

## Ruben: A student story of change

Aimlessly wandering through the Netflix library, which must by now have been almost six years ago, I stumbled upon a documentary called *Cowspiracy*, and as it sparked my curiosity, I watched it entirely. It showed me the gigantic impact the animal industry has on our world and how tightly woven the veil is in hiding this from us. Things have begun to change in this regard, as the environmental impact of animal products has gained attention in the media.

I had a whole lot of different thoughts at the same time back then. First I was just shocked by how terrible the industry was and how effective they had been in keeping that out of public awareness. Then I was happy that I already was a vegetarian. But since there was still a huge difference between being vegetarian and vegan in terms of environmental footprint, I decided to lower my consumption of dairy and eggs. Yet as I did and learned more about the industry, I asked myself *Why do I lower my consumption? Why don't I just quit? Is the little bit that I still eat worth all the destruction and suffering it causes?* And as the answer was clearly a no for me, I decided to go vegan. I looked in the mirror and changed my ways.

So my name is Ruben Venema and I have been on this path of veganism for almost six years now. And I am immensely grateful for the decision I made back then, although living with the knowledge of the destruction of and the suffering in the world is not always an easy thing to do. As my interest in philosophy grew, so did my interest in the ethics of veganism. Now that I am in the second year of my bachelor *Philosophy: Global and Comparative Perspectives* I very much enjoy discussing animals and how we should relate to them, as we recently did in a course on political philosophy, trying to inspire my fellow students to think of animals in new ways. The philosophy of what we owe to future generations, along with other branches of environmental philosophy is also very interesting. What I haven't encountered enough of though, but find very interesting myself are questions concerning the inherent value of nature; Is it something we should protect because of its inherent value in and for itself, or do we only aim to protect it because we think it has value *for us*? My desire to do vegan activism manifests itself in many ways and became stronger after I forced myself to watch the documentary *Land of Hope and Glory* on youtube. So although I became a vegan for the environment, by now I am very much in it for the animals and for my wish to be a compassionate and kind human. One way my activism took shape was by founding the *Vegan Student Association* in Leiden (VSA Leiden). I wanted to have a community in Leiden for like-minded people, to make veganism more enjoyable and easier. There was not yet any such thing, so I decided not to wait for someone else, but to create what I wanted to see myself.



With the VSA I also hope to help normalise veganism and to bring it into public consciousness, so as to make people aware of the positive impact they can have on the world by going vegan, be it for the animals, the environment or for the human(ity). We change the world by having fun. I am always very happy when I see organisations or companies trying to do the same. To try to change the world and help people to make a change in their lives to have this positive impact. As such we, as VSA Leiden, love to collaborate with them and support each other in creating the world we all wish to see. LUGO is of course one of these! I am very happy it exists and grateful for the work they do and I hope we will be able to organise some wonderful activities or set up lovely projects together, until they aren't seen as activist anymore, but rather just as fun. Hopefully the time will come where we aren't needed anymore and Green and Kind are the standards.