Exploring Veganism in Korea

LG GLOBAL CHALLENGER 25기
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We want to express our gratitude to the LG 사무국 team, whose care and attention on every step of our expedition was a great assurance of safety and support. In particular we want to express our deepest gratitude and utmost appreciation to the Jeong Tae Young (정태영) PD님 whose suggestions and guidance was invaluable to us in succeed to make the most out of our project.

To all the people and organizations we met on our journey – we sincerely thank you for sharing your thoughts and knowledge with us. Because of you we were able to broaden our horizons and understand our topic in depth. Every single one of you gave something valuable to us, and we could not have reached the results we did without you.
Originally, our team wanted to research a topic related to environmental issues, health and technological innovation. This is how we came up with the idea of researching veganism. However, during our research we came to understand that veganism on its own is more complex than we initially thought. One of our team members had the experience of being a vegetarian in Korea and thought that being a vegan seemed too challenging in this society. Others had vegan friends, who were experiencing some difficulties practicing their lifestyle. This realization gave us a specific direction on what we wanted to focus on: the reasons behind the hardships for vegans in Korean society and how to make the life for our friends easier.

Veganism is a global trend, and it is taking off in South Korea as well – the vegan population is on the growth. In the past, Korean food was vegan-friendly, but following recent economic growth it has become almost impossible to find vegan options in convenience stores or neighborhood restaurants. Being vegan in Korea is difficult if you do not have the money to eat in a vegan restaurant everyday, if you live in a neighborhood that does not have a vegan restaurant, if you do not have time to cook all of your meals or if taking part in after-work meals (회식) is a crucial part of your work. It can be frustrating when your only options are Kimbap and Bibimbap.

Celebrating traditional Korean food such as temple food (사찰 음식) and taking steps to create vegan options to those who want it, would restore the glory of healthy Korean food as well as make Korea a more inclusive society. Considering modern trends and globalization, Korea has no other choice than to transition into a country which will take diverse dietary habits as well as lifestyle choices into account. By speeding up the process, it will give not only help the formation of a happier society but also be economically beneficial to Korea.
About the Name

When we chose our team’s name: “비긴”, we thought it was a smart name as it is really close to the Korean way to write vegan: “비건” and the English word ‘begin’. Our half-serious logic here was, that we would begin the vegan revolution in Korea. However, what we found out during our expedition was that the revolution had already began – slowly but surely.
“Although I am not even a vegetarian, the increasingly severe environmental and human health problems have made me realize the importance of reducing meat consumption. In order to help myself and others around me, I can’t wait to learn more about veganism.”

Feng Kejie
- Nigbo, China
- Hanyang University, Mechanical Engineering
- Team Leader, Transportation (the Lone Driver)

"Even though I have always read and knew about veganism and its positive effects on our earth, I never took the time to actually invest in it. I think it is high time we stop being selfish and start thinking for our future generation. Through our challenge, I was finally able to motivate myself to start my vegan journey and will be forever grateful for it."

Saira Tahsin
- Dhaka, Bangladesh
- Hanyang University, Computer Software Engineering
- The Cameral(w)man, Graphics

“I transitioned to vegetarian diet while living in Korea, and prefer vegan diet. This made it possible for me to experience the hardships that occur in Korea if you try to eat plant-based. I hope and believe, that through this report we can help Korea to become more vegan-friendly country.”

Julia Bärlund
- Helsinki, Finland
- Hanyang University, Business Administration
- Communicator, Engine of the Team

“Being grown up in a family where my parents are practicing vegetarian for long time, vegetarianism had always been the subject of interest to research more for me. Even though my parents are vegetarian for religious reason, the impact that they have got in their health has been amazing. After being aware about impact that we create in the environment from the food that we eat, I got more curious and wanted to learn more!”

Nirmal Acharya
- Kathmandu, Nepal
- Hanyang University, Biomedical Engineering
- Life of the Party, Vlog filming
About the Report

This report is conducted on the basis of South Korean society. We only make references to other countries for comparison. The research was conducted mainly from the 20th of August, 2019 to the 30th of August, 2019, though we did additional research until the 4th of October. Thus, all of the information is based on our knowledge and resources available between these dates.

The report is made mostly by using qualitative research methods—one-to-one interviews being the main method. We did also do some quantitative research in order to get a general picture about where Korea stands in relation to veganism right now. Our team did not only hear about different experiences of several vegan people living in Korea, but we had the first-hand experience of challenging ourselves to live a vegan lifestyle during our expedition time. We believe, that this was a crucial part of our research, as it made us understand the real weight of the issue. In addition, we took part in several experiences related to veganism—from a Buddhist temple stay to making our own vegan cosmetics.

While conducting our research, we found out that the terminology of “vegetarian” and “vegan” has not been fully adopted in the Korean language yet. In our report, we start by differentiating these terms and hope everybody understands the difference while reading our report.

Furthermore, we will introduce veganism so that the readers will have the right basis in order to understand our main findings. After this, we will talk about the hardships and problems there are in Korean society regarding veganism and give our suggestions on how to solve these problems. We will also introduce business opportunities in the vegan market, in order to motivate more business establishments to take part in this growing movement and at the same time to build the infrastructure that is still lacking. Finally, we will look at the topic from the viewpoint of the Korean government.

This report will be helpful for vegans and non-vegans living in South Korea in understanding how we can improve society through embracing our differences and making practical changes. From starting entrepreneurs to big corporations, we believe that our report will give new ideas and a better understanding of a growing customer segment.
Purpose of This Research

We are going to spread awareness about veganism in order to encourage Korea to become a more vegan-friendly country. Instead of viewing "veganism" as a segregated lifestyle, the aim of our project is to incorporate it as a norm within Korean society.

Objective 1.
Understand the underlying reasons why people in South Korea have chosen to live as a vegan.

Objective 2.
Identify the areas in need of improvement regarding the lives of vegans in Korea.

Objective 3.
Find realistic solutions not only for individuals and businesses but also on a government level to improve the everyday lives of vegans in Korea and encourage everyone to consider the benefits of a vegan lifestyle.
Visited Places and People

**SEOUL**

**Korea Vegetarian Association**

We were able to understand the big picture of veganism in Korea as well as how Korea’s stance on veganism has changed in last 30 years.

**University of Seoul, Veggie Ssuk Ssuk**

We learnt about the state of veganism on university campus and what university students think about veganism. We also found out how student activism can change things!

**Softcity**

The CEO of Softcity went vegan due to some health issues. We wanted to hear about his personal experience and the affects of the dietary change.

**Jingwansa Temple**

In Jingwansa, we were able to learn about the relationship between Buddhism and veganism as well as how it has affected Korea in the long-run. We also discovered delicious temple food!

**Vegan Bakery Vege-ang**

From the young entrepreneur we were able to learn about the vegan market for baked goods as well as the hardships related to choosing to have a vegan business.

**Korea Vegan Nutrition Research Center**

We were able to learn about how nutrition effects us as well as how to get enough of all the nutrients needed on a vegan diet.
**Visited Places and People**

**DAEJON**
- **BBL House**: At BBL House we learnt about the vegan start-up scene as well as how vegan cosmetics differ and why cosmetics are also an important part of veganism.

