Regenuary: the alternative to Veganuary wants you to only eat meat from sustainable sources instead

The idea behind Regenuary is not to champion a restrictive, plant-based diet, but to ask shoppers to commit to sourcing food more responsibly.
Most people will have heard of Veganuary by now – the campaign to persuade people still stuffed with turkey to eat only plant-based food in January.

But an alternative, lesser-known strategy known as Regenuary is building ample traction, too. Founders The Ethical Butcher received more than a million clicks on a social media post about the idea last year, and this year a substantial movement has emerged, backed by farmers, chefs and food suppliers, who see animal consumption as part of a sustainable future.

The idea behind Regenuary is not to champion a restrictive, plant-based diet, but to ask shoppers to commit to sourcing food more responsibly – considering the locality and seasonality of produce, and buying meat farmed using regenerative agriculture, a method that works with nature to help soil retain carbon emissions.
Glen Burrows, co-founder of The Ethical Butcher, is the man bringing modern farming into the mainstream, and his posts on New Year’s Day have been shared and liked by thousands. Now, a week in, he says that momentum is building: “Regenuary has had a lot of attention on social media. Instagram has really picked up.

**Sustainable meat**
Glen Burrows, left, came up with the idea (Photo: Glen Burrows)

"I was walking around London and seeing all these Veganuary posters from places like KFC, Subway, and Pizza Hut. These big companies are jumping on the bandwagon, but simply going ‘plant-based’ and seeing the issue in black and white is lacking in nuance.

"Big manufacturers are replacing factory-farmed meat with processed vegan food, which is not solving a problem, it’s shifting it somewhere else. Eating avocados on toast and drinking almond milk won’t save the world.

"These monoculture [single crop-growing] vegan products aren’t sustainable. It’s about being holistic rather than reductionist. Nature wants lots of things to grow."
Burrows has received plenty of support, but has also had death threats. “It’s clearly ruffled feathers,” he adds. “I’ve had death threats from vegans telling me to die of cancer and calling me a c***. I don’t think avoiding meat gives you the moral high ground.

“But the majority are open to discussion. I just think, what if everyone was more responsible for a month, buying less but better-quality meat, and really thought about the planet?”

**Vegan revolution still roaring**

The team at Veganuary soon became aware of the burgeoning trend. But the campaign’s Toni Vernelli said its focus remains on converting people to plant-based living. “Obviously I believe in some of what [Regenuary] is promoting – meat reduction. We can’t continue to consume animal products at the rate we are,” she says. “But I think some things are misleading. The local angle focuses on food miles, but most emissions come from the animals and their feed – that’s what harms the environment.”

Vegan stalwarts Peta are also holding firm. “The vegan revolution is roaring into the 2020s,” says a spokesman. “In the first week of January, we saw Krispy Kreme launch its first vegan doughnut and Asda open a vegan butcher counter. Celebrities including Paul McCartney, Alan Cumming and Lewis Hamilton have also spoken out to urge people to ditch meat and dairy to fight climate change and prevent another pandemic.”

At least one thing everyone can agree on is the danger of factory farms: the consensus is that if their existence persists, we may all be doomed.
“Factory farming is the problem,” says Harry Mayhew, the co-founder of Ember, which sells salamis and cured meats made using regeneratively produced meat.

“It doesn’t have to be complicated – regenerative agriculture is just about leaving nature in a better place, rather than destroying it through outdated farming techniques. And what’s exciting is that consumers are ready to listen. And the more people who subscribe to higher-quality meat, the more inclusive it will be, and the more affordable. We have that choice.”

‘It’s quality over quantity’
Regenuary: the alternative to Veganuary wants you to only eat meat from sustainable sources instead

Matt Chatfield supports eating less, higher quality meat (Photo: Matt Chatfield)

Matt Chatfield, a sheep farmer from Cornwall, has employed these modern methods for three years. He says that the more people understand how it works, the more likely it is to succeed.

"I think the campaign is a sign it's going mainstream," he says. "Maybe it's because farmers are starting to get considerable followings on social media. People really do want to know more.

"My family used to farm dairy farms in a monocultural way. The Government encouraged the use of fertilisers and it was wrong, it was misguided. Instead of planting one crop and leaving animals on grass alone, I let nature take its course. I don't cut hay for silage or use chemicals. I produce less but it costs less. It's quality over quantity."

Chatfield allows organic matter – plant material and organisms that feed on it – to thrive, and capture carbon in the atmosphere via photosynthesis.

It is a possible solution to greenhouse gases, hailed in some agricultural quarters but little talked about outside of them. After a week of Regenuary petitioning, that might, finally, change.

"By letting the likes of dung beetles do their work, it lets soil capture and hold carbon emissions," says Chatfield. "My fields are holding about 300 tons of carbon per hectare and rising now. It's how we can beat climate change."

Chantelle Nicholson, chef-patron at the sustainable restaurant All's Well in Hackney, says: "If the world went entirely plant-based, so many livelihoods and cultures would be lost. Instead, we all have to be conscious about the meat we eat."
“We source from ethical farms, and use less expensive cuts of meat such as lamb ribs and pork collar. Surely that’s the best way forward – balanced, realistic, supportive of economies and welfare.”