

Got Milk? Ottawa Veg Fest speaker encourages you to re-think that

Elise Desaulniers is a popular and respected Quebec blogger, and a food ethics and animal rights advocate.

In her latest book, *Cash Cow*, she takes a hard look at the dairy industry, and how it has persuaded the general public of the naturalness and value of cows' milk in the human diet. She asks just who really benefits from the promotion of dairy, and just how effectively animal welfare and small farming operations can be protected in an age of consolidation and confinement.

She will be speaking at Ottawa Veg Fest on Sunday, June 5 at 2 pm.

1. Why did you decide to write *Cash Cow*?

Since the publication of my first book on food ethics (*Je mange avec ma tête*/I eat with my head), I've been talking a lot about the treatment of animals, marine life, and the environmental consequences of raising livestock. More often than not, people have agreed with me. Several readers have written to tell me that I have inspired them to eat less meat.

But I soon realized that when it comes to cheese and yoghurt, it's different. Dairy products are held dear. I wanted to understand this emotional attachment to dairy. People figure that it's fine to be vegetarian, but adopting a vegan diet seems a little extreme. We all know milk comes from cows and these cows are often raised in horrible conditions and slaughtered after a few years. The reality is not different than animals raised for meat, but our perception is different. I wanted to understand where it comes from and why are we so scared to challenge our relationship with dairy.

2. How have people responded to it?

In many different ways. Many readers have become vegan after reading the book. But there was also a lot of controversy. The reality I describe is so far from what most people believe that many thought that I was wrong, that I have no idea what I'm writing about. There has been a lot of debate in person, in my inbox and in the comments sections!

3. Has there been any reaction that surprised you? What has surprised people who read it?

I'm lucky enough to give a lot of lectures. A lot of the content of *Cash Cow* had already been tested in front of a live public, so nothing really surprised me. But many readers were surprised to understand how cows are treated like simple means of production and that there is no such thing as 'humane' treatment in dairy production. There's as much suffering in organic milk as in conventional milk. The environmental cost of dairy production is also a big surprise.

4. What do you think resonates most with people when they are reading it, or hear you speaking about it?

My own story, from a milk lover, to someone who understands that there's nothing natural, normal and necessary in consuming dairy products is often their own story, even they are not yet vegan. Increasingly, people understand what is the real cost of dairy and are looking for facts and alternatives.

5. What can people expect when they come to hear your presentation?

We hear so many things about dairy and its alternatives that we can get lost and have no idea what is true and what we should do. Is milk really that bad for your health? But what about soy? And what about almonds and the drought in California? And what about small farms, are those better? I hope to bring clear answers to those questions so people have the right tools to make good decisions.

A full speaker and demo list, including topics, will be posted to the Veg Fest website.

Ottawa Veg Fest - June 4-5, 10 am – 4 pm

The RA Centre

2451 Riverside Drive, Ottawa

www.vegfest.ca