

# Jonathan Safran Foer: We Are the Weather

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**Greg Dalton:** This is Climate One, changing the conversation about energy, the economy, and the environment.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** We do not as a species have to stop flying, stop eating animal products, stop having babies. We just have to do these things with a lot of moderation.

**Greg Dalton:** Author Jonathan Safran Foer says fighting climate change doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing enterprise. But it should start at breakfast.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** It's a tricky thing to engage the public in a conversation that is inconvenient, and having to say no to certain foods that have been so important to us is extremely inconvenient.

**Greg Dalton:** Can we create our own "new food normal?"

**Helene York:** I just cannot live with the idea that beef should be an every day food even for people who eat it. These have to become treats.

**Greg Dalton:** Climate-friendly eating. Up next on Climate One.

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**Greg Dalton:** Can a climate-smart diet still satisfy our deepest food cravings? Climate One conversations feature oil companies and environmentalists, rRepublicans and Democrats, the exciting and the scary aspects of the climate challenge. I'm Greg Dalton.

**Greg Dalton:** Eating a meat-free diet is one of the most powerful things one can do to cut their personal carbon footprint.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** I still find it extremely pleasurable to look at meat and to smell meat and I desire to eat meat when I see it. I just choose not to.

**Greg Dalton:** Author Jonathan Safran Foer, who teaches creative writing at New York University, wrote about meat-eating in his 2009 book, *Eating Animals*. In his most recent book, *We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast*, he asks how individuals can change their behavior to create new climate-sensitive norms.

**Helene York:** The analogy in the restaurant world is it is now inappropriate for chefs not to have a plan to reduce food waste.

**Greg Dalton:** Helene York is head of social and environmental responsibility at ISS Guckenheimer, a company that manages cafés on corporate campuses around the country. She previously supervised a food program for Google that served 300,000 meals a week to its employees. Helene describes Jonathan's book as "stunning" – even though it takes him until page 64 to confess that the book is in fact about the impact of animal agriculture on the environment.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** I had read a lot of books about climate change before I even contemplated writing my own. I was and I guess what you might call a concerned citizen, you know, like a concerned father. And I heard myself saying more and more often somebody really has to do something, somebody has to do something. Can you believe this, look at these images of the Amazon burning, look at these super storms and these 500-year storms that are now annual events, somebody has to do something. And I thought about my reactions to those images and to those books and the ways in which they were powerfully upsetting. They made me alarmed. They made me angry. They made me depressed. They made me motivated. Until I wasn't looking at them anymore at which point I just went back to my life. Many of these books I would read a paragraph or two paragraphs or 10 pages and say everyone on planet Earth has to read this. And then by page 20, I wasn't reading it anymore because, not because they weren't wonderfully written these are great books by smart people and wonderful writers. But something wasn't sticking to me. And so I try to give thought to what would stick and well, a balance of what would stick and then what has to stick. And our food choices have to stick you know, we know uncontroversially that there are four choices we make as individuals make that matter considerably more than any others which are flying less, driving less, having fewer children and eating fewer animal products. And it's a difficult thing to talk about because most obviously, it's a pleasure for most people. I'm a vegetarian. I have been since I was a kid. I still find it extremely pleasurable to look at meat and to smell meat and I desire to eat meat when I see it. I just choose not to. But not because I find it repulsive and not because it's easy. I also have some of my happiest memories involve meat, you know, the chicken my grandmother would make for me when I was a little kid my dad grilling in our backyard. My mom bringing lox home on a special weekend morning. So it's one thing to know that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between what you choose to eat and what will happen in the world, especially when it's scaled. And it's another thing to have to bring that into a kind of engagement with our psychologies and our cravings. And there's a reason why Al Gore has never really talked about meat, he's starting to more now. There's a reason why the leading environmental groups haven't talked about meat although they really are now at full speed. It's not because we're only now learning about it, it's because it's a tricky thing to engage the public in a conversation that is inconvenient, you know, as Gore put it, and having to say no to certain foods that have been so important to us is extremely inconvenient. So I wanted to get as far and as I could and pick as much momentum as I could before really engaging in the most necessary material.

