

Minute on Right Relationship with Animals

The Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) Working Group on Right Relationship with Animals will be proposing a minute for the consideration by the full body at the Annual Session July 30th to August 5th at Hood College in Frederick. Since 2014, the Working Group has been engaged in education and advocacy on the practice of compassionate eating that fosters non-exploitive relationships with animals. As the Working Group states in its background to the minute, "...concern for the suffering of animals caused by human food choices extends beyond the animals themselves to the entire ecosystem." The following minute was sent to the Green Organizing Action Team (GOAT) at Homewood for review and feedback.

In the spirit of peace and compassion, and with a deep concern for the living world, Baltimore Yearly Meeting encourages Friends to extend the circle of love to animals, and to consider their welfare when making food choices.

GOAT supports this minute and asks that Homewood Friends consider it, too. If you feel a sense of unity with this minute and plan to attend Annual Session, would you consider speaking - as an individual and not a representative of Homewood - on behalf of the minute when it comes before the Meeting for Business? If you have questions, please feel free to contact a member of GOAT.

Advance Report from the BYM Working Group on Right Relationship with Animals 2018 Annual Session

During a workshop at Annual Session in 2014, the Working Group on Right Relationship with Animals came together out of a concern for the animals that are used for food. We came to the group with varied personal backgrounds—nursing a baby, dissecting frogs, hunting birds—which had changed our understanding of our relationship with animals. The nursing mother had been compelled to reexamine the cultural practice of depriving a newborn calf of his or her mother's milk and loving bond. The biology student's dismay at having caused pointless harm had prompted her to seek out alternatives to unnecessary killing for her meals. The hunter had been humbled by the beauty of the grouse she had shot and became a bird watcher. Having learned that we could thrive on a plant-based diet, we could no longer justify the tremendous suffering inflicted on animals in our names. Since forming a Working Group, we have continued to examine our relationships with all beings capable of suffering. We worship together, opening to the light that guides our search for ways to eat without harming others. It's a journey: we are vegan, vegetarian, locavore, pescatarian, and vegan-who-doesn't-ask-what's-in-the-cookies. Together we hold a leading to extend the circle of love and compassion to all beings. We invite all Friends to join us in exploring non-exploitative relationships with animals.

Members of our Working Group have travelled singly and in groups of two or three to as many local meetings as scheduling would allow, totaling 25 meetings so far, to lead discussions and worship sharing. We have given workshops at Annual Session and the Women's Retreat. We have submitted our concern for seasoning to Unity with Nature, Peace and Social Concerns, Young Friends, and Young Adult Friends. We have found that Friends love animals and are willing to engage on the subject of their welfare, bringing kindness and deep listening to the worship-sharing sessions. Most are distressed by the inhumane conditions found in factory farms. Many have been inspired to action. The ethical question of whether it is humane to eat animals if they have been respectfully cared for on small farms has come up repeatedly and will continue to prompt reflection and discussion.

Friends' concern for the suffering caused by human food choices extends beyond the animals themselves to the entire ecosystem. Occupying roughly a third of the Earth's ice-free land, animal agriculture contributes significantly to species extinction as it generates pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and appropriates ever more of the world's few remaining natural areas, while fisheries decimate the inhabitants of the oceans. As we monopolize resources for ourselves, we diminish our humanity and imperil our own survival while leaving no room for the rest of the living world.

We rejoice at the opportunities that are presented by each meal to help create a world of peace. We can awaken to and eschew the violence-by-proxy that may be inherent in our lifestyles and which desensitizes us to violence in general. We can recognize that society is destabilized by environmental degradation and by unequal distribution of resources. We can support each other as we adapt to changing conditions and to an evolving culture. We can open our hearts to our affinity with animals, each of which has one life to live, just as we do. Our light shines brighter with every act of mercy and kindness.

Therefore we request that BYM adopt the following minute:

In the spirit of peace and compassion, and with a deep concern for the living world, Baltimore Yearly Meeting encourages Friends to extend the circle of love to animals, and to consider their welfare when making food choices.

Proposed actions:

Continue to provide education and encourage local meetings to hold discussions about our relationship with animals.

Ask that plant-based options be available at meals served at BYM events, in quantities sufficient to allow everyone to try them.

Let the greater Quaker world know about our process.