



Shop & Save

Want to help the environment as well as protect animals? A thriving crop of eco- and veg-friendly businesses make low-impact living align with your ethics.

By Abigail Young

IT'S BEEN NEARLY FOUR YEARS SINCE AL Gore unleashed his inconvenient truth on the world, sparking a revival of environmental awareness dormant since the cause-crazy college kids of the '90s reverberated their mantra of "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle." To complement the shocking stats of the former vice president's documentary, the UN released a report saying what he refused to acknowledge: To really go green and save the planet, we must ditch the meat. The much referenced 2006 report held animal agriculture responsible for 18 percent of greenhouse gases, more than all modes of transportation combined, now a well known fact pointing to a veg lifestyle as the greenest move one can make. The Worldwatch Institute released a 2009 study that re-evaluated all animal agriculture, raising its impact to a whopping 51 percent. With more than half of harmful gases coming from the meat and dairy industries, it's clearer than ever that a vegan lifestyle is a must for any environmentalist. Gore himself finally admitted after years of avoiding the topic that yes, meat is harming more than the animals and consumers' health—it's destroying the planet.

"Being vegan has a major effect on the environment, so vegans are eco-friendly by default. However, it doesn't really work the other way around. I don't meet a lot of environmentalists that are vegetarian, which is surprising ... [but] there are a lot of vegans who could stand to take more eco-friendly measures," says blogger and activist Whitney Lauritsen of Eco-Vegan Gal. Her blog follows the intersection of the two movements, providing simple ways to step up your game, whichever side you tend to identify with.

Fashion's Friendly Side

So maybe you've taken the green step and gone veg, or perhaps you've been plant-based for years. Either way, veganism has hit its stride with a blossoming market of all-veg businesses that take "cruelty-free" to a higher level. With the obvious overlap of veganism and environmentalism, it's a logical progression for companies to adopt eco-friendly initiatives to complement their animal-free foundation. "I believe in the whole goodness—good to the animals, the earth, and the people, and in each decision I make, these are on my mind as to how I can take a step further for the industry," says Leanne Mai-ly Hilgart, founder of fashion label Vaute Couture.

The 27-year-old entrepreneur launched her

Chicago-based label in 2008, filling the need for warm, resilient winter coats with designer appeal. In addition to high-quality vegan apparel, Hilgart makes a point to adopt as many green practices as she can. Manufactured locally in Chicago, her coats are the result of eight months of fabric research, yielding the best eco choices available, using 100-percent recycled and recyclable liners, recycled shells, and even eco-friendly buttons. Hilgart also utilized the potential waste from research. "I had so many beautiful leftover fabrics that we created a couture collection hand-painted by a young Japanese artist and showed it at the Museum of Contemporary Art," says Hilgart.

What's your top piece of green advice?

...✦ **Inder Bedi, Matt & Nat:** Reduce the amount of garbage you throw out every week. Recycle, compost, and aim for waste-free homes as much as possible.

...✦ **Jen DeMaria, Deer Run B&B:** Become educated about issues locally and globally, then get involved in some way to make the world a better place for everyone and everything on it.

...✦ **Dan Korman, Park+Vine:** Going vegan is the quickest and easiest way to go green. Reducing—or even eliminating—car trips would be the next quickest.

...✦ **Elizabeth Olsen, OlsenHaus:** Educate and invite without pretense. Find the way that relates to friends, family, and strangers, introducing them to veganism in a non-confrontational, non-judging way.

While many "accidentally vegan" fabrics and fashions can be found, Hilgart and a talented crop of designers are making it their mission to weave in sustainability. Inder Bedi focuses on his line of coveted handbags, Matt & Nat, while Elizabeth Olsen, designer and founder of OlsenHaus, reinvents the look of earth-friendly shoes. Bedi does his part to counteract American's water bottle habit by creating bag liners from the recycled waste and is searching for more ways to incorporate recycled goods into handbags and an upcoming line of jewelry. Olsen also utilizes

creative recycled components, including discarded television screen film. Taken directly from factory waste piles, the film is transformed into an ultra-suede type material. "For the shoes, it is laborious and expensive, but really what I feel is the height of creativity right now," says Olsen.

In the veg fashion world, it's not just about the latest trends and looking good—all three designers lead vegan lifestyles and incorporate their principles into every area of their companies. Olsen's co-workers, models, and photographers are vegan, and every employee at Matt & Nat is required to follow Bedi's cruelty-free ethics at the head office. And of course, there are the no-brainer steps every business owner can take—using recycled paper and soy-based inks wherever possible, moving toward more electronic communication, and sourcing/producing as locally as possible.