**JEJU-DO**
- **Hanyang University**: We met with professor Mark Rublik to learn the importance of education about veganism in schools. We also wanted to know how we could get related classes to universities.
- **Monyeo’s Kitchen**: While the owner of Monyeo is a vegan, she also prepares food for non-vegans. We wanted to learn about the backstory of her restaurant.

**GANGWANG**
- **Vegan Gong-gam Community**: We participated in the monthly community meetings to learn about the importance of having the support of a like-minded community.
- **And You Cafe**: And You Cafe prepares western-style vegan food. The owner is also a passionate activist. We were able to learn about Jeju’s vegan culture.
- **Organic Farm Pohgae Cooperation Union**: As vegans are concerned about the environment, they prefer organic food. With the supplier’s standpoint in mind, we explored the organic farm.
- **Vegan Climate Action Network**: We learned about the impacts of the vegan diet on the environment as well as how organizations can affect the local government.
Part 1. Discovering Veganism
Vegetarianism? 
채식주의

Vegetarianism is a broad term, and there are many different kinds of vegetarians. Most vegetarians do not eat anything that requires the killing of an animal. This is what vegetarian means in everyday language. Semi-vegetarians might eat fish (pescetarian), or white meat, such as poultry (pollotarian). Flexitarian is a person who usually maintains a plant-based diet but will occasionally eat animal products.

Veganism? 
비건 채식주의

Veganism is also a form of vegetarianism, but it is the lifestyle of abstaining from the use of all animal products. Vegans do not consume any product or by-product that comes from animals, including milk, eggs and honey. Vegans avoid all animal-derived materials, (e.g. leather) as well as products tested on animals (e.g. cosmetics) or places that use animals as entertainment (e.g. zoos).

In order to understand veganism, it is necessary to understand that vegetarianism is a broad term which includes veganism - but something being vegetarian does not necessarily make it vegan.

Types of Diets and What They Eat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diet Type</th>
<th>Example Foods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vegan</td>
<td>Apple, Pea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacto Vegetarian</td>
<td>Milk, Cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ovo Vegetarian</td>
<td>Eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacto-ovo Vegetarian</td>
<td>Milk, Eggs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pesco Vegetarian</td>
<td>Fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollo-Pesco Vegetarian</td>
<td>Chicken, Fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexitarian</td>
<td>Eggs, Fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omnivore</td>
<td>Chicken, Fish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Veganism on a Global Scale

How Did the Vegan Movement Start?

Avoiding flesh in eating habits can be traced to as far back as ancient Greek – Pythagoras was the first person to use the term ‘Vegetarianism’ at around 500 BCE. Vegetarianism has been practiced for a long time, especially in Asia, as the followers of Mahayana Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism follow vegetarian diets. The term ‘Vegan’ was first introduced in 1944 by Donald Watson in Great Britain, as he wanted to differentiate the vegetarians, who do not eat dairy or eggs, from the vegetarians, who only restricted themselves from meat consumption. While he started ‘Vegan Society’ with only 25 subscribers, by the time Watson passed in 2005, there were 250,000 vegans in Britain alone. In the United States there were already 2 million self-identifying vegans at that time.

“The great need is for the movement to accept a logical and consistent objective to which all can aim, and then use its energies to make the realisation of the objective possible, easy, and safe.”

– Donald Watson, 1948

Source: HappyCow (https://www.happycow.net)
Veganism on a Global Scale

Growth of the Vegan Movement

In most parts of the developed world, the population of vegans has been growing exponentially in the recent years. Additionally, the attitudes of business and government sectors have been changing:

1. In the U.S. the people identifying as vegans grew **600% from 2014 to 2017**. According to GlobalData, the vegan percentage of the consumer population grew from **1% to 6% during this time**.

2. In Australia, **vegan food products rose by 92%** between 2014 and 2016 (Mintel Global New Products Database).

3. The government of Canada released a new food guide for the public in 2019, which **recommends plant-based proteins** primarily before animal-based proteins as well as water rather than milk as a beverage.

As demonstrated in this graph, we can see that interest in veganism started to grow noticeably in 2015. The peak in searches for “Vegan” in 2018 and 2019 are during January – that is the reason for the global campaign called ‘Veganuary’: a challenge to be vegan for the first month of the year. In 2019, 250 000 people worldwide signed up to the Veganuary movement and made effort to try the vegan lifestyle for a month.

Source: Google Trends (https://www.google.com/trends)
1. Internet – Easy Access to Information
As access to the internet has grown, access to diverse information outlets has become easier. Many consumers, who were not aware of problems concerning livestock industry, have decided to change their lifestyles after realizing the impacts of the industry. Many people have also found vegan-related answers to health related problems through search engines.

2. The Environmentally Conscious Youth
As concern for climate change and environmental issues (e.g. climate change, 6th mass extinction caused by human activity) has risen, the interest on sustainable eating habits has been also on the rise. Making environmentally friendly choices on a personal level is crucial in order to make changes for a more sustainable world. The reason for this is a change in consumer demands will result in the market changing to meet those demands. For example, as the vegan population has grown the vegan suppliers have also increased – even big meat-production companies like Tyson Foods have started their own plant-based lines. Many people believe, that next to recycling and reducing waste choosing to eat a plant-based diet is one of the easiest ways to make a positive impact on the environment.

Did You Know?
In Europe vegan is becoming the “new normal”. The basic dish is plant-based, and you can add animal products to it with extra charge – this would be the opposite to current state where vegan people have to take the extra step to get plant-based meals: which often results in getting less food and paying the same price.
Veganism in Global Scale

Reasons for the Sudden Interest

3. The Famous Leading the Way

- Brad Pitt
  Actor
  Animal & Environmental Activist
- Al Gore
  American Politician
  Environmentalist
- Venus Williams
  Tennis Sports Star
  Vegan for Health

Note this!

For varying reasons, global celebrities have gone vegan. This has raised awareness about veganism. Even when not fully vegan, many are promoting veganism as well as encouraging fans to reduce their meat consumption, mostly for environmental reasons.
Development of Food Culture in Korea

Snapshots of History

Pre-historic

In the myth of Dangun (당군), plants such as mugwort and garlic are mentioned to have been used in cooking. This indicates that Korea has a long history of using diverse methods to flavor food with plant-based resources.

Three Kingdoms Period

Traditional Korean cuisine has been around since the Three Kingdoms period. The practice of centering the meal around rice, as a main source of energy, and supplementing with farmed vegetables began. Hunted game animals were a main source of meat.

Goryeo Dynasty

Buddhism was the state religion in the Goryeo Dynasty. This influenced eating habits greatly: for example, eating beef was prohibited. A system of ethics surrounding food was introduced to Korea. Buddhism has had a great influence on Korea’s vegan culture.

Joseon Dynasty

New vegetables and crops were introduced to Korea from the ‘New World’ resulting in more variety in dishes. Koreans still relied on vegetables as a main food source. Beef was still prohibited by law, but in reality was widely enjoyed by the people who could afford it.

