

## Could What You Put in Your Mouth Prevent the Next Pandemic?

By Zoe Weil, as posted on Psychology Today / Animal Emotions

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/becoming-solutionary/202004/could-what-you-put-in-your-mouth-prevent-the-next-pandemic?eml=>

April 24, 2020

COVID-19, the environment, and animal suffering point to the same conclusion.



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When the history of [COVID-19](#) is written, will we finally name our obsession with eating animals as the original sin that led to a catastrophe of such profound consequence?

Will we have learned from the lesson of the Wuhan “wet market” – where COVID-19 is thought to have [originated](#)– that cramming wild animals into meat markets is dangerous? Will we have added to that lesson the one about the H1N1 swine flu of 2009 that [originated](#) in an intensive pig confinement operation in North Carolina? Will we have also added both these lessons to the H5N1 bird flu lesson in 1997, in which yet another deadly disease evidently [originated](#) in animal farms? Will we have factored in the [tens of millions](#) of illnesses each year that come from bacteria-contaminated meat? And will we have finally concluded that confining billions of animals annually into potentially lethal [pandemic](#)- and bacteria-breeding grounds didn’t add up to anything good?

When we have carefully compared the number of people who died in the U.S. in April, 2020, not only from [COVID-19](#) but also from [heart disease](#), will we notice that the numbers were similar, but one disease – COVID-19 – led us to shutter our economy and spend trillions of tax dollars to prevent more deaths, while the other – heart disease, largely preventable through [reducing](#) or [eliminating](#) our excessive consumption of meat and dairy – had been exacerbated through tax-subsidized animal agribusiness?

Will we wonder why meat sales [surged](#) during the pandemic? Will we have mourned the employees in slaughterhouses who [died](#) after hundreds were infected in crowded, dangerous conditions that left no room for safe distancing, as well as mourned those who died after being exposed to these COVID-19-infected people?

Will we have also mourned the pigs themselves, the abuse of whom was so [torturous](#) that anyone treating a dog or cat the way we treat pigs (as well as lambs, cows, calves, chickens, and turkeys) would have been guilty of a [crime](#)?

When we remember the 50th anniversary of Earth Day that occurred during the pandemic, will we notice how little mention was made of our animal-based diets, which were [largely responsible](#) for rainforest destruction, water pollution, and aquifer depletion, as well as a huge contributor to climate change?

Will we still disdain vegans, who are so often [disliked](#) in our society?

Perhaps something different will have transpired by the time the pandemic history is written. Maybe we will have finally decided to change our food systems and dietary habits in order to protect ourselves from future pandemics and preventable diseases, as well as reduce the rate of runaway [global warming](#). Maybe we will have resolved to put an end to the animal cruelty that future generations will be utterly appalled by.

When our children ask us: “How could you have been so foolish, selfish, and cruel?” perhaps we’ll honestly admit that for too long we cared more about temporarily pleasing our tastebuds than about their future. And then we’ll quickly add that we finally changed our systems, and it turned out not to be so hard to do.

We’ll describe how even the biggest meat companies began producing plant-based proteins that tasted identical to animal flesh, while other companies produced [clean meat](#) by growing animal cells, obviating the slaughter of animals and the use of antibiotics in farming, which had caused antibiotic resistance that gravely threatened human health.

We’ll tell them that we finally transformed the political systems that had enabled animal agribusiness to influence legislation for so long, and we put an end to subsidizing the foods that were killing us and harming our planet.

We’ll point to the sustainable food systems we created that nourished billions of people safely, and which simultaneously helped protect other species’ habitats, stemmed the rate of extinction, and slowed the warming of the planet.

We’ll remind them of what, by then, they would already know well – that our educational system (the system underlying all others) had shifted to ensure that they learned [how to be solutionaries](#) who could bring their good minds and big hearts to bear on solving real-world problems in ways that enabled all life to thrive.

We’ll be able to tell our children that COVID-19 made us finally change what we put in our mouths to nourish ourselves, and our children will thank us.