Proving her commitment is more than marketing-driven "greenwashing," Hilgart's upcoming Chicago boutique will garner LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification, the US Green Building Council's rating system for eco-friendly establishments. Evaluated in six areas, successful LEED certification is a clear sign that a business has gone the extra mile to lower its impact. While going green is often equated with higher expenses—much like the myth of a plant-based diet—obtaining certification only costs two percent more upfront than conventional construction and promises a greater return over the life of the business.

Eco Outlets

When it comes to profits with a purpose, UK-based LUSH is proving that there's not only space in the market for ethical goods, but growing demand. The international cosmetic company produces 100-percent vegetarian products—74 percent are vegan—earning its place as a coveted boutique brand creating high-quality and green products. On the ethical side, LUSH adopts a strict no-animal-testing policy. In addition to never testing any finished products, the company carefully selects its sources for ingredients, requiring all business partners to sign a strict agreement to never participate in any animal tests.

On the green side, LUSH is constantly upgrading their cosmetics to be more earth-friendly. Approximately 60 percent of finished

CooltoBeKind

In every aspect of her chic fashion line, Vaute Couture, our cover girl Leanne Mai-ly Hilgart works to preserve the planet.

What's ahead for veg businesses?

I don't think any vegan company would purposefully not make their product eco. It's just a whole additional challenge. As we create more eco-conscious innovations and they become more affordable to adopt, I'm sure there will be more overlap.

Do you work with animal-protection groups?

Farm Sanctuary is my favorite place on earth, and I'm donating all net profits of our signature style, the pea dress coat "Vaute," there. I also love Mercy for Animals.

How will eco-veg movements fare in the future?

[Veganism] is not just a fringe concept anymore. Big brands like Victoria's Secret and Express Fashion are marketing a segment of their products as "vegan" or "cruelty-free" and associating that with being sexy and chic. Environmentalism has had some backlash, but it is on its way toward creating a new standard in how business is done.

What are your favorite eco-vegan brands?

Mainstream, I love Method. I would marry Method if I could. Niche, I just discovered Lagusta's chocolates—the rose-colored truffles are incredible.

← The El coat in blue (left) from native Chicagoan, Hilgart (below with Whitman).



products are packaging-free, a concept it pushes for whenever possible; think solid soaps, shampoos, and bubble bath. By switching to solid soaps instead of liquids packed in plastic, millions of bottles could be saved each year. Concerned about palm oil? This popular oil, prevalent in everything from soap base to processed foods, has been linked to rainforest destruction, resulting in the loss of not only crucial forests, but the habitat of indigenous people and endangered orangutans. "LUSH decided that the only responsible thing to do was to reformulate its products to no longer contain palm oil ... The switch to a palm-free soap base has meant that LUSH has reduced the amount of palm oil they use by 133,000 pounds each year," says Jen Graybeal, LUSH's regional media manager.

With many other popular cosmetic ingredients bringing their own sourcing concerns, such as shea butter from Ghana and endangered sandalwood from India, LUSH

“As consumers, we must all be proactive in the process, which includes taking time to investigate companies and their products.”

investigates its sources firsthand to ensure they're eco-friendly and in compliance with fair-trade practices. Add to that 100-percent post-consumer recycled packaging, company-wide green practices, ethical campaigns and charity work, and a "Green Helper" assigned to every LUSH retail store, and you have a truly eco-conscious operation. "We are honest with consumers and provide them with exactly what we promise: high quality and effective products made with the environment and animals in mind," says Graybeal.

While LUSH does have the power of a multi-national company to fuel its green fire, local vegan businesses aren't to be overshadowed. Deer Run Bed and Breakfast, an all-vegan destination in Big Pine Key, Fla., sports a stunning list of eco-vegan initiatives, including its pending LEED certification. With half of the guest rooms revamped with recycled fabrics, carpeting, and vintage furnishings, owners Jen DeMaria and Harry Appel are working with a LEED-accredited interior designer to complete the transformation.

Go-To Green

On the forefront of sustainable tourism, Deer Run's grocery list of green initiatives

includes organic vegan food (some grown on the grounds), linens, and cleaning products, cruelty-free toiletries, and rigorous composting, recycling, and rainwater-collecting programs. "Our track record is proving this is something consumers want and our planet needs, and why we believe we are paving the way for more places like us to enter the market. We are proving that sustainability as well as some profitability can co-exist," says DeMaria. Cincinnati's Park+Vine, an eco-convenience store, serves its community with the best veg products, local goods, and community-focused events. "There's still a disconnect between environmentalism and veganism. Most environmentalists I know are eating fast food and don't want to talk about the impact of their food choices. It's a matter of convenience," says owner Dan Korman. The store is home to events such as local wine tasting, eco-baby workshops, and animal-shelter fundraisers.