1900s

During the colonial period, rice was mostly sent to Japan, thus Koreans mainly ate cheaper grains. During the Korean war, Western culture influenced Korea a lot and cheap meats e.g. spam was introduced. Following the burst of economic growth starting from the 1970s, the consumption of animal products increased.
Economic Growth & Meat

From the graph, we can see the direct correlation of economic growth and beef consumption in South Korea. Commercial dairy and livestock production increased together with the influence of globalization and gaining economic strength. Living in modern Korean society, we can take note of the fact that meat used to be a luxury: now it is a commodity. In this era, it is hard to find food that does not include animal products in it.

Note this!
- Traditional Korean food used to be mainly vegan.
- The consumption of meat, especially pork, is a relatively recent phenomenon to the Korean diet.
- In Korean dishes that might seem plant-based, there is often ‘hidden’ animal products used in the preparation process.

South Korea’s economic growth shown as GDP per capita (current US$) together with the growth of beef production and consumption:

Current Status of Veganism in Korea

“In the Korean Vegetarian Union we estimate the vegetarian population in Korea to be 3% which equates to roughly 1.5 million people. People interested in vegetarianism is estimated to be as much as 30% of the population. There is no official data, thus it is hard to estimate how many of these people are fully vegan. Even though interest is on the rise, it is not easy to live as a vegan in Korea - the lack of infrastructure, information, as well as society’s negative perception makes it difficult.”

If there were more vegan products available, would you consider going vegan?

In the survey* we conducted on people living in Korea, we learned that participants were surprisingly interested in becoming vegan, if it was more convenient. This shows that society is opening up to the idea of veganism.

*Survey conducted by Begin Team (Survey, 2th September, 2019)

*Over 90% of the respondents were 20–30 years old students.
Why People Choose to Be Vegan?

In order to understand vegan people, we wanted to know why people decided to lead a vegan lifestyle. In particular, we were curious if there was an unified reason to go vegan specific to Korea.

Even with Korea’s collectivist cultural context, if people understood the reasons for different lifestyle choices it might be easier to accept them.

During our expedition, we distinguished 5 different main areas that were most prominent when making the decision to go vegan. We will focus on these factors next:

1. Environmental Impact
2. Health
3. Physical Appearance
4. Religion
5. Empathy for Animals
The reason I went vegan was because of the environment. I learnt about the process of raising livestock and how much crops are grown to feed them. **The Amazon rainforest being on fire is a real example of what kind of problems eating meat causes.** Many of the fires were set deliberately in order to create more pastureland as well as to grow more GMO crops to satisfy the needs of animal agriculture. So, **because of excessive animal agriculture, the lungs of the Earth are dying.** Also, cows in particular produce methane, which quickens climate change. This is how I started my lifestyle change. Of course, this includes also reducing the use of plastic. In our restaurant we do not use any plastic but encourage customers to use their tumblers for take-outs – if they do not have tumblers, we rent them.

Ms. Yoo lived in the U.K. when she learnt about veganism. She watched a documentary, and was shocked especially about what kind of consequences were related to her eating habits. She decided to turn vegan and she says it was a lot easier in England. When she moved to Jeju Island, the vegan options were so scarce that she decided to open her own vegan restaurant.
“Since the 1960s, the world’s population has doubled but the meat production has quadrupled. It is a fact that the livestock industry affects the environment negatively in more than one way. According to FAO*, in order to produce 1 kg of meat, we need 7 to 16 kg of grains. In 2010 UNEP** reported that 50% of world’s grains are used as livestock feed. The same amount could feed 3.5 billion human beings. The livestock industry is also the main culprit behind the destruction of marine life. In 2007, already 70% of Jeju’s sea areas were categorized as areas covered by ‘sea desertification’. Overfishing destroys the marine ecosystem. The seas are not the only ecosystem under the risk of desertification – because of the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, the land also suffers. After some time, cattle can no longer be put to pasture in these areas and they turn into deserted land. This has happened in the American West. As if the destruction of the seas and land was not enough, the livestock industry is the main culprit behind the destruction of forests and rainforests, which store our greenhouse gasses which is why we call them carbon sinks. Quite frankly, if more people do not reduce their meat consumption, especially beef, the future of the environment does not look very bright.”

Did You Know?
The climate activist Greta Thunberg is vegan for the environment. She has made impact to her parents, as her father has turned fully vegan and her mother is 95% vegan.

One person who goes vegan can save approximately 219,000 gallons of water a year which adds up to 6 months of showers.

Prof. Jo’s Tips to Reduce Your Carbon Footprint
1) Eat vegan, with seasonal and local food. Reduce the food waste!
2) Buy hybrid or electronic cars. Don’t fly if possible!
3) Make sure that insulation works well in your houses!
4) Reduce plastic and aim for zero waste!

Prof. Gil Ye Jo
Chonnam National University, Honorary Professor
Vegan Climate Action Network, President

*FAO food and agriculture organization, 2005
**UNEP United Nations Environment Programme, 2010 (https://static.independent.co.uk/)
Mr. Noh discovered the plant-based diet after getting a shocking diagnosis from a doctor during a yearly health check-up. He was told that he has to take medicine to lower his cholesterol for the rest of his life. After taking the medication, he had an allergic reaction to it and suffered from rashes all over his body; he realized he could not keep living like this. He researched other solutions, read a lot about plant-based diets and decided to give a vegan diet a shot for just 6 weeks. After 6 weeks he went to another check-up and got a diagnosis that his cholesterol level was in a healthy range, and he could stop taking the medication.

“When I went to the next check up, my doctor did not ask how I lowered my cholesterol levels. I still told him that this happened after I stopped eating animal products for only 6 weeks. The doctor just shrugged his shoulders and was not really interested. That was when I felt that rather than believing in doctors, we really have to take care of our health on our own. After researching more, I discovered that doctors only learn about how to treat the symptoms of a disease, not the causes and nothing about nutrition. That is why doctors just keep giving medicine. This made me even more motivated to learn more about health by myself, so I read many books and acted accordingly. I truly felt the benefits in my body. I wanted to share this new knowledge with my employees, but they were not exactly excited about the 100% plant-based lunches I prepared a few times. I realized, that pushing these kinds of things does not work. It has been over a year I have eaten vegan, and after changing my diet my cholesterol levels stayed fine. No more rash from the medication!”
“Many people have misconceptions about a healthy diet, but to tell you the truth, meat is not actually necessary at all. **There is no nutrients in meat that can not be gotten from somewhere else.** Animal protein increases the cell-activity so much, that children are growing up faster than before. This was seen as a positive factor before, but actually it makes people age faster. Also, the cancer and diabetes have increased with these dietary changes. According to the Rotterdam study done in Netherlands, **plant-based diet reduces the risk of type 2 diabetes.** In my opinion, if we are being really conscious about our health, we should not eat meat at all.”

