

Norris (left) and Ball are two of the animals' most tireless activists.



10 Questions

MATT BALL & JACK NORRIS

Meet the co-founders of Vegan Outreach, changing the world one booklet at a time.

By Joseph Connelly

FOR NEARLY TWO DECADES MATT BALL AND Jack Norris have built Vegan Outreach (VO) from the roots up. Along the way, they—with VO's legion of loyal volunteers—have handed out, mostly on college campuses, more than 10 million pro-veg pieces of literature. Now that school is back in session, we turn our **10 Questions** to the men who might be responsible for keeping more meat off more plates than just about anyone.

1 Let's start at the beginning: How did VO come to be?

Matt Ball: Jack and I met in 1990 when he was the Special Events Coordinator for the Animal Rights Community of Greater Cincinnati. At first, our efforts together fell into the trap of “do something, do anything,” but we eventually realized we should focus on the 99 percent of animals who are slaughtered to be eaten. Vegan Outreach grew out of those efforts.

2 VO is known mostly for its literature, especially the excellent *Why Vegan?* What is the genesis of this ubiquitous pamphlet?

Jack Norris: In '92, while with ARC, we produced, to our knowledge, the first brochure promoting vegetarianism in the US that showed full-color graphic pictures of factory farms and slaughterhouses. It was only a one-page tri-fold; we printed 10,000 and it took about two years to hand them out. We now often go through

that many brochures in a day. At the time, we were into promoting veganism using the three-pronged approach of health, environment, and animals. We wanted a tool that would basically serve as a mini *Diet for a New America*.

3 In addition to *Why Vegan?*, how many other brochures does VO produce?

MB: We produce two other advocacy booklets, *Even If You Like Meat* and *Compassionate Choices*. *Even If* was designed for leafleting, and *Compassionate Choices* for displays, tabling, and leafleting. Our *Guide to Cruelty-Free Eating* is a follow-up booklet for people who want more information or who are already vegetarian. It includes recipes, a vegan-food glossary, and excerpts from Jack's detailed nutritional overview, “Staying Healthy on Plant-Based Diets.” We also have *A Meaningful Life*, for people who want to move beyond vegetarianism to focused, effective advocacy. It covers the whys, whats, and hows of vegan outreach.

4 Speaking of effective advocacy, Matt, you recently co-wrote *The Animal Activists' Handbook* with Bruce Friedrich of PETA. Did that book grow out of your work with VO?

MB: Yes. Bruce and I have been bouncing ideas off each other for more than a decade, and we didn't want others to have to go through the same slow, wasteful learning process we did over the past 20 years. During this time, we've written various essays and given talks about

our often hard-won lessons. Thanks to the encouragement of others, especially Martin Rowe of Lantern Books, we compiled our experiences into *Handbook*.

5 Another avenue of advocacy VO is involved with is its Adopt A College program. It's now back-to-school season: how does this work?

JN: Adopt A College is our main advocacy effort. It started in the mid-90s when I toured 248 colleges in 42 states. I came away realizing that our movement was missing the boat—banging our heads against the wall of older people who are relatively set in their ways, while putting very little effort into reaching the vast numbers of students, people available to us each and every day on more than 2,000 college campuses. The feeling at the time was that student groups were doing outreach to students, but this was true at only a handful of schools.

6 The program has now been going on for nearly a decade-and-a-half. How has it matured, and how can one get involved?

MB: In '03, VO officially “launched” AAC, emphasizing and tracking leafleting efforts to reach as many students at as many schools as possible. Since then, VO activists have handed a booklet directly to more than 3 million students. During spring '09 alone, activists leafleted at more than 700 colleges, reaching at least half a million students. We hear from many people

every week who went vegetarian or vegan from getting a booklet. It is clear to me that the work of AAC is playing a major role in expanding vegetarianism and changing attitudes towards animals. You can get involved by going to adoptacollege.org.

7 Jack, your “world tour” led you to return to college, and not necessarily to leaflet. Why did you go back to school?

JN: I found that about once per college someone told me that they didn't feel healthy when they had tried being vegetarian. In some cases, I thought it was just an excuse, but in many cases it seemed the person really wanted to be veg but just didn't feel healthy. So I went back to school for nutrition and then became a registered dietitian.

8 Was there a particular issue that you found was negatively affecting some people?

JN: Unfortunately, there are no simple answers. B-12 was the key for some people — back in the '90s animal and veg groups kind of hid away the fact that vegans needed to take B-12 in an effort to make the diet seem natural and not requiring supplements. After I and a few other vegan health professionals and organizations made a stink about it, the vegan community now accepts the need for vegans to get B-12 and many vegan foods are fortified with it, so I rarely come across B-12 deficiency anymore.

9 Speaking of nutrition, VO also sponsors a Team Vegan. What's that all about?

JN: Team Vegan is a fundraising event in which runner's sign up to run a race, typically a half marathon, and also to raise at least \$1,000 over the course of a 13-week training program. About half of the runners live in the Bay Area and attend weekly training runs in San Francisco with vegan running coach Darren Middlesworth. We organized Team Vegan in 2008 and 2009, with between 25–40 runners. For 2009, the program culminated with the San Francisco Marathon on July 26 and a celebration afterwards.

10 Earlier this year VO surpassed 10 million booklets handed out in 16 years. Congratulations. Is there anything new up Vegan Outreach's sleeve that you'd like to end on?

MB: Our goal remains the same: To have the greatest impact possible per hour worked and dollar donated. **VN**

VN Publisher Joseph Connelly still has his first edition Why Vegan? in his pile of clutter.