



# Our Hen House

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## Interviews with Leena Ledermann, Britta Chamberlain, Gieri Bolliger, Jonas Vollmer & Michael Moor, and Ruairi Donnelly

By OUR HEN HOUSE

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*Following is a transcript of an interview with **LEENA LEDERMANN, BRITTA CHAMBERLAIN, GIERI BOLLIGER, JONAS VOLLMER & MICHAEL MOOR, AND RUAIRI DONNELLY** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 224.*

JASMIN: So our first guest today -- we're doing this episode similar to how we did last week. We have several guests again, short interviews. And it's just so exciting to me to be able to have a taste of what's going on in Switzerland for animal rights and in the vegan scene. And our first guest is Leena Ledermann. And Leena is actually somebody whom we met because she emailed us, and she's a podcast listener who lives in Zurich. And when we found out we were going to Switzerland, we actually had reached out to her and she offered to meet us at the airport. And we met at the airport after an overnight flight and then we went out to breakfast at Hiltl, I believe.

MARIANN: Hiltl! It only has one vowel in it, and it's the oldest vegetarian restaurant in the world. Imagine that! And I thought it was going to be a very modest place. It was actually right in the center of Zurich in a very high-end shopping district, and a really beautiful and large vegetarian restaurant, buffet-style.

JASMIN: Yeah, so good. And let's hear what Leena has to say about what it's like being a vegan/animal rights person in Zurich.

Welcome to Our Hen House, Leena.

LEENA: Hi, Jasmin.

JASMIN: Here we are, in Zurich!

MARIANN: Yes, we're sitting here eating at Hiltl restaurant, in the oldest vegetarian restaurant in the world.

JASMIN: Yeah, I think, what was it, the 1800s it started? I think it was the late 1800s?

MARIANN: Somewhere around there. We're here for lunch. It's absolutely packed. You can barely move. It's just amazing, and the food's amazing. And we're here with Leena.

JASMIN: So exciting to be here with you.

MARIANN: We never would have found it without her.

JASMIN: No. It's just so thrilling to be able to connect with you live and in person after connecting -- do you remember the first, the reason you initially emailed us?

LEENA: Yeah, I was really amazed at how everything I was hearing on the podcast was resonating with me in a different way in Switzerland than in the US.

JASMIN: Can you expand on that a little bit? Just give us your impressions about people's attitudes about animals here in Switzerland, 'cause as our listeners probably gathered, you're not originally from here.

LEENA: Right, yeah. I'm from the US. Yeah. I think I was really amazed by the tradition, especially with cows and sort of dairy, how farmers were treating the cows.

JASMIN: Yeah, cows seem to be really important to people here, is that right?

LEENA: Yeah, it's kind of an icon I guess, in a way, the cow bell, sort of the tradition. But I'd seen a television show where they were comparing ranching in the US to dairy farming here, talking about learning each cow's name and decorating them with flowers and going up into the Alps and all that, and it just struck me as very different I guess.

JASMIN: So since they love cows so much, clearly they don't eat them.

LEENA: If only.

MARIANN: Yeah, and also I think it's much like the humane meat movement. Really, it just never left, so it didn't have to come back... or the humane dairy movement that to some extent, it's just an illusion.

JASMIN: So tell us about where we are right now, Hiltl. You said that this is a very popular place that people like to frequent. It's unbelievably crowded.

LEENA: Yeah, and I think it's popular with everyone, not even vegetarians or vegans. Everybody likes to come here. It's very hip, people of all ages and it's always packed.

JASMIN: Yeah, I have a tour book of Switzerland. And I just randomly opened to the page that talked about this the other day, so that's exciting. And the ads here are amazing too, don't you think?

LEENA: Yeah, definitely. I think they have a humor to sort of the vegetable, which is really cool.

JASMIN: So what's it like being vegan in Zurich?

LEENA: It kinda gets easier every day actually. In fact, tonight, they're having a week of free vegan meals in Zurich to get people interested in not only veganism but sort of respecting food and not wasting, so I wouldn't have seen that two months ago.

MARIANN: A week of free vegan meals!

JASMIN: We came on the right week.

MARIANN: This is an idea that must catch on. We could just move from city to city as they have weeks of free vegan meals.

JASMIN: And can you just tell our listeners a bit about what it is that you do?

LEENA: I'm a grad student right now.

JASMIN: You're getting your PhD?

LEENA: Yeah, in geography.

JASMIN: And what's your dissertation on?

LEENA: Muslim women in France insecurity.

JASMIN: I love how vegans just are always so much more evolved, don't you think, than other people, just in the way they think? And just, there's so many themes and threads of social justice in your dissertation.

MARIANN: Yeah, well, vegans are more evolved. It's just a fact.

JASMIN: Okay, well, I can't thank you enough for showing us around Zurich this morning after our redeye, and I didn't even brush my teeth. I shouldn't have admitted that, but it's true.

