



Our Hen House

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Interview with Kip Andersen and Keegan Kuhn

By OUR HEN HOUSE

Published July 19, 2014

*Following is a transcript of an interview with **KIP ANDERSEN** and **KEEGAN KUHN** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 236.*

JASMIN: Welcome to Our Hen House, Kip and Keegan.

KIP: Thank you!

KEEGAN: Thanks for having us.

JASMIN: We're so completely honored to have you as guests on our show today. For those who are unfamiliar, can you give us a basic gist of the film that you made, *Cowspiracy*?

KEEGAN: So *Cowspiracy* is a feature-length environmental documentary following my coproducer, Kip Andersen, on a journey finding out about the most destructive industry facing the planet today. If you look at most of the large environmental organizations, they're gonna talk about driving less and turning all the water off when you brush your teeth and turning off lights when you leave the room. But the reality is the number one cause of environmental degradation is actually animal agriculture. So the film explores that issue and why the world's leading environmental organizations aren't talking about it.

MARIANN: People have such a hard time with environmental issues 'cause they involve so many facts and figures. Can you just give us some of the basics, some of the just really nuts and bolts facts and figures that people should know about regarding this issue?

KEEGAN: I think one of the big ones -- and it's on a lot of people's minds -- is greenhouse gas emissions. In 2006, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization released a report saying that livestock -- or animal agriculture, raising animals for food, attributed 18% of all greenhouse gas emissions, which is pretty phenomenal when you think in consideration that all transportation industry -- that's all cars, boats, trains, planes combined -- is only 13%. But those figures are actually, are pretty low. And in 2009 a study came out from World Watch Report putting the figure at 51%. So 51% of all greenhouse gas emissions are attributed to animal agriculture, which is just phenomenal. So that's just, that's a major one because that affects everything. But it goes on to the leading cause of water depletion and the leading cause of water pollution and ocean dead zones around the world, leading cause of rainforest destruction. It's estimated about 91% of all the deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon is attributed to raising animals for food, whether that's clearing forests to make room for grazing cattle and sheep, or for clearing forest to grow corn and soybeans that are fed to those livestock. And again it just goes on and on. For

pretty much any environmental issue you care about, animal agriculture will be the number one cause of destruction and degradation.

JASMIN: And yet people aren't really talking about it yet, which is also kind of mind-blowing. And some of the interviews you got from the leadership of environmental organizations were absolutely out of this world. Were you surprised that their responses were so pathetic?

KIP: We were. Going into it, it took months, if not years, of trying to get their attention just by answering a simple email. It's easy enough if you want to send money and get a response, but just asking about the leading cause of sustainability and issues about that, it was very weird. Initially every single one of the interviews was two hours, and they would love to talk about anything about sustainability and what they're doing and fossil fuels. Right when we would mention animal agriculture, it was kind of funny. If it wasn't so serious it would be very funny, even though as you saw there's a lot of funny parts in the film. But after every single interview we were probably shocked at how bad and how evasive they were.

MARIANN: Can you just give us an example so people will know what they're facing? Maybe the one that starts off the film or just any one, the kind of responses you got when you brought up this issue of, well, you know, the leading environmental destruction in the world.

KIP: The one that was really shocking to me, and I think Keegan as well, was when we went to these rainforest -- Rainforest Action Network and Amazon Watch. 91% of all the clear-cutting for the Amazon is for animal agriculture, yet on both these organizations' websites, you don't find it anywhere. So on Rainforest Action Network, they have four main topics and not one of them is animal agriculture, the leading cause. And then so when we interviewed them, their responses of just did not want to talk about it -- And Rainforest Action Network, I asked her specifically, "What is more detrimental, fossil fuels or the cattle, animal agriculture?" And she said, basically, "Why does it matter? Why does it matter what the leading cause is?" And then she says, "I don't know." It's like, how do you not know? It was just unbelievable.

JASMIN: I wrote an article a few years ago about ecotourism and I had the same exact reaction over and over again, that there was absolutely no cognizance whatsoever about the animal products. How do you account for the complete failure of these folks to even address the issue of animal agriculture?

KIP: Well, the one thing too about that is they do know.

JASMIN: They've got to.

KIP: And that's the thing that -- Yeah, and especially those two. And especially after the Rainforest Action Network, I was really, really straight up mad after that one because she was so purposely evasive and smug with her answers and it was just unbelievable. Like, why?

