



Our Hen House Podcast: Transcript for Episode 660, Interview with Tamara Human

Mariann Sullivan: Welcome to Our Hen House, Tamara.

Tamara Human: Hi, nice to see you today.

Mariann: It is such a pleasure to talk to you. I really feel privileged to be able to talk to you and hear more of what's going on in Ukraine, something that the whole world is worried about. And of course we wanna talk about the war and what's going on right now, but you've been doing vegan advocacy for a long time.

So I just want to reassure everybody that we're going to get into both what's happening now, but also what happened before and your plans for the future. But let's start with right now because it's such an emergency situation. And a lot of your work right now is involved around providing vegan food.

Let's start with soldiers. There are vegan soldiers and they do not want to give up their ethics just because they're fighting. How do you find them and how do you help them?

Tamara: So when the full-scale war started, we didn't know exactly how to be effective for humans and animals. And we just started helping everywhere we could. Helping animal refugees and people and all things we could.

And then we found out that there was a vegan kitchen in Lviv, and we thought that we can do the same thing, but in different cities in Ukraine, all cities in Ukraine. And we started, like just in few days, we started the project Vegan Kitchen Ukraine where we were providing vegan food for refugees, for elderly people, for soldiers as well.

And that's how we understood that the soldiers, the vegan soldiers, are those who need vegan food right now. Because they're vegans, now they serve in the

armed forces of Ukraine and they don't want to give up their ethics, as you said. The regular, the traditional army meals, they're not vegan. You may find the vegan products there, but it's not going to be the full meal.

We started helping, at first, our friends. Those who we knew already who are vegans or vegetarians, who are now in the army. And then we started to do the posts on social media sharing that we are doing this and we can help if you are vegan and you need vegan food in the army, please let us know, we'll help.

And that's how we start receiving orders and requests. We just started receiving more and more and more. And as for now we send more than 500 parcels and each parcel can last for two, three weeks or even (a) month. So we pack a lot of food there.

Mariann: That it's amazing. And I want to go back because you're talking about how these vegan kitchens are also feeding other people. It didn't start necessarily with soldiers.

They're in a whole bunch of cities now, right? You have them all over the place. Where are you personally located and where else do you have these vegan kitchens?

Tamara: I'm personally in Kyiv right now. And we also have a kitchen in Uzhhorod, Vinnytsya, Odesa, Dnipro, Rivne, Lutsk, Zaporizhzhya, and two more cities are now...oh also Ivano-Frankivsk and now we are setting up the kitchens in two more cities. In every city we have about 10 volunteers who help us to cook, deliver, transportation and buying food. And every day we, as a whole project, give about 2-300 free vegan food.

Only a few cities work every day. Some cities work just on weekends, some are just on workdays. So it's different, but usually per day we serve 2-300 of free meals.

Mariann: And are people doing this out of their own kitchens or do you have some commercial kitchens that you can use?

Tamara: In each city it's a different story. In some cities, we have just volunteers' kitchens, where people just cook at their homes.

And in some cities we cooperate with cafe and restaurants. So they help us to cook. And in some cities it's volunteer centers where they have kind of commercial kitchens, where they can cook a big amount food, and we just

cooperate with them and provide food and sometimes volunteers and work together to make this happen.

Mariann: It's an amazingly huge project that you've brought together in a short amount of time. I'm assuming that there are vegan refugees and vegan people in these cities who you are trying to reach just like vegan soldiers. But it's probably lots of other people who are just hungry, right?

Tamara: Yeah, true.

In many cities, especially in the West of Ukraine there are many refugees and people who moved from their places because their homes were bombed or they just had to leave because the city's under attack. So many people left without almost anything. They left all their stuff at home. They might lost their jobs or they might not have money to rent (an) apartment with a kitchen to cook. So there are many, many things that make people in such situation where they need help with the food. As I said, it can be just financial problems or just location. They just don't have the kitchen and many other things, people just need help.

So of course, when we offer vegan meals, they are taken not just by vegans. Many non-vegans who are eating our plant-based food, they enjoy it and they're really thankful and grateful for the support, any support. And this is also another thing I like about this project, that we are not only helping people who need it, we also kind of spread vegan message inside this project. Many people who never thought about veganism or vegan cuisine or anything like this, they can try the vegan food, they can enjoy it and got the idea that veganism is tasty, can be a full meal, and they kind or discover veganism.

Mariann: It's a hard way to advance vegan activism, but you're totally right.

I mean, the best way to reach people is with food and you don't even really have to talk about too much. They just know it's vegan and they suddenly know it can be totally delicious. I've seen pictures of your food on your website and it really looks terrific. I mean, you must have some great cooks.

