

Americans are Eating Less and Less Meat Every Year. Why?

By
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The meat industry's future in recent years isn't exactly looking bright. And as meat demand wanes, Wall Street is watching. NASDAQ published an [article](#) headlined *How the 'Death of Meat' Could Impact Your Portfolio*. In it, analysts advise investors to "think twice about holding long positions in meat industry stocks," because "meat consumption has been steadily declining."

How did the fortune of this once-powerful industry begin to decline like this?

In 2007, the U.S. raised and killed 9.5 billion land animals for food—a statistic that had been steadily increasing each year for decades. Today, that number has plummeted by 400 million individual animals—to 9.1 billion. What that means is that compared to 2007, last year almost half a billion *fewer* animals were subjected to the torment of factory farming and industrial slaughter plants—and that's despite the increase in the U.S. population. While dropping from 9.5 to 9.1 billion may strike some as minor, that drop represents more animals than are experimented on, hunted, used in circuses, bred for puppy mills, and that end up in U.S. animal shelters each year—*combined*.

And that's just land animals. We're eating fewer fish, too. In 2013, *Nation's Restaurant News* [reported](#) on new data from the National Fisheries Institute. The takeaway: Americans decreased our per-capital seafood consumption by nearly 14 percent between 2006 and 2012.

What's particularly fascinating is that almost none of the decline in meat (and fish) consumption in the U.S. comes from a major increase in vegetarianism. The rate of vegetarianism in our country has remained at around 5 to 8 percent for years. But the reduction in meat consumption by people who aren't vegetarians but are cutting back on eating animal flesh—is what's really fueling this trend. In fact, a 2013 Mintel [study](#) found that while only about 22 million Americans consider themselves vegetarian, 113 million buy meat alternatives like Gardein, Tofurky, and Beyond Meat. In other words, the market for vegetarian meats is being largely driven by nonvegetarians.

Just why are more and more people opting to go meat-free more often?

According to Patty Johnson, global food analyst at Mintel: "Health trends motivating consumers to cut fat and cholesterol intake are by far the most dominant factors affecting the red meat market." Professor Robert Lawrence, director of the Center for a Livable Future at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, told [NPR](#) that his research agrees with this conclusion: "Health concerns still remain the No. 1 reason people might consider cutting back on meat."

Besides the desire to look and feel better, nonvegetarian consumers also cite the rising costs of beef and the environmental benefits as reasons for reducing their meat consumption. [?](#)

The results of lots of people eating a little less meat are staggering.

In fact, if you don't happen to read *Meat & Poultry* as often as I do, you may have missed this [great editorial](#) asking meat producers, "why doesn't [the] industry make meat analogs?" The writer notes that "meat analogs are evolving and tasting better than ever" and quotes a meat scientist talking about companies like Tofurky, counseling "don't fight them, join them."

And that's exactly what's happening. Food giant Kraft may own Oscar Mayer, but it also owns Boca Burgers. Kellogg owns Morningstar Farms. Meat-centric chains like Johnny Rockets and [Friendly's](#) now offer vegan burgers. [Walmart](#) promotes meat-free eating. Dollar Tree sells [Hampton Creek's](#) egg-free mayo (a product that once, in a distantly past era, might have been consigned solely to health food stores). Even Burger King—the *king of burgers*—is [promoting](#) Meatless Mondays.

The world is indeed shifting, and for the better. Whether people are choosing whole plant foods or meat substitutes over animal products, the overall trend is less animal slaughter and healthier Americans. Even pork giant Hormel recently bought another type of plant protein product: Skippy peanut butter. One benefit of

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this acquisition, according to [Meatingplace](#) is that
“activists are not using hidden cameras to scope out
peanut abuse by Hormel’s suppliers.”

Certainly not.