

Lies, damn lies, and statistics*

From [There's an Elephant in the Room](#) blog

March 2021

February is the month that FAO (The Food and Agriculture Organization, a specialised agency of the United Nations) publishes the [annual global statistics](#) of the number of land-based individuals [slaughtered](#) in the latest statistical year, which is currently 2019. This is the fourth year that I've looked at these figures and blogged about them.

SPECIES	2018	2019	Difference
others	90,543	0	90,543
ass	2,622,294	1,958,602	663,692
other birds	52,327,000	46,216,000	6,111,000
buffalo	27,798,474	27,692,388	106,086
camel	2,540,635	2,991,287	450,652
cattle	302,150,268	324,518,029	22,367,761
chicken	68,794,452,000	72,118,779,000	3,324,327,000
duck	2,989,099,000	3,311,899,000	322,800,000
game	595,998	0	595,998
goat	479,137,284	502,808,495	23,671,211
goose and guinea fowl	691,324,000	723,648,000	32,324,000
horse	5,045,483	4,940,693	104,790
mule	281,819	290,266	8,447
other camelids	961,919	967,656	5,737
other rodents	71,316,000	70,977,000	339,000
pig	1,484,492,843	1,316,765,380	167,727,463
rabbit	921,895,000	925,628,000	3,733,000
sheep	573,806,842	602,319,130	28,512,288
turkey	656,309,000	635,955,000	20,354,000
			0
Total slaughtered	77,056,246,402	80,618,353,926	3,562,107,524
Global population	7,700,000,000	7,800,000,000	
Land based individuals slaughtered per head of population	10.01	10.34	Increase

First of all I'd like to express gratitude to my friend, committed activist [Markus Bøhning](#) whose many vegan projects include tierrechtsaktivistenbuendnis. This year, he was the one who crunched the numbers from FAOSTAT's raw data, examining the statistics back to when they were first published in 1961. It's thanks to him that we're able to look confidently at patterns and trends from year to year. But before diving into what the latest numbers tell us, context is vital; there are several things that need to be said.

Those who have read my blogs in the past will have observed a sense of increasing urgency, summed up in my ['statistics' blog](#) of March 2019;

‘Make no mistake. We are now in the midst of the fight of our lives; the fight for THEIR lives, and the fight for the [very existence of our living world](#). We [no longer](#) have options. Anyone who tells us differently, has [a vested interest in lying to us](#).’

So where do we hope we are now?

If you’re reading this I’d like to start by asking you a question. I’m not expecting – or even wanting – an answer, but whatever it is just hold the thought in your head once you reach a conclusion. Okay. Here we go. One question, two parts:

*Q – a) Judging by what you hear and see and read on social and mainstream media, and taking into account advertising, publicity and the availability of plant-based and/or ‘vegan’ options in shops, restaurants, stores and manufacturers, do **you** think that plant-based consumption /veganism is on the rise?*

*b) If you **do** think it’s on the rise, and if like many you think it’s taking off in a big way, what would be your conclusion about the consequent impact on nonvegan animal use and exploitation?*

It’s an interesting question, isn’t it? You may think it’s a no-brainer and I’m going to help out a bit here. Here’s what I would answer if I wasn’t so determined to look behind the hype. I’d say that plant based options are definitely on the up and up although not fast enough for my liking. However I’d also conclude that if that’s true, then logically the use and consumption of other animals should be either reducing or holding steady, taking into account the increasing human [population](#). And I’d be wrong.

Slaughter numbers per head of human population

Now take a look at the numbers – I’ve included a link to an Excel summary which is clearer. The first thing to notice is that slaughter numbers have INCREASED between 2018 and 2019 by over 3.5 BILLION. Now I’ve seen lots of patronising and even dismissive comments about the increase being accounted for by an increasing population. For this reason, a new number has been included with this summary that indicates the number slaughtered for *each member* of the human global population.

And that number is going UP.

Which means that all the feel-good hype about plant based diets is just wishful thinking until that number starts to fall.

It doesn’t require any particular insight to realise that on a finite planet this is unsustainable And for those who claim that breeding, eating and using our fellow animals to death is just what humans have always done, here’s a horrifying snippet of information. In 1961 when these records first began, that number was 2.70 per person. The number of defenceless creatures slaughtered per human has gone from 2.70 to 10.34 in 70 years. in terms of land use, species extinction, climate collapse, human health, [pandemics and zoonotic disease](#), antibiotic resistance, need I go on?

