



**Ryan M. Katz-Rosene, Sarah J. Martin, eds.** *Green Meat? Sustaining Eaters, Animals, and the Planet.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020. Illustrations. 272 pp. \$27.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-228-00133-1.

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*Green Meat?* takes on a critically important and complex issue: whether meat can or should be part of a sustainable food system in a future clouded by climate change. Central to the debates laid out in this collection of essays are competing narratives about the meaning of sustainability and its relationship to the human-animal-environment nexus.

Experts concur: the current system and sheer magnitude of industrial meat production is not sustainable. Greenhouse gas emissions, land erosion, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, rising temperatures, and pollution are just a few markers of a climate crisis exacerbated by a global and growing desire for meat. Many point to a seemingly straightforward solution: we must reduce or eliminate meat and animal products from our collective diets to “save the planet.” Exciting innovations in plant-based and cultured meats abound, and Impossible Burgers and Beyond Meat have gone mainstream, so clearly this message is gaining traction. But is eschewing meat the only solution for living sustainably? Or, as several authors in *Green Meat?* posit, is it possible that meat could actually play a role in environmental and cultural restoration? Much of the book’s contribution lies in its ability to explore these issues in nuanced

ways while providing real-world examples of how we might turn theory into practice.

In *Green Meat?* editors Sarah J. Martin and Ryan M. Katz-Rosene challenge us to take a wide-lens view, to embrace a “vast array of competing truths” over simplistic and well-known arguments against meat eating (p. 1). Even the term “green meat” defies easy definition, but overall it refers to sustainable meat production and consumption practices. Martin and Katz-Rosene suggest that there are three possible pathways for the future of sustainable meat, to modernize, replace, or restore, and that is how they have structured the book. In a collection of nine essays by scholars and activists, *Green Meat?* thoughtfully approaches this layered, controversial topic from many angles. Several authors ultimately argue that it is indeed possible—even preferable in some ways—to reconnect meat production to natural ecological processes, consume meat sustainably, and ideally become “eco-carnivores,” “socially and environmentally conscious consumer[s] seeking to promote sustainable animal agriculture” (p. 12).

But how do we become eco-carnivores when ever-increasing amounts of industrialized meat—and the practices that accompany it—are being exported around the world? It is no coincidence that many of the globe’s top producers of beef, includ-

ing the United States and Australia, are settler-colonial societies. Colonists devastated the foodways of Indigenous peoples by taking their lands and establishing cattle ranching, and the national identities and economies of settler-colonial societies became intertwined with meat consumption. Still, as Shirley Thompson, Pepper Pritty, and Keshab Thapa discuss in chapter 6, Indigenous Americans continue to model resilience and sustainable meat consumption. The industrialization of meat culminated in the creation of Concentrated Animal Feedlot Operations (CAFOs), which take a massive toll on environmental and human health but are supported and protected by powerful meat lobbies, government subsidies, and aggressive marketing campaigns that link higher standards of living with meat consumption. Tony Weis notes in chapter 2, however, that “meatification,” or ever-increasing global meat consumption, creates *greater* food insecurity and inequity, not less (p. 31). But he also argues that this process is not inevitable and challenges us to reverse “the current trajectory of meat production and consumption [in order to] build more sustainable, equitable, and humane food systems” (p. 30).

One of the strongest themes in the book, and with which I wholeheartedly agree, is that our modern, meat-centric food system has alienated us from the animals we consume, the workers who process their meat, and the environment that has produced them, and this collective “ecological amnesia”—or our ability to forget our impact on the natural world—is at the heart of anthropogenic climate change.[1] This process of alienation from animals as food began in earnest with industrialization and commodification. As William Cronon wrote, “forgetfulness was among the least noticed and most important of [the meat industry’s] by-products.”[2] Several chapters in *Green Meat?* argue that meat production and consumption practices can actually breach this disconnect. Livestock animals “can be key partners in humanity’s effort to address climate change while supporting global food security and nutrition targets” through

holistic planned grazing and other practices, Katz-Rosene and Sheldon Frith argue, and Alexandra Kenefick, a vegan-turned-carnivore, maintains that the most responsible path is for consumers to embrace and respect animals by choosing their meats carefully and consuming normally wasted but highly nutritious animal parts (p. 55).

However, sustainable meat consumption depends on socioeconomic status and geographical location; it is a luxury afforded to few to consider where their food originates. And further, as *Green Meat?* admits, because meat is linked to culture and identity, it is unlikely to be replaced in our diets anytime soon, if ever. Still, issues of equity, access, and health are important considerations in the sustainability debate. Another underlying tension that connects all of these issues is animal rights. With its focus on the relationship between humans and the environment, *Green Meat?* largely sidesteps the ethical treatment of animals, which nonetheless remains the giant cow in the room. Animals are discussed primarily as a food source that affects ecosystems, not as sentient creatures deserving of consideration, but eating sustainably is at its core an ethical issue and one that requires deep engagement with the natural world and all its creatures.

*Green Meat?* provides compelling examples throughout of how meat can be sustainably produced and consumed, but as Abra Brynne discusses in the final chapter, how do we turn theory into practice in ways that slow climate change? Corporations and meat producers will continue to monitor profits and governments will support these companies. The real power lies with consumers and entrepreneurs, those advocating for change and working within existing structures to diversify the meat industry at all levels. Combining holistic grazing with industrial meat production and adding plant-based options at major fast food chains are two examples of changing attitudes and practices.

Meat will remain an integral part of humans' diets for the foreseeable future, and *Green Meat?* provides realistic yet hopeful analyses of how we can consume meat more sustainably. We will need to incorporate *all* of these ideas when it comes to creating a greener meatscape-modernization, replacement, and renewal; this is the most powerful takeaway from the collection.

#### Notes

[1]. Wade Davis, "Ecological Amnesia: Life without Wild Things," in *Memory*, ed. Philippe Tortell, Mark Turin, and Margot Young (Vancouver: Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, 2018), 21-30.

[2]. William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 256.

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