Do you have standard recipes that you suggest to people that are easy to make? Easy to make and also easy...like things that people are very familiar with so they'll be very comfortable eating. People who are under enormous amounts of stress probably just want very familiar foods.

Tamara: We kind collect recipes together and volunteers can use the recipes we collect or create something by themselves. We just make sure that it is a hundred percent vegan and not any animal products used though we are not strict in the recipes, so volunteers can make something they want. And especially it's important because every city has different availability of products in the supermarkets, it's different. For example, in Kyiv you can find more different food and in some places they are limited in variety of food. So you have to be flexible in what you can cook.

Mariann: Do you have trouble getting food? How do you get the food? And are there places where there are shortages that are really prohibiting you from doing as much food advocacy as you would like?

Tamara: So at first, when the full-scale war started, it was a struggle sometimes because people were stressed out, of course. And everybody just took everything from the shelves. We had to cook from things that were left, sometimes we found that many vegan foods were left, like vegan yogurt or plant-based milk because this is not the first non vegans buy. So we tried to cook from what we found.

Of course, the good thing about Ukrainian business is that many producers stay. They keep working every day and also we have the mail service that is also working very well and very fast, you can receive the food the next day, and it is really convenient and helpful that I can order something today and receive it tomorrow. This has also helped us to deliver the parcels.

So if the soldiers are pressed, like he or she leaves tomorrow, and it has to be like the next day, we can pack it and send it and he or she will receive it tomorrow, even if it's somewhere in the East or South. Maybe not there on the front line, but really close to the front lines. Because this mail, Ukrposhta works it helps not only us, it helps a lot of volunteers and people because you can deliver everything. And because any other way, it just seems impossible to send something to the East or to the South where it's not safe at all.

Mariann: Yeah. I know in addition to food, you're encouraging people to get involved in animal rescue and I don't think you do that work yourselves, but we've seen so many news stories about people rescuing animals in Ukraine and getting animals across the border.

Can you tell us a little bit about the status of that work? Are there really big problems for the shelters?

Tamara: Yeah. Many shelters try to leave Ukraine and just to rescue and send their animals from Ukraine to some European shelters. We as an organization, we help as an informational platform. Some of our volunteers does this, so they go to take these animals and help on the border and then help to find a home for the animals.

And we usually work as a kind of platform. So we help to find those who need transportation or animals who need to find a home or foster. So we kind of post and do a lot of stories and try to connect people and animals who need help and those who can provide this help. And just today, no yesterday, I received a request from (a) volunteer that they will be on the border on September 3rd, in few days.

And they need many volunteers to help animals to cross the border because when you're crossing the border you're not allowed to take many animals. You're allowed to take two or three. And if it's a shelter, there are like 50-100 so there have to be many people who can do this. So we help with the information and try to help to find volunteers who can go there and help.

Mariann: I saw an old article, which talked about the animals at your headquarters. It was from before the war and they mentioned a dog and a rat. I'm just wondering, are they still with you?

Tamara: Yes, they are. They are with me. When we went...because the second day when the full-scale war started, we left Kyiv and went to Lviv all together! Rat, dog, my husband...so we packed our stuff and yeah...

And the rat is rescued from a lab where medicines and maybe even cosmetics were tested on rats and rabbits and guinea (accent on word) pigs.

Mariann: Oh, guinea pigs, guinea pigs. Yes.

Tamara: We have rescued from that lab, I think about 10 animals - rats and guinea pigs and rabbits.

Mariann: I'm glad to hear they're still there. I'm curious as to what kind of react... I mean, I know you're not doing, probably not doing from what you've told me, really hard core activism right now. Just providing the food and being open to talking about it is a form of activism.

What kind of reactions do you get to the idea of veganism during very desperate times? Are people more open to it or are people like, “why do you care about animals?” What are the reactions?

Tamara: So, we have not only the vegan kitchen project, we also have our Vegan Express course where we have the program for seven days. People can learn about being vegan and what veganism is and how these industries of exploitation work.

So this course is dedicated to making people vegan, basically. Again, after 24th of February, we stopped the course and we thought not now. And on May 1st we resumed the course and since that time we got about 800 registrations for the course almost with no advertisement. We just put a small budget.

And I can say that people (are) receiving (it) really well. It's hard to say better than before, but we definitely feel that people became more sensitive about doing something bad to vulnerable... anyone! Human or animals. It's like injustice becomes so... Just Ukrainians can't stand injustice right now.

