

## Asientag 2023: Gemeinsam durch die Klimakrise?



Photo: Valentina Kiefer

### **Veganism as a civil society initiative in South Korea**

Veganism is a civil society initiative that has been gaining popularity in South Korea in recent years. The movement is driven by concerns about animal welfare, environmental sustainability, and personal health.

The South Korean filmmaker Miyeon Choi cares for Animal Rights, Climate Crisis, Gender Equality and does live a vegan lifestyle herself. Miyeon started the workshop by laying down that Korea's diet is largely dependent in the consumption of meat especially chicken and pork. South Korea has traditionally been a meat-centric culture, with dishes like Korean fried chicken, bulgogi (marinated beef) and samgyeopsal (pork belly) being popular staples. This tradition or dependence is the result of media influence, controlled by big food businesses locally and abroad. However, as more people become aware of the negative impacts of animal agriculture on the environment, people's health and animal welfare, there has been a growing interest in plant-based diets.

### **Rise of malnutrition in Korea**

One factor driving the rise of veganism in South Korea is the influence brought by the rise of malnutrition in the Korean population. According to Miyeon, 76% of the population experience insufficient consumption of vegetables. This is cause of the phenomenon that meat is much cheaper than things that came from the ground or vegetables and fruits. Mad cow disease and foot and mouth disease affecting tens of thousands of cows and pigs are also one of the factors that

influenced the drive of the growing population of Koreans that are now opting for a plant-based diet.

### **Travelers and social media spread awareness**

As more young Koreans travel abroad and are exposed to veganism, they bring those ideas back home with them. Social media has also played a role in spreading awareness about veganism and connecting like-minded individuals. Another factor is the increasing availability of vegan options in restaurants and grocery stores. In recent years, there has been a surge in vegan-friendly restaurants in major cities like Seoul and Busan. Additionally, major supermarket chains like Lotte Mart and E-Mart have started carrying a wider variety of plant-based products.

### **Veganism still faces challenges**

The government has also taken steps to promote plant-based diets. In 2018, the Ministry of Environment launched a campaign called "Let's Reduce Our Meat Consumption by Half" to encourage Koreans to eat less meat. The campaign highlighted the environmental benefits of reducing meat consumption and provided resources for people interested in transitioning to plant-based diets. Despite these positive developments, veganism still faces challenges in South Korea. Many Koreans view meat as an essential part of their diet and may be resistant to change. Additionally, some traditional Korean dishes are difficult to make without animal products, making it challenging for veganism to gain widespread acceptance. Miyeon also cited that one of the challenges she personally faced as a vegan was it was hard to fit in as the majority of the population are meat eaters. Many think that veganism is a luxury as meat is cheaper than vegetables in the market.

### **Veganism can protect the environment**

The social impacts of veganism are varied and far-reaching. On an individual level, veganism can improve one's health, save money, and reduce their environmental footprint. On a larger scale, veganism can help to end animal suffering, improve human health, and protect the environment from the climate crisis.

In conclusion, after her presentation, Miyeon asked the participants how they understand "veganism". Of all the responses these are the important things that we learned: Veganism, while it is basically a diet, it is also a right that should be respected by everyone. It is a lifestyle of people who want change and finally, veganism is a movement against over consumption of meat, against food capitalism and it is a campaign against climate crisis. While there are still challenges to overcome, the movement is poised to continue growing in the coming years.

*Report by Juluis Dagatan*