



Our Hen House Podcast: Transcript for Episode 662, Interview with Amy Luebbert

Jasmin: Welcome to Our Hen House, Amy.

Amy: Hello, hello! I'm so happy to be here!

Jasmin: I'm so excited! I've been really looking forward to talking to you because in addition to following your work and really admiring you, I am so honored to be your friend. So it's always funny to interview a friend, but I love it too.

Amy: I know! I'm like Jasmine's my bud, so this is exciting. Thank you for having me and thank you for being my lovely friend.

Jasmin: Well, I appreciate that. And just consider this a chat between two buddies with like, you know, a few people maybe listening in as we drink our soy lattes. First question, is it a soy latte you would drink or an oat latte or something else?

Amy: Oh, I know this isn't going to land well with you, but I'm an oat latte. I know you're a soy.

Jasmin: I am a soy. I'm drinking a soy latte right now, actually.

Amy: I know you are. You're team soy. I'm not, not team soy. I just really enjoy my oat latte.

Jasmin: So I'm not, not team oat, for the record. *laughs*

Amy: *laughs*

Jasmin: So don't you wish like politics was this easy? *laughs*

Amy: Good luck!

Jasmin: Exactly. All right, Amy, there's so many things I want to talk to you about. You are very active in a number of social justice movements, particularly anti-racism and animal rights. So before we dig in, from a thousand feet high, how would you describe the overarching motivation behind all of them? Like what gets you up in the morning, besides your oat latte?

Amy: I think it's a desire to see equity and to see people being able to live their lives. And in people, I include animals into people.

Jasmin: Mm-hmm me too.

Amy: To let everyone live as they'd want to live. And to have the resources that they need or to have what they want. To have joy and to have family, if they want, whatever that looks like for them. To have peace and to be able to be who they are.

I think that's really what motivates me is just to have folks be able to, and by folks, again, animals included, to have people be able to live their lives the way they wanna live and not without any sort of limitations based on...whether that's white supremacy limiting you or animal injustices that are happening.

Jasmin: That's like my favorite answer that anyone's ever given in the history of Our Hen House. Honestly.

Because if someone asked me that question, I'd be like, I just don't think people should be on the other end of violence, but I love that you kind of turned it on its head in this sort of positive way. Like everyone deserves the right to just... right isn't even the right word, is it? Because a right is something that like, a group in power gives a marginalized group... So, well done. I love it! That is beautiful.

Oh God. I have so many things I want to talk to you about! How do you account for the fact that animal rights are so often ignored by people who care about social justice? I mean, not to ask you like the big question that every single person listening to this wonders about all the time, but why? Why are animal rights ignored?

Amy: Well, I think that there's a general disregard and a lack of seeing them as equal on our playing field as humans. There's the domination of humans over animals that I think a lot of people, even in the social justice, you know, fighting

for human rights are just having a hard time seeing that because of our culture. Because of the way of our culture is indoctrinating people into this idea that animals are less than us.

Some of them we care about, right? We care about our cats and our dogs... horses, maybe. These are animals that we care more about, but when it comes to other animals, especially those in the farmed animals segment, those animals are generally disregarded. And I think it's just hard for folks to overcome that, even though they have this justice mindset.

I think there is opportunity when you work within coalition with people and you bring these beliefs into those spaces that people can hear more. They're more open to listening to you. If you are actively engaged in a movement to fight for human rights with them, they may be more open to hearing about injustices towards animals.

I wish it wasn't necessarily the case. It does feel like it could be a great opportunity for people to come together to have more power around our anti-oppression work. But it's currently just the way our culture is set up. It is a very dominant thing that oppression towards animals is just very okay. It is just a very okay thing for people to do. And it's a second thought and it's seen as a second...like they're second class citizens, you know? Citizens isn't a great word to use, but a second class group of people, the animals. I think it's just breaking that mindset.

But people think that it's more valuable to spend time towards human rights. And I certainly spend a lot of my time, the majority of my time, working in human rights as well. And I think that without ending white supremacy, I don't think that we will ever end animal oppression. So I think that we have to be fighting for the end of white supremacy.