And I think that veganism gained more... kind of people are more receptive. Now, maybe it's (a) subjective vision of me. So it's not a hundred percent, but something I think of. That maybe now people are more receptive to this because they feel when you are in a vulnerable position and what is the injustice and how it's bad when someone just exploits you or kills you or do something bad. So we do the course and it goes well.

And also we started doing lectures again. Before the war we were doing (a) lectorium, where we did lecture about veganism and also about (the) impact of animal agriculture on (the) environment. In August we resumed this project as well. I went, and my colleague, we went to the children's camp where we were talking about veganism, had a lot of discussions with kids. Showed them *Game Changers* movie, had a discussion about that. In September, we'll have the lectorium again in Kyiv, where we'll have a lecture about veganism again, and I hope a podium discussion with athletes on a plant-based diet. And we'll talk about veganism again and have food samplings so we can show veganism for the people.

Mariann: That's wonderful that you're redoing those programs. I hadn't realized that you're starting up again.

The course, Vegan Express course, that's totally online? How do you connect with people? Are they able to interact with you?

Tamara: Yes. So the course is in two ways, (you) can go with the YouTube version and watch seven videos on YouTube or you can go to the text version and read the program. And it is seven days so you receive every day and you will talk. And all participants are invited to join the chat where we have the guys who are vegans for many years, it's our organization members, and they guide participants on the course. So if participants have any question regarding veganism, regarding recipes, regarding talking to parents or friends about this, like kinda any question related to the veganism, they help in this chat. And also in this chat there are previous participants from previous course, and this is also good because they all interact with each other and they can share the experience. Because those who pass the course like a month ago, they can share how it went next and what they learned. And this chat is always live for many, many talks, discussions, sharing some thoughts and emotions so people can receive help.

Mariann: It sounds like a great model, really.

And it sounds like you've had great success with it, even in these hard times. How do you reach people with the fact that this exists? Is it mostly through social media?

Tamara: So social media, and now we are working with the blog on the website. So we kind of will answer the questions people may Google.

So if a person Googles, for example, like “what is veganism?” or “what is the difference between veganism and vegetarianism?” or “what do vegans need to take B12?” or any other questions. So we write articles about this so it's basically working with SEO so the website of the course is just going upper on the Google search.

So when people search something about veganism, they can find our course.

Mariann: That's great. I think that you talk about the health implications, which you know, is always a good in with people, but I'm curious to know about your messaging on animal cruelty. How much do you focus on it? How much do you tell people?

Do you try to soft pedal it? So not to freak people out because people are so naive about what's happening to animals, sometimes they can get too upset. How do you approach messaging about the horrible animal cruelty in animal agriculture?

Tamara: So all our messages in the course and everywhere else. So we focus first on ethics.

Because the ethics is the only way we think person can go vegan, because if the person goes from the environment perspective or health perspective, it just goes as far as plant-based diet. And if we are talking about veganism, which includes refusing all animal exploitation products, in clothing and in testing and everywhere else. So we have to talk about all industries, not only about the food industry.

So we try to cover all topics as much as possible and do it in way that first, if there is some sensitive people, we put the trigger before (a) person go(es) further. We are not trying to cover the truth so of course we are not going to shock person, like just from first second, but we're not going to hide what's happening.

So this is what is happening in the farms or other industries. So we just about this and say numbers and say facts we don't put a lot of words only just say facts. Like, "This is what's happening. This is what is true. This is the evidence. What we know now, what we can do with this and the choice on our hands. We can change something. So when we talk about animal exploitation, we always try to show them the way to stop this and what this person that reads this or watch(es) this can do.

So the person not just to go sad and then doesn't know what to do, but we have the how to say, like the instruction kinda of what you can do right now, step by step and what you can read more, what you can learn more. We created the vegan guides to Ukraine. So the person who discovered what's going on in the those industries.

And of course it can be hard just to go vegan right away. So we try to provide all information that can be needed right now. And the vegan guide is one of these pieces of information. So this is the guide with a lot of lists with the brands, with the shops, with the clothing, with the makeup, or with books, with movies, like everything a person can be interested in or can struggle with, like, "Oh where to buy that?" or "What should I wear?" or "Where to buy makeup?" Or any other questions?

So we try to put it together so it can be easier to go vegan, not harder.

Mariann: That's hugely important. You can't just tell people why you have to tell them how. I mean, especially in hard times where people are stressed out

anyway, it's hard to just cope much less changing the way you eat. And, you know, I feel like Eastern Europe in general has really seen a huge growth in animal activism over the past 10 years or so. Do you agree and do you see this happening in Ukraine? A real tidal shift in the attention being paid to animals, especially farm animals, and veganism?