KEEGAN: Yeah. I think there's a lot of issues at play in why they don't talk about this and we explore a lot of them in the film. Part of it I think is these organizations, they're donor based. They get their money from donations and I think they're afraid of upsetting their donors by talking about change in diet. I think part of it is also the repression. Right now there's a series of laws, these ag-gag laws all across the country that criminalize exposing

the atrocities committed by animal agriculture, whether that's the violence committed against the animals themselves or against the environment. So it could be partially that. And then I think another issue that we don't really go into in the film but I think is reality is that these people who run the organizations, they don't want to change their lifestyle and their diet.

MARIANN: Exactly.

KEEGAN: So how are you gonna tell other people to do that if you're not willing to do it yourself?

MARIANN: It is unbelievable, isn't it, how much we're giving up just because of people's addiction to this food? Do you think that things are starting to shift at all within environmental organizations?

KEEGAN: Yeah, there are. There's some organizations, Center for Biological Diversity, which is a great organization who actually is championing this issue. They started a campaign called Take Extinction off Your Plate, and it's all about the true impacts of animal agriculture and about how, if you want to save the biodiversity and threatened species, the best that you can do is to adopt a plant based diet. They're advocating pretty strongly for meat reduction, but they also do talk about elimination, which we feel is really important. We have to talk about real solutions and not the pseudo solutions that we think people want to hear.

JASMIN: Outside of the organizations, do you see any shifts in the general public about climate change in general?

KEEGAN: It's an issue that I think a lot of people are starting to wake up to. Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, I think really got the general masses thinking about climate change and how it's going to affect life. And in the years since that film came out, you see it constantly now in the media and people are talking about it and world organizations and governments are addressing the issue. But again it's their solutions that they come up with are "let's build solar power plants and wind turbines" and all these things, and they're not really viable solutions for the timelines that we're looking at. We're looking at the potential for huge impacts to all life on this planet because of climate change. And they're saying, "Okay, well, in 20 years we'll have these solar farms and we'll have these wind farms." And those aren't really solutions. We need solutions today, and real solutions are gonna be adopting a plant based diet.

MARIANN: Yeah, I agree that there does seem to be growing awareness even that not only that it's time to do something to avoid this but that it's actually too late to avoid it, that we're going to have some serious, devastating impacts and that we have to think of how to limit it and manage it. But do you agree about this, and do you think it will make people more motivated to make changes and possibly come to some realization about the meat issue? I guess that's why you made the movie.

KEEGAN: Yeah, and the thing though that Kip and I also come back to is that outside of even climate change, even if we can get that one under control, we're still dealing with the rainforest destruction caused by animal agriculture. We're still dealing with the water pollution caused by animal agriculture. So even if people -- for climate deniers out there,

you can't deny that forests are being cleared at a rapid rate because of livestock. You can't deny that wildlife are being hunted and slaughtered en masse because of cattle grazing in the West. There's just these undeniable facts that can't be avoided because they are the reality of modern animal agriculture.

JASMIN: What sort of actions, in addition to going vegan, can folks take after watching this film? Because I like to believe that a lot of the people listening to this right now are already vegan, but are very passionate about this issue, and like you, want to get it out there much more in their communities and in the mainstream.

KIP: Well, a big thing about the film is learning the truth and then the big part is sharing the truth. The other part is living the truth but I think a lot of especially your listeners, they already are doing that. So a big part is sharing the truth, holding people accountable, such as these environmental organizations. And there's a term that we have in the film that's "secondhand eating." Whereas secondhand smoking affects those right around you, immediate family or if someone's in the house or car, but secondhand eating is a new term that you'll hear more of. Your diet affects not only your local community but the entire world. So when a lot of people say, "Oh, don't worry about my diet. You do what you want," well, it affects all of us. So it's at the time now when people do realize what another person eats, what another person's actions do have to be held accountable, nicest way as possible but it's really just sharing the truth of what's going on. So I think once people at least learn the truth then they can take the next steps of showing responsibility. Knowing's half the battle, as they say.

KEEGAN: Yeah. And we're encouraging people to go to our website, cowspiracy.com, and follow us on Facebook and Twitter because we're gonna be doing a series of petitions and events and other as creative ways of doing outreach as possible to, again, get this information out to as many people as we can.

JASMIN: You were talking about accountability and how people really have to learn the truth and embrace it for themselves. And that of course is a way of boiling down everything that we're trying to do in the world, right? That we're trying to advocate for animals and for veganism. How do you feel like you can penetrate through this massive wall of denial that so many people have, that we, probably everyone on this call, had at some point? Like, how do we use the power of a documentary like this to get through to people? When will they take their barriers down, Kip and Keegan?