**Greg Dalton:** Helene York, you read a lot of food books as part of your job to do that. How is this one different?

**Helene York:** Well, when you call me Greg and asked me if I would participate in this panel. I thought to myself, what's the difference between this book and Anna Lappe's book 9 years ago now, *Diet for a Hot Planet*. And then I looked at my shelf and I saw all of these books starting with *50 Simple Things You Can Do to Save the Earth*. This is 30 years old, although it did not address food at all. And for me this book does depart from all of the books that I have had the opportunity to read and mind you I read them for facts. I read them to try to find metaphors I read them to try to teach chefs why they should make different choices on their menus to make lower carbon choices. And this one is stunning, let me just use that as a word. It's really a call to almost the spiritual action and I don't consider myself a religious person but there were times when I was moved to tears and that's very hard for me in reading a book I can do it with movies, however. I'm not usually one that gets there with books. But I think it was so personal for you and it felt personal for me. I'm a parent, I'm not a grandparent but I think if you are in either of those categories you would find a connection. And I thought the analogy to the, well, the story of how individuals tried really hard to persuade and got audiences with influential people said this is what's happening in 1943 this is the Holocaust. And I don't think it was the word at the time but this is what's happening in the Warsaw Ghettos. And people heard those stories couldn't fundamentally believe it emotionally and didn't do anything about it. And I can't think of anything else in the lifetime of myself, my parents, my grandparents, that is as parallel and I thought the parallel was haunting, but it did what the other books haven't done, it's emotional. And I think I was finding even though you know I'm somebody who walks to public transportation, curses, sweating along the way and, you know, I'm a vegetarian until dinner and then I'm a pescetarian sometimes but I don't eat meat. And, you know, I've committed my professional life to this I found reading this book that there were other things I could potentially commit to. And so I began trying them on per size and that doesn't typically happen and I think there's a lot of power in this book.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** I'm so moved to hear that and, you know, I had the most amazing experience about two weeks ago. I did a reading and there's a signing line afterwards and a young couple came up and they put their book in front of me and open to what would normally be the title page, there was the title page would normally be empty and it's filled with their handwriting. And I said, "What's this?" And they said, "We're getting married in a couple of months and we decided that we really need to have a plan. Because if we don't have a plan, we're just gonna do what we've always done." And their plan was eat vegetarian unless served meat at a friend's house. Eat vegan two days a week have no more than two children and drive no more than a thousand miles a year. And instead of asking me to just sign it, they'd written a line that said "witness" and wanted me to sign that. And I was really moved by their plan I was really moved by the particularness of their plan, you know, like so interesting eat vegetarian except when you're at a friend's house. Yeah, that make sense to me. It's maybe not what I would do but what a great idea that's a really cool way to approach the problem. A thousand miles a year, could I do that, a thousand miles a year? I'm not so sure. Eating vegan two days a week. You know, one can look at that and say, hey, if it's wrong it's wrong. Like if the answer is that we got to eat less, just go all the way. You could measure the five days of hypocrisy or you could measure the two days of accomplishment. And I think we've gotten so used to measuring the hypocrisies and the distances from a perfection it's not only unattainable it's also unnecessary. We do not as a species have to stop flying, stop eating animal products, stop having babies. We just have to do these things with a lot of moderation. We have to do them a lot less than we're doing them now. And when I saw their plan, it occurred to me, having written this book, which took me I don't know two years to write. And having thought about this issue having opined at dinner parties having made posters for marches that I didn't have a plan. I could not say to anybody I could not say to my kids this is what I'm going to do. And instead, I have been doing what I imagine most of you do, which is you say, I'm gonna try to fly less in the coming year I'm gonna try to eat less meat in the coming year. But that doesn't really translate into behavior, at least not in my experience. I think we're so used to thinking about the shame of not acting that we forget the joy of acting and how good it can feel and what a relief it can feel to close the distance between what you know you should do, not because someone else is telling you, but because you're telling you because of your own inner compass. I know I should be participating in this way and yet we witness ourselves not participating in those ways. And just to close the distance, even by increments it provides its own kind of joy.

**Helene York:** I think in some ways, you're really talking about a new norm in creating a new norm where people really do make their own commitments and then you share it with other people. And they feel they have to share it with other people and then it becomes what people do. And the analogy in the restaurant world and it's taking a good 10 to 15 years to get to this place is it is now inappropriate for chefs not to have a plan to reduce food waste. And 50% reduction is what all of the major companies that have sort of thought about this issue in the last couple of years have committed to. Food waste is, you know, by many accounts responsible for about 8% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. If we're able to cut it by 50% that's reduction of 4%, that's extraordinary. There are very few things and you talk about you know your identity as your choices of food that's based on, you know, preferences and history and many different things. Convenience, certainly the cost, what the people you live with wanna eat and so forth. There are many different things that you might choose to eat but reducing food costs and then focusing on do I really need to eat this much food maybe I'll order less next time is something that really everyone can do without changing your food choices. I'm not suggesting that if you eat meat that you don't consider eating less, or not eating it because I do agree that that's one of the big ones up there. But reducing food waste is really I would make a top five and I think Project Drawdown would back me up on that one. Reducing food waste is a radical step that everyone can take every single day.

