

Making Ripples

A Sustainable Smorgasbord of Turkeys

by Amanda Bancroft

Earlier in my life, turkey came in two forms: the edible bird I'd never seen alive before with large tail feathers and an entertaining gobbling noise, and the colorful construction paper variety.

But today, one is often confronted with decisions that go beyond how to cook. Will your turkey contain growth hormones, antibiotics, or factory farmed meat? Will it be organic, gluten-free, or from a local farmer? Will it contain meat at all, or be composed of mushroom, nuts or tofu?

Why would anyone want anything other than turkey in their turkey? For vegetarians and vegans, the main reason is to protect their health by avoiding growth hormones or antibiotics used in unsustainable animal agriculture, which can degrade soil and water quality and take more resources to produce. A plant-based diet has also been linked to longevity, since those from plant-based dietary cultures tend to live the longest and have the highest quality of life for seniors (Wikipedia, and other studies found in the book [Blue Zones](#)). 5% of Americans define their diet as “vegetarian” according to a 2012 Gallup Poll, 1 in 200 children avoid meat (Associated Press), and 22.8 million people eat “mostly vegetarian” (Vegetarianism in America). Does this mean we should give up turkey to save the planet and our health? Not really. Sustainability runs along a vast scale of choices, any of which are better than nothing.

There are plenty of ways to make your Thanksgiving feast a more sustainable indulgence, including eating organic meat. Here are a few options:

Turkey Type	How Sustainable is it?
Mary's Free-Range Turkeys	Free-range, vegetarian fed, gluten-free, no antibiotics, preservatives, or hormones. Raised in California (increases carbon footprint)
Local Turkeys (various farms)	Depending on the farm, local turkeys can be organic, free-range, and more, with other benefits including a small carbon footprint; local options may be raised unsustainably
Tofurky Roast	Vegan. Made of wheat protein and organic tofu, lower in calories and fat than turkey.
Quorn Turk'y Roast	Vegetarian. Made of mycoprotein, extracted from fungus grown in vats. Not vegan, but uses only free-range eggs
Homemade Vegan Roast	Vegan roast options abound online, with minimal impact on the planet. Health benefits when compared to meat. Uses mainly nuts

Whatever kind of turkey you're enjoying this Thanksgiving, don't forget those with no turkey at all – donate food to the Northwest Arkansas Food Bank, Full Circle Pantry at the University of Arkansas, or your local church soup kitchen. Fresh produce is especially in demand because many people give canned goods instead. Consider donating organic produce so that those who otherwise couldn't afford it can enjoy increased health from a diet that includes fewer chemicals and more fresh foods.

Ripples is a blog connecting people to resources on sustainable living while chronicling their off-grid journey and supporting the work of non-profit organizations. Read more on this topic and others at www.RipplesBlog.org