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## EVEN OFFERS EDUCATION FOR VEGANS, NEW AND OLD

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After more than forty years as omnivores, Lin Silvan and Robert Jacobucci sought to change the way they eat.

**Story & Photos by [Adeline Bash](#)**

What you choose to eat impacts more than just your own body. It affects other humans, the health of the planet, and the non-human beings that we share it with. This is the message behind Lin Silvan and Robert Jacobucci's Eugene-based non-profit, the **Eugene Veg Education Network (EVEN)**, which works as a resource to help people see the impact of their food choices. Doing so, the couple hopes, will promote change.

"We always have to make the most compassionate choices when we are confronted with it," Silvan says, referencing Maya Angelou's quote, "When you know better you do better."

Almost every global issue, the couple says, leads back to our food choices. The central problem, Jacobucci adds, is that five percent of the world's population uses one third of its resources and produces half of its waste, making our food production system simply not sustainable.

"I realized that every meal I ate I was contributing to the problems. I was contributing to animal suffering. I was contributing to the degradation of the environment," Silvan says of changing her own diet at forty-one years old. At forty-nine, Jacobucci came to a similar conclusion.

"We could be selfish and greedy and let everybody else suffer or we can behave in a way that everybody can win," he says.

So it was after forty plus years of following the standard American diet of meat and potatoes that the pair made the change that they saw as the solution: Silvan and Jacobucci became vegans. Now in their sixties, the two have dedicated their retirement to opening up the minds of others and aiding them in making the same change.

## Breaking Away from the Herd

Two years after moving from Idaho to Eugene in 2003, the couple founded EVEN, based out of their small home office. EVEN is now an official 501(c)(3) non-profit. Silvan and Jacobucci reach the community mostly through [their website](#) and through tabling at events like Earth Day and the UO's Environmental Law Conference. The intent behind EVEN, the couple writes on their site, is to provide the community with information on the positive impact veganism has on the planet and its inhabitants. However, eating habits are hard to break.

People are conditioned their entire lives to eat what they are given without questioning it.

“You just follow the herd,” Jacobucci says. “You do what everybody else does. You eat what they eat. It seems right because that’s what everybody else does.” By the time we are old enough to make our own decisions about what to eat, it is often too late. “Out of twenty years of conditioning we form habits that many people cannot break for the rest of their lives,” he adds.

It’s a dilemma the Eugene couple can relate to. They spent years questioning the process of killing animals for food, but allowed “the power of habit,” as Silvan puts it, to control their eating choices. As such, the pair says they do not try to pressure or guilt people into changing.

“We just want to get the information out there,” Jacobucci says. As he explains, it’s not that people don’t want to do the right thing, but that they’re just misinformed and don’t see the big impact their decisions make.

Our food choices, for example, have a far greater impact on the health of the planet than any other decision we make, Silvan says.

According to a 2010 report by the [United Nations Environment Programme](#), more than half of the world’s crops are used to feed animals, not people. Animal products require more resources and create more greenhouse gas emissions than plant-based foods. Reducing the impact, the report concluded, would require a substantial worldwide shift away from such animal-based goods.

EVEN member and [Lane Community College](#) philosophy professor Dale Lugenbehl, who has been a vegetarian for thirty-seven years and a vegan for twenty-three, says many people don’t understand these statistics and what they translate to.

“There is a lot of suffering and death in the world basically because of taste preference,” he says. “It seems like a pretty trivial reason.” Eating animal products wastes food, Lugenbehl says simply. When resources are scarce, everyone suffers.

But big business, Silvan and Jacobucci say, has a vested interest in making sure people don't come to these types of realizations. Take for example the process of getting meat to the dinner table.

"If you ever take a look at what the animals endure during the slaughter process, that is something you will never forget and you'll never want to take another bite of meat," Silvan says. The slaughter, however, is not what people see. Instead, meat is neatly wrapped in cellophane and stocked at grocery stores so that "we don't connect that the animal did have a life before we allowed it to be slaughtered."

More importantly, the food industry is manipulating what we eat by, as Silvan and Jacobucci explain, economically limiting our choices (i.e. making fast food cheap through millions of dollars of subsidies), and by perpetuating the myth that meat and dairy is what Americans should be striving for.

Growing up, Jacobucci says, he played into the propaganda about meat and dairy. "I remember when I thought that if a meal didn't have meat I didn't think it was a meal," Jacobucci says, adding that he originally believed he would be making major sacrifices to his health if he changed to a plant-based diet.

"I didn't know at the time. I was thinking I would sacrifice five or ten years of my life because I didn't want to kill the animals," he says. Instead, he says, he found that a vegan lifestyle was actually better for his health; at sixty-nine years old he has not been diagnosed with any of the illnesses that often plague his age group and he uses no prescription drugs.

## Spreading the Veg

Silvan and Jacobucci attribute changing their eating habits to having the right information. Through EVEN they share that same information with the local community and beyond.

Fellow member Lugenbehl says although he was already a vegan when he joined EVEN, the organization has helped him connect with like-minded people. For people who haven't made the change yet, he says, EVEN helps by simply creating a possibility for a different lifestyle.

"When you're a vegan you're setting an example," he says. "The way you live is your message to the world."

In the end, Silvan says, people tend to react like she did to going veg. They're surprised to find that it's much simpler than they anticipated, and more fulfilling.

"You don't just not miss meat and dairy, in a week or two you begin to *thrive* without it. It makes you feel like you're leaving behind a contribution, a legacy. Making the world a little bit better," she says.

Though Silvan and Jacobucci's retirement savings are suffering as a result of it—they only have a few sponsors and funding remains mostly donation-based—the couple plans to continue outreach for as long as they can because someday, Silvan says, "we [will] look back on these barbaric practices and we'll cringe that we ever found it acceptable."

EVEN will be celebrating its six-year anniversary at 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 1, 2011 with a free event at the McNail-Riley House. The general public is welcome to attend.

- See more at:

<http://ethosmagonline.com/archives/10124#sthash.me5piqKy.dpuf>