Jasmin: Right. Because I could ask that exact question, but about racism. I mean, I just was asking you, like, how do you account for the fact that animal rights are so often ignored by people who care about social justice, but how do you account for the fact that racism is ignored by people who care about animals?

Amy: Absolutely. Which is happening all of the time. There's this idea that if you are vegan, that you are somehow morally superior and that you don't have any racial bias or racism inside of you. Which, if you are raised in the United States, and especially if you are a white person, this is something that you are

going to be grappling with for your entire life. White supremacy lives inside of you.

And so if you're not actively thinking about that and working to be anti-racist in your everyday life, then you are not doing justice towards the animals and you are certainly not doing justice towards humans.

Jasmin: 1000000000%. So, Amy, I know this is a complicated question, but you were an important part of Encompass until it folded recently.

That's actually how we originally connected. Can you tell us why you felt the work Encompass was doing was important and maybe how you would like to see it continue?

Amy: So I think that the work was really important, it is still very important. It kind of had a two-fold factor. The way that I describe it is there (were) spaces that were exclusively for people of the global majority to connect, to gain skills, to share resources, to be in community. And I think that's really important within our animal movement because of the fact that there are a lot of white-led spaces that are not inclusive, are very much perpetuating white supremacy beliefs and ideologies, and so those spaces are not safe for folks of color.

And I think that that was a very important piece and I'm really delighted that that's continuing under Apex with Braille Ringer, so folks should check that out, if you haven't heard about that before. But that work will continue and I'm super grateful that that's continuing. And then the other piece of the coin was that we were working on those white-led organizations, financial fundraiser type folks, as well, donors, to say, "Let's start working at chipping away at that white supremacy within your organizations, through trainings, through education, through relationship building." And that's the piece that I think will now be left to those organizations to carry on, on their own. And the hope is that they do, and there was a blog posted with some recommendations for folks.

So hopefully people will check that out. There's the research report that was launched earlier this year. And of course, the book that folks can use as a resource as well. So I think that's the work that is critical, that does need to continue, is white folks doing the work of breaking down that white supremacy within their organizations as well as within themselves. And hopefully they'll have access to do that.

Jasmin: It's always a little shocking when an organization dissolves, especially when it's an organization that we care so much about collectively. So I'm sure

that you've gone through the wringer of emotions and feelings and you probably still are. When an organization that you've invested so much time and energy into dissolves, it's a loss. It's a big loss. Is there an overall takeaway that you have carried with you that you will bring to your next endeavors?

Amy: Definitely. Yeah. I think that for me, this really showed me that even within a space where we are actively working on trying to be anti-racist that white supremacy traits show up within those spaces and have to be reckoned with.

And no space is safe, if you will. And so I think me moving into any space moving forward will be extra diligent and extra mindful and really challenging those traits and characteristics that I see. Or times when racism comes up, that it has taught me to be more vigilant even in spaces that are claiming to be anti-racist.

Jasmin: That's a tough pill to swallow. And I think it's something that a lot of people who have worked in social justice could probably relate to. I mean, we've all been in situations...I've certainly been in a couple situations where I thought that I was working in a space where everyone would sort of like show up in their most woke self.

And I was repeatedly kind of like, oh, this isn't not only is this not happening around me with my colleagues, but I started to recognize ways that I wasn't showing up to the best of my ability and my sort of highest consciousness. So, I mean, that's something that I'm really grateful that there are people like you and Braille who are continuing to put this work out there and I'm grateful to the resources that still exist.

So we'll be sure to link to all of those relevant resources on the show notes for this episode. So let's switch gears and we'll certainly touch back on anti-racist work because I know it is very much entrenched in all of the justice work that you do.

Tell us about VegLife Des Moines.

Amy: Yeah. So VegLife Des Moines started in 2017. It's a nonprofit that's based, obviously, here in Des Moines, Iowa. And it's really about connecting folks around community, that are interested in veganism or anti-oppression work. And we started with a humble set of potlucks in a church and one year, we hosted an event counter to a bacon fest. So that's a popular event here in the middle of Iowa. And we wanted to say, "there's another way," right? That there

are other options that you don't have to support that industry. And we thought maybe a hundred people might come and 800 people came and crammed into a space that was not built for 800 people.