“Diseases in developed countries are mostly caused by excessive intake of calories. Excessive fat stored in the body and entering the blood vessels will not only lead to cardio-vascular diseases, but also reduce the breakdown of blood sugars, leading to diabetes. Because plant-based foods have far fewer calories than meat, **the biggest benefit of a vegan diet is to avoid excess calories.** Also, because animals are at the top of the food chain, their bodies hold high levels of toxins such as heavy metals and pesticides. We could draw a conclusion that it is safer and healthier to consume plants.”
“Many of my customers come to my bakery because they want to eat tasty baked goods, but also are on a diet. As I make everything vegan, I also think more about putting healthy ingredients into the pastries. **When trying to lose weight, eating vegan helps!**

“Vegan diet has many benefits. It helps with preventing overweight, which is why many people choose to go vegan. Other benefit is, that it really clears out the skin – you can cure acne in the most cases if you go vegan. Cutting out dairy in particular makes a big difference.”

**Dr. Eui Cheol Lee**  
VegeDoctor

**Ah Yoon Kim**  
Vege-ang

Source: Reddit (https://www.reddit.com/r/vegan)
Source: Korean Vegetarian Union (https://www.vege.or.kr/)
1 Reason 4. Religion

“The speciality of Buddhist temple food is that it is 100% vegan and natural. We grow all the ingredients by ourselves thus everything is from nearby.”

“Jingwansa (진관사) is famous for its temple food (사찰음식). It is one of South Korea’s oldest temples and it holds a temple food festival on a yearly basis. It also holds many temple food exhibitions, conferences and opportunities to experience temple life. An additional interesting point is that all of its monks are female.

“The concept of Veganism was introduced to Korea during the Three Kingdoms period, which means it has been around more than 1600 years. In the Goryeo Dynasty, king of Korea established Buddhism as the state religion and it was practiced throughout the country. This is why we can say that Korea has a long vegan tradition. “

“The reason that we practice a vegan diet is that Buddhism is build on compassion and respect for life. We should not harm or kill any living beings, as that would not be compassionate.”

“Temple food is famous on a global scale. People who come to the Jingwansa temple say that the food here is beyond what they could have imagined. It shows that food with simple, natural ingredients can be very tasty. Many foreign VIP guests visit our temple for the food as well, for example the former second lady of the US and an Arab prince have visited us. Also Michelin star chefs come to us in order to learn about our food preparation.”
Reason 5. Empathy for Animals

For many, the reason for turning vegan is the problematic animal industry. We went to the Animal Rights March in order to find out where the people stand. The participation rate was surprisingly high, showing how much interest towards animal welfare has grown.

"I first got to know about animal issues by watching the documentary ‘Earthlings’ on YouTube. After I learnt what kind of violent system is behind the animal industry, I changed my lifestyle. I think that demonstrations like today’s Animal Rights March are important, because it is one of the best ways to let other people know about these issues. Not only the regular people happening to walk by get interested in what is happening, but also various media sources pick up on it. If it becomes an issue we discuss in society, I believe there will be improvements in animal rights."

Yuna
Student & Animal Rights Activist
Reason 5. Empathy for Animals

“It is not that I can not eat meat, it is that I just do not want to anymore. Veganism for me is compassion.”

“I really like animals. And I see Korea’s development going in a positive direction as a democracy. That is why I participate in animal rights events on Sundays, to push Korea faster in the right direction. I wish more Korean people could feel a greater degree of empathy towards not only animals, but also towards other humans as well as the environment.”

Did You Know?
Korea is taking steps towards animal welfare! In 2016, Korea started to take steps to ban animal testing and in 2018 animal testing for cosmetics was banned in the country. However, ingredients and products imported from other countries are still allowed to be animal tested. Additionally, until this year, all products sold in China were required to be animal tested first. The good news is that the Chinese government ended animal testing requirements in 2019!!
In conclusion, we were determined that there is not one reason above others why Korean people decide to go plant-based. The turning points are different for everybody, as are the reasons to keep up with the lifestyle. The main shared values we detected were 1) compassion and 2) interest in a healthy lifestyle.

The more you study, you realize that veganism is not only an animal rights issue, but it is related to health, the environment, human rights, and so much more.

Regardless of the reason of becoming a vegan, most of the people we met faced similar problems in Korea. In the next part, we will introduce the areas to develop in order to make Korea a more vegan-friendly country.
Part 2. Detecting the Problems
Detecting Problems: Introduction

On the scale of 1 to 5, how difficult do you think it is to be vegan in Korea? (*1 being very easy, 5 being very difficult)

From the graph*, we can detect that the overall consensus is that practicing a vegan lifestyle is not easy in Korea right now. The majority of the respondents believed that being vegan in Korea as it is now is very difficult. *Information from survey conducted by Begin Team (Survey, 2th September, 2019)

In addition to the survey, our qualitative research also showed the same results: practicing veganism in Korea is challenging. Through our research we found two main problem areas:

1. **Social Pressure**
2. **Lack of Infrastructure**

In this part, we will share our findings about these problem areas, and the reasons behind them.

“Compared to abroad, it is really difficult to be vegan in Korea. In Korea, people don’t even know what veganism is. Even when I say “please leave out the meat”, I am asked tons of questions about my choices. I think people here are not really accepting of other people’s personal lifestyle choices... There is a bad image associated with vegans and veganism. In the future, I wish that that bad image would go away and we can all work together to achieve that.”
Personal Experiences of the Begin Team

As one of our research goals was to find out the problems that vegans face in Korea, we felt that we should experience it ourselves and not just research it from the outside. We wanted to understand exactly how vegans in Korea feel. Thus, our team decided to go fully vegan for our expedition time. The main difficulties we personally faced were:

1. **Unawareness of Veganism**
   Most people in Korea are not aware of the term “vegan” nor are they fully aware of the reasons why anyone would choose to lead a vegan lifestyle. This lack of awareness leads to a lack of understanding, causing uncomfortable situations and some level of discrimination. Most people felt as their duty to comment on how we would have a protein deficiency.

2. **Lack of Vegan Options in Convenience and Grocery Stores**
   During our expedition wanting a quick snack to get some energy happened quite frequently. We were rushing from place A to place B and just wanted to get something quick to eat at the nearest convenience store. We checked the sandwiches, Ramyeon noodles and lunch boxes. There were no vegan options. The best we could do was a few fruits and some basic Pringles chips that we had researched beforehand and knew to be vegan. Almond milk was also a positive addition. Even so, this was not satisfying. Even the salads or Bibimbap options had some form of animal products in them. Also shopping in local grocery stores was not easy. Searching for vegan bread, vegan ready-to-go meals and easy, cheap options other than vegetables was quite hard. The first time we went to the grocery store, we had to spend enormous amounts of time on checking the labels.
3. Lack of Vegan Options in Restaurants
Eating out was more stressful than expected. Many times we kept going from restaurant to restaurant to find a vegan option only to go back to a ‘Bibimbap’ restaurant we had already been to 3 nights in a row. In the Bibimbap restaurant we had to tell the owner to not add the meat or egg to the food without getting any discount. If not living in the trendy areas e.g. Itaewon, Insadong or Hongdae, finding a vegan restaurant in your neighborhood is not very likely.

