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# 'Vegan Friendly' Supermarkets: On Mercadona

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This is about what we eat. It is clear that it is a personal decision to not eat food that comes from animals, but it is not only this; it is also about what we want our environment to be like, about how we conduct ourselves within our surroundings and the compromises we make in our behaviour as citizens. Therefore being vegetarian or vegan is at least a three-dimensional stance: personal, environmental, and political.

Local Spanish supermarkets rarely stock their supply ranges with food that can be eaten by those who choose not to eat animal products. Mercadona's announced launch of the ["Vegan Friendly" charcuterie](#) range has appeared as outstanding news in the heat of this summer. In actual fact, right now this means a few products that, not being strictly vegan, are still a possibility for vegetarians and flexitarians – we can welcome this initiative as a start!

It makes one think that to buy vegan products one must search in shops that right now tend to only be found in big cities, and are difficult to encounter in smaller Spanish cities and towns. In this sense, we are quite different from our surrounding countries – the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, Austria or Germany –[1] that have a long tradition of selling products suitable for vegans. There are websites and apps that simply provide information on the contents of products in supermarkets. We covered this a year ago by publishing an [excellent article written by Martina Pluda](#) on the website. Still, this does not happen here.

When we eat animals, the question becomes one of personal and political ethics - an issue that has not been overlooked by the scientific community and has already been a subject of discussion [2] and of reports [3] that inform about the responsibility of animal welfare that, as citizens, concern us. While reports now confirm that European consumers began to worry for the welfare of the animals they consume in as early as the year 2000, this concern has not taken priority in the moment of deciding what to eat. In my opinion, this is due to insufficient information.

We can be certain that after 16 years of informative policy from the EU, the extent of consumer choice has increased significantly. Regarding what is being bought in supermarkets, consumers now demand more transparency in terms of the quality of a product, and the origin and welfare of the animal that produced it. An obvious example is with eggs, to which I have previously made reference.[4] As consumers we know how to read the code on eggs and, if we do decide to eat them, can choose between those that come from free range hens, or from those that are kept in battery cages. It is a question of information, of social awareness, of clear communication and, ultimately, of labelling.

Among the various strategies of the EU, the ones that have had most success in recent years have been those that promote knowledge of animal welfare, improvements

of the living conditions of animals, and have tried to reach an understanding with consumers.[5] One needs not look any further than at how the names of local supermarkets have changed (Bars are now Gastro-Bars!), vegan restaurants have increased in number and in the offers on restaurant menus – including in the cafeterias of work premises – they begin to indicate the dishes that are suitable for vegans and vegetarians.

However, we are only at the beginning of the long path that lies ahead. Initiatives like the one launched by Mercadona must be more wide-scale and reach consumers in all corners of Spain, with all the information that they need. Society has transformed, but we lack public policy that adapts to this change. Once again, we are the citizens, the ordinary consumers. With a little change – choosing to not eat animals, or for those that do, to consider the way the animal is raised – we can make a difference.

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[1] Vid. The chronology on veganism in Berlin written by our communication officer Krizia Said during her work experience at PETA Germany

[2] MIELE, M. and EVANS, A. (2010) '[When foods become animals: Ruminations on Ethics and Responsibility in Care-full practices of consumption](#)', *Ethics, Place & Environment*, 13: 2, 171 — 190.

[3] HARPER, G. and SPENCER H., [Consumer Concerns about Animal Welfare and the Impact on Food Choice](#).

[4] GIMÉNEZ-CANDELA-M., [Cuestión de huevos](#).

[5] [EU Animal Welfare Strategy: 2012-2015. Better Welfare for Animals. A new Strategy for a new Approach](#):

"European citizens care deeply about animal welfare, and in recent years more and more people become concerned about the ethical treatment of animals. Thanks to the European Union's Lisbon Treaty, animals are recognised as sentient beings, meaning that they are capable of feeling pleasure and pain. In recognition of this, the European Commission has adopted a new strategy to improve welfare conditions for animals kept on farms, living in zoos and used for experiments. The European Commission is striving to ensure that farm animals are kept and transported under conditions that do not subject them to maltreatment, abuse, pain or suffering".