MARIANN: You chewed some gum.

JASMIN: I did chew some gum, which is sort of like the same thing. So thank you so much, Leena, for joining us today in Our Hen House and for showing us your city.

LEENA: Yeah, thanks so much for emailing me. I'm really happy I got to meet you both.

JASMIN: It's so great when you get to meet your podcast listeners. And quite frequently people say, "I feel like I know you!" to us because you do know us. We tell you our innermost secrets quite frequently. But when you meet people like Leena, you start to feel like you know them too oddly. Is that weird?

MARIANN: Yeah, there's always this odd beginning when I feel like somebody else knows me and I don't know them. But then quickly, you do find that you get connected very quickly because obviously we have so much in common. I just love the fact that we have this family all around the world.

JASMIN: And speaking of which, we met another listener, Britta Chamberlain. And Britta also reached out to us over email, and she was telling us about some of the work she's doing in Romania. She lives in Germany. She came out to the conference when we mentioned that we would be out there and we got to chat with her. And both Britta and Leena for that matter were both so nervous about going onto the show and they were both absolutely exquisite. So I have to say meeting Britta was a true honor and to hear about the work she's doing. And on the article that corresponds with today's podcast episode, we're going to be linking to some of the campaigns she's going to be talking about, that she is working on in Romania with dogs. So here is Britta Chamberlain.

Welcome to Our Hen House, Britta.

BRITTA: Hi.

JASMIN: It's so exciting to meet you in person. I know we were communicating online and in email. And I'm so excited that you were able to come out from... Germany is where you're based, right?

BRITTA: Yes, correct. I'm in Munich.

JASMIN: Oh, in Munich, okay great. How far is that from Basel?

BRITTA: It's about a four hour drive.

JASMIN: Oh, wow. Okay. So I know that when we were communicating over email, you were telling Mariann and I about some of the work you're doing volunteering in Romania. And it is actually with dogs specifically, right?

BRITTA: Yes, correct. It's specifically concerning the Romanian street dogs there, yes.

JASMIN: Okay, well I'd love for you to tell our listeners a bit more about this. I just told you to stop telling the story because I wanted everyone to hear this. But basically this all started with a trucker, is that right?

BRITTA: Yes. This German trucker, Tamara Raab, she's been driving to Romania and to other European countries for years helping causes there, helping animal shelters, helping orphanages. And she just started this whole thing where she wanted to help out a specific animal shelter with manpower right there, and so she got this group of people together to go over there and to build new buildings, to build dog houses, to bring food. So basically that's how it started.

JASMIN: Well, actually let's back up for one second. How did she find out about this place?

BRITTA: Well, it was on one of her tours. This was a regular tour she did, and I think it was just by chance that she went past there and she saw this animal shelter of, let's say, 1,500 dogs there. And she just felt like something needed to be done to help those dogs.

JASMIN: Wow.

MARIANN: And what kind of conditions were the dogs living in when she first came upon this place?

BRITTA: Well, it's really a very decrepit run-down place. It's basically a big area fenced in with burnt down buildings, a whole bunch of garbage, nothing really for the dogs to enjoy or to live in, no really good conditions. So that was unfortunately the problem there.

JASMIN: And she put together a Facebook event, is that it?

BRITTA: Yes. I got to the event via Facebook, so she was looking for volunteers who would come down there with her and just help out, really to put in the manpower and make it a better place for the dogs.

JASMIN: So let's talk about how it is now. Can you describe how things have changed and the condition that these dogs have now?

BRITTA: Well, we went down there with about 40 people. We had some funds. We all tried to get money together so we built a new storage place for the dog food so that the rats don't get in it. And we built a lot of dog houses because we knew the winter was coming and they really didn't have a dry safe place to stay in. So that was our main purpose. We also built a little bit of an operating center for the dogs because that's also one of the big things that we do there is really try to incorporate a spay and neuter program for the dogs, which is basically the most important thing in Romania right now.

MARIANN: Now who is running this? Was this shelter run by people in Romania who are trying to help the dogs, or were they rounded up, or how did they end up there in the first place? These were originally street dogs?

BRITTA: They were street dogs, but the shelter has been in existence for a couple of years. It's a private shelter that's been under new management since last year, and they are really the most animal-loving people in the world, and they really just try to give these dogs a better life. But of course, in Romania it's very difficult. The economic situation in Romania is bad as well, so they only have this much they can do. So they're, I think, very helpful for help from different countries.

MARIANN: I think it's great to think that they're so committed to this but they just didn't have the resources, and you had some of the resources and joined together to help these dogs. I love that story.

JASMIN: Yeah, and I want to hear more about you, Britta. So you're on Facebook one day, wasting time procrastinating, which is what I do on Facebook usually.

MARIANN: But it was doing something useful.

JASMIN: Well, it turned out to be something useful. Tell me about what called to you about this, what you're like as a person, and why this specific event to get involved made the light go off or on for you.