4. Price in Vegan Restaurants
When visiting vegan restaurants, the food was delicious but quite pricey. It was not a sustainable everyday option for students. It would be cheaper to eat meat-based food, which seemed illogical to us, but we started to understand it during our expedition. The reason for the price seems to be that many vegan products are imported from abroad. Additionally, many vegan restaurants aim to be natural and organic, resulting in higher prices from the organic ingredients.
“Actually, it is not hard to not eat animal products. What is hard is to live in a society where many people do not understand my standpoint. The main hardships are the social problems.”

Burden of Being Different in Collectivist Culture

We found out in our research that regardless of the reason why the person has become vegan in Korea, they experience similar kinds of societal stress. As Korea has a collectivist (집단주의) cultural background, being different from the others can be an uncomfortable and burdensome experience. Voicing out individual needs is also difficult for a number of people, often resulting in people with special needs distancing themselves from social communities and gatherings. While interviewing regular Korean youths, we had interesting answers regarding going vegan. As an example, a female interviewee in her 20s said that she would never go vegan – not because she could not give up meat – but because she would be afraid other people commenting on her lifestyle choices e.g. asking if she is trying to act pretty or special. She would not be ready for that kind of pressure.
Lack of Awareness

Many people living in Korea are not aware of the various reasons people might choose to maintain a vegan diet, thus leading to various stereotypes or misunderstandings. Also the Korean language does not differentiate between “vegetarian” or “vegan”, thus it might be hard to match people’s diverse needs.

Additionally, in this modern age, the speed at which new information and research is released makes it difficult for people to adjust their perception of certain facts or habits they have maintained since they were young. This adds to the stress of plant-based eaters as they feel pressured to eat animal products just for the sake of others - even though the others have no ill intentions – they are simply just worried about their close one’s health.

Food-Centered Social Culture

In Korean culture a lot of social gatherings happen around food. Making friends in school, developing closer relationships between your co-workers and boss, and establishing new business deals are often tied sharing a meal. Most of the places do not offer a plant-based option, making it difficult for one leading a vegan diet to take part without seeming out of the place. Even if the person that is vegan is okay with skipping the meal or bringing his/her own lunch with him/her, it would likely make others uncomfortable. Sharing not only the food but also the experience is perceived as meaningful in Korean culture. These characteristics of the status quo leads to many vegans avoiding social gatherings or being unable to continue leading the lifestyle they have chosen.

Do you think it is possible to get full nutrition from Vegan food?

According to the student survey conducted by Begin Team (Survey, 2th September, 2019), 41% of the participants did not believe that full nutrition can be received from vegan diet, and 16% were not sure. 43% believed that it is possible, but that still adds up to more than 50% of the respondents believing that a vegan diet is not good for one’s health.
Societal stress has resulted to some behavioural coping methods specific to Korea. We understand why these would be perceived helpful on a personal level, however we believe that these methods result in a ‘hidden vegan population’, which makes the vegan demand seem lower that it actually is, preventing the market from growing more quickly. Additionally, these mechanisms add to the issue of unawareness.

1) Hiding one’s lifestyle and avoiding social settings.
2) Avoidance of being a burden to others: Adjusting to others and making exceptions in order to accomplish this.
3) Making excuses to explain why one is not eating.

“No matter how good a vegetarian diet may be for the individual, if it diverges sharply from the conventional way of eating, then it becomes a bad practice that **disturbs harmony** within the group. Without a doubt, such labelling by other people is the major impediment that frustrates the vegetarian’s attempt to maintain such a diet in Korea.” (Yoo and Yoon, 2015)

*In Korea there are very active vegans who have overcome this societal pressure. Still, when starting the vegan lifestyle, many result to these coping methods so as to avoid creating a negative atmosphere around them.
The Lack of Infrastructure

1. Lack of Vegan Options

“If you go to a new place, it is hard to know where there are vegan restaurants nearby. Sometimes you can not find anything to eat.”

Key Points!

1. Only few restaurants offer fully vegan options.
2. There are only very few schools or companies that offer vegan options.
3. Difficulties in finding vegan products other than vegetables and soy milk (두유) in supermarkets or convenience stores.
4. Lack of variety in the vegan products available online.
5. For vendors and businesses, there is a lack of vegan materials (e.g. vegan patties for burgers).

“The only vegan food in the company cafeteria is salad, and all the other dishes have animal ingredients. This is why I mostly bring my own lunch box, but sometimes I forget to bring it and I have to eat the salad that does not fill me up or I go hungry all day.”

“One of the biggest problems is the lack of vegan restaurants and the supply of vegan products. In addition to fresh vegetables, it is difficult to find vegan products in shops. There are still only a few vegan restaurants around the city. Also, I was vegan when I went to the army. During boot camp (기초군사훈련), as there was no vegan option in the main dishes, I survived by only eating rice and dried seaweed (김). It was a hard time.”

“There are no vegan dishes in the school cafeteria, so I have to go home and cook for myself at noon every day, which wastes a lot of time. I hope the school cafeteria could add even one vegan menu in the future.”
According to the student survey conducted by Begin Team (Survey, 2th September, 2019), most of the participants did not feel that there was enough guidance to transition from omnivore diet to vegetarian or vegan one. The problems noted were contradicting information in media outlets and that even when there is a lot of information, they are usually not country-specific thus not helpful when transitioning e.g. in Korea. Additionally, the information is scattered around internet, thus making it tiring to get all of the important and accurate information.

With our online research, it initially seemed like there were only three online shopping malls that offered vegan food. The classification of the food did not seem clear – just a simple list but not detailed information. After more research, we found out that e.g. Coupang (coupang.com, 쿠팡) offers also vegan products if searched. Our conclusion was that there should be a better information outlet on where we can buy vegan products and what kind of variety is available in Korea. This would also be for offline stores. Initially, we were only aware of the “Vegan Space” in Yongsang-gu as being the only supermarket for vegan food. We found out through intense research that “SahmYook” (삼육) stores provide some vegetarian options which are actually vegan.
Poor information in and about restaurants: According to our field research 12 out of 17 restaurants were not familiar with the term ‘Vegan’ and did not know what it means. After talking to them, we actually found out that 7 out of 17 restaurants actually had vegan dishes (excluding side salads). Thus, some restaurants actually have vegan menu without potential customers or themselves knowing it.

Even when a product appears vegan, it is hard to determine what it contains: in convenience stores and supermarkets going through all the ingredients lists takes enormous amount of time and is extremely difficult, especially for foreigners. The lack of any marking demonstrating if the product is vegetarian or vegan is a huge problem which makes it harder to live a vegan life in Korea.
Part 3. Finding Solutions
1. Using Social Media

The fastest way to distribute information is through the social media channels where big audiences can be reached. During our expedition we found various examples of the kinds of efforts that can be made to spread awareness in the social media.

“"I operate a blog and a Naver café to spread information about health issues related to veganism. I want everybody to be able to live a healthier life. I am also planning on starting a YouTube account so that I can reach a bigger audience.”

