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7256495/>

58 <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2015/11/changing-climate-changing-diets-pathways-lower-meat-consumption>

<sup>59</sup> <https://tenderly.medium.com/the-exploitation-of-factory-farms-doesnt-stop-at-animals-f40243c44a03>

<sup>60</sup> “Emissions of Greenhouse Gases in the United States.” U.S. Energy Information Administration. March 31, 2011. Cited by [cowspiracy.com/facts](http://cowspiracy.com/facts).

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.fao.org/3/a0701e/a0701e04.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.fao.org/3/a0701e/a0701e05.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.fao.org/3/a0701e/a0701e07.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> <https://mercyforanimals.org/blog/tyson-foods-averages-one-human-amputee-per/>

<sup>65</sup> [t.ly/qdhm](https://t.ly/qdhm)

<sup>66</sup> <https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/removing-meat-subsidy-our-cognitive-dissonance-around-animal-agriculture#5>

<sup>67</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/pdf/GS31-Minutes-Final.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/AFFIRMING-GOVERNMENT-S-ROLE-TO-PROTECT-THE-COMMON-GOOD.pdf>

<sup>69</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/accra-confession.pdf>

<sup>70</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/economic-justice.pdf>

<sup>71</sup> <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/ANOTHER-WORLD-IS-POSSIBLE.pdf>

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- 84 <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/RACIAL-JUSTICE-Seeking-Liberation.pdf>
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- 90 <https://new.uccfiles.com/pdf/gs29-6.pdf>
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- 92 <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/TO-EXPLORE-THE-IMPLICATIONS-OF-OUR-DIETARY-CHOICES.pdf>
- 93 <https://new.uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/THE-UNITED-CHURCH-OF-CHRIST-THIRTY-YEARS-OF-FAITHFUL-ACCOMPANIMENT-WITH-FARM-WORKERS.pdf>