BRITTA: Well, I have a dog at home as well, who I love very much. And I just, I've been donating to animal causes for a very long time. But for me it was just important to for once be there and see where my money goes, what happens. And that was just very interesting for me, to know the background of it. And I just got really invested in it, and it was just a very exciting opportunity to kind of do something right there.

MARIANN: Do you feel this experience has changed you?

BRITTA: It has definitely changed me, and everybody around me says it as well. They're like, "wow, you are so motivated with this right now" because of course the efforts continue. We didn't just go over there once and say, "okay, they got some dog houses, now it's all good," which it's not. We are now trying to make this really a long-standing effort with educating the public in Romania because the situation again is very bad. They have this new law in place now where, after 14 days, if the dogs are not picked up in the shelters they can be euthanized. And unfortunately the euthanasia in Romania, since there's no funds to do it, is very cruel and very horrible. So we're trying to educate the public. We're actually

inviting them to get their pets spayed and neutered for free in the shelter. We have a resident vet who comes in once a week, and whoever from the town wants to get their dog spayed or neutered, we do that for them.

JASMIN: I love this. And there's something I'm trying to get at here, so I'm just gonna be forthright about it. I'm trying to kind of give us and our listeners a glimpse into the fact that you and the other volunteers doing this are just regular people, not people who are particularly gifted at building dog hutches and not particularly experienced necessarily in putting together this kind of volunteer effort. Can you just give me an idea of the types of people who are involved in this effort with you and what they do for a living? Like, are they just people from all walks of life?

BRITTA: Oh yes. And that was one of the interesting things. Actually there was maybe one or two people who are experienced in building something. Everybody else, we're office workers. We're -- I don't know.

JASMIN: Things like teachers, things like that.

BRITTA: Yes, everything, and so it was very interesting that we were basically there to do manual labor but it was interesting for us to figure out how to do it. But yes, from all walks of life for sure. And it's just a great bunch of people that got together there, and it really worked together in an effort that we all believe in.

JASMIN: I think it's so inspiring.

MARIANN: So what called you to come to this conference?

BRITTA: Well, I'm very interested in animal law. And I don't see a lot of other opportunities to kind of be exposed to this kind of information. So for me this was just an opportunity I jumped at, where I'm also in a room with likeminded people and I get all this information that is otherwise for me hard to come by.

JASMIN: And finally Britta, can you tell us a little bit about the vegan scene in Munich?

BRITTA: Well, I'm a new vegan now.

JASMIN: Welcome.

BRITTA: Thank you. I've been a vegan now for three months.

JASMIN: Wow!

BRITTA: Thanks to your podcast as well.

JASMIN: Oh, cool!

BRITTA: Honestly you have been inspiring me a lot. And I'm not often in doubt, but every time I kind of need a picker-upper I listen to your podcast and it helps.

JASMIN: I'm getting verklempt!

MARIANN: Best moment of the conference.

JASMIN: No kidding. That's so wonderful. And have you had a nice time enjoying this new world that you have leapt into?

BRITTA: Yes, amazing. I really switch from one day to the next without any issues. I've been a vegetarian for many years, but I just, 9th of January, I said, okay, I'm gonna try this now. And it's great, and I enjoy finding out all these places in Munich as well. I'm still learning. I'm still trying to figure out all the restaurants and everything. But it's, I think, a great scene, and I'm enjoying it. I love it.

JASMIN: Well, I heard that Germany is really vegan-friendly in general.

BRITTA: Yes, and it also seems that at the moment, it's very trendy as well, which is good for vegans as they are anyway because we just have even more resources now, especially for me, being a new vegan, all these books, all this information coming out, so I really love it.

JASMIN: Well, thank you for inspiring us. And it's so nice to meet you in person, and thanks for all you're doing in Romania and everywhere else.

MARIANN: Is there a way that people can help?

BRITTA: Yes. Of course we are looking for donations as well. We have what we call a food taxi, so we have this truck company who's actually giving us their trucks for free. We just need to get it full of 40 tons of food every time and then they'll ship it down to Romania for us, which is very nice. So that is kind of how we get our donations in, so this is a way to help as well.

JASMIN: Well, send me a link and I'll post it on the article that corresponds with today's podcast. So if somebody listening to this feels so moved, and I'm sure they will, then maybe they can help out. Does that sound okay?

BRITTA: Yes, great, thank you very much.

JASMIN: Well, thank you so much for taking the time out and joining us today on Our Hen House in our satellite office here in Basel.

BRITTA: Thank you very much.

JASMIN: It's always so amazing and humbling to hear from someone who's doing such great work and to know that you've had a part to do with their process. I can't believe that Britta went vegan because of Our Hen House. That is just so special and we just totally fell in love with her.