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**Greg Dalton:** You're listening to a Climate One conversation with Jonathan Safran Foer, author of *We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Starts at Breakfast*, and Helene York, head of social and environmental responsibility at ISS Guckenheimer, which manages cafés on corporate campuses around the United States. Coming up, we'll hear more about forging new norms for a climate-friendly diet.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** I'm gonna try and I'll try and I'll fail and I'll try not as a religion not as a rule of law, but because I want to participate and I'm not gonna be somebody who accepts the science rhetorically, but doesn't accept the science behaviorally.

**Greg Dalton:** That's up next, when Climate One continues.

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**Greg Dalton:** This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton, and we're talking about eating a climate-friendly diet with author Jonathan Safran Foer and food expert Helene York. *Carbon farming* refers to agricultural practices that store carbon in the soil where it is needed and doesn't heat the sky. One way to do that is moving cows around in a structured way as they munch on grass all day. Calla Rose Ostrander, who wrote climate action plans for the cities of San Francisco and Aspen before becoming a carbon farmer, tells us more.

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**Calla Rose Ostrander:** Grass is actually need to be eaten it helps them stay healthy and it helps them grow. In fact, when they're bitten off, they dispose more of their sugars down into their roots in the soil and that helps the soil carbon increase. So grazing in a positive manner can really help store more carbon in the soil. But the way we've been doing grazing getting them down to the bare nubs when those grasses get bit down to the nub and it's just that really short grass is all that's left. Well then they actually did the opposite. They have to pull up all their sugars all that carbon from their roots and try to help the plant grow. But manage grazing says, okay, well, we still have fences but let's move these animals around in a fashion that they would move more in the wild or how they evolve to move. The science showing if manage grazing can actually sequester carbon in the soil is a little bit all over the map. There's some science that says it does there's a lot of science that says it doesn't. However, there is no doubt that manage grazing is always a good tool when it comes to ecosystem restoration. And a healthy ecosystem is something that you need in order to have large-scale carbon sequestration. So I think we really need to be shifting this conversation from is meat good is meat bad or is this thing good or is this thing bad to how was it produced how was it grown. Was it grown in a way that was restorative and regenerative. Was it grown in a way that was degenerative and extractive and bad for the people and animals and landscape.

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**Greg Dalton:** That was Calla Rose Ostrander with the Marin Carbon Project. An effort to change the way cattle graze on grasslands. Trying to reframe, Helene York, a way from good or bad to how the cows graze. And you've actually posted some things on your blog questioning this whole grass-fed is better notion.

**Helene York:** I agree with everything in that. But there were a few pieces that were missing. And the reason that the data is all over the map is because the weather conditions and the soil conditions in a place like Marin County versus Kansas City versus anywhere else on planet Earth differ. And you know, in the Bay Area, we have many more warm months in other areas we don't. Even the so-called conventional beef are grass-fed for 12 months before they moved to a feedlot which is also typically an outdoor pen. If every system were in the same location we could compare the two systems side-by-side. I would also say that an effect that we have to remember is that, the so-called conventional beef reach a weight of typically about 1,300 pounds in only 16 months. And the cattle on pasture, fully pasture systems are typically not slaughtered until 20, 24 months. And so they are belching methane gas for a lot longer period of time, and they're slaughtered at about 1,200 pounds. So there are a lot of variables here. I do think though, you know, the outdoor systems the fully grass finished systems have a role certainly from an animal welfare perspective, from a land management perspective. But I just cannot live with the idea that beef should be an every day food even for people who eat it. It's just like bluefin tuna frankly like giraffes and tigers I mean we're talking about really, really big animals. And these are not creatures that even set aside the ethical issue of eating meat. If you eat meat or fish, these have to become treats and sooner rather than later.

**Greg Dalton:** Jonathan Foer, you think that it's immoral to eat animals. Do you see this as more black and white, good and bad?