Tamara: In many ways, people (view) animals differently. What you can say that in past few years, definitely people start hearing not only about dogs and cats and the next step was like fur animals, like the fur farm. And then it was animals used in circuses and then even animals used in testing. But in each step, fewer and fewer people go. Regarding veganism, I definitely see that, especially now, many factors came together and veganism became a topic that is talking on the TV, national broadcasts.

Like many times! Not once for just one week and because there are vegan soldiers, so becomes like the topic that people talk (about) and media does coverage of this topic and not in a way like, "Oh, veganism or vegans or what do they eat or like, is it healthy?" but in the kinda, totally different way, like, "We have a lot of vegans and how we can help them and who help vegans right now?" Like taking interviews with vegan soldiers, showing these examples of vegans who are defending the country. And it just destroys all stereotypes about vegans who cannot do anything. I'm thankful to media actually, because they did a lot of programs last month, last two, about veganism, even the ethics and our project and our organization. And it's good because more and more people know that veganism exists and people go vegan, different people go vegan.

And it's normalizing is what I wanted to say. That as many times you hear veganism in a kind of good context, it becomes normalized. Like, "oh, veganism, it's okay." Not like, "oh, veganism...whatever..."

Mariann: Yeah, yeah. That is fascinating and really reassuring. And it does sound like the press...I looked at the press on your website and I could use Google translate to look at the written stuff. I couldn't watch the videos, but it was amazing. All the coverage was amazing. It was very positive. It was very sympathetic. Like the press isn't gonna come in and make fun of a soldier who's fighting and who just wants to get the food that he or she eats. So, it looked to me from that small glimpse, I'm glad to hear you reassure me that it's the truth, that there really has been this positive attitude.

So let's talk a little bit about the future because I wanna talk about, you know, you're probably very focused on the present because the present is very fraught, but what are your plans for after the war?

Do you expect to grow? Do you expect to go back to the things that you were doing? I know you were doing some street action and the lectures, which you've actually started to renew, which I'm very glad to hear about, but what other plans do you have for after the war?

Tamara: Last year, we had project called Ukrainian Vegan Tour where we visited different cities of Ukraine with the program for two days. We had movie screening, food sampling, street outreach action and then the action with the VR sets. And we went to 10 cities last year and it was just amazing experience. We got a lot of great feedback and this year we wanted to do it again, but we have a different situation.

What we talked to the team about when the war will end and the Ukraine will win. We want to do this tour, but in different way, we want to go to the most destroyed cities and feed the people there. And to go talk to them while we do distribution of food. We can prepare food for those who rebuild the cities, for the volunteers, for the workers, for builders. We can do kind of talks in this.

So it's in my imagination. I'm not sure how it'll be, but I view it as like we feed where we build new buildings and we can talk about veganism maybe and just share foods and we'll help them to recover the city. So it's kind of just our feelings that we have to help Ukraine to recover, but in our way as a vegan organization. So we can bring food and help people and talk with them, just because they will ask, "what is this food and who you are?" So to kind of share our message.

And also we have a children's book, I forgot to mention. So we created the first vegan book for children in Ukrainian. We haven't had this book in Ukrainian ever. And we created with our team and the help of the organization of Supreme Master Ching Hai. We distributed 24 thousand of this book. And now we're working on the next book. That book (is) called *Hands, Paws or Hooves* and it was nonfiction where we just sharing with kids what's happening in different industries, but in kid's form. With nothing to traumatizing just...and it's in poems.

Like with animals who are playing, they want to be happy. And there are a lot of illustration of happy animals. And at the end, we just have an explanation of what is veganism and we share different facts about farmed animals, so called farmed animals. Like the facts about cows, the facts about pigs, like some nice facts like that. For example, pigs they like music or chickens they can hear voices and know who is this exact voice. So some interesting facts.

And the next book will be kind of the tale...

Mariann: Oh, fairy tale.

Tamara: A fairy tale! But not...yeah, the animals will have names and a story. And these animals, they would live on (a) farm and then they decided to leave (the) farm and to rescue themselves. And then all these different animals they will meet with a sanctuary. So kind of a story about this.

Mariann: I love both of them. That's a lot of books that you've gotten published. How do you get them to the kids?

Tamara: We just created the book. We said that we had this book and many people just ask us about this book and received the book. So we had like sold out. And when this organization approached us, already the war started and we had printed another hundred of (the) books, of copies. And we distributed it to the children refugees, to the children in shelters, because families, they left their homes without any books or pencils for the kids. So kids get bored in shelters and it was a huge problem. So we offered the books to the refugee centers and they were so happy. They took all of books and then the association approached us.

