

Interview with Jack Norris, President and Co-founder of Vegan Outreach



Jack Norris is the president and co-founder of Vegan Outreach, an organization that works tirelessly to create a compassionate culture and promote animal rights. However, Jack isn't just an animal rights leader, he is also a Registered Dietician and vegan health expert!- Chef Jason

I imagine like most of us, you didn't start out involved in animal rights and you didn't start out vegan. What made you aware of these issues and what brought you to them?

In 1986, I had an unpleasant fishing experience which made me wonder why humans thought it was okay to treat animals in ways we would never think of treating other humans. The next year I found out about factory farming through the PeTA benefit record album, Animal Liberation. About a year later, I had transitioned to being vegan.

Please give our readers a synopsis of Vegan Outreach and its mission.

Vegan Outreach produces booklets that describe factory farming and slaughterhouse conditions and how to change one's diet so as not to support such businesses. We are most well-known for the booklet, Why Vegan, although Even If You Like Meat is now our most distributed brochure.

Hundreds of people leaflet for us throughout North America, focusing a lot of attention on college students through our Adopt A College program. During this current school year, our leafleters have handed brochures to over 700,000 students. Many recipients tell us that they changed their diets after reading the booklet.

What led you to co-founding Vegan Outreach and how did you go about it?

In 1990, Matt Ball and I were doing local animal rights advocacy in Cincinnati, OH. We had similar views on tactics for achieving animal liberation and decided that spreading veganism was critical. In 1993, we formally started an organization which changed its name to Vegan Outreach in 1994. It wasn't until about 2000 that we finally had what we believe to be an extremely effective brochure for getting people to change their habits. For our first 10 years, we had a very meager budget. Recently, we have raised more money and our distribution has really exploded.

What did you do before Vegan Outreach professionally?

I basically did animal rights advocacy right out of college and only had temporary and part-time jobs to pay the bills.

Do you have a personal philosophy that you try to follow?

When hungry, eat. When tired, sleep. ☺

I can't say that I do, which might be odd for someone with a philosophy degree. I believe that when making ethical decisions, intensity of pain should be the primary consideration.

What do you find has been your most successful method for reaching out to people?

Handing out brochures on college campuses inevitably leads to better results than anything else I know. If you want to immediately increase in the number of vegetarians in the world, go hand out 100 or so brochures to college or high school students.

I imagine you have a lot of touching stories from your work. What is one that really stands out for you?

What touches me the most is how our leafleters stand out in rain, snow, or extremely hot weather day after day handing out our brochures because if they don't do it, no one will. Among them are:

- Joe Espinosa changed his work schedule so that he works on Saturdays in order to get one day a week to leaflet. He often gets up in the wee hours of the morning to drive a few hours from his Chicago home to the bigger schools in Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

- Stewart Solomon is a teacher with a wife and three kids. Yet he hands out brochures to over 25,000 students every semester. This week, he is taking his spring break to leaflet a college every day.

- Casey Constable realized that a lot of schools in Florida weren't going to be leafleted this semester so he took a week off work to drive from Houston to Florida and back, leafleting one or

more schools every day.

And then there are the people who donate large portions of their income to Vegan Outreach in order to make this work happen, sparing animals from factory farms.

What advice do you have for people who want to become active in helping to alleviate the suffering of other creatures?

I would say that supporting Vegan Outreach either with time and/or money is a very effective way to help alleviate suffering. Every person who changes their eating habits spares animals from suffering. You can get involved at VeganOutreach.org.

What led you to branch out from animal advocacy to health advocacy?

When out leafleting during the mid-90s, I was coming across too many people who said they were no longer veg because of their health. I decided that we needed to understand this problem, so I went back to school to become a Registered Dietitian.

You aren't just an advocate for compassionate living. You're also an advocate for vegan health. What do you find are the key health points pertaining to a vegan diet?

Vegans need to make sure they have a reliable source of vitamin B12, vitamin D, iodine, calcium, and omega-3 fatty acids. More info on each of these is available at VeganHealth.org. But if I had to guess (unfortunately there is no research on the subject) the biggest causes of people going back to eating meat are iron deficiency (especially in premenopausal women), and intolerances or allergies to soy and wheat.

For iron deficiency, an iron supplement should take care of the problem in most cases (you should speak to a health professional for dosages). I recommend taking one with ascorbic acid (also known as vitamin C).

For soy and wheat issues, there is a good book called Food Allergy Survival Guide by Melina, Stepaniak, and Aronson. The authors are vegan. You can order it on-line or through bookstores.

What has been your greatest success in this area?

Although I still come across vegans who aren't aware of the need to take vitamin B12, the vegan community takes the issue a lot more seriously than it did during the 1990s.

What current projects are you working on that you are most excited about?

I'm excited about expanding our Adopt A College program. Thanks to generous donors, we continue to be able to hire more activists to leaflet colleges on a full or part-time basis. This is how the program has expanded in terms of numbers of students handed booklets:

School year 03-04 – 81,779
School year 04-05 – 207,814
School year 05-06 – 366,922
School year 06-07 – 687,280
School year 07-08 – 734,248 (as of April 9)

With 16 million students in college, we soon hope to be reaching millions per year.

What is your favorite food, the one that drives you to jump up and shout, “Yes!”?

Cream of potato soup is a food that bypasses my satiety signals. I once ordered 4 bowls of it at a restaurant.

Not being an avid cook, I imagine you go for the simple stuff at home. What do you find preparing for yourself when you’re not eating out?

I'm a big fan of good 'ole spaghetti and tomato sauce. I have oatmeal with fresh fruit for most breakfasts and veggie burgers for most lunches.

If there is anything we didn’t talk about that you would like to cover, please take this opportunity to write about it!

You can stay on top of all of Vegan Outreach's activities through our weekly eNewsletter. Sign up at VeganOutreach.org (click the newsletter box in the right sidebar). This is where we post our latest activities, vegan news, and any new vegan health information.

Thanks Jack!

*Jack Norris co-founded [Vegan Outreach](#) in 1993 and is currently the President. Vegan Outreach produces the [booklets](#) *Why Vegan, Even If You Like Meat*, *Compassionate Choices*, and *Guide to Cruelty-Free Eating*, and has distributed over 7 million copies to date. Jack runs Vegan Outreach's [Adopt A College](#) program which has directly handed a Vegan Outreach brochure to over two million students since it started in the Fall of 2003.*

Jack is a Registered Dietitian. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Nutrition and Dietetics from Life University (Marietta, GA) in 2000 and performed a Dietetic internship at Georgia State University in 2000-2001. He was an American Council on Exercise certified personal trainer from 1994-1996.

Jack is the author of [Vitamin B12: Are You Getting It?](#) and [Staying Healthy On Plant-Based Diets](#). His nutrition articles can be found on [VeganHealth.org](#) and [JackNorrisRd.com](#). In 2005, Jack was elected to the Animal Rights Hall of Fame.