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** I'm not so sure I would say that actually. I have now written two books that are focused on eating animals and I don't know what I think about the philosophical question at the bottom of it. You know, I've been to farms, I went to the original Niman Ranch in Bolinas. I thought, you know, it's not a bad set up they've got here. And if I were to imagine myself into a cow's position and maybe this is a kind of unnecessary or stupid hypothetical but, you know, it's not, if you think of it as a deal like this is what the cow gets in exchange for what the cow has to give. But the reality is we live in the world of 7 billion people and it's not an abstract question of whether it's right or wrong to eat animals. It's a very practical question of how, you know, the production methods that are available and that are necessary if this many people are going to eat this amount of meat and dairy. The amount of animal products that we consume now are the equivalent of every citizen in the world in the year 1700 eating 900 pounds of meat and drinking 1200 gallons of milk every day. So some of that is because of our changing diets and obviously a lot of that is because of our expanding population. But whatever

the explanations it is where we are this is the reality. And, you know, are there ways of farming beef that are better than others, obviously. Would it be wonderful if we could transition away from, you know, factory farms to the kinds of farms that existed 80 years ago? I would be the first person to support that. But, that will also require eating dramatically less of these products than we do now.

**Greg Dalton:** And the other part there, Helene York, is the kind of practices this kind of boutique grass-fed that happens in elite coastal areas. There's problems with scaling that because of the land needed because of their organic practices. Tell us, you know, organic is not quite all that it's sometimes cracked up to be.

**Helene York:** I think that there is a real dramatic difference between what you can do on a small-scale and what you can do on a large-scale. And that's true whether you're talking about fruits, vegetables, meat or grain crops, cereal crops. And you think about the history of how we got so few cereal crops, why do we have one kind of wheat for instance that is predominant. Why do we have one kind of bean, you know, pinto bean it's just much more prevalent than all the other beans combined. And that there's we've lost flavor and we really have lost a lot of flavor. But, you know, yields matter and if you practice farming in particular ways in an environment now where we have to really conserve the land for many different kinds of uses and we have the house so many more people and we have to move them around, yield is one of those factors we have to consider. And, you know, just like beef and the production system the same is true with fruits and vegetables, organic versus nonorganic. I mean I have given long lists of organic pesticides to chefs. And in a class that I do, and I said, do you want to serve these pesticides to your guests? They're like no, no. And then I say, okay, these are all approved on the National Organic Standards Board's list of pesticides. And they look at me like, what do you mean pesticides? I'm like, yes, pesticides in organic farming they absolutely do exist and some of them are because they are not as intense have to be used more frequently. Now, that typically doesn't happen on smaller farms it happens on larger farms. So there's the issue with scaling. And 75% of the organic produce that is available in the United States these days is from really large-scale farms. In fact, I talk about the books, you know, the many books on my shelf, Organic, Inc. it was early 2000 and it's been an issue that has really accelerated rather than gone back in the other direction.

**Greg Dalton:** It's complicated. We're gonna to our lightning round ask them some quick questions of our two guests. If you're just joining us we're talking to Jonathan Safran Foer, teacher of Creative Writing at New York University. His new book are, We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast. And Helene York, Head of Social and Environmental Responsibility at ISS Guckenheimer, a company that manages restaurants on corporate campuses around the country. So Helene York, your favorite food that was cooked in your home growing up?

**Helene York:** Oh god I hated the food growing up. Hamburger Helper was what we had. I can't answer that, sorry.

**Greg Dalton:** Oh boy. Jonathan Safran Foer. Your least favorite food that was cooked in your home growing up?

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** That's actually quite simple. A hard-boiled egg. To this day I can't be in a room with a hard-boiled egg. Probably nobody's fault by the way I mean --

**Helene York:** It smells like sulfur.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** It's the worst thing.

**Greg Dalton:** Helene York, one food you wish you could prepare better.

**Helene York:** Vegetables. I love vegetables I cook them all the time. They could always be better and more exciting.

**Greg Dalton:** The first thing that comes to your mind, Jonathan Safran Foer. One food you thoroughly enjoy.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** So this is gonna be a trick answer to your question, which is the afikoman at the end of the Seder the Passover Seder, you know, but halfway to the Seder, my dad let our Seders would hide half of the middle matzo. And then it was all the kids would go searching for it afterwards. It's a wonderful kind of food memory because it's hard to imagine a less appetizing food than matzo and yet it is probably my warmest food

memory which just points to how taste is a very complicated experience.

