

## **You're Invited to Dinner**

by Kay Bushnell

The environmental, health and cruelty concerns about factory farmed livestock are motivating millions of people worldwide to make the transition to a healthful plant-based diet. When eating at home or in a restaurant most people find that it is easy to enjoy plant-based meals. Socializing in the homes of others provides another experience.

Some folks may feel uncomfortable about requesting food that may be different from what the hosts are planning to serve. They needn't. Many people are on special diets today, and there may well be other guests who join you in preferring vegetarian dishes. Learning a few tips on dealing with social invitations is a good way to build confidence. Feeling hesitant about finding plant-based food at any social occasion will soon become a non-issue.

If the hosts already know about your plant-based preferences, they may discuss with you what they are planning to serve. These considerate individuals should be assured that you will have plenty to eat as long as there is salad, bread, or vegetables. You might offer to bring a delicious plant-based dish for yourself and others.

If your hosts don't know about your food preferences, you have several options. You can say nothing, eat a moderate meal at home as insurance before you go, and trust that there will be a sufficient number of animal-free dishes available. If the meal is a buffet it will usually contain some plant-based options. If it is a sit-down meal you can avoid being served a plate already arranged with meat and other animal foods by speaking with the host ahead. Explain that you eat grains, vegetables, fruits, beans, and nuts, and do not expect the host to make special efforts on your behalf. Offer to bring a tempting dish for yourself and others.

If family members are the hosts and might take personally your rejection of foods that you used to eat, it is wise to discuss ahead of time your decision to change your diet. Express appreciation for their kind invitation, and tell them that you no longer eat animal-based foods. If they ask why, be prepared to tell them with diplomacy and enthusiasm. A brief explanation such as, "I'm eating only plant-based foods because I've learned that meat production is extremely wasteful of our planet's natural resources," should suffice. If they wish to know more about your decision, they will ask. You may wish to share with them books such as *Eating to Save the Earth* by Linda Riebel and Ken Jacobsen, *Diet for a New America* by John Robbins and *The Vegetarian Starter Kit* by Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (1-888-260-8458.) Offer to bring a tasty plant-based casserole or vegetable dish to the meal.

Your new way of eating may make others feel defensive. That's understandable. Most of us have been non-reflective eaters at one time or another and felt irritated when nudged to justify our food choices. The defensiveness of others will pass as they witness your commitment to sustainable food choices, your non-judgmental attitude, and most of all,

the outstanding food that you prepare and share with them. Be a good role model for the environmentally friendly diet that you have chosen.

Linda Riebel states, "Eating less food of animal origin is the single most powerful choice you can make for your health and for the earth." If we so choose, each of us has the opportunity to take this "single, most powerful" step. Even the decision to have one or two animal-free meals a week, if made by many of people, can make an enormous difference.