



## Meatless? A Fresh Look at What You Eat

By Sarah Elton  
Illustrated by  
Julie McLaughlin

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### Grades

4–8

### Reading Levels

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### Curriculum Links

**Social Studies:**  
Politics; World Cultures  
and Societies; Environment;  
Conservation

**Science:**  
Nutrition; Human Body;  
Chemical Reactions

## Food for Thought

### *A Conversation with Author and Food Journalist Sarah Elton*

*Meatless? A Fresh Look at What You Eat* is a book for kids all about the food choices we make. The book explores the many different reasons behind our dietary choices: health, religion, animal rights, the environment, and more, and how these factors have changed over time. *Meatless?* empowers kids to make their own choice about eating meat, going vegetarian, or something in between.

SARAH ELTON is a food journalist and bestselling author of several books including *Locavore. Starting from Scratch* was her first book for children, and it was shortlisted for the Canadian Children's Book Centre's Norma Fleck Award as well as the Ontario Library Association Red Maple Award. Sarah was the food columnist on the CBC Radio show *Here and Now* for more than a decade, and her writing continues to be featured in newspapers and magazines. *Meatless?* is her second children's book. She lives in Toronto, Ontario.



**Q: Humans are eating more meat than ever before. At the same time, vegetarianism is taking off. How can that be?**

There have been big changes in food in North America over the last ten years. People are becoming more and more interested in what they eat. I'd even go as far to say that food is the zeitgeist of the last decade. As a food journalist, I've reported many stories that speak to this surge in interest. The love of meat is spreading quickly to countries like China and India, where people haven't traditionally eaten much meat—or any at all. At the same time, people are also thinking more about food and their health, as well as the health of the planet—and even how what they eat is connected to the lives of other beings, like animals. So we've seen the rise of not only vegetarianism but also veganism. And kids are aware of what's happening around them. They're listening to conversations and thinking about big issues, too. That's why I wanted to write a book for them: to include them in these larger conversations that we're having about food.

**Q: In the introduction to *Meatless?*, you let readers know you're not a vegetarian. How would you define what type of eater you are?**

I'm a very happy eater. I get a lot of pleasure out of eating and also cooking. I'm also very aware of how food connects me to the people who grow my food, to the animals that become my food, to nature that helps my food grow (the water! the pollinators! the soil!)—and to the planet. So I try to make the best food choices possible, keeping in mind all these links in the food chain.

**Q: The book begins with your personal story of killing a chicken, which profoundly affected you. What other influences inform your food choices?**

I'm concerned about climate change. I want my food choices to have the least impact on the planet as possible—it's really important to me. Farming animals uses a lot of natural resources, like water and land, and it can create a lot of pollution and greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. Making meatless food choices can help reduce these environmental effects.

**Q: Vegetarianism, veganism, and special diets in general are definitely current hot topics. Why do you think society's interests have shifted here?**

We live in a time when so many of us think a lot about our personal health. I'm working on a PhD in public health right now, and in academia, people are constantly talking about this. We discuss why so many people in North America spend so much time working on their own personal health, like eating healthy food, wearing a Fitbit to keep track of their steps, and going gluten free. The idea is that over the last few decades we've lowered our expectations of what the state—government—will do for us and society in general. Whereas people might have expected before that it was society's job to help keep us all healthy by doing things like passing laws stopping pollution, investing in public health, and so on, today we focus much more on our own responsibility to be healthy. Focusing on our own diets is an example of this.



**Q: Your first children's book, *Starting from Scratch*, was published in 2014. Both of your books address a wide range of topics all dealing with food. How was the writing process similar and different?**

I enjoy writing about big topics for young people. I have two kids of my own who are in elementary school, so I know very well just how much children can care about the world around them. They have so many questions about the way the world works, and it has been an honor for me to help provide young readers with some answers.

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**Q: *Meatless?* includes a section on family and friends and our food choices. How do you approach this at home with your two children? How do you encourage them to think about their choices?**

We talk a lot about where our food comes from. We always have. One of my daughters famously asked if the rabbit stew that my mom had cooked one Easter was, in fact, the Easter Bunny—and she wasn't upset about the prospect. It helps that my kids have grown up going to my parents' farm where they lovingly hand-feed the cattle that will one day become their dinner. One of my daughters did go through a period of time when she didn't want to eat beef because of this connection. We respected that choice. We want our kids to think about the food chain and how their choices might affect others.

**Q: Do you have any tips for trying new tastes and textures in meatless options, especially for picky eaters?**

Oh, picky eaters. I know all about picky eaters! Getting kids to try new foods is not easy—unless they want to try it. We have a saying in our house: “looks yucky, tastes yummy.” That sometimes helps. I find when my kids are involved in the cooking, they are more likely to want to eat the food. Otherwise, I always ask them to just have three bites. Sometimes they are surprised by how delicious the food actually is!

**Q: What are your favorite meatless meals, both to cook at home and to go out to eat?**

We eat a lot of tacos in our house, made with beans. Tofu is a favorite, too—we stir-fry it with vegetables, or eat it with noodles and with rice. And every week I make a pot of lentil or bean soup. We keep it in glass Mason jars in the fridge. My girls are welcome to eat the soup any time they are hungry.

**Q: Eating insects as food is an intriguing future option that you mention in the book. What other futuristic food trends or food technology do you see us heading towards?**

The food industry is rushing to figure out how to make vegetable protein taste like actual meat. So there are all sorts of wacky products being developed—like a veggie burger that bleeds reddish stuff that is supposed to look like blood from a rare hamburger. I'm also hopeful that people will choose more plant-based diets made from scratch, with fresh, simple ingredients. We don't need a food product for everything!

**Q: What is the most important message that you want a reader to come away from the book with?**

I think I'd like kids to know that it isn't just people today who have been thinking about what they eat. For thousands of years, human beings have been wondering about why they eat meat, whether they need to eat meat, and what it means to eat the flesh of another living thing. I loved learning about the history of vegetarians. I wish I could travel back in time and taste the food at the vegetarian feasts held by the ancient Indian emperor Ashoka the Great—instead, I'll just have to imagine.