MARIANN: Yeah, and the work that they're doing is so wonderful. I think it just seems like we're just hearing more from people who are working with dogs in countries where they've really been ignored in the past and Romania is certainly one of them. The problem is very substantial and I'm just so heartened to hear of the work that's going on there.

JASMIN: And our next guest is Gieri Bolliger. And he has been fighting the good fight for animals by way of animal law for many years.

MARIANN: Yeah, he spent his career doing animal law and he now heads up an organization that's really unique in Switzerland. It's basically a not-for-profit organization that brings law cases on behalf of animals, and really doing some fascinating work.

JASMIN: So this is Gieri Bolliger.

MARIANN: Welcome to Our Hen House, Gieri.

GIERI: Hi, Mariann.

MARIANN: We're so excited to be here in Basel, and we're so excited to hear about the work that you're doing. What's the name of your organization?

GIERI: It's called *die Stiftung Grundlage für das Tier im Recht*. This would be in English the Foundation for the Animal in the Law.

MARIANN: I just can't believe there is such an organization. And can you tell us a bit about the nature of the kind of work you do?

GIERI: Well, it's the only animal welfare organization in Europe really focused on legal issues. We try on the one hand to influence animal welfare legislation, and mostly in Switzerland but also in whole Europe. On the other hand, we try to help everybody who has problems with or because of his or her animals. We try to give them information, how to treat the animals in the right way, in a good way, because we are convinced that good information helps always the animals in the end. And so that's the main tool of our work.

MARIANN: Can you tell us a little bit about the differences between how farmed animals are treated by the law here in Europe and specifically in Switzerland as opposed to the United States?

GIERI: Yes. I think that the legal situation for the farm animals is better here in Europe because our farm animals are not excluded from this code of application of the Animal Welfare Act. We have certain things that are completely prohibited in Switzerland and also in other European countries, for example the gestation crates. Since more than 20 years we have no more battery cages for the hens, for poultry. There are regulations that say, for example, that a cattle has to let out for at least 90 days a year. And so all these things are for sure better than the legal situation in the United States. On the other hand, we know also the best statute is always only worth the way which it is implemented in reality. And we have deficiencies in the implementation and enforcement of these statutes also in Switzerland, so it's not really a paradise for the farm animals. I don't want to present it in a too positive light, but I think if we compare it, it's better here.

MARIANN: Right. If you're gonna compare it to the United States, that's not a very high bar to be better than. So yeah, I know it's better here, but we still all have a lot of work to do. Does your organization bring litigation?

GIERI: Yes. We do that. This is not our main work. Sometimes we do that if there are really interesting cases, we do that. Once we went even until the Swiss Supreme Court. This was in a case of animal experiments. But our main field is much more really to improve the legislation, this means this is basic legal work and then political work in cooperation with

other organizations, with politicians, others, in order to improve the current animal welfare law standard that we have.

MARIANN: And how's the vegan scene here in Switzerland?

GIERI: Well, compared to the situation I met in Portland, in Oregon, so we are really behind, probably many years behind. But I noticed that there is kind of a trend right now. There are new vegan restaurants. There are vegan shops, that people begin to interest really in vegan philosophy and vegan lifestyle. I hope it's not only a trend that goes away after a year or two. But let's be positive and hope that the situation how I saw it in Portland, that this will be our reality also here in Switzerland and in the whole countries of Europe.

MARIANN: Well, Portland is a hard act to follow on the vegan scene. But the food we've had here when we've been in Basel has been delicious and we're very excited about it. And we're very excited to hear about the work that you're doing here. It's really inspiring for us. So thank you so much for being with us on Our Hen House.

GIERI: Thank you. It was a pleasure, thanks.

JASMIN: Our next guests are Jonas Vollmer and Michael Moor, but not that Michael Moore! And they're talking about some very exciting campaigns that they are working on in Basel. There's a very strong vegan and animal rights scene going on in Basel. And did you enjoy talking to Jonas and Michael?

MARIANN: Yeah, they're really doing some unique work there and a lot of it is through legal means. Their use of the ballot initiative, which is a really big thing in Switzerland and of which they're very proud, is really -- I think they have some wonderful ideas, which we are going to be excited to hear about. And it was fascinating.

JASMIN: Here's Jonas and Michael.

Welcome to Our Hen House, Jonas and Michael.

JONAS: Thanks, it's nice to be here.

MICHAEL: Hello, thanks.

JASMIN: It's so great to be here. I can't believe now we're in Basel. Here we are!

MARIANN: We're actually in their hen house.

JASMIN: Yes, we are. We're in their rooster house, I guess, as it were. But it's so exciting to hear about all of the wonderful work that you guys are doing here in Basel, and beyond, really, to change the world for animals.

MARIANN: There's a really lot going on here in Switzerland, and I really want to get into talking about the specifics. But really, I'd like to start just by asking how this group started to come about, because I understand that it was really from a broader way of thinking that brought you to the animal issue. Can you explain?