And we were like, “wow! more people are interested in this than we thought.” And that's how VegLife Des Moines decided to become an actual nonprofit, from having that wonderful turnout back in 2017. And since then we've hosted a myriad of events, including large vegan fests, educational events.

At this point, we're doing a vegan summer market series. That's happening once a month, every month. And really, since the pandemic, we have been doing outdoor type events as our team is still very concerned about spreading COVID. And we do tend, at our potlucks, to get about a hundred people to come to those before the pandemic.

And so we just don't feel that that's safe to continue to do indoors. So we host outdoor events. But yeah, it's really about bringing people together and what's different, maybe, about how we are operating is that we are not doing normal vegan outreach. We don't necessarily do that. What we are doing is creating a space where people feel welcomed and feel that they...

Because it's Iowa, we're few and far between. There's not as many vegans or vegan curious folks here in the Midwest. We're certainly growing in numbers, but you know, it is possible to feel lonely, to feel isolated, to not feel like you have anyone that supports you. And so for me, it really felt like the key thing to keeping people interested, engaged, and caring about continuing their veganism was to create this space where they felt like they had a community of people that cared about them, that was looking out for them, and was able to share resources and information. So really about creating community around it. But of course, everyone is always welcome at our events, you don't have to be vegan to come.

Jasmin: There's not like a survey when you get in...they're not like, "how much do you know about this? What is this?" *both laugh* “Where's your vegan club card!?! You didn't get one?”

So what is your target audience? The veg curious?

Amy: Yeah, and even the vegans. I would say vegans, veg curious, people related. We have a lot of folks that might have a family member who's vegan, they're not vegan. So they come to us for resources or they wanted to bring their loved one to the market or to this event.

So I think we end up reaching a lot of different people, but in general, our market is people who are curious about that eating vegan or being vegan.

Jasmin: What kind of resources do you provide on your website? And can you tell us what your website is?

Amy: Yes. It's veglifedesmoines.org, and we have a myriad of resources we offer.

There's like some of our favorite cookbooks, some YouTube channels. We have resources about local doctors that are vegan friendly. We have a restaurant guide for Des Moines and our events, of course.

Jasmin: Very cool. I love it so much. And you mentioned some of the services that you're providing for new vegans and for vegan curious folks like grocery store tours and restaurant support and vegan mentoring.

So like, what's the brain power behind that? Is it like you, is it the folks who run the group with you? Like, I'd love to know how these ideas start and how they get implemented.

Amy: Yeah. So we are a nonprofit, so we do have a board that is working on these ideas together. For example, if somebody were to come through for the vegan mentoring and ask for mentoring, it would be based on what type of information they're looking for.

If they're looking for nutrition information, I'm not your guy. Like that's not my expertise. So I'm gonna reach out to somebody in the community I know, who has that background, and match them with that person. So everything we do is volunteer based. It's all community led and so different people are jumping in to sort of support different people based on that.

Otherwise, the events that we bring, like one of the events we do is it's called trunk or treat. And I realize people outside of the Midwest, maybe don't know what that is. It's a thing where you park your car and you give treats out of the trunk of your car at Halloween.

Jasmin: Oh my God. I love that.

Amy: And if you're a kid, think about like! When I was a kid, I wasn't vegan. So I have memories of Halloween and enjoying Halloween. And now I think it would be a sad affair because you'd go around and get all this candy that you

can't eat. So we create this space and we usually have about 80 kids come through and we have these vegans, like 30 different adults, volunteer to have vegan treats out of the back of their car. And these kids come through with their costumes and it's freaking adorable. But like, is that vegan outreach? I don't know, but it's creating a space where these vegan kiddos can have an experience where they are...it's kind of normalizing that vegan Halloween could be a thing.

So I love that event and it came from a parent asking like, "Hey, would you ever consider doing this? Because Halloween really stinks as a vegan family."

So, we created it and we've done it two years in a row. We're planning on bringing it back this year.

