

On November 17th 2007, in honor of World Farm Animals Day, the Vegetarians of Central Florida put on a massive community sponsored event – **Veg Fest 2007**. Among the supporters participants were big organizations like Whole Foods Market and Vegetarian Times, community groups like Animal Activists of Central Florida and Florida Voices for Animals, and local businesses like Dandelion Communitēa Café and the Girls Gone Green.

With speakers, cooking demos, food, and live music all day it promised to be a day full of information, education, entertainment, and most importantly, compassion.



To see if it delivered, roving reporters and sneaky insiders from VegSarasota attended, and with complete lack of discretion we made ourselves known to all. With the cloud cover threatening early on, there was no time to delay in absorbing lots of good vibes (and vegan brownies).

First up to speak was expert nutritionist and registered dietician **George Eisman**. Eisman is considered one of the nation's foremost educators on vegetarian nutrition.

Eisman spoke about the effects of food choices on health. Including books by Jane Plant, and a revised version of his Vegetarian Nutrition course book which has the tests removed and a new 10-page section added



After taking a brief break during the Q & A to dash over to the Crystal Springs booth for a refill on water and to the Dandelion booth for some breakfast, which was hearty Chili with vegan cheddar and chips, we got back to hear Paul Shapiro speak.

Campaign Director for HSUS, **Paul Shapiro**.

Even without his projector, Shapiro was able to share a fresh and optimistic view on the status of farmed animals in the US. citing recent successes in legislation in Arizona & Florida.

Paul is currently working on a major campaign in California to ban Gestation Crates and Battery Cages



It's about that time that brain says "Chili breakfast is over, must find more vegan treats! Let's move!"

But before we could get very far, a friend pointed out this interesting T-shirt.

Lots of interesting activist clothing was spotted throughout the day. Our favorite Vegan T-shirt, many types of group-oriented shirts, and definitely the most bold one we've ever seen, pictured here.



Ok, back to the food finding - are you detecting a theme here? Vegans love to eat! After all, what would any festival be without indulging on some cruelty free junk food? Luckily, we found a group which seemed to be solely dedicated to helping us achieve this aim. After grabbing a great cup of freshly roasted coffee at the Z-Café booth (where they were also serving hot food including vegan crab cakes) we found the mecca.

[Food Not Bombs of Orlando](#) was there giving away all kinds of free food, including some of the drippiest chocolatiest brownies in town. They also had soups & stews, but who wants that when you can have free peanut butter cookies?

Notice the cool shirt as well!



As we roamed around we encountered a plethora of friendly faces, holistic practitioners, and dedicated activists. Several prominent figures from the movement were in attendance as well. Some, like Gene Baur and Lauren Ornelas were there to speak. It was great to see people opening their hearts and minds to animals in new ways. At the same time it was great seeing the light bulb come on as folks connected issues such as environmental protection to the overall issues of veganism and animal rights.

Many vendors were there donating body work including yoga, cranial release, massage, and reflexology. VegSarasota couldn't resist the temptation of free reflexology of the feet, especially after walking around for a couple of hours. We chose the booth of [Alternatives Gateway](#) after getting a recommendation by another Sarasota resident in attendance. They got an A+ and got us back on our feet, literally. It was gracious of them to donate all of their services for a great cause. Although there was no mandatory fee, we were glad to donate some money to them for a wonderfully refreshing and rejuvenating foot massage.

We stopped by a few other booths as we continued to stroll around the beautiful park setting. Some worth mentioning are the [Girls Gone Green](#), who supplied delightful Emcee services to the event, [Larabar](#) who was giving out handfuls of free samples, and [ARFF](#) where we got to meet and chat with Nick Atwood, another speaker of the day.

Fortuitously and by chance alone, VegSarasota ended up at the amplified music stage just in time to catch some music. This terrific trio was composed simply of a violinist, cellist, and a guitarist. From these seemingly simple youngsters sprang a set of music that was immediately impressive. Turns out, this was none other than the group [The String Theory](#). We'd heard of them, but until today, hadn't heard them, but we are glad we did. The trio on stage, lead by a pretty amazing and passionate vocalist delivered several songs to a captivated audience. The only way it could have been better is if they'd had a CD for sale.

It was after this, in the early afternoon, that it began to sprinkle. We took the opportune shade of the speakers tent to catch some of Gene Baur's talk.

Gene Baur – President and Co-founder of Farm Sanctuary.

Definitely the heavy hitter of presenters, this goliath in the animal activism arena from San Jose delivered an articulate speech on changing hearts and minds about animals and food. His talk was punctuated by extremely graphic depictions of the horrific conditions and processing which farmed animals routinely experience.

He covered deeply connected topics like workers rights, war and violence, compassion, and awakening understanding. Take away activist tip – 'The best way to start a discussion with someone regarding animal welfare is to ask them a question that is non-threatening'.



So as promised, tasty smelling cooking demonstrations, great reflexology and massage, environmentally friendly vendors of all varieties, good live music (acoustic, amplified, and spoken word), good crowd energy, and mostly good weather made the event a tremendous success. With any luck, a small portion of the people who attended will begin to make some changes in their lifestyles, having learned a truth or two that is new to them. Unfortunately, the afternoon showers continued dampen the crowd, but all in all it was fortunate that the day was so packed with passion.

Please check out some of the links and use the concept displayed in this photo as an indication that no matter where you are in life and on your educational journey, there is room for growth.

Special thanks to Larry Rumbaugh and everyone else involved with the CF Veg Fest