Dr. Eui Cheol Lee
VegeDoctor
We took advantage of the time we had on our expedition not wanting to be the only ones benefitting from our research, but to share our findings with the broader masses. This is why we created a documentary to be uploaded on social media platforms, e.g. YouTube to reach as many people as possible. We believe that through the spread of information on why people choose to be vegan, the hardships vegans face in Korea and the simple ways that would help everybody be happier in the society, most of the public would be open to accept the different lifestyle.

Documentary: Veganism in Korea
https://youtu.be/LMaTMFnt6xw
Spreading Awareness

"As many people shy away from announcing they are vegan for fear of being judged by others, it could be said that vegans in Korea have to ‘come out’* to the people surrounding them. I hope that more vegans could find courage to do this."

*Coming out refers to the act of coming open to the public about something, that is not a norm in the community. Usually used in the context of LGBT community.

2. “Coming Out” as a Vegan

We discovered, that if more people ‘came out’ as vegan, the movement could become accepted by the mainstream more easily, as has happened in the Western world. Coming out means being open about the lifestyle choices and sticking to them. In order for many people to do this, veganism would have to become a normal and accepted thing to do in society. Reflecting the global example, if Korean celebrities who have chosen to be vegan would be open and non-apologetic about it, this would help veganism find its place in society. Also non-vegan celebrities bringing light to other forms of vegetarianism is helpful in making Korea an accepting environment for sustainable dietary choices.

Won Bok Lee
Korean Vegetarian Union

Source: 푸드 에세이 (http://blog.daum.net/)
3. Adopting the Terminology of Different Vegetarian Diets in Korean Language

Many countries have adopted the word “vegan” to their respective languages, even though the source language is English. The underlying belief is, that when the word ‘비건’ is adopted into mainstream use, it will be easier for the vegan population to communicate their needs. To achieve this, the term ‘비건’ has to be used as often as possible and always when referring to vegan diet to differentiate it from other forms of vegetarian diets.

**Why do we believe this is possible?**

As an example, Halal has become a very accepted concept in Korean society with the increasing Muslim population. People have educated themselves on the reasons why these people can not eat certain foods, and have created menu options for them. Additionally, the term “Halal food” is on its way to becoming standard language. Many restaurant owners understand the requirements of Halal food, at least in the central Seoul area.
Veganism is not only a trend, but it is an outcome of many real-world problems regarding the environment and the treatment of animals. There is a need for ethical discussions not only in small, specific communities but on a society level. This is why having education to deepen the knowledge of the animal industry is crucial in finding alternative ways to match consumption levels or lower consumption levels (especially) in order to sustain the environment.

“I have background in psychology and biologics. I wanted to expose students to global social issues and also my students hoped to learn about animals – these were the motivations behind creating the class ‘Animal Ethics’ in Hanyang University. I believe these kinds of classes are important, as they are related to not only the treatment of the animals and environment but also personal health. The class challenges students to think about these issues philosophically. For many, it is their first time considering the disconnection we have between meat and where that meat comes from. To get classes related to the livestock industry and its issues, students have to show their demand and schools should be open to give funding as we need competent professors to teach them.”
Taking Part in a Vegan Community

“I did not have any friends to eat with when I started university – through Facebook I found other students interested in the vegan lifestyle. We started as lunch buddies, and I was inspired to **start a vegan club** (동아리). Right now in our club we have debates after reading informative books, we share information about veganism and to put it simply: learn together. We also try to encourage people to be more eco-friendly for example by distributing reusable straws. This semester we are having a film festival where we are showing documentaries related to veganism.”

We discovered that being part of a community plays a big role in improving the quality of one’s social life as a vegan. Various internet communities, like Naver Cafés, are working as support groups for vegans and finding like-minded friends on Instagram has also been on the rise.

We had the pleasure of visiting Korea’s Vegan community **Vegan Gong-gam’s** (채식 공감) monthly meet-up, where the atmosphere was more than welcoming. Many of the attendees shared their experiences of how the community has helped them: in their regular lives many of them did not have any vegan friends but through coming to the community meet-up they were able to meet new people while enjoying vegan food together. This gives them support and energy to keep up with the lifestyle and provides a great platform to share new information about the new vegan opportunities in Korea.

**Through interacting in communities, vegans can release societal pressure and gain confidence in standing behind their choices even in front of non-vegan people.**
Connecting Suppliers and Consumers

1. Vegan Fairs and Tasting Events
Great way to reach consumers and a bigger customer base would be to get visibility with vegan fairs or do marketing through tasting events. Suppliers should be active.

2. Vegan Products to Grocery Stores

Having Vegan Menu Options and Putting the V-Sign on the Menu
We find, that one of the most important steps would be to clearly marking the vegan menu items, whether in a vegan restaurant or a general one. The Vegan mark is widely used in other countries, and by having the vegan dishes clearly pointed out, it is a lot easier for vegan consumers to make an informed choice. This makes it possible for vegans and non-vegans to easily spend time together without veganism being a problem or a mood-breaker.

Note this!
As it would help spreading awareness, ‘coming out’ as a vegan would be beneficial in showing the demand, which would motivate market to respond by building a better infrastructure → creating more supply.
Begin Team Helping to Deliver Information

As shown in the part of 2.3.2. ‘Lack of Infrastructure’, we detected that there is not enough of information for people to transition into veganism, specifically in Korea. Thus, we decided to take the initiative. We wrote a guidebook to transitioning into veganism as well as tips on how to be vegan in Korea. There are two versions, one in Korean and one in English, so that we can reach as many people as possible. Additionally, through field research we created Vegan & Vegetarian Map for the Hanyang Univ. area.

Vegan Trademark - Verification System

Korea Agency of Vegan Certification and Services
140 vegan verified products
Gives verifications only for single products (not manufacturing process, company, restaurants, etc.)

한국완전체식 인증원
5 vegan verified products
Gives verifications for products and restaurants, own testing laboratory.

Important! Even though there are two institutions giving verifications, it should be made standard that vegan products would have a vegan trademark. This would help with marketing purposes as well as for the consumers to 1) shop with assurance and 2) save time (not going through every ingredients list).
For example, in Finland it is a norm to ask if anybody has any special dietary needs before any get-together. Additionally, starting from elementary school, parents can inform schools about any special diets their children might have. Just taking note of these possible needs is the next step that Korea should take. These kinds of questionnaires are still rare in Korea, but especially because Korea has a fast-growing foreign population we see that even beyond a vegan point of view, it would be crucial to help everybody to integrate into different communities without dietary restrictions being a problem. The ultimate goal would be, that in every company, school and even in the army there would automatically be vegan options, but the first step would be to take into consideration everyone’s dietary needs by conducting surveys.
Part 4. Opportunities in the Vegan Market
Blue Ocean

“Blue Ocean Strategy is referred to a market for a product where there is no competition or very less competition. This strategy revolves around searching for a business in which very few firms operate and where there is no pricing pressure.”
- The Economic Times

According to the Blue Ocean Strategy theory, businesses have better opportunities to succeed in unsaturated markets compared to already mature ones with many competitors. Simply said, blue oceans are markets that have high potential profits.

