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Why Are Americans Eating Less Meat?

By Ta-Nehisi Coates

[Mark Bittman](#) looks into a Department of Agriculture report which shows Americans eating less meat:

It's not the non-existent federal War on Meat that's making a difference. And even if availability is down, it's not as if we're going to the supermarket and finding empty meat cases and deli counters filled with coleslaw. The flaw in the report is that it treats American consumers as passive actors who are victims of diminishing supplies, rising costs and government bias against the meat industry. Nowhere does it mention that we're eating less meat because we want to eat less meat.

Yet conscious decisions are being made by consumers. Even buying less meat because prices are high and times are tough is a choice; other "sacrifices" could be made. We could cut back on junk food, or shirts or iPhones, which have a very high meat-equivalent, to coin a term. Yet even though excess supply kept [chicken](#) prices lower than the year before, demand dropped. Some are choosing to eat less meat for all the right reasons.

The Values Institute at DGWB Advertising and Communications just named the rise of "flexitarianism" -- an eating style that reduces the amount of meat without "going vegetarian" -- as one of its top five consumer health trends for 2012. In an Allrecipes.com [survey](#) of 1,400 members, more than one-third of home cooks said they ate less meat in 2011 than in 2010. Back in June, a survey found that 50 percent of American adults said they were aware of the Meatless Monday campaign, with 27 percent of those aware reporting that they were actively reducing their meat consumption.

It'd certainly be [a good thing](#) if we ate less meat--particularly beef. But I'd like to see more data on the causes.

On a more personal front, I'm trying to make this the year that I kick the hamburger habit I've developed. I was off to a great start. Then I went and to a Korean tapas joint in Hell's Kitchen. The food was so good, it almost made it worth it.