**Greg Dalton:** I actually like matzo ball soup.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** That's different.

**Greg Dalton:** Okay. Helene York, one book other than the one we're talking about one food book everyone should read.

**Helene York:** There are so many fabulous cookbooks right now that focus on vegetables. And if you want to make a commitment to do better find one of these recipes and make it for breakfast.

**Greg Dalton:** Jonathan Safran Foer. A food writer you think is amazing.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** Samin Nosrat, I think better than anybody else right now, conveys -- what I was trying to say a minute ago when talking about matzo which is why we love food. And the joy of food and she is now moving away from animal products for breakfast and lunch. And I love the way she talks about it, which is this sucks, like this is gonna be really tricky for me. You know, for her to say she's gonna try to refrain from animal products for breakfast and lunch is like me saying and I'm going try to refrain from adjectives and verbs in my writing until the end of the day. I mean she has more at stake and cares about it more and I just find it truly inspiring.

**Greg Dalton:** We're going to go to association. I'm gonna mention a noun and you gave me the first thing that pops into your mind unfiltered not thinking about what you should say. Helene York, what pops into your mind when I say Blue Apron the meal delivery service?

**Helene York:** Not the way to go.

**Greg Dalton:** Jonathan Safran Foer. Meat grown in a laboratory.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** Irrelevant.

**Greg Dalton:** Helene York. Farmed fish.

**Helene York:** Much better than it was 10 years ago.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** Your answers are not one word by the way.

**Greg Dalton:** Oh it could be one phrase.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** One phrase? Okay, I wanna take back my last answer then. Presently irrelevant.

**Greg Dalton:** Okay. Also for Helene York. What pops into your mind one first phrase when I say ugly tomatoes?

**Helene York:** Delicious.

**Greg Dalton:** Jonathan Safran Foer. Corn.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** Omnipresent.

**Greg Dalton:** Helene York. Sweetbread.

**Helene York:** Yuck.

**Greg Dalton:** Last one. Jonathan Safran Foer. Flight shaming.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** Useful.

**Greg Dalton:** Let's give them a round of applause for getting through the lightning round.

[Applause]

We're talking about meat and sustainability with Helene York and Jonathan Safran Foer. I'm Greg Dalton. Plant-based meat is quite a trend these days. Beyond Meat went public earlier this year. Shares are up 500% since their IPO. Beyond Meat is now available in Albertsons, Safeway, A&W, Carl's Jr. and Tim Hortons really getting to the middle of America. Impossible Foods a private company has a similar plant-based burger and other meat products available in Applebee's, Cheesecake Factory, Burger King. Jonathan what do you think about this trend for the first time meat lovers have something of a viable alternative.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** Well, one in three Americans eats a meal a day at a fast food restaurant. If plant-based meats replaced, I mean it'll be great if we could replace fast food period. But that's not gonna happen too quickly and in the meantime, if we replace fast food meat that would be a really, really wonderful way to begin to reduce meat consumption and I think it's a very easy way to. Because an Impossible Burger is not so different from a Burger King burger except that it requires 99% less water, 93% less land and amidst 90% fewer greenhouse gas emissions. I think the argument about whether or not it's considerably healthier kind of misses the point. The point is in this moment of climate crisis. This is a really easy way to begin to make a difference. One thing that I'd like quite a bit about how they've been rolling out these products is and that's been shown out in the buying habits. 90% of people who buy Beyond Meat in a supermarket, also buy meat in the same period of time that they're conducting this. When KFC released their vegetarian plant-based chicken, what a weird thing to say isn't it plant-based chicken. They had pictures in the New York Times of people lined up around the block and I thought, it's just a bunch of vegetarians didn't really excite me that much. But they painted KFC painted the restaurant green that day, which I thought that was pretty cool. They're not just making a little substitute for vegetarians to get them off their backs, but their statement was what impressed me the most, which was they said, we don't think of this as a food for vegetarians. We think of it as a food for people who eat meat and are going to eat meat, but want to eat less. And if we can move away from the binary of vegetarian or meat eater, I mean you even had discomfort when you said, pescetarians, these words trip us up, you know, they make us stutter, both literally and also emotionally. And if instead we could move toward just this recognition we have to do a lot less of this thing I think you would see -- like if you're to ask me in 10 years will half of Americans be vegetarian? I would say I think that's pretty unlikely. If you're gonna say in 10 years will half of the meals eaten in America be vegetarian? I would say that I feel that that will happen. It's the same outcome, you know, with regards to the environment with regard to animal welfare. But it's a totally different it's a perspective shift away from claiming an identity to claiming the choices that are in front of you.