JONAS: So two years ago, some students met up together and tried to think more about science and ethics and be skeptical and rational about what to do with the world and with

their lives. And it came out as a weekly discussion meet-up where we gave talks to each other and discussed topics that we found interesting. And so one of the topics was animal ethics, and it quickly caught our attention because we thought this was extremely important. And we realized that there was a lot of good reasons why we should care about animals. And so our group quickly changed its focus and started considering how to have the most positive impact on the world. And one very important issue was animal ethics.

JASMIN: And what's the group called now?

JONAS: It's called "Free Thinkers of the University of Basel," *Frei Denken Uni Basel*. And yeah, that's the group it started with.

MARIANN: And these students, are they mostly philosophy students?

JONAS: They're from all disciplines, so we have psychology, medicine, economics, philosophy of course, and lots of other students, like physics, sciences basically, everything. Biology of course as well.

JASMIN: Michael, can you actually elaborate a little bit about your role in this beginning and talk a bit about your thought process in becoming awakened to animal issues and incorporating that into your otherwise very progressive worldview?

MICHAEL: Yeah. Actually for me it all started as well with this Free Thinker group. And I was interested in like exchanging knowledge or ideas with other people and from other faculties. And yeah apparently we of course -- there were some arguments and discussions also about ethics. And I always found it very interesting, but suddenly there was like the turning point where one's figured out that, oh, now we actually have to do something, not only talk about stuff.

JONAS: Yeah, we don't want to be armchair philosophers. We don't want to be the kind of philosopher who holds a champagne glass in his hand and says, "oh, this is all so inspiring." It's actually about doing something and about rethinking our own lives and our goals. And so this very inspiring talk about animal ethics by Adriano Mannino, that's really what did it at the beginning.

JASMIN: Well, tell us about what this group has evolved to become what it is today.

JONAS: So we've become a lot more active and involved. We've started concrete projects. So one of the organizations we've founded is the Giordano Bruno Stiftung Schweiz, or in English you would say Giordano Bruno Foundation Switzerland. And it's a think tank for evolutionary humanism, a philosophy that basically combines humanist ethics with anti-speciesism, and an evolutionary worldview. And with the Giordano Bruno Foundation, we want to create a dialogue about the issues that we think are interesting, the main ethical topics of our time.

JASMIN: Can we actually back up for a second? Can you explain a bit more about what evolutionary humanism is?

MICHAEL: Generally you can imagine that once you take some insights from science, that we figure out that we are not like special in some like deep sense, but we are just like human animals, then it's not too far away to realize that maybe there are other animals that

can too. So as an evolutionary humanist you try to look backwards in like evolutionary time and you see that there are lots of common ancestors with other animals and that other animals count too of course. And what you also can do is look forward and say, oh, yeah, there is lots of stuff going on, with technology for instance. And it might be that in the future, there might be huge changes that we cannot really imagine, and that it is really important that we talk about what might happen and what we should do now to make sure that the future and all technology stuff turns out to be a good future and make sure that it's gonna be a good future, and also of course considering all the animals that might be affected.

MARIANN: I love the way that you're such big thinkers about ideas but you're also big thinkers about what needs to be done in the future. But you're also doing things right now. And can you tell us a little bit about -- I know there have been two steps that I've heard about, in actually helping people to move closer to living well with animals. And the first was the effort at the university which resulted in getting more vegan options. Can you tell us a little bit about how that came about?

JONAS: Sure, so there were a few students who want to make a difference for animals and who thought about promoting plant-based diets. And the idea they came up with was to hand in a motion for the Students' Parliament to prohibit meat at the university cafeteria. And of course the main goal was to create a discussion and figure out whether eating meat was justified in the Students' Parliament and get a lot of media attention as well probably. And so how it went was even more positive than we expected. Basically those students handed in the motion, and at the time I was the president of the Students' Parliament so I did my best as well to emphasize how good the arguments were and that it really makes sense. And we had a long discussion, probably two hours, and at the end of this very long discussion, six people voted in favor of prohibiting meat in the university cafeteria and only two voted against. So that was an amazing success for all of us, and there was a lot of media coverage as well. We had a lot of nationwide media articles. It totally was about 150 articles and a TV talk show and several TV reports, so yeah that was a big success.

And also, so Switzerland is a special democracy. You always can collect signatures to achieve sort of things. So there were some meat eaters who collected signatures to keep meat at the university cafeteria and they basically succeeded in overturning our decision, and it had to be decided again. But I think that only helped us because it brought it into the media again and people discussed it again. And so there were several drawbacks, and the final result is that the official position of the Students' Parliament is now that there should be one vegetarian day a week, and there should be more vegan options. And out of that, quite a bit has been implemented, so there are vegan options like three times a week approximately, and there's in general more and more attractive vegetarian food. So I think we've reached our goal with creating dialogue and actually having this change.