Jasmin: And it's also a way to take care of the advocates too because it's not just the people we're reaching out to, but it's the people who are doing the outreach. So it sounds really fun and like good energy and a good time.

Amy: Oh, it's so fun. And kids, the costumes, love it.

Jasmin: So cute. Yeah. So you mentioned you've done veg fests in the past. I know it's weird times with COVID and I know you and I are on the, I would say, more terrified side of getting it. Do you intend to continue the veg fest?

Amy: So that's really interesting. I have planned three now and they take a really long time and they take a lot of your energy and I've debated if a veg fest is something that...a one day event that happens for only a few hours and you dedicate all of these hours and resources.

For us, it was also a huge financial lift. We're spending, I don't know, three times as much on a veg fest as compared to these vegan markets. And I guess for me, I'm not sure they'll come back with my support. I certainly would volunteer at one or be a friend to one that happens in Des Moines, but I'm not sure that VegLife Des Moines would do one. Just because of the expense and the resources that it takes.

And I think that these markets actually bring in...are more casual. They are more frequent. They have a similar vibe, I guess. I just think they're (the veg fests) probably not coming back under VegLife Des Moines, at this time.

Jasmin: Mmhmm.

When I record these interviews, they're on video, even though we're only airing the audio. And I just kind of wanna tell our listeners that, as you said most of that answer, you were behind a cat butt. So, can you tell us who that was that just made an appearance on the video?

Amy: Of course, I would love to tell you! That was Norman. He's just the most charming and cute cat you could ever possibly adore.

He's lived in my house now for a year, adopted from a lovely rescue.

Jasmin: Aw. And who are your other family members in your house?

Amy: Sure. I've got Ethel and Tooey. They're all cats. And Ethel and Norman are bio brother and sister. I got them as a bonded pair. It's so cute.

Jasmin: I love that, so, okay. I just needed to talk about the cats because it's too cute.

Okay. So what are your strategies for bringing in new people? Or do you have strategies? Is it just kind of like presence? Like, "oh, there's the, the Veg Des Moines group again?" Or is there a specific brain power around how to bring others in so that it doesn't wind up feeling like a vegan club?

Amy: Oh, yeah.

So we've been really lucky. We've had some local media that has promoted the vegan summer market, which I think brings in lots of new people. It's also in a really interesting location, it's downtown and across the street from a civic center, which is where we have local plays.

So like Hamilton was playing during our first one. So I think people saw us walked through and we're like, "Hmm, what's happening?" So it's definitely in a space where people are curious and walking through.

We also had a new person move into the community here and has elected to be our brand ambassador. So they are sharing VegLife, Des Moines everywhere they go. And I love that human and I think it's great because they're new to town and they see us as a great resource and they want to find other people who aren't connected and make sure they're connected.

Jasmin: So I have a question for you that I'm not entirely sure how to word, kind of going back to your anti-racist work.

And I know that, you know, as also an anti-racist activist, it is very much embedded in how I approach everything. But do you have any examples of how you blend the two through the work with the Des Moines group? Or is that too amorphous of a question?

Amy: So we definitely are thinking about and engaging in anti-racism work as a board.

So this is something that we talk about a lot in terms of - Examples are that the venue that we chose for this event doesn't require a police presence. That's really important to me to not have a police presence at events. And so we will always, with my direction, at a venue that doesn't have a police presence.

We also really think about accessibility and transportation needs for venues, but also in our vendor selection. So when we are thinking about what vendors we want. We have an application process, but not everyone makes the cut. And usually if you don't make the cut it's because we feel that your values aren't in line with ours.

And a recent example of that is somebody who is selling products that are from a women's collective in the country of Morocco. They're selling them here in Des Moines and, you know, that has the potential to be either good or bad. And so we did our due diligence to chat with that business owner to really understand where they're coming at that. To look at their past social media, to look at any media presence that they had, and to really ask them questions about how their whiteness, cuz this was a white woman here in the Des Moines market, and ask them questions around how is their whiteness showing up in this and how are they breaking down the power dynamic between the US white person and, and the black women of Morocco. And unfortunately they aren't in a space, right now, where they have considered those things. And so we felt that that was problematic. And, for us, we are not going to just have vendors at events that don't align with our values.

