

Animal Tracts

Changing Lives One Leaflet at a Time

By Mark Hawthorne

It is two o'clock on a sunny Texas afternoon, and Jon Camp is pulling another stack of vegan leaflets from his bag. As students here at Sam Houston State University hustle to their next class, Jon greets each one within speaking distance. "Brochure to help animals?" he asks, proffering a pamphlet to a young woman hurrying past. She shifts the large book bag on her shoulder and quietly takes the literature, walking as she

out the organization's literature at college campuses. He estimates he distributes about 100,000 vegan leaflets a year.

Face Time

Getting our message out there often means face-to-face meetings with the public. The good news is this personal interaction is tremendously successful at affecting the hearts and minds of people, and this can be much more effective than advertising or

a busy spot, such as a concert or packed festival, can pass out 150 to 200 leaflets in an hour. In that same amount of time, a superb leafleter can pass out as many as 500 leaflets—about one leaflet every eight seconds. If you commit with a friend to hand out leaflets for an hour each week, you will reach about 30,000 people a year with the message of compassion for animals. All of these people's lives will have changed, and some of them will change their behavior.

While an activist can leaflet in support of any animal cause, from spreading the word about animal shelters to asking local residents not to visit the circus that's coming to town, leafleting in support of vegetarianism is probably the most popular tactic. That makes sense, because every person you convince to adopt a vegetarian (or vegan) diet saves about 100 animals a year and doubles your impact as a vegetarian. Think about that: Each person you sway to embrace vegetarianism is just as important to animals as your lifetime commitment to vegetarianism.

Vegan Outreach

One of the most active groups engaged in vegetarian and vegan leafleting is Vegan Outreach (veganoutreach.org). Activists Jack Norris and Matt Ball founded what would become Vegan Outreach in 1993 after discovering that handing out literature promoting veganism was a better use of their time than protesting or staging media events.

Among Vegan Outreach's programs is Adopt a College, which encourages volunteers to focus their leafleting efforts on a nearby college campus. This is the campaign Jon Camp works on, covering a lot of miles every year in support of animals. Clearly, not every person we leaflet is going to become vegan. So it makes sense to leaflet to those who will be the most receptive to the message of compassion that veganism offers. Young people, particularly college-age women, are more open to new ideas like veganism and thus are more inclined to embrace the vegan lifestyle. The learning atmosphere of a college, with students challenging old beliefs and embarking on new experiences, is ripe for positive, life-affirming changes. That's not to say you shouldn't hand out vegan



*Power leafleter Jon Camp at Slippery Rock University.
Photo by Matt Ball/Vegan Outreach*

looks at it. Then, a few paces beyond, she stops, turns on her heel and heads back. "This is horrible," she says, clearly upset by the information she's taken in about factory farming. "Yes, it is," responds Jon. "Most people have no clue how bad today's farmed animals have it." She asks for a few additional leaflets and thanks Jon for being on campus that day.

You're not likely to meet a more dedicated leafleter than Jon Camp, nor a more successful one. As an employee for Vegan Outreach, Jon travels the U.S., handing

legislation; after all, an ad can be ignored and a law repealed, but once someone is enlightened about the harrowing abuses that occur every day within factory farms, biomedical labs, circuses, puppy mills and more, it is unlikely that a compassionate human being could forget what they've learned. You might not convince someone overnight to give up eating meat or wearing leather, but on the other hand, you just might.

Leafleting is often described as a numbers game, working to influence as many people as possible. An average leafleter at

literature elsewhere—train stations, concerts, busy street corners, festivals, street fairs and other public places with high foot traffic are all great—but you’re unlikely to find a more effective location than a college campus.

“At the moment, I don’t think the animal protection movement is even reaching ten percent of college students,” says Erik Marcus, who uses his weekly podcast on *Vegan.com* to promote activism. “Given that leafleting requires no special background and is something that anyone can do, I can’t think of a better starting point for new activists who want to make a difference.”

Other Leafleting

Veganism isn’t the only topic your leafleting efforts can focus on. Fur, circuses, vivisection and companion animal issues are just a few additional animal rights concerns about which activists can educate the public by handing out literature. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals organizes at least one leafleting campaign every month, targeting a specific issue, such as “Kentucky Fried Cruelty” or its efforts to free the dogs and cats languishing in animal food test labs at Iams Company. Each one of these monthly campaigns results in the face-to-face distribution of about 30,000 leaflets, and as a whole, PETA’s activist network hands out millions of pieces of animal rights literature every year. Check it out at animalactivist.com.

In addition to handing out leaflets, you can also post them on bulletin boards in public areas such as apartment buildings, companion animal supply stores, laundry facilities, libraries, student unions, supermarkets and veterinary offices. Your leaflet will stand a better chance of staying in place if you can get permission before posting it in a public area. Often, vegan and vegetarian restaurants and health food stores will allow you to leave a small stack of pamphlets near the register or in a designated literature rack. Leaving stacks of leaflets out is a great idea because everyone who picks one up is actually interested in the topic—you’re reaching the lowest-hanging fruit, and with almost no time expenditure on your

part. If you leave some there, be sure to check back frequently and restock the supply—the leaflets go fast!

Getting Started

Although it is a very easy tactic, walking around handing out booklets to passersby can sometimes feel routine, and you may encounter a few rude people. As Jon points out, it’s important to remember how much good leafleting does for animals.

“In just a matter of an hour,” he says, “we can oftentimes reach hundreds of individuals with this information. Even if just one individual goes vegetarian out of this, we’re looking at approximately 100 birds and mammals spared a life of suffering per year. This is not including the number of people who will be more empathetic to farmed animal issues and such. In short, this is a highly effective and efficient use of time. So while it might be easy to dwell on the worst-case scenario, the likeliest of scenarios is always that leafleting will be relatively painless and that as a result, many more individuals will consider the animals’ plight.”

To emphasize his point, Jon likes to share his favorite example of how powerful vegan leafleting can be. About 15 years ago, Matt Ball—now executive director for Vegan Outreach, but then a student at the University of Illinois—was distributing vegan literature at his campus when he was approached by two men: a dairy farmer and a fellow student named Joe Espinosa. Rather than berating the dairy farmer for exploiting animals, Matt used a very respectful tone and discussed the positive aspects of veganism. Joe was so impressed by Matt’s civil approach that he got some information himself, went vegan and has gone on to hand out more than 100,000 booklets on behalf of Vegan Outreach and farmed animals. “So,” says Jon, “Matt’s decision to get out that day and speak up for the animals has yielded some enormous benefits!” ■

Mark Hawthorne is a contributing writer for Satya. This piece is excerpted from Striking at the Roots: A Practical Guide to Animal Activism (O Books), to be published in April 2008 (www.strikingattheroots.com).

Effective Leafleting

Paul Shapiro from the Humane Society of the United States shares a few leafleting tips:

- Always look professional and clean-cut. Activists have found that the general public is much more receptive if we look as mainstream as our message of compassion should be.
- While leafleting, try to be outgoing and friendly. A simple smile can have a dramatic effect on how people perceive you and serve as an encouraging invitation to take a brochure.
- Try to place the leaflet directly in front of the passing person’s stomach so it’s less effort for them to take the brochure from you if they so choose.
- If you have a conversation with someone, make sure to stay focused. Never lose sight of why you’re there: to expose the misery endured by farmed animals and to promote veganism as a solution.
- Be overly polite and make it easy for them to take the literature. When we refer to people as “ma’am” or “sir” and say “thank you” or “have a great day” to those who take literature, we are seen as polite, well-meaning individuals concerned about the issue, rather than “radical militants” whom the public is all too eager to dismiss.—*M.H.*