During our expedition, we discovered that the vegan market in Korea is at a ‘blue ocean’ status. There is a huge economic opportunity in the growing local consumer base as the supply of plant-based products is scarce. These opportunities do not stop at a local level – there is a huge international market which is growing exponentially and has insufficient supply. As an example, the world’s largest retailer, Walmart has asked for more plant-based products from its suppliers.

Did you know?

Plant-based food-companies’ stocks are continuously increasing in value. The market interest grew significantly after Bill Gates showed interest in the plant-based “meat” company “Beyond Meat” and invested in 2013. Gates also invested 75 million dollars on the Beyond Meat’s competitor “Impossible Burger”-company in August 2017. As Gates is very determined to change the world for better, especially fighting poverty and climate change, his support for alternative meat products can be seen as an effort to help to fight climate change without losing business.

Interesting!

There are more than 50 million vegetarians in neighboring China, but the supply of vegetarian products is very small. This means that the potential for vegan businesses is not restricted to Western countries, but constantly growing in the whole world.
1. Importance of Environmental Impacts
As stated above, being environmentally friendly is becoming more and more important for consumers. For a business, having a socially irresponsible image is detrimental to long-term success. As the livestock industry has high connections to deforestation, water contamination, waste and many other issues (refer to part 1.4.1. Environmental Issues), minimizing negative environmental impacts are encouraged. One way to do this, would be to move from using animal-based products and shift the weight to plant-based.

2. Inclusion of Vegan Lifestyle-choices
Offering a line of vegan products shows the acknowledgment of the vegan population and creates a new, growing customer segment. This would show an effort to include the needs of a minority in the company’s product selection. Additionally, the possibility to eat a meal that does not go against an individual’s personal values at workplace cafeterias can increase job satisfaction levels creating a more positive image of the whole company.

Reducing environmental impact and taking the vegan population into consideration would likely give results of increased brand image and brand loyalty in the long-term.
Veganism’s growth in Korea can be also seen in the market. Vegan restaurants, vegan bakeries, vegan fashion and vegan skincare are some of the fields that have been waking up to respond to the new demand. Still – the supply is insufficient and there is space to fill.

“I had three main reasons why I decided to open a vegan bakery. Firstly, producers have a great impact on the earth. Secondly, since I have always had interest in nutrition science, thinking about the customers’ health, I wanted to make products without any bad ingredients and effects. Lastly, I wanted my shop to be an environmentally friendly bakery.”

“Within just one year, I have seen a significant growth of demand for vegan baked goods. From my perspective, the future of veganism is quite big in Korea.”

“Instead of waiting for big companies to take on the challenge of vegan skincare, small start-up companies like mine are playing the market.”

Vegan Market is not just for Vegans!

- **Grabbing the DiETING Market:** In Korea, especially women have a great amount of interest in dieting and it has been an ever-growing market, vegan start-up companies are jumping at this opportunity.

- **For People with Food Allergies:** People with allergies, for example gluten allergies, meat allergies or lactose intolerance are potential customers to the vegan market.
As we can see, vegan start-ups are not just food-related. It is a reality that veganism really is a lifestyle which requires consideration in all parts of life – not just eating.

Botanic Beauty & Lifestyle House which provides organic and vegan skin-care DIY products. As the trend for vegan skin-care has been well received by the Millennials in Western countries, Hee Song Kim (The owner of BBL House) believes that it is only a matter of time before Korea is the next big market for vegan skin-care. She also said, instead of waiting for big corporate companies to take on this trend, this is a great opportunity for start-up companies like hers to grasp this market.

A clothing company with an ethical purpose. This start-up company stands against exploiting animals and provides consumers a wide range of substitutions for wool, leather, angora, goose hair, silk, etc. Part of their profit also goes towards the “Animal & Environment” campaign. Vegan tiger has done a successful job of understanding hidden market demands and have turned it into a truly successful business. Celebrities like Itzy (girl group), Sunmi, Nuest, Mamamoo, SBS Drama ‘Fates & Furies’ have been showing their support to Vegan Tiger, which is a milestone for setting the trend.

Vegan bakery. Ah Yoon Kim, a young entrepreneur wanted to open a bakery with consideration for the environment and health. Most of the customers seek vegan baked items because of dieting – they want to loose weight. Her shop has also drawn in consumers who are lactose intolerant.

Food service. Sprout is committed to the environment and sustainability while providing its customers who are vegan, vegetarian, or just into healthy eating convenient and delicious meals that are packaged-to-go and ready to eat.

Food-tech start-up. The Plant Eat develops new products by analyzing molecular data and researching ways to create safe food through simulation and testing. For example, they have made a plant-based mayonnaise.
1.LG 초점
In company cafeterias, we believe that there should be a vegan option available. As an example, Google has been constantly adding delicious plant-based options and encouraging employees to eat healthily and sustainably in order to reduce the company’s carbon footprint. If LG would take steps to enable and encourage healthy and sustainable eating habits, it would support LG’s company philosophy of creating a healthy and sustainable future society.

2. 아워홈
As OurHome has strong core values of 1) Challenge & Innovation, 2) Customer Focus and 3) Communication, we believe that now would be a great time to take the step of adding a vegan lunchbox to the selection. If ready to take up the challenge, OurHome could be the first large company vegan lunchboxes in large scale. They could be marketed as not only an ecological and healthy choice, but also as an option for those who are in the process of dieting.

3. LG 생활건강
We recommend that LG Household and Health Care speeds up the development and production of a vegan and cruelty-free brand. We would like to see a cosmetics brand, which is marketed as vegan with a vegan certificated trademark. The vegan cosmetics market is growing rapidly in Korea, thus it would be beneficial for LG’s business as well.
Part 5. Considerations for the Korean Government
Government Considerations

Environmental Threats

In this era of climate crisis, governments around the world sign agreements in order to reduce our carbon footprint as a whole. Right now, Korea is still not sufficiently reducing its national emissions (Climate Action Tracker, 2019). Referring to the section 1.4.1. Environmental Impact, by reducing animal-product consumption, especially red meat, our carbon footprint can be reduced.

Shifting to policies that encourage eating less meat and more vegetables, would help South Korea to gain global respect as a country that is making practical efforts to help its citizens make sustainable choices. As suggested in section 3.3.2. Vegan Meal Option to Companies, Public Schools and Army, vegan meal options should be available in government facilities: this would not only help the environment but would also improve the public health. As an example, in Finland there is a vegetarian day once a week in all schools. In the army, there are two compulsory fully vegetarian meals a week.

Additionally, the government should provide funding for start-ups fighting environmental issues, including the plant-based protein and vegan products markets. The data shows that the market is growing, and new innovations are needed. As Korea is known for its high tech and growing innovation market, investing in these fields could add positively to the country’s GDP.

Source: Climate Action Tracker (https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/south-korea/)
Vegan Food and Hallyu Wave

As the "Hallyu Wave" (Korean Wave) does not show signs of stopping, we believe that utilizing vegan food alongside this trend could be beneficial for Korea. Korean food has a healthier image globally compared to e.g. Chinese food, which is perceived as oily. Furthermore, traditional Korean food offers multiple options that are easy to 'veganize', for example substituting fish sauce with soy sauce. By putting more weight on the vegan Korean food supply, the customer base could grow as it would include 1) People interested in Korea, 2) People interested in healthy food and 3) Vegans.