And so we educated, we sent multiple articles about different things and offered to talk more about it, to really dig in with them, and we just ultimately decided they weren't a good fit. And that's not the first time, we've done this countless time...not countless, maybe a handful of times where we've had to tell vendors that this isn't a good fit.

And so we really tried to uphold those values in the way that we do events and have event. We also, as part of our vegan summer market, we have a cool thing where we ask the community to donate items. Like maybe you've got some

kitchen gadgets, you've got some vegan T-shirts, maybe you've got some anti-racism books, anything like this.

And we have a little thrift store at our table. And any of the people buy the items for whatever they want. So this brings a bit of economic justice to our market. So you can afford, you know, if you want this cookbook or you want this t-shirt or sticker or vase, art, whatever, you pay whatever you can for it.

And then the money is all going back to six different organizations here in Des Moines that are working in the human rights field. And so we are hoping to raise \$3,000 this year. To give each organization \$500, which maybe doesn't sound significant to other folks, but our budget is pretty small and that's a big, significant portion.

So we're trying to incorporate things like this as well.

Jasmin: Oh, I love it. Very specific examples too, that I think other groups could replicate. So what is the vegan scene like in Des Moines? I know that people who are sort of aware of it or pop around in it have probably seen you show up. You're like *Where's Waldo*. Like *Where's Amy* in the vegan scene.

Amy: Oh yes. You might be referring to the fact that I work for two vegan establishments right now and we only have a total of three.

Jasmin: When are you starting at the third, Amy? My goodness.

Amy: Oh, wait. We do have more. We have one non-food one, of course, too. So yes, the vegan scene in Des Moines is charming. I'm not sure how to describe this. At this point, I mean, so what's been...

I do think that we have a lot. If you come to Des Moines, you will be able to eat and enjoy your life. Like, I don't wanna make it sound like that, but in terms of like dedicated vegan spaces, we certainly are on the low end of that right now. But we are hopeful that more things will come, of course, in the future.

I think that there's a lot of people interested in it and curious about it. It's, you know...we are a state that has the number one...we are the number one producer, and I'm not saying that in a great way, number one producer of chickens. We have 60 million chickens living in Iowa and we have 25 million pigs living in Iowa.

I mean, we only have 3 million humans here, so we are outnumbered by animal agriculture a lot. And so our scene is both somber and joyful. We are living within this state of pretty terrible animal agriculture happening. Well, very terrible animal agriculture happening here. But also we have this community of people that have come together to really like uplift ourselves because of this circumstance.

And I think that is why we have this really special community feel because we have the surrounding narrative that is death to all these animals. And so we really have needed to cling to each other. So I think while...so that means that we're supporting those vegan businesses. We're showing up for them. We're promoting them.

The only thing I'm really missing, Jasmin - vegan donuts! Where are my gosh, darn vegan donuts? I would be remiss to not try to advocate for some freaking vegan donuts to get here in Des Moines. I'm not kidding you, right now you cannot get yourself... You could buy a Whole Foods donut, but to me, a cake donut is not a donut. It's not a donut.

Jasmin: I feel that, I agree with that. I mean, I think we're on the same page there as well.

Wow. Iowa is a really extraordinary place to be doing vegan advocacy because of the power of animal agriculture in the state and the number of factory farms. Do you have a vision of post animal agriculture Iowa? Like what does that look like?

Amy: Wouldn't that be beautiful? So in addition to also raising all these animals and murdering them, we also have just fields and fields and fields of corn and soybeans, which are going towards feeding these animals, or feeding your gas tank through ethanol. We love making corn for ethanol.

So I think that what I see as the next steps of what we need to have happen is really a government transition of farmland and farmers. We need to be giving resources to farmers. I don't think we can expect that farmers will do this on their own independently when your income is tied to this and we live in a capitalist society.

I don't think that's a fair thing for us to ask as. My grandparents were farmers. My uncles are farmers. I don't think that we are in a space where we can expect that, and that's fair. So we need, at a government level, we need programs that are helping the farmers transition.