And they at first printed 4,000, then 10,000 and then another 10,000, and all these books are distributed to the refugees again, and to different centers. And for volunteers who help kids. Yesterday, I sent three hundred of books to two refugee centers, one in Odesa and another one closer to the East of Ukraine. And they're a lot of kids. It's not the first time I sent to them because I got feedback from them that, "kids just love this book and can we have more?" So I sent more.

This is the book project and what now we want to move forward on, is education in schools. So we want try to talk to Ministry of Education and make kind of a lesson in schools, but not obligated, but kinda the extra one. To teach kids about, not like just veganism, but to make them think of what's going on with the environment, with the food system and what we do to animals in this circle, right? So kids from the very young age can understand what we do to animals and they can have an idea that it does not have to be that way.

And when we went to the children camp, we clearly saw this, that kids are very open to veganism, they just don't know about it. They just don't know, as I was! Like, no one talked to me about veganism or what's going on with animals. I

loved animals, always! But I was eating them and didn't relate this to actions. And the kids, they love animals and they don't want to harm them.

They just have to know what to do with this. This is the big project and I don't know if now is the right time to start, but in the near future, or maybe after we win, we'll do this and try to go to schools with the education.

Mariann: That sounds like you have amazing plans and you sound very inspired about all of them. You talked a little bit about funding and from the Supreme Master, and I know you've gotten some grants from other organizations, but tell us how difficult funding has been or how it is right now.

And I'm sure there are people who would like to help. So tell me how people can help.

Tamara: People who listen to us and decide that we do something they feel is important and they want to support us, we would be very grateful because every Hryvnia, every Dollar counts. And we try to use money as much effective as possible.

And on our website, everyanimal.org, we have an English version of the website and it is the way to donate. We have the bank account to USD, in Euro, we have PayPal, so any way is appropriate. People can support us and we would appreciate it. We also have a Patreon, which can work for someone regarding funding.

So at first, when the full-scale war started, first we just like, as all people, as everyone, we were just stressed out, we didn't know what to do, what's going to be next. And of course, even now being in Kyiv, I cannot tell that I'm hundred percent safe and I will survive. We are here, all we live with a thought that we can die. And this is something that we just used to it because we just live in the country where it is at war. The rockets fly every day and the bombs, bombings every day. So you just know that you can die.

At first, I was of course scared, but since it's six months, I just feel that I will do as much I can until I do it. And my team will do it even after. So if I will die, I know that they will continue to fight. Of course, because Ukraine now is many, many people from all over the world want to support Ukraine. And this is so amazing.

Like I've seen so many people from many countries, many cities, just right into our organization and wanted to offer some support. Even those who didn't have

money, they said I don't have money, but I can put some posters somewhere. And it is amazing how people from all over the world to help Ukrainians. And I can say not only from my side or my organization. From every Ukrainian, like, we all are so grateful. Everybody who help us these days and don't forget about us and speak about us and donate and support and share our stories. And that's why I think we got a lot of support from foundations, from organizations. We were able to cover the cost for this project we had for these six months.

And we spend a lot of money for the vegan kitchen, like every month, it's about \$5,000 we spend just for food and parcels. Yeah, so it's a lot of money. So we got covered for this time, but the fundings they're never unlimited. They always have limits. So yeah, we always need them. And especially when you don't know what's going to happen next, it's very hard to predict even if you'll have the support to stay. Because before the full-scale war, we had a lot of support from Ukrainians, from the like many people they had kind of subscription for support. Now it's almost gone to zero because all Ukrainians, they support armed forces of Ukraine and understandable, so many people just spent all the money to support the army. As many of us do as well from our own money. So, Ukrainians, they don't now support so much organizations like ours, so we mostly rely on foreign support.

Mariann: I mean, you're doing such heroic work and I'll tell you the truth \$5,000 a month. Yeah. It's a lot of money, but you are doing an enormous amount with that \$5,000 a month to feed so many people in such fraught circumstances.

So it sounds like you're using the money extremely well. I certainly encourage people to check out your website, everyanimal.org. Is that right? That's how people would reach it here?

Tamara: Yes. Yeah. English version. Would be everyanimal.org/en

Mariann: Okay. Thank you so much, Tamara, for taking time out of your crazy, crazy life to talk to us, it's really been a privilege.

Tamara: Thank so much for having me. It was a pleasure to talk to you. And for sharing our story. Thank you so much for your support.