



## Making the Connection

MARIANNE PETERS

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A few months ago, some people clashed over statements the president of Chick-fil-A made about marriage. Regardless of the political fallout, the public briefly thought about the connection between what we eat and what we believe.

I was ignorant of that connection for most of my life. As I got “greener,” I began to pay attention to what I ate, learning that environmental awareness included my food choices. I began to realize that behind my dinner plate stood a whole community. Suddenly it was getting crowded in my kitchen! There were the people who made their living providing food—putting dinner on my table so they could put dinner on theirs. There were the animals living and sometimes dying so I could enjoy a source of protein. There were the plants, whose roots carried on a conversation with the soil’s microbes and whose leaves transformed power from the sun into something edible.

To learn to eat more green, I began to make more educated choices about the food I bought. I spent hours reading food labels, magazine articles, and books about the current food industry and the people involved in it. I had long conversations with farmers, health food experts, and other concerned parents. It was information overload.

Eventually my philosophy boiled down to avoiding food made with a lot of chemicals I couldn’t pronounce and food made in ways that clearly exploited other people—as much as humanly possible. It was about loving my neighbor as I loved myself. A former Little Debbie fan, now I am uncom-

fortable eating “food-like substances,” as author Michael Pollan calls processed food, because I want to take care of my aging body and eat natural, recognizable, and whole food. (Thank you, Jesus, that a little dark chocolate is actually good for me!)

I also decided to buy fair trade and locally grown foods when I can, because now I’m uncomfortable eating certain foods when I know that an industry or company participated in human slavery, exploitative labor practices, animal cruelty, or environmental degradation. This does seem strange and almost a bit picky. After all, we are used to eating what we want, when we want, and as much as we want, no matter what this way of eating does to other people, the animals, or the planet. How can that glorify God? How can I thank God for food knowing that something or someone is suffering unjustly because of it? I can’t control the source of everything I eat, but when I can, I try to choose fairly.

It’s impossible to live a completely chemical-free, cruelty-free life, at least for this small-town mother of two. The temptation to take a short cut through the fast food drive-up window can be overpowering. The more I think about it, I think that eating thoughtfully is a very ordinary act. I think I’m doing what any Christian disciple should be doing, trying to live justly in a world where justice is rare. Trying to pay attention. ■

Marianne Peters is a freelance writer living in Plymouth, Indiana.