MARIANN: So often people who are campaigning, they say that if you ask for too much you'll get nothing. But I think that experience shows, if you ask for too much, then you'll get something. And you asked for perhaps what was too much for the population you were dealing with ultimately, but I think you're right. Otherwise it wouldn't have made all that press. You wouldn't have gotten that great discussion if you hadn't gone big in the first place, you tried to actually ban meat. And I just want to follow that up with, I do want to ask a little question about dairy because I know how important that dairy is in Switzerland in particular, so I want to get there. But before that I want to follow that up, because I know

you're taking that idea and taking it much broader, and that's really going on right now in trying to get vegan options available more widely. Can you tell us about that?

JONAS: So we thought what happened at the university cafeteria could be done again on a national level, and so we collected some funding and hired a person as a project leader to work on an initiative project, to hand in a public initiative for more vegetarian and vegan options in public canteens. And so this is a specialty of Swiss law, that basically everyone can start to collect signatures for some proposal, and if the majority of the population votes in favor of it, it becomes binding law and the Parliament has to accept it. So what we did is we now collect signatures in two Swiss cities, the Swiss capital, Bern, and the city of Basel, and both of these cities are very progressive and in the past have voted very much in favor of animal protection and stuff like that. And so in these cities we'd like to get a discussion going and to get these votes on more vegetarian and vegan options in public canteens. Because we do it in two cities we can have a nationwide dialogue as well, so big newspapers from Zurich, for example, have had articles about our work, and there was a lot of media attention. We just had our first press conference two days ago and it was very successful. There was a lot of coverage and a lot of journalists attending, and it was also very neutral or positive. There were almost no negative reports, and we think that by just being a professional organization and doing good work that makes sense to normal people, not appearing as vegan hippies but still promoting vegan food, that works pretty well and we can continue doing that in the future.

JASMIN: And by public canteens, can you explain what that means?

JONAS: Yeah, that's not too clear actually, but generally I think what's really important might be the schools and university canteens, and also hospitals.

JASMIN: So the cafeterias.

JONAS: Yes, basically.

JASMIN: It's very incredible to hear the way that you took this idea that you worked on at the university and you made it city wide.

MARIANN: I think it's a great concept because the idea of giving people choice, the idea that it's a very powerful one, and to present to the people the idea that everyone should have this choice in these public cafeterias or... we call them cafeterias, I guess you call them canteens. I think it's a great idea for an initiative. And as you know, we were talking before that we have the initiative process in some states in the United States, not in New York where we live, but in some states. And I think we've used it in the past to ban certain very harmful farming practices such as the gestation crate, things that you don't really have in Switzerland 'cause your government has managed to ban these things. But I think using it in this manner is a really, really sharp move. And I just wanted to talk a little too about -- you had talked a little bit about getting vegetarian options and getting vegan options. And I know that, as I said, dairy is a hugely important food in Switzerland. Do you find a particular resistance to people leaving dairy out of the diet here?

JONAS: I think Swiss people are mostly concerned with Swiss meat, and probably dairy is important as well and people really like cheese here. But in the past I haven't heard many

people not going vegan because of dairy. I think most people are concerned with meat. But probably I'm wrong here, I'm not sure.

JASMIN: Well, you're guessing.

MARIANN: I may be influenced just by American obsessions with cheese. People just say, "oh, I could never give up cheese!"

JASMIN: Right. No, and --

MARIANN: I just figured since I was in Switzerland it would be even worse.

JASMIN: That's what we hear about Switzerland is that people just really love their cows and they love their dairy. Does this ring true?

JONAS: I think that's true, yeah. And so since the Second World War actually, agriculture has been very important in Switzerland, and especially, yeah, livestock has been super important in politics. And there's a fixed share of the annual federal budget that goes into subsidies for meat and dairy products, and only recently we have seen that the subsidies are starting to get questioned and people think about investing it in plants and vegetables instead. But there's a lot of advertising going on as well, so you see like whole trains covered with happy cows and stuff like that. And there's a huge amount of advertising done that you probably don't see in other countries. And it's all about, "animal protection is good in Switzerland and Swiss animals are happy," and most people are grossly misinformed about the actual situation in Switzerland.

So it actually is the case that Swiss animal protection laws are much better than in most countries, but they're still not good, and we recently published a video. We worked together with the Swiss Vegan Society in publishing a video on how animals are being kept in Switzerland. And so it's TiereEssen.ch, which means eatinganimals.ch, and there you can see a video that shows how animals live in Swiss factory farms and this has been very useful in informing people about Swiss animal protection.

MARIANN: That's great, 'cause I have found in general that in the United States, people don't resist the idea that animals are raised in factory farms. They just don't seem to care about it, or they just don't think about it, whereas in Europe you find a lot of people, they really think that factory farms just don't exist in Europe, which of course is nonsensical. But they just see the cows out on the pasture, so they think all cows are out on the pasture and all chickens are out in the yard and that's of course not the case. When we were on the tram this morning in the airport going from one part of the airport to the other, it had sound effects and mostly it was mooing. So I figured, welcome to Switzerland, here are the cows.

