

Research brief: Meat consumption affects N-use – and meat narratives affect Danish self-identity and society



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Summary

The Danish public is well-informed about the health and environmental issues caused by high levels of meat-consumption: and yet Danes average per capita among the biggest meat eaters in the world. Since narratives about meat have various and overlapping functions for individuals and society, strategies for reduction of meat-consumption must be tailored to each function.

Conclusions

- Dietary narratives enforce a concern for adequate protein levels in non-animal foods.
- Because men have a biological proclivity to hunting, meat is psychologically associated with maleness – and meat-consumption narratives are symbolically associated with masculinity.
- Daycare centers constitute the first society for Danish individuals, and the societal meat-consumption narratives that they practice become a life-style norm for young children – and for their future families.

Projects and Methods

1. 'The Meat Dogma Blogging Project': participants pledged to eat less or no meat for at least four weeks, and to write about their experiences. Research was qualitative: surveys, interviews, and journal analysis; and quantitative: measurements of decrease in nitrogen (N)-use resulting from reduction of meat-consumption. Our transdisciplinary data showed that completion of this self-challenge resulted in an increased awareness of diet and an incentive to eat less meat – but that the practice is too demanding to be effective on a large scale.
2. The 'Meaty Matters' Online Blog: entries on the Cork Environmental Forum website and Facebook page providing talking points for hundreds of viewers about the various aspects of the meat-consumption debate. The blog included an analysis and summary of journal entries from the Meat Dogma project and was launched as an example of online networking. A blog such as this can be used on the websites of all of the stakeholders in this issue.

3. Reduced-meat menus for the Ta'Fat daycare center: a four-week period of reduced-meat menus for approx. 100 children and 20 pedagogues. A taste samples day was held as a kick-off to launch the project and to invite parents to try our vegetarian substitutes together with their children. The research procedure was similar to that of the Meat Dogma Blogging Project. N-use data from the daycare center is being incorporated by Morten Graversgaard in his construction of a standard Danish N-footprint.



'Taste samples of dishes with less meat.'
Poster made by the pedagogues at the Ta'Fat daycare center in Horsens, DK



Sandy Andersen presenting taste samples to the fathers and mothers who have come to collect their children

Recommendations & Perspectives

- The concern for protein can best be eased by introducing a visible and readily understandable comparison of the protein levels found in meat dishes and in dishes with vegetarian alternatives. Events that promote alternatives to animal protein should provide clear protein level comparisons, as well as making meat substitutes attractive and accessible
- An association between meat and maleness can lead to an entrenched stance as meat-eater if the practitioner is confronted with moral arguments against this practice. While narratives of the masculinity of meat are formed within local societies, narratives of men as hunters are basic to all human beings, and must be respected in any meat-reduction dialogues. Addressing men in the role of family father is a more non-confrontational way of introducing healthy and environmental food alternatives into their dietary practices, and consequently those of their children.
- As the first society for Danish individuals, the daycare center is an effective base for the implementation of meat substitutions in the daily diet. Alternative dishes which become part of the dietary norm in Danish childcare institutions can potentially become a part of the dietary norm of the children's own families: currently, and in the future.

More information

Sandy Stiles Andersen (+ 45 28 43 00 01)
Department of Philosophy and History of Ideas,
Aarhus University
filsa@cas.au.dk

Morten Graversgaard
Department of Agroecology,
Aarhus University
morten.graversgaard@agro.au.dk