KEEGAN: I think one of the reasons why this film was made and why it's important is that media has a way of getting past people's barriers. And if you can entertain somebody while educating them I think it's a lot more effective. And that's the thing about the film is that it's unlike a lot of documentaries that are really dry and a lot of just talking heads, this film has a really strong narrative. And so I think that's something that, if we can encourage people to engage in the film because it's entertaining first and foremost, I think then the message comes with it. But we look at other films that have come along. We look at the phenomenal success of a film like *Blackfish* and the impacts it's having on captive orcas in captivity around the world. Films do have the ability to create social change on a mass scale and we think *Cowspiracy* has that same potential. And other people have said that, told us that this is the next *Blackfish*.

KIP: And also too, a few years ago, kinda compared to cigarette smoking again, where a lot of times, no one ever thought the ramifications or the reforms that happened with the whole smoking thing were basically -- I'm from Virginia, and you would have never thought in a million years that you wouldn't be able to smoke in bars and in restaurants. And then look, in only, what, 10-20 years of how fast that shift happened, whereas 20 years ago no one would have thought that could happen. So the movement, this whole shift already has happened. It's happening actually rapidly fast. I think the hundredth monkey has awakened and you're gonna see that all over. And you already do see it all over with all the thriving restaurants and thriving new plant based businesses out there that are just booming. So I feel it's happening really fast.

MARIANN: Yeah, I agree with you. And I love your invention of the term "secondhand eating" because I do think the secondhand smoking argument really had a big impact on smoking. Even though we don't think that animal agriculture is a victimless crime because of the animals, I think other people do tend to think, "Oh, it's just a personal choice." But when they understand that people are destroying the world with this, it doesn't become a personal choice even if you don't care about the animals. One thing I'm curious about is that the title of the movie is *Cowspiracy*, and certainly I think everybody would agree that cows are the major problem here. Do you have a fear that making this argument will just make people shift to chicken, which from my understanding, at least the climate change implications aren't as great, but certainly other polluting issues are substantial?

KIP: Yeah, well, the movie is called *Cowspiracy*. Of course it's definitely catchy, but as you saw in the film we explore everything. We have a big part on oceans which is very dear to us, on how the oceans is near collapse. So it's all animal agriculture. And a lot of people think it would just be about cows, but especially at the end we go into like the backyard farming and ducks and chickens and then talk about how eggs, the ratio of eggs, of how unsustainable that is, the ratio of --

KEEGAN: 39 to 1, the energy conversion ratio for eggs, versus 2 to 1 for a product like Beyond Eggs. Yeah the film touches on all aspects of animal agriculture and animal products from dairy and eggs all the way to, as Kip mentioned, backyard farming to large factory farms to grass-fed beef, every aspect of it. It was a concern of ours that people would focus just on cows. And cows is a major issue as far as greenhouse gas emissions. But as you said the impacts of raising animals for food, no matter what the species is, are still contributing to topsoil erosion and deforestation and water pollution and on and on.

JASMIN: Did you receive any follow-up correspondences from the heads of the environmental organizations you interviewed? Are they angry that they made such fools of themselves?

KIP: It's actually funny. After the LA interview, I went out to dinner and the actual executive director of Amazon Watch was right there. And she didn't see it but someone else did, and we actually hung out for an hour. They were super nice, but after that long talk I was still glad we did it. When we walked into Amazon Watch we walked in during their lunch and people were eating carne asada burritos. They were ordering carne asada burritos and chicken burritos at Amazon Watch. And I mentioned that to them and they said, "Well, we're open to discussing." And we said, "Any time you're ready to show radical change," of just really just by mentioning the truth, not even -- that's the thing is we're not asking for

anything crazy. It's just like, put something on your website. That's the thing. It's not that much money, it's very easy to do. But very defensive, put it that way.

JASMIN: I know, I had the same reaction during the time I was writing that article that I mentioned. Just not any responses and then finally someone CCing one of their bosses and one of *their* bosses because they were too much of an underling within the organization to actually respond to the writer who was asking them to put something about animal consumption on their website, just bringing up this subject that nobody wants to even go near.

KIP: That's it.

KEEGAN: And these organizations, I think it's important that people at these organizations realize is that we're not against them. The work that all these organizations are doing is important and really good and absolutely needed. But again to put things into perspective and to address the number one cause, it's about holding people accountable, but also them knowing that we're not gonna walk away from this and we won't walk away from *them* if they address these issues. And if Amazon Watch tomorrow came out and had a whole campaign about not eating meat or just mentioned it on their website about the destruction that animal agriculture is having, we'd support them and we would champion for doing that. I think it can come off as an "us and them" but it's really about us, all of us together who care about the planet. And we're gonna work together but we have to hold each other accountable.

