

# Visions of a vegetarian New Zealand

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A vegetarian New Zealand is seen as contradictory to our national identity but may create a kinder society, according to Victoria University of Wellington research.

Maddie Judge, who will graduate next week with a PhD in Psychology, examined mind-sets surrounding vegetarianism and veganism, including one study that asked participants to imagine a meat-free society in 2050.

A large proportion of those surveyed viewed this future as conflicting with our interests as an agricultural nation and inconsistent with New

Zealand's perceived [national identity](#).

The predicted negative outcomes include economic decline (due to the loss of animal-related industries), environmental degradation (as a result of an increase in animal populations) and a malnourished population (due to the perceived inadequacy of plant-based diets).

Although many viewed plant-based future societies negatively, Maddie was surprised by the large number of positive views that it would reduce dysfunction and increase warmth in society.

"People also referred to more individual changes as a result of widespread plant-based diets—seeing a utopian society where people are peaceful, caring and communal. It's quite interesting to see these variations."

The study also focused on the language used to describe vegetarians and [vegans](#) in social interaction, and attitudes toward non-meat eaters.

Maddie found that vegans who described their veganism as simply a 'personal choice' in online discussions were described in positive terms, but vegans who discussed moral reasons were portrayed as 'militant' or 'extreme'.

The research also found that women tended to be more positive towards vegetarians and vegans than men, and attitudes toward vegetarians tended to be more positive than those toward vegans.

"This might be due to the advocacy—often vegetarianism is framed in dietary terms, whereas veganism is framed more as something to do with values and a concern for nonhuman animals. This may make veganism a little more challenging to the dominant perspective," says Maddie.

The results of her research led Maddie to explore other ways New Zealand could promote positive messages for vegetarianism and veganism.

"Perhaps plant-based diets could be framed by emphasising the potential positive effects on society, and relating to Kiwis concerns for nature, animals and other humans."

Provided by Victoria University

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