**Greg Dalton:** Yeah. And that identity and that purity is often an obstacle for people they can't be perfect that won't start. So I'll just stay where I am it's a real obstacle those are real barrier. Helene York. I read on Yahoo that Bank of America Merrill Lynch did a survey of people who are buying these plant-based meat 35% are opting for plant-based protein for health reasons 30% for environmental reasons. When you're thinking about you serve thousands of people in corporate cafés around the country is it health first and environment second. How do you balance those?

**Helene York:** Its deliciousness. Seriously, and it's how it's described. Because if it is described with toppings that are just really, really appealing to consumers and its highest on the menu people will order it. If it's described as a healthy option on the menu people will say this restaurant has healthy food, great. I'll order the cheeseburger. So it's really about does this appeal to me in the moment when I'm making the decision for what I'm gonna eat for lunch.

**Greg Dalton:** So you don't lead with virtue.

**Helene York:** No. Although I think that the virtue has gotten supermarket sales going. I think the curiosity has gotten the fast food sales going. And I think that has everything to do with social media because you've got young people who think of food as an experience and they think of it as entertainment, really. And they wanna share that enthusiasm. And so they're willing to try new things and take pictures of it and share it with everybody and I think that trying new things has really accelerated the change because people want to try more things.

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**Greg Dalton:** You're listening to a conversation about climate-smart food and agriculture. This is Climate One. Coming up, we'll ask if tackling climate will require taking away burgers.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** Nobody's talking about that, it's not gonna happen, nobody is gonna make everybody

become a vegetarian. What would be great is if we had structures that encourage better choices.

**Greg Dalton:** That's up next, when Climate One continues.

**Greg Dalton:** This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton. We're talking about food and sustainability with Jonathan Safran Foer, author of *We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Starts at Breakfast*, and Helene York, who buys food from farmers and ranchers for employee cafes at companies around the United States. As if food itself wasn't complex enough, things like compostable cups and plates often have more environmental downsides that we think, as Helene York explains.

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**Helene York:** It's going through an evolution, you know, we started with corn which is actually a coproduct of the feeding of confined animals, I mean that sort of a sad, you know, you don't know that you think oh my god you mean I'm economically supporting the confinement of animals by having compostable cups? Yeah, to a certain degree, you are.

**Greg Dalton:** Because the corn is fed to the cows and then some byproduct is made into a cup.

**Helene York:** Yeah, when the celluloses is extracted. But, you know, now we're going into all kinds of other fibers. We're seeing leaves we are seeing bagasse which is a sugarcane coproduct. We are beginning to see seaweed that's my great hope because seaweed can be ground in the oceans, which occupy a lot more of the land, you know, the planet earth than land. And it sequesters carbon better than anything else on land and it's so malleable that I see the move away from plastics is good. The move toward compostable is good. But if you're throwing a compostable product into a bin and it ends up in the landfill is just generating methane gas as opposed to plastic which will just sit there. I mean sure we'd like to recycle it but there's a great debate going on in the design community. Do we use a plastic and then recycle it to make products or do we go with organic small products bioplastics if you will. The debate is not settled, but I think we're gonna see some breakthroughs over the next five years that is just going to be better than the other options that we have now

**Greg Dalton:** Jonathan, you have a chapter in your book, dispute with soul. And I thought it was one of the most interesting part there because it gets we've talked about how this is not of a spiritual book it's not about identity. And part of this says, have you noticed how often conversations about climate change end with the question of hopelessness. Maybe that's the self and the soul says have you noticed how often conversations about climate change end, that's because we're hopeful and we're comfortable putting off the discussion. So tell us about that chapter and how that represents this own conversation or conflict within yourself about your climate consciousness and responsibility.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** Well, it's something that I had noticed listening to other people talk about climate change. The conversations inevitably begin or end or both with the subject of hope. And I think that when people feel vulnerable they tend to move toward extremes, you know, the extremes can be binaries like I have to do everything or I do nothing. Or extremes even in terms of understanding climate change. You know some very smart people are doomsday-ish in a way that isn't in keeping with the science. Now these modes that we can kind of fall into if we're not vigilant, I find myself falling into them. I don't think I would ever say either of these two things aloud but I know that they are psychological resting places for me which are we are doomed or we're gonna be okay. And the truth is we're not doomed and we're not gonna be okay. We're at the beginning or near the beginning of a process of loss and we will determine the amount of loss. And some of the losses has already been set in motion and can't be undone. Most of it hasn't. So when I say or when I feel we are doomed or we're going to be okay, I'm first of all, excusing myself from the much more complicated mix of emotions that a real engagement with climate change would inspire like anger, sadness, guilt, resolve, hope, despondency, sometimes coexisting. And I'm also excusing myself from participation, you know, like people who say we are doomed and people who say we're gonna be okay really aren't including themselves in the we that they're speaking about. So I feel cautious about the conversation ending with hope, ending with emotion rather than action. It's very easy to confuse emotion with action.