How to 1

Many Hallyu-stars are on the vegetarian scale. Ranging from flexitarian (중일국) to full-blown vegan (임수정), these faces could provide good options for global marketing purposes. Also, in Korea’s promotional material, they could invite vegetarians and vegans to Korea, showing that they are acknowledged here. The result would be a positive national image and possibly more tourist traffic as world’s vegetarian population is estimated at 375 million.

Jill Biden Visiting Jingwansa-temple
Former Second Lady of the United States

How to 2

The Korean temple food (사찰음식) is already famous in the world. Many world-leaders as well as Michelin Chefs come to experience and learn from the Korean temples. The Korean government could use this cultural perspective as well when promoting Korea; especially K-Food for the common people. **Combined with the health benefits, natural food and peaceful message**, Korea’s image could add yet another dimension next to the high-tech and entertainment industries.
National Curriculum

As for elementary, middle school and high school environments, adding diversity studies to the national curriculum is a necessity considering globalization. Korea is still a relatively homogeneous country, and while it used to be that Koreans would go abroad, now foreigners from different cultural backgrounds are coming to Korea. In order for us all to live peacefully together, we believe that teaching children from a young age about diverse cultures and lifestyles is important. Obviously, this also includes different dietary habits. Additionally, it would be important to teach how our dietary habits affect the environment for conscious eating habits to form: not only in regards to reducing meat, but also having the basic knowledge of the problems regarding food waste, how to reduce it and the importance of it.

Nutritional Guidelines

The government should take into consideration dietary habits, and give official guidelines on how to maintain a healthy diet in vegetarian or vegan lifestyle. A lot of research backs up the fact that (refer to part 1.4.2. Health), living a nutritious life is possible with vegan diet. However, as stated, many people who transition to a vegan diet other than for health reasons, might face problems on getting full nutrition because of the lack of right information. Coming from government authority, this information would be beneficial in terms of public health, and minorities who would otherwise not have access could also benefit.

The official Dietary Guidelines provided in the USA also include guidelines for the vegetarian diet!
Concluding our Report

We asked what veganism meant on a personal level to everyone we met. Every answer was different but we were able to feel that veganism is an expression of love for them. It is love for themselves and others around them, love for the environment and nature, love for animals and life. Their way to communicate this love is through veganism.
“The compassion I felt from all the people we met during our expedition is something I will never forget. It really made the change for me – I did not want to just learn and research about the issue for my own benefit but actually **do something to help these people**. I feel that spreading awareness and being active in the society will be the major factors in making the change towards Korea becoming a vegan-friendly country. I do not believe that the world is ever going to be 100% vegan, but what I believe is that everybody should be able to enjoy the same social life without their dietary restrictions coming in the way. Being a vegan, such simple things like having a lunch at the university campus become difficult tasks: this is not the way it should be. I am happy we chose our topic to be about veganism in South Korea, as I was able to have the intrinsic motivation to give my all to this project. There are real areas to be improved related to the state of veganism in Korea right now, and we **have the solutions on hand**.”

“Vegan people who we met during this trip, although they were not supported and understood by others, they still are persistently making efforts for their ideas. I also realize that **many goals are challenging to achieve at one time**. We need to take it step by step. It's the same in Veganism; we do not need to change a lot at one time, **perhaps start with eating one meal of vegan food every day**. The little effort will bring a significant change.”
"With climate crisis being a present issue and an existential threat for not only humanity but to most species, I started to think about what I can contribute on a personal level. I realized quitting meat and reducing plastic are things I can easily do. After the expedition I became a pescetarian and will continue this diet. The commitment and aspiration of the united youth to make this planet a better place has encouraged me to strive for a better planet with sustainable choices. We should all carry this responsibility together. Let’s all together be united and do our individual parts. Since the journey has already begun and will reach the destined future sooner or later, this report is a part of the journey. Our team is trying to make an impact with this report of discovering the status of veganism in Korea - which is all of our members’ second home."

"Other than our team’s research, I decided to my own research. I watched documentaries and did a lot of reading. I was surprised how many recent research papers there were about the environmental impact as well as the health impact of veganism. I could not eat meat anymore after learning what I know now. Recently I have ‘come out’ as a ‘vegan’ to my friends, and to my surprise, everyone has been very supportive."
Concluding our Report

“Being a vegan is an individual choice which contributes to protecting the environment. Even though I am not a vegan personally, I respect the people’s choices as they all have their own reasons. This is why I created an additional vegan menu in my restaurant, so that everybody coming to Jeju can enjoy delicious food together with their friends and families.”

Happy Together

On Jeju Island, we discovered what is most important. The restaurant owners we met were respectful and inclusive – they wanted all who visited their restaurants to be able to eat with their travel companions: they had vegan options as well as non-vegan options and were aware of the vocabulary and their meanings. The development we want to see is that Korea as a whole could come to this stage, where it is not shunned to be different but accepted. It should not matter where you go, whether it be school, company dinner or a night out with friends: there should be the possibility of having a vegan option. With anyone and anywhere, possibility to enjoy food together should be a given. Korea is on the right track, but there is still a lot of work to be done. We hope that everybody in Korea will keep an open heart towards all the diverse people around us and maybe even experiment with veganism themselves!”

Dong Il Lee
Dotori Kitchen
Distribution Plan and Future Aspects

More than we could have anticipated, we discovered a deep passion on our topic. Before conducting our research, we were not aware of the diverse aspects of being a vegan – especially in Korea. We grew fond of all the people who helped us, and hearing their stories gave us determination to do the most that we could do help their lives to become a bit easier.

We believe that Korea is on the right track and we are willing to invest our efforts to speed up the process. The more people are aware and the more people feel that they are not alone, the more we believe that the vegan population of Korea will be able to raise their voices and show their demand to the market. This is why, we are not planning to stop our efforts on this project – we will continue to do our best to bring happiness to the country we love.

This report will be distributed through various channels:
1. It will be available in the description box of our ‘Veganism in Korea’-documentary on Youtube
2. Uploaded to the Vegan Gong-gam (채식공감) community (Naver Café)
3. Posted on various Facebook groups such as Vegan Korea
4. Uploaded on the Korean Vegetarian Nutrition Research-centre (채식영양연구소) website
5. Uploaded to the LG Global Challenger website
6. Distributed through the Hanyang University Global Environmental Club Healers
1. "Veganism in Korea" Documentary

2. "Vegan Guide 101 South Korea" - Guidebook to Transitioning and Keeping Up with Veganism in Korea

3. Vegan Map for Hanyang University area

References


1. "Veganism in Korea" - documentary
   Link to Youtube provided.

2. "Vegan Guide 101 South Korea" - Guidebook to Transition and Keep Up with Veganism in Korea
   Physical copies provided.

3. Vegan Map for Hanyang University area

References


한국완전체식인증원. (2019). Retrieved 4 October 2019, from https://vegancertification.co.kr/%EC%9D%B8%EC%A6%9D%EB%A1%9C%EA%B3%A0