

## The Unlikely Vegetarian

NHL heavyweight Georges Laraque has been effectively dispatching on-ice opponents with his pugilistic prowess for over a decade, and now he's setting his sights on a different kind of opponent: the meat industry.

You see, on 1 June 2009, the 6' 3" 245 lbs. Montreal Canadiens' winger officially became not just vegetarian, but vegan.

For those of you that don't know, a vegan is someone that avoids *all* animal products. They don't eat it. They don't wear it. "I would and will never buy anything that comes from animals, so leather is out of the question," says Georges. "Unfortunately, I do have leather goods that I previously bought, which I still own, but will throw out after they're worn out."

Laraque's personal revelation and the epiphany that came along with it transformed him, and provided him with a more compassionate world view. "I think that whether you're killing for a big factory farm or local farms, killing an animal is a troubling act," he says. "Even though they are not humans, they feel pain like us."

And although his primary motivation seems to have been on moral grounds, he's quick to point out the health aspects of his new approach. "The human body was not designed to eat red meat. Our intestines are not meant to digest it. We do not need to eat animals to survive," says Laraque. "There's a stereotype that goes with being vegan in society," he adds. "Today, there are enough resources to replace the protein you get from animals. There's lots of different food you can eat to build up your muscle mass even if you're a professional athlete, so it is totally possible and easy to follow those steps at a young age."

And if you ever find yourself over at Georges' house for dinner remember he's the chef: "I like to ask people what they like in general to make sure I can make something they will eat, but once you cross the door anything that goes in your mouth will be vegan," he says with a laugh. "And as far as my favorite meal goes, it's definitely a hot vegan chilly. My all time best."

He's quick to add that if you're going to make the switch to becoming a vegan it's important to get qualified help to ensure that you're getting the proper nutrients.

But what about the people that say there's no way they could give up meat? They love the taste too much. It's probably safe to assume that at one time, Georges would have been counted among their numbers. Indeed, even though it wasn't always red ("I used to eat lots of fish," he confides) he ate meat almost every day. But, in the end, Laraque's conscience trumped his taste buds.

So how did the change come about? According to his website [Georgeslaraque.com](http://Georgeslaraque.com), he says, "I decided to become vegan after I saw the movie called "EARTHLINGS," which shows in detail the cruelty animals go through to end up on your plate, become a piece of clothing or even end up in a circus or a zoo."

The movie's profound impact compelled Georges to take action right away. "Since seeing the documentary I've decided I can never touch [meat] anymore because I refuse to support any industry that treats and slaughters animals in such terrible ways."

And abstinence wasn't his only response. "The movie was first and then a couple days after, I joined a fur protest [...]. I learned a lot that day from everyone that was there."

On Georges' website, he mentions the impact that meat production and consumption has on the environment, so is it safe to assume then that as well as being a vegan he's also a conscientious consumer that tries to pay attention to the carbon footprint that he leaves?

“Of course there’s a lot of stuff I need to learn, and the environment is one of other aspects I’m learning about,” he says. “And making associations with that and the meat industry - once you go this way, you start to make a lot of changes in your life to make people and our environment better, so slowly I’m starting to make the change to do my part.”

And in doing so, Georges is becoming what an article in The Montreal Gazette, proclaims him to be: “The newest face of Canada’s animal welfare movement.” The new face that is both conscientious and intimidating. But don’t worry, he won’t kick your ass just because you eat meat. “I don’t do it to force people to be vegetarian or vegan,” he says on his website. “I just want to educate people on the subject to make this world a better place. If you, for example, can watch the entire Earthlings documentary and still eat meat, I will respect you because at least you will know what you’re contributing to, and if you can live with that, then so be it!”

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