JASMIN: Well, speaking of mooing, my goal -- can you moo for us? No, I'm not gonna make you. Very good. It's just like being on the tram. What's it like being a vegan in Basel?

JONAS: It's great. There are more and more vegan options in non-vegan restaurants actually, and they also declare it now with a green "vegan" logo, so it's -- yeah, things are getting better and I'm glad that I didn't turn vegan 10 years ago. Back in time it was much harder probably, so it's a much easier thing for everybody now. And yeah of course Basel's a good place to be as a vegan because all the people that are vegan try to do stuff and it's great.

JASMIN: It's amazing. We've just got here today and it's really, truly wonderful. And can you just tell our listeners where they can learn more about what you're working on, how they can find you online?

JONAS: Yeah, so I recommend visiting Sentience Politics. The website is [sentience.ch](http://sentience.ch), and it's the website for our public initiatives. And then there is also GBS Switzerland, so [gbs-schweiz.org](http://gbs-schweiz.org). That's the address. And I also highly recommend getting involved with the community of Effective Animal Activism, so there's been a lot of dialogue there what interventions could be most effective and what we should focus on, and yeah. So I think it's highly important to always reconsider what we are doing and question whether our projects are really the best we can do for the animals. And joining the Effective Animal Activism Facebook group, for example, can be a first step in that direction, and also visiting Animal Charity Evaluators. That's an organization that tries to evaluate which animal charities are most effective.

JASMIN: Just in closing can you give us some tips on the effective animal activism that you were just referring to? What would constitute as effective animal activism and what would constitute as ineffective animal activism?

JONAS: So I think the most important part of it is thinking about where your impact comes from and how much resources you put into it. So I think it's important to remain skeptical of oneself and if a project doesn't work out, just shut it down and start something new. So to give some examples, some projects that are likely to have a very high impact are... so there's the Humane League run by Nick Cooney, and that organization among other things promotes or distributes leaflets that turn people vegetarian or vegan, and they also have online videos that they use, and that also seems to be a very effective activity. But there's a lot of research to be done, and probably in the future we will know much more and think that, okay, showing videos and distributing leaflets is probably not the best thing, that we have even more effective activities that we could pursue.

JASMIN: So we're constantly evolving and changing and learning from our activities and assessing it and reassessing it and reassessing it and not getting stuck in the habits of what we're used to, right?

JONAS: Yeah, that's it. So also try to think quantitatively about your success, and yeah. Get the numbers down, like how many people did you actually turn vegan or vegetarian? How many people started becoming active campaigners, for example? These are important questions. Also, how many hours and how much money did you put into a project?

JASMIN: Weigh it all.

MARIANN: And of course how many animals are involved in this particular type of exploitation, which is why I guess one of the reasons we all focus on food so much.

JASMIN: Exactly. Well, I can't thank both of you enough. You're truly changing the world for animals and it's an honor to be sitting here in your kitchen and learning more about everything that you're doing with your advocacy efforts, and I hope that we can stay on top of what you're doing. We'll find you at Facebook. Thank you.

JONAS: Thank you.

MICHAEL: Thank you so much.

JASMIN: It was refreshing speaking with Jonas and Michael, and they introduced us to another man that they work with whose name is Ruairi. And Ruairi is from Ireland, and he is a student who has a particular interest in wildlife.

MARIANN: Yeah, he's doing very interesting research, and his studies concern issues regarding wildlife that I would say are unique.

JASMIN: Welcome to Our Hen House, Ruairi.

RUAIRI: Hi, thanks, it's great to be here.

JASMIN: It's wonderful to be here. I love the team we're talking to today in Basel.

MARIANN: Yes, and I love the fact that you're working on wildlife issues. And can you tell us a little bit about the kind of work that you're doing?

RUAIRI: Right, so it might be maybe slightly different from the more traditional wildlife issues that are talked about a lot in kind of anti-speciesist circles, but it's really on the same theme and it's all due to the same anti-speciesism that we care about these issues. So basically we're concerned not only with animals who are harmed or suffer due to things that are caused by humans like oil spills or other things like this, but also animals which suffer purely due to natural reasons. In some places there are interventions, such as certain animals being vaccinated against rabies. This is obviously very positive for those animals. Then in other places there can be things like feeding programs, or in places with floods, certain protections can be put in place so the animals don't suffer.

MARIANN: Yeah, and I think that everything that we do for wildlife really does have to do with making up for human intervention. Even if they're things that aren't directly caused by humans, humans have put wildlife at such peril and reduced their numbers so much that whatever we can do to help them I think is redressing some of the harm we've done. Can you tell us about the specifics? Is this a research project you're working on? Are you working with others on this?