**Greg Dalton:** And a lot of people say we don't have time for talk we need action and they jump right into action. Thinking that any action is better than no action and that may be misguided action or not thoughtful action. I



think some climate people are so uncomfortable that emotion they just get moving thinking that any action is constructive.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** I think it's, you know, like climate change itself. The solution to climate change, both collectively and individually will be a process. It's not an event. We're not gonna save the planet or not save the planet. So it's not a one-time event.

**Greg Dalton:** And that's a problem with that this 11-year deadline too. There's not some cliff 11 years out the people been talking about it that scientists have push back on that. It's more of a slope it's not like there's this, you know, turn in the road that have a particular date. That's, yeah, an inaccurate.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** There's a range of outcomes that's responsive to a range of choices. And we are not going to choose all or nothing and we are not going to end up with all or nothing. But a sensitivity to the power of the choices and to, you know, how variable this process of loss is and how empowered we are to not wholly determine it, but largely determine it I think it's more psychologically difficult because, you know, the book ends with -- the book begins by describing the first the oldest known suicide note. It's written 4,000 years ago in ancient Egypt. And the book ends with it as well with this notion of each of us arguing with ourselves will build a home together. And that's sort of my personal conclusion is that I'm not gonna decide to be an environmentalist and be an environmentalist, whatever that even means. It's not going to be an identity that I have and it's not going to be a choice that I make. It's going to be an argument that I have with myself over and over and over. An argument to stay vigilant and not become lazy.

**Greg Dalton:** You say it's between resignations and resistance that's kind of the choice.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** Yeah, but the resistance is, you know, there's a kind of resistance that is like a march that happens on a day. And there's a kind of resistance that's like a state of being. And I think that's the kind of resistance that we need more, listen, this is not to dismiss marches that's, my kids marched, I marched it's one of the most heartening things that's happened in the last several years. But a march is an event and the resistance that's required is going to be a process.

**Greg Dalton:** And as we record this the climate marches, Greta Thunberg came to the United States. Helene York, what did you think of the sort of this the shame she put on our generation. She's been quite strong shaming people in Congress shaming our generation saying, "Shame on you for looking to us for hope. We want action." What did you think of her and what we've been through the last few days?

**Helene York:** I think she's fascinating and I think she is really not speaking to us. She's speaking to people her own age and saying come with me and let's do what the people before us, our parent's generation our grandparent's generation hasn't done. And I think that's fair and it's appropriate. I don't mind if, you know, she blames us. I think that this is gonna be generationally waged, you know, it's like I don't expect a lot of people in their 60s 70s 80s to change their diets, although somebody has a heart attack and they become vegetarian that happens all the time. But I think that each generational wave will have its own norm. I really want her to be and others to galvanize action that young people are not typically involved in political processes and I think it's great.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** What is the action you would like her to galvanize. Because the one thing I think she's absolutely amazing and has captured the kind of global imagination. One thing that I find a little concerning is that the emotions are rising very high in a way that feels almost unsustainable. But there haven't been really specific calls for action. And a march, it is a kind of action but I mean behavioral action. If you could whisper into her ear, knowing the size of the audience that she has, what would you ask her to ask students to do?

**Helene York:** I think the next step is really a call to action for her generation. The five things. You mentioned four? I'm gonna add food waste because I think that's critically important. But I think that's gonna come with the students who go back to their schools and their environmental committees or their environmental justice committees and they're gonna come up with their five things. And I think one of the things your book does really well is call it back to come up with your own four or five things your plan. And I hope that that's what I would ask her to do is ask those who are listening to her to make their personal plans to go with whatever group they associate with. Whether it's a religious community or college or something else family even, make your own plan because we're all gonna have different plans as you point out. We'll have to start marching with action.