Across the country, another eco-veg powerhouse is still thriving after nearly 40 years. For Bob Goldberg and Paul Lewin, co-founders and owners of Follow Your Heart (FYH), the connection between planet and plate is an easy one. After starting Southern California's landmark veg café in 1970 as a small, seven-seat snack bar, Goldberg's vegetarian vision has grown to encompass a 7,000-square-foot store and café, seating more than 70 people and housing the best veg products for its loyal shoppers. Known to regulars and locals as "The Heart," FYH also creates and produces the popular product line by the same name. With vegan mainstays such as Vegan Gourmet cheese and Veganaise, Goldberg's master creation, FYH is responsible for some of the most long-standing vegan products. Behind the scenes, it gets better—every FYH product is created using nothing but bright, California sunshine.

Earth Island, FYH's manufacturing plant located just miles from the store, operates on 100-percent solar energy thanks to more than 700 panels decorating the roof. In addition to creating more than enough energy to power the facility, the panels provide crucial shade to the sun-drenched building, keeping

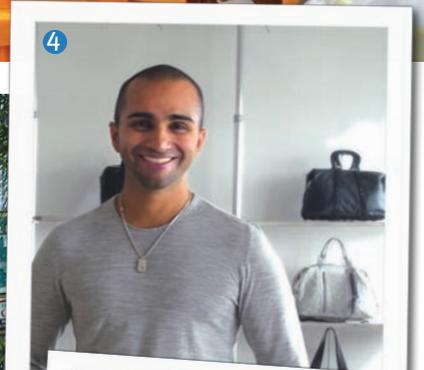
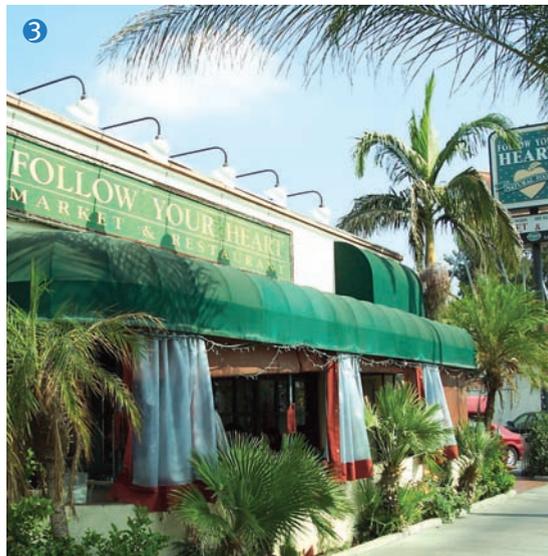


cooling costs lower than average. Inside this green machine, sustainability can be seen in everything, from the energy-efficient lighting and skylights, down to the recycled carpeting. With solar panels averaging a lifespan of 50 years, Goldberg and Lewin's investment is a smart, earth-savvy move.

With a smaller but expanding inventory, Park+Vine maintains its integrity by keeping a close eye on "greenwashing," a term used to describe companies or products that promote a green advertising message but less in the final product or service. It's easy for anyone to claim to be green, a label similar to "all natural" that carries no certification or weight on its own. And like diligently reading food labels in search of animal by-products, the eco parallel requires a bit of research to ensure consumers aren't getting duped. "We've had pretty good luck with avoiding greenwashing in our inventory, but it's still a lot of work. We've found that the smaller the vendor, the better. It's easier to negotiate terms and confirm authenticity," advises Korman.

DeMaria and Appel have fallen victim to greenwashing in the tourism business and now take a more stringent approach to research. "We have found many small, relatively meaningless alleged 'certifications' of products, ranging from foodstuffs to bedding and more. As consumers, we must all be proactive in the process, which includes taking time to investigate companies and their products," DeMaria says.

While the conscientious consumer requires a little footwork to guarantee ethical and eco-friendly products, there's an upside to the money-driven greenwashing that's sweeping the market. "Though I rarely shop at big supermarkets or retail stores, I think they've made green products very accessible and affordable, and that's a start," says Lauritsen. "Regardless, I prefer to support



Dreaming of a better future? Eco-veg is a reality at Deer Run B&B (1), LUSH stores worldwide (2), and at sunny FYH in California (3). Inder Bedi (4) and Elizabeth Olsen (5) set earth-friendly trends.

small business with the environment at the forefront of their mission."

Graybeal agrees that "it brings attention to the important environmental issues that would otherwise go unnoticed, like in the past. It's just unfortunate that some companies are taking advantage of consumers by claiming to be something they are not." Like with most successful markets, the push for earth-friendly goods is bound to produce less-than-honest results. But business owners have proven there's a thriving crop

of vegan- and planet-friendly companies to serve a growing community. "Over the next five years, we will see more demand for, and more transparency in, business practices," predicts Olsen. With the growing demand for sustainable businesses and as the vegan and environmental movements continue to merge, a reliable, honest supply of cruelty-free companies is sure to follow. **VN**

Associate Editor **Abigail Young** is pinching pennies for her first pair of OlsenHaus shoes.