MARIANN: Yeah, I think that's such a great attitude and it's so important for all of us to remember 'cause you can get so angry, and I got angry watching this movie. As you said there are light parts as well but a lot of it is just infuriating, but you're right. If they would just come around then it would be great for them to be putting all of that money and all of that prestige behind this project and this cause. But speaking of money, we understand you're pursuing crowdsourcing for distribution of the film. What are some of the challenges for documentary filmmakers in getting distribution?

KEEGAN: Things are changing and the whole film industry is kind of in upheaval at the moment. But it's a challenge to get documentaries distributed widely. We are talking with some distribution companies about taking on the film, but at this point right now we're self-distributing it theatrically through a platform called Tugg. So people can actually now go for free, cost of nothing, no money invested or anything like that, to tugg.com and organize screenings in their communities anywhere in the United States virtually with participating theaters. And it's crowdsourced essentially so that you need to hit your goal, say it's you have to have 70 tickets sold in order for the event to happen, but you lose no money if it doesn't happen. It's a kind of radical new way of doing theatrical distributions. But again, it's a challenge, but we feel really positive about this community and about the huge outpouring of support that we got for our crowdfunding campaign to do this distribution. But we feel that the film can go really far just from all the passionate and compassionate people out there.

JASMIN: You also talk in the film about being scared of the animal exploitation industries using their legal power. Is this something that still makes you nervous? And what specifically would make you nervous about it?

KIP: Well, especially after we had an interview with Howard Lyman who got sued with Oprah Winfrey --

JASMIN: Right, there was that.

KIP: Yeah, eventually we're gonna release that whole interview. That was a very, very powerful and at the time very scary interview. And after, we really considered putting the cameras down and not doing it. But then we realized the fear, the global fear of what's happening to this planet has to supersede any individual fear that any one of us can have because if we don't address this issue then it doesn't even matter anyway. This is a global thing and it so supersedes any one personal fear that either Keegan or I could have 'cause it's so much bigger than us. And so it just must be done. So I don't really have any fear at all anymore, just these things have to be done. And sure, there might be litigation or something like that. But if the industry or the Big Green, as we call them, Greenpeace and all those, if they do anything just to try to call things false or whatever, all it does is, it will blow up in their face because the truth will just come out that much faster and bigger. So we're not really concerned, it's kind of a win-win no matter what. The truth will get out either way.

KEEGAN: Yeah, and I think, and Kip said that our biggest fear is that things don't change. That's the fear that keeps me up at night and the anxiety I feel is we're losing species, we're in the largest mass extinction of species on this planet in the planet's history, and that if we don't change radically how we live that there is no hope. And that's the real fear.

MARIANN: Yeah, I'm so with you and I'm so glad to hear you standing up. And I think you're absolutely right. I think they're the ones who are gonna be afraid. They're gonna be afraid to confront you 'cause that'll just make this bigger and that's exactly what we want. In addition to looking at your crowdfunding site and thinking about hosting a screening, how can people help this movie be seen?

KEEGAN: Well, they can again go to our website, cowspiracy.com, find us on Facebook and on Twitter and other social media. We will be doing a release of the film on DVD at some point later this year. There'll be online distribution as well and then we're talking with getting the film on Netflix and iTunes. That would come online later in the year. But probably the best thing to do would be to sign up for our newsletter at cowspiracy.com because that'll keep people up to date with the film's releases on a larger scale.

KIP: And we're doing a West Coast tour now starting actually next week, so if any one of your listeners are on the West Coast, go to cowspiracy.com and click on at the top "Screenings." We're doing a whole West Coast tour.

JASMIN: Any plans on coming to the East Coast?

KEEGAN: Yeah, we're still trying to line up dates. People are organizing screenings now on the East Coast starting in August and we're gonna try and do a larger screening in New York some point in the middle of August.

JASMIN: Wonderful. Well, definitely keep us posted about that. And we are so honored that you took the time out of your very busy schedules to join us today on Our Hen House. We can't thank you enough for making this film. It's absolutely, absolutely time for this film to be out there. And I know that our community will rally behind you, and I absolutely have no doubt that this will reach the mainstream and in a way that is much needed. So thank you

so much for making *Cowspiracy* and for sharing your story with us today, Kip and Keegan. We look forward to staying on top of all of your efforts to change the world.

KEEGAN: Thank you all so much.

KIP: Thank you so much for all the great work you guys do.

JASMIN: That was Kip Andersen and Keegan Kuhn, the filmmakers behind *Cowspiracy*. Learn more at cowspiracy.com.