

WORLDWATCH FIRST-PERSON

Julia Tier: Reluctant Vegetarian

I love bologna. There was a time in my life when bologna constituted a significant portion of my diet. During this time, I also consumed more than my fair share of turkey sandwiches, bacon cheeseburgers (medium rare), and chicken calzones. At that stage of my dietary development, my affinity for meat was matched only by a suspicion of anything and everything green. It was with this penchant for pork and aversion to veggies that I began working at the Worldwatch Institute and simultaneously embarked on an unlikely and rather reluctant journey along the road to vegetarianism.

Before joining Worldwatch, I hadn't given much thought to factory farms, recombinant bovine growth hormone, or livestock-induced greenhouse gases. Like many carnivores, I avoided the mental connection between the food on my plate and the global meat industry that produced it. After a little over six

months at the Institute, which counts sustainable food and agriculture as one of its three



main program areas, I reluctantly realized that I had every reason to stop supporting animal agriculture. What I lacked was even the slightest desire to stop eating meat.

After devouring Worldwatch Senior Fellow Danielle Nierenberg's report *Happier Meals: Rethinking the Global Meat Industry*, my mind began churning with questions. How will I get enough protein if I stop eating meat? What will I eat on Thanksgiving? Will I need to take supplements?

Questions that seem silly now caused me a lot of worry at the time. I decided to start small. I set a goal to cut out all beef, pork, and chicken from my diet for one month. Along the way, something miraculous happened. I didn't miss it one bit. As a lazy eater, I had consistently been eating the same foods day in and day out, often pre-packaged and microwavable. Once these convenient standbys were no longer on the menu, however, I started to try new things and I soon discovered that I was rarely disappointed.

Foods I hadn't tried since childhood made an unlikely and triumphant comeback. I was utterly shocked to find that spinach is one of my favorite foods. I'm also crazy for lentils and simply cannot get enough hummus. I've learned how to cut a mango (not as easy as it sounds) and traded in my microwave for a pan and a spatula. While I still suffer from an acute culinary inferiority complex at times, I'm often pleasantly surprised at my own abilities. Those times when my meals come out a bit too salty, too soggy, or too charred, I'm encouraged by the fact that even these are more nutritious, more sustainable, and most importantly, more me. It's this dietary consciousness and connection to my food that was conspicuously missing from my old diet.

More than a year ago, I decided to eliminate meat from my diet to stop subsidizing an inhumane, unhealthy, and unsustainable food system. In the end, this turned out to be just one of the many benefits of the most rewarding lifestyle choice I've made to date. While there will always be a place in my heart for bologna, I can now say with conviction that I also love eggplant. And avocado, and zucchini, and sweet potatoes...