And wouldn't it be beautiful if instead of soy for animals, we were growing soy for humans or we're growing oats for humans and having, instead of mono crop culture, poly crop culture, like we can do this. It's definitely possible. It just needs to be incentivized by, I believe, the government.

Jasmin: Oh, that is super interesting.

I totally agree with you. It's really sad to me when I'm passing all of the corn and I remember, you know, I've taken the train across the country a couple times and when I'm in the middle, this is all I'm seeing out the window. I know it's for the animals to eat and it's just, it's a little heartbreaking.

Like where do you put it all, especially doing the work you do in Iowa. How do you stay sane?

Amy: Yes...Um...uh...am I?! *laughs*

Jasmin: Okay. We can move on. *laughs*

Amy: Maniacal laugh! No. Okay. So for me, my grounding techniques are to have deep relationships with people that I care about to be able to talk about issues that are really important to me. So a lot of my friends, both encompass animal rights and anti-racism. I also am involved in community actions so that I don't feel hopeless, that there are other people standing up for the same things that I believe in.

And I have my cats that I love. And then if I could just get some vegan donuts, I'd actually be...that maybe would help me. *both laugh*

If you're listening and you know how to make vegan donuts, please come to Des Moines and make me vegan donuts.

Jasmin: I mean, it's a good opportunity for another food truck and Amy could probably work there.

Amy: I would work for you and I would host events where you can come and bring your food truck. So I'm often giving you publicity, so, please come.

Jasmin: Switching gears, how do you feel about the red state/blue state division? Like aren't most states different shades of purple?

Amy: Iowa used to certainly be a purple state if that's what you're referring to, but we are now fully in the red zone. We are a red state, our governor and both houses of our Iowa legislature are Republican and very... What are we calling that wave of Republicans? The, um, the very... like we are trying to ban books here in Iowa. We are also legislating people's bodies around abortion. We are legislating around trans bodies, as well. That trans girls cannot play in sports.

There are so many, we have a stand your ground laws that you can use gun violence against other people, if you feel threatened. Which as a predominantly white state is incredibly dangerous because white people feel threatened by black people for no reason because of our culture of white supremacy. And so these are very dangerous times that we are living in.

And I think that the legislation... our legislation is terrible here.

Jasmin: And yet when I was trying to campaign for you to move to Rochester, which is the cult that I lead. I try to move queer vegans to Rochester. You said no, because you wanted to stay there because why?

Amy: Well, I definitely have a very strong community here and while it is tempting for all of us who are able to leave.

There is some sense of I should stay and fight the fight. And there are fights everywhere though. So like even in Rochester, you're fighting for things.

Jasmin: Oh, there's a lot. There's a lot of racial injustice here. There's a lot to fight here for sure. There are vegan donuts though, right?

Amy: So, I'm not saying it's forever, but for now I do feel a connection to this community.

And I think that there is work happening that is hopefully making change in our state.

Jasmin: And I fully respect that. I feel like I asked the question a little oddly, I just kind of was interested in your perspective of what it's like to be in a place like Des Moines, like Iowa. So many people listening to this are in areas like that.

And I was just sort of curious about your perspective of how to stay, how to make it work. And you're giving a lot of very specific tips on how to do that because a lot of people write to us and say, you know, maybe they'll say Our

Hen House is the vegan in their ear, but then the rest of the week is very depressive and very oppressive.

So do you have any sort of words of hope for people like that?

Amy: Well, I do think that if you're able to create, try to create community space where...and whether that starts, I mean, honestly, our potluck started with 10 people coming, like 10 people coming to a potluck, but you do that every month for five years and you end up with maybe more.

And maybe not, you know, but that's okay. At least then you have 10 people who are your allies, who are thinking like you, which provides you with some comfort. I think trying to organize in your own spaces and to take on some responsibility for creating that space is really...don't wait for someone else.

You know, that you have the opportunity or power to create something in your backyard. Or if you don't have a yard, in a community park or a space and just putting it out there and seeing if anyone comes. And give it a few tries, we've definitely had failures as an organization where no one comes and those events don't feel great.