Chickens. It’s always chickens.

Here’s another thing the statistics tell me. The numbers of most individuals tend to fluctuate – some go up, some go down. But in keeping with last year where the bulk of the 2.2 billion increase on the previous year was accounted for by slaughtered chickens, we have the same pattern repeating itself here. Of the 3.5 billion overall increase, 3.3 billion of the victims are chickens.

The enormity of this outrage is impossible to express. It certainly should be rocking the boat of complacency, and the wishful thinking about the uptake of ‘plant-based options’; screaming out to all who will listen just exactly why we are in such dire peril from a predicted Avian Flu pandemic that could leave COVID19 looking gentle by comparison. Incidentally, millions of defenceless birds are currently being slaughtered as I write this, in what are predicted to be futile attempts to stem the jumping of the species barrier to humans, but I know – and if you’re paying attention, you know too – that it’s only a matter of time. We may already be out of time as a species.

The take-home message

It’s hard not to feel discouraged as I know only too well. The situation is clearly getting worse rather than better and the monstrous brutality of our species is accelerating.

One thing is for sure. We are fooling ourselves if we embrace the capitalist consumer extravaganza of plant-based options aimed at nonvegans as a solution to the demise of planet Earth. The statistics show that these are supplementing rather than replacing the use and slaughter of defenceless creatures.

I’ve written before about why it’s important to realise that [veganism isn’t a diet](#). The statistics emphasise that ‘eating plant based’ without a moral commitment to becoming vegan, to stopping all use of other species, is having no visible effect on the unfolding catastrophe.

We have to wake up and realise that our job as animal rights advocates is just being made a whole lot harder by a media circus spinning fantasies of a ‘vegan revolution’. The fact is that although more nonvegans may be supplementing their diets with plant-based products, veganism ISN’T on the rise, and we can’t even think of easing off. We owe it to the victims of nonveganism to promote veganism and absolutely nothing less.

It remains to be seen whether the impact of COVID19 upon humans will result in their finally realising that unless we change our ways radically, we truly are sunk. We can live in hope but I, for one, won’t be holding my breath until the statistics are released in 2022 and 2023.

Notes

NB

1 – The numbers above do not include numerous other groups including:

- [Marine creatures](#) – estimated deaths 2.7 trillion annually.
- [Male chicks](#) killed by the egg industry (which is currently celebrating an increase in consumption) – currently estimated at 7.4 to 8 billion annually;
- [Bees](#) in the honey industry;
- Silk worms;
- Frogs, snails and other amphibians;
- Insects such as crickets executed for ‘novelty’ and ‘alternative protein’ markets;
- Dogs, cats and other species slaughtered in ‘small establishments’, ‘backyards’ or slaughterhouses not contributing to FAOSTAT;
- [Wildlife dying from loss of habitat and climate change](#) caused by farming other species;
- [Laboratory test subjects](#).
- Members of all species who die before slaughter for a multitude of reasons including disease and injury, having been discarded by the slaughterhouse because only healthy animals are ‘fit’ for meat production. Depending on the species, this number may be up to 10% of the slaughter total – in this case over 8 billion more deaths than are recorded.

2 – *And that list is attributable mainly to the market for consumption. Numbers skyrocket once we add in those whom we victimise for other reasons, such as:*

- Individuals slaughtered for their [fur, fleece or skin](#);
- Trophy hunting;
- ‘Culling’ of indigenous creatures so the ‘farmed’ animal profits may be maximised;
- Deaths in the ‘entertainment’ industry;
- Deaths of individuals incarcerated in various establishments such as zoos, safari and water parks etc.

3 – *Please note that FAOSTAT’s statistics for each year are amended over the course of that year. That is why, for the purpose of this blog, the statistics used are those released in February rather than the amended (increased) numbers from the end of the statistical year.*

4 – *Just for interest, the following are the links to previous blogs on this subject*

[2020 re 2018 stats – Slaughter numbers jump by 2.2 billion](#)

[2019 re 2017 stats – Ending life as we know it – humanity on the edge of the abyss](#)

[2018 re 2016 stats – Statistics: a list of individual tragedies](#)

*The further I looked for the origin of the title phrase, the less sure I was of the attribution. I didn’t make it up but it seemed an appropriate title for this blog.