**Greg Dalton:** We're gonna include your audience questions. Welcome.

**Female Participant:** Hi. Thanks for coming. My name is Annie Gilbert. I had a hypothetical question for you both. I will strike at the Democratic national debate. The third one that happened in Texas when Cory Booker was asked, as a vegan if you would force all Americans to be vegan. He quickly said, no, and then pivoted. If either of you had been Cory Booker's speechwriter what should he have said?

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** I would say meat should cost what it actually costs. And then people can make their own choices, you know, armed with a sufficient amount of information. Because information has been concealed it's been impossible for people to make good choices. I know so much more about my refrigerator than the contents of my refrigerator. And if a Burger King burger was not a dollar but was the \$10 whatever it is \$25 if the externalized costs that underwrite that industry were removed, then people would eat a lot less meat. There's a kind of rhetoric that people use, Elizabeth Warren, who I happen to love sometimes uses this rhetoric of, you know, the corporations want you to be worrying about your food choices. They want you to be worrying about your light bulbs because it takes the attention away from them. That to me sounds like taking the, prying the gun from a cold dead hands, you know. Nobody's talking about that it's not gonna happen nobody is gonna make everybody become a vegetarian. What would be great is if we had structures that encouraged better choices. And that's the kind of virtuous cycle where the micro and the macro meet up. Like as we change our habits and make our will clear through behavior and through how we spend our money then it's gonna be easier to legislate where there'll be a pressure to legislate changes that make it easier to make those good decisions which make it easier to legislate or creates more pressure to legislate to make it easier to make a decisions and that's how change will happen. But this idea that it's either going to be the individual or the system as if they were two distinct things doesn't make any sense.

**Greg Dalton:** Yeah iterative and reinforcing. Jonathan, tell us about the demographics of vegetarians in this country. The data paints a different picture of vegetarians of what many people might think.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** Well, there's an impression that to talk, I mean, let's not even talk about vegetarianism itself, but a movement away from --

**Greg Dalton:** Eating less meat.

**Jonathan Safran Foer:** Yeah. That it's elitist it's an elitist consideration. It's something that people who have the luxury of thinking about eating less meat and the opposite is true. Harvard Medical School did a study at the end of last year and found that it's \$750 a year cheaper to eat as a healthy vegetarian than as a healthy meat eater. And that it's \$250 cheaper year to live as a healthy vegetarian than an unhealthy meat eater. There are about two and half times as many people who make less than \$30,000 a year who identifies vegetarians than people who make more than \$75,000 a year who identifies vegetarians and people of color are disproportionately vegetarian. So I hear this again and again and again, like oh this is something for privileged white people to do. I only hear from privileged white people actually and it's one of the like quickest escape routes from having to like confront your own choices. There are without a doubt people who live in urban food deserts in America who don't have access to the same kinds of choices that people in this room do. We shouldn't use them as an excuse not to make changes in our lives we should dig in and solve that problem. Those are two distinct problems. So it really is important I think to come back to these basic truths that it is less expensive to eat less meat it is healthier to eat less meat and it's better for the environment to eat less meat. Not to mention animal welfare. There are plenty of arguments against the world going vegan, but that's not what we're talking about. But the argument against really reducing the amount of animal products that we eat and a movement away from industrialized animal agriculture. There isn't a cogent argument to be made in response and the meat industry does not want to talk about this. They just don't want to talk about it because they know that the values that would lead somebody to eat less meat are not liberal values they're not conservative values they're not religious values or they're not exclusively any of these things. Or secular values are old or young, they're just fundamental human values, you know. These are issues that we all agree on. We just haven't had sufficient information we haven't been aware of when we're making the choices or the opportunity to make better choices.

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**Greg Dalton:** You've been listening to Climate One. We've been talking about sustainable eating with Jonathan Safran Foer, author of *We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast*. And Helene York, head of social and environmental responsibility at ISS Guckenheimer, a company that manages cafés on corporate campuses around the country.

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**Greg Dalton:** Kelli Pennington directs our audience engagement. Tyler Reed is our producer. Sara-Katherine Coxon is the strategy and content manager. The audio engineers are Mark Kirchner, Justin Norton, and Arnav Gupta. Devon Strolovitch edited the program. Dr. Gloria Duffy is CEO of The Commonwealth Club of California, where our program originates. [pause] I'm Greg Dalton.