And you kind of wonder, "well, what do we do wrong? What can we do differently? How do we do something different?" But I mean, I wouldn't be able to be in this space, I think, without the deep friendships and relationships that I've built with people and those have come through being active in the community.

Jasmin: I love that. Well, speaking of community spaces, you are also planning on starting a vegan sex shop. Tell us about that. I love it. Tell me your plan.

Amy: Yeah. So I need you to think about liberation, decolonization. We are gonna liberate our sex shop here, and it does feel a little revolutionary in Iowa based on what I was just telling you about.

But these are not new. You know, there are definitely liberated sex shops around the country. I haven't found one that's vegan so I do think that's a unique spin that we're gonna bring here. But it's going to be a space that doesn't only have things to help you with your sexy time or support you with sexy time, but also educational time, joyful time.

I'm hoping to have some dance parties. I want a space where we can roller skate. I mean, is that an option? I don't even know if that's an option...but how

big? How big can we go? But I think it's about bringing folks together and I really want there to be spaces that are facilitated by or brought together by people of that community.

So whether that's trans folks or fat folks or Black or brown folks, like whatever that space is like, everyone is welcome. This space isn't gonna be centering all of the things that are normally centered in a sex shop. I've done some detective work around Des Moines to see what's out there and I'll just tell you it's not great.

It's for cisgender heterosexual white men basically. And so this space is gonna be for everyone else, basically.

Jasmin: Oh, I love it.

Amy: Of course, everyone's welcome. Those cisgender white men are totally welcome, but you know, the space won't be geared toward their gaze and toward their needs. And I think that is unique and different for, especially, Des Moines but there are these spaces and I'm just hoping to create one here in Des Moines.

Jasmin: Forget you moving to Rochester. I'm moving to Des Moines. *laughs*

Amy: O M G come to Des Moines. I mean, it's so great!

Jasmin: I hear there's a few food trucks and donuts coming soon, somehow.

Is there a lot of overlap between the vegan and the queer communities in Des Moines?

Amy: Yeah, there's a bit of us. It does seem like a lot of folks who are interested in vegan things also sometimes are queer, but it's a mix of things. Maybe the younger folks in our crew are leaning more towards the queer spaces, but it's a mix.

Jasmin: So let's switch gears before we conclude our interview. I wanted to touch on climate change, which is pretty much the opposite of a queer sex shop, or vegan sex shop. Sorry, I always confused the two.

Amy: No, it's gonna be all of those things and anti-racist like, we're gonna... yeah, it's gonna be great.

Jasmin: So basically the opposite of that is climate change. What do you anticipate will happen over the next, say 10 years?

Amy: I mean here in Iowa, I can speak to that. So we are getting hotter and windier. So we have things now, wind experiences, that are like knocking over large swaths of trees.

This happened two summers ago and completely decimated an entire tree population in the city of Cedar Rapids. What does that do then to the climate within that community? You know, tree cover is extremely important for not only our oxygen replenishing, but also for us to have cooler cities, to have spaces that are comfortable and those are entirely gone.

So we are gonna see here in Iowa, we're going to see more of that. Probably more tornadoes touching down and then hail, things of this nature. I do appreciate that we are a landlocked state, so we are not experiencing your hurricanes and tsunamis. We are also not prone to fires, as well, or earthquakes.

So if you were looking to move to Iowa, you would just experience some windy times, which can blow over your house. So no big deal. Yeah. It's not great. I think that more people need to be urgently thinking about climate change and this, again, would be most transformational at our government level, corporation level.

Of course our individual impacts are super important, but we do need to be making change on a larger scale if we even want to combat this.

Jasmin: And speaking of transformative change, is there any chance that this time of transformative and mostly horrifying change will create opportunities to rethink what we do to animals?

Amy: Oh, Jasmin... Yes. Let us hope. Let us hope that people are waking up to the information that's out there about how destructive animal agriculture is to our... Here in Iowa, for example, our waterways are just completely trashed because of the manure and runoff from these facilities. We are a big reason why the dead zone is happening in the Gulf of Mexico.