RUAIRI: So at the moment I'm working with a group called Animal Ethics, which has just started up recently in Spain and the US. And so at the moment one of the things we're most interested in is popularizing this issue and getting people to talk about it and getting people to research more to better understand these interactions between wildlife and how we might be able to help them. Obviously there's a lot of unanswered questions, like, if you vaccinate one species against rabies, this is gonna have a lot of other effects. So we have to look at all the effects and what seem to be positive interventions. And really this research has only kind of started. Only a few people have written about this. A professor in Spain, Oscar Horta, was one of the first guys to write about this. And a US guy, Brian Tomasik has also been writing about these issues.

MARIANN: Are there any practical projects planned that would carry out some of these ideas or is it still all in the thought process?

RUAIRI: I think it's all gonna be in the thought process for a while, but we can still see some projects that have already been carried out that it seems may have had positive -- or some

other projects that may have had negative interventions. Something that I think Oscar Horta has written about is the reintroduction of wolves in Yellowstone. It seems like this might have actually had quite a negative impact on at least some of the animals who live there. And it's not at all clear that this was the best way to go.

JASMIN: What is it about wildlife that calls to you and says this is what I'm going to focus my advocacy on?

RUAIRI: Well personally I just want to prevent as much suffering as I can, and there's a really huge number of wild animals, so this is obviously a really important issue. But at the same time it's obviously incredibly important as well to help animals who are suffering terribly in factory farms and to not consume them or harm them in other ways.

JASMIN: And I know you're originally from Ireland. Are you situated here in Basel now?

RUAIRI: Only for a while, and then I'm gonna be going back to Ireland to continue my studies but also I'll be continuing working on these issues and other ones.

JASMIN: How does the animal rights scene in Basel compare to the animal rights scene in Ireland? And where specifically in Ireland are we talking about?

RUAIRI: I come from a town called Bray, which is not too far outside Dublin. But the animal rights scene in Basel is more exciting, the anti-speciesist scene is more exciting. I haven't been connected too much with the groups in Ireland, but yeah. It seems like things are kicking off a lot more here, but hopefully I can take some of that back to Ireland and things can start to get going there.

JASMIN: Yeah, that's a great reason to spread out and spread the love and go back to Ireland and bring this work there.

MARIANN: So much of the wildlife advocacy in the United States, and I assume everywhere in the world, focuses on species from the environmental side, and really doesn't look at individual animals at all. How do you feel about that?

RUAIRI: Right, so I think definitely as anti-speciesist activists, we should always be focusing on animals at the individual level. It's the individual animals who we can benefit and who are gonna suffer without our help. The focus on species when you really look at it closely can even seem a bit strange sometimes. When we talk about benefiting humans, we wouldn't talk about benefiting a certain group of humans. Rather, we'd talk about benefiting the individual humans. So the focus on species certainly seems strange. A species in itself can't actually be harmed or benefited. It's the individuals who can be harmed or benefited. And I think we really need to apply this reasoning when we think about animals in the wild. Instead of having an approach where we might think that it's vitally important that certain numbers of individuals exist in certain places, instead we should just look at the individual animals, how well their lives are going and how we can improve their lives.

MARIANN: That's a hugely controversial issue in the United States, I think. As species become, quote unquote, overpopulated, which means that they survive well in the presence of humans, people start to hate them. That's happened with Canadian geese, it's happened with white-tailed deer, particularly, for us. And I'm sure it's happening in other places as well for other species. As soon as they succeed and aren't dying out in the presence of humans,

people start to hate them, whereas animals who are on the verge of extinction are beloved by all. Do you find this to be the case?

RUAIRI: Yeah, absolutely. In fact we have a similar situation in Ireland with gray and red squirrels, where the red squirrels were originally native and then the gray squirrels were introduced some time later. But even the wording we use around this issue is kinda strange because a species that was once native, it just means that it's been there for some period of time historically. But again I think we simply need to focus at the individual lives of the individual animals and just work on doing whatever we can to prevent their suffering and to make their lives as good as possible. Again in the human case we would never focus on a group of humans and say that the way to benefit them is to make sure this group continues to exist or something. Instead we would look at the individuals and try to benefit them.

JASMIN: It's clear, Ruairi, that you're one of those people who so deeply care about animals and are devoting your career and your life to saving them and speaking up for them. And so we're so grateful to have the opportunity to meet you today, and thank you so much for all you do for our feathered and sometimes four-footed friends.

RUAIRI: Thank you very much. Thanks for all the work you do as well.

JASMIN: So many amazing interviews and so many *amazing* people who we got to meet while in Basel, Switzerland. And we're just so grateful to Alex Gray and to David Cabrera once again for sponsoring us to go to this unbelievable conference.

MARIANN: Yeah, it was a really great time.

JASMIN: And we have a video that we're making for our TV show that you'll see where we will be piecing together pieces of interviews that we did with some folks who you heard on the podcast and some other folks who weren't on the podcast as well. So stay tuned for that on our TV show.