Sorry, everyone, Iowa apologizes. Do we think that it will... I mean, I don't know, Jasmin, I don't know if in our lifetime we are gonna see this sort of... I don't think that we're gonna see an end to racism in our lifetime. And I don't think that we're gonna see an end to animal agriculture in our lifetime.

So it's one of those things that we are currently living and trying to create the life in the future that we want to see, even without everyone else on board.

Jasmin: I was on a meeting yesterday that had like a sort of dorky icebreaker and the icebreaker was - go around and say, is there someone dead or living who you would like to have a coffee with?

And the first person I thought of, for some reason in that moment, was Susan B. Anthony, who's buried like across the street from where I live. And I said, "Susan B. Anthony, because I would like to, first of all, tell her it worked! You know, and women got the right to vote," which she didn't see in her lifetime.

And then I wanted, I said during this dorky icebreaker, I would like to also ask her, like, "How did you carry on with everything feeling so hopeless, at times?" And so I guess, given what you just said, I'll ask you that - do you think if it's not going to happen in our lifetime, there is a chance it will happen in gen Z's lifetime or what's your prediction for a post Amy and Jasmin world?

Amy: That's deep Jasmin...

I don't know. I think that it's...we're really on an uphill...and right now people are pushing back. I mean, if we look at white people, specifically, are really pushing back on any progress that's been made towards justice and anti-racism. And that's how things swing in the justice world is you move, you make progress, and then you take 10 steps back, it seems.

So the hope, what I see, is that it is our fight to continue and that's how I perceive this is that I don't have...I can't sit back and do nothing. I'm part of the problem as a white person. And so I need to be working to create a difference, however that may look.

I think that for animal rights as well, that this is, in my opinion, it's...for people that have resources, if you are able to purchase your food at a store and you're making your own choices - so that's not everyone, right? But if you do have those choices, it can be something that you can do to make a difference. To me, it feels easy, but I've also been doing it almost 21 years now.

So I know that my easy is different than other people's easy. And that's why VegLife Des Moines exists is to try to support folks to help them get from, "Whoa, how would I go from eating animals every day to eating more and more vegetables and plant-based foods into your diet?" Because that transition can feel really jarring for people and you lose a lot of your community or cultural

ties. If everyone in your family is doing X, Y, Z, and you stop doing that, it can feel really isolating and lonely. And we want to honor and respect that. That's not an easy thing to give up. That giving up your traditions or your cultural foods or your family's...your mom's best mac and cheese...That's a loss and we acknowledge that.

I also think that there is opportunity for folks to incorporate more and more of that. Obviously, I'd love if more folks went vegan, but I guess for me, I'm not thinking about in a hundred years, where are we at? I'm thinking about right now. And right now I see all of us have a role to play in breaking down these systems of oppression.

Jasmin: Well, that's very beautifully said and very inspiring. I really appreciate all of the wise words that you shared with us today. I know that you don't like to be interviewed so I just really extra appreciate it.

You were, of course, as I knew you would be, fabulous! And I admire you so much, I love the opportunity to pick your brain. And I know that everyone listening to this is super jealous that you're my friend. Ha ha! *laughs*

Amy: It's true.

Jasmin: Like a good friend! Like Amy's in my inner circle, I love her.

So can you tell our listeners how they can find you online and support your efforts and follow you?

Maybe they're not in Des Moines or maybe they're not even in this country, but they might want to get some inspiration from the work you're doing and implement it into their own communities.

Amy: Sure. You can follow VegLife Des Moines on Facebook or Instagram, where just @VegLife Des Moines. And I'm hoping that someday here I'll have a sex shop link for you to follow as well.

So stay tuned. Maybe when this airs, there might be an additional link in the show notes that I don't quite know yet.

Jasmin: Well, definitely come back when this shop opens, cuz I'm excited about that, for many reasons. All right, Amy, thank you for joining us. Please stick on the line so that we could talk to you for some bonus content, but I really appreciate you taking the time this morning to chat with us at Our Hen House.

Amy: Of course! Thank you for having me! Hello, Hen House people! I love you!