



Our Hen House Podcast: Transcript for Episode 689, Interview with Maria Cebrian

Jasmin Singer: Welcome to Our Hen House, Maria.

Maria Cebrian: Hi, Jasmin. So nice to be here with you. Thank you so much for inviting me to your podcast.

Jasmin: Yes, of course. Thank you for all that you do. I'm excited to chat about it. And I know that you're in Boulder, Colorado right now, which is a place that I love, but I'm just guessing that from your accent, you are not originally from Boulder.

Maria: I'm not originally! Not at all! *both laughing*

Jasmin: Where are you from?

Maria: I'm not from Colorado. I'm originally from Madrid, Spain.

Jasmin: Wow! Another beautiful place.

Maria: And I still have a strong accent, as you can see. *laughs*

Jasmin: It's a beautiful accent and a beautiful place.

Okay, well, I want to ask you more about that, but first, let's talk about vitamins. So other than b12, which we can talk about in a moment, if vegans are eating a healthy diet, why do they need a multivitamin?

Maria: A multivitamin will cover your basic nutritional needs, and that gives you a lot of peace of mind. And that's the reason why we created Terraseed.

There are a lot of vegans who really know how to get all the nutrients they need, vitamins, and minerals in their diet. And the only recommended vitamin for

those who are very, very knowledgeable about nutrition is b12 because that's the only vitamin you cannot take from plants as we eat plants these days.

It's not that vitamin b12 doesn't exist in plants, but the way we process plants, and the way we clean plants, that removes the b12 that normally lives on the plant's leaves. So, that's the only vitamin that is recommended for vegans if you have a very diligent nutritional plan. If you are good with that, that's the only vitamin that you will need.

Jasmin: Okay. That's good to know. So, regarding b12, why is it so important for vegans to get?

Maria: Well, b12 is a vitamin that is super important for your cognitive function and is one of the key vitamins everyone needs. So it's not just vegans; every single person needs that. B12 is one of these vitamins that is very, very important for your brain health and your nervous system.

Jasmin: So why is it important to have a multivitamin designed specifically for vegans? Like does it mean there's something lacking in veganism?

Maria: So it's not that all vegans need to supplement, but for a lot of vegans, who don't have the time or the knowledge to eat healthy. It's probably something that is going to cover your basics. So, for example, you can get omega-3 from flaxseed oil, or you can get omega-3 from other sources, algae, for example. But not a lot of people introduce these types of foods into their diets. And you also need to prepare and eat these foods in a certain way. Unless you are knowledgeable and diligent about this, the recommendation is that you get that vitamin.

For some people, their bodies tend to integrate some vitamins and minerals better than others. So we always recommend that you see your doctor, get your blood tests, and then decide. A multivitamin like Terraseed is not going to harm you, of course not. Having too many of these vitamins is never going to be damaging for your body at all. And for some people who don't have that knowledge about, like, "What am I really lacking?" It can give you those basic nutritional ingredients like vitamins and minerals.

Jasmin: So what about omega-3? Like what do we need to understand about omega-3?

Maria: Omega-3 supports bodily functions such as immunity, cognition, cardiovascular health. In this case, it's not like a vitamin; it is a fatty acid. And it

is really key in supporting all these functions in your body. So with vitamins and, in this case, fatty acids, minerals, there is normally like a chain reaction almost, like one nutrient helps the other synthesize another one and then makes the whole system work properly. So if you're lacking one, it's not that there is a lack of one ingredient only. This ingredient is unlocking the potential of another nutrient or vitamin, and this is a whole system that needs all these elements to actually function correctly.

So, omega-3, in this case, is more linked to immunity, cognition, and cardiovascular health. But, at the end of the day, it's going to support other functions too. Other minerals and elements in your body to do their work.

Jasmin: Okay, so that's good to know, but people really seem to think we need fish oil to get omega-3s. Why is that wrong, and how much harm is it doing?

Maria: Yeah. In this case, with omega-3, it's really interesting because, at the end of the day, it's similar to how animals obtain b12 from plants, and people who eat meat obtain b12 from animals. So, in this case, it's similar. Fish is a middleman.

So fish get the omega-3 fatty acids from algae, mostly. So, in this case, it's the plants that they find in the sea, right? Which is algae. And then, they take omega-3 from algae, and they store high quantities of omega-3 in their bodies. And that's how most of the omega-3 supplements you see in the aisle are made with fish oil because it has concentrated amounts of omega-3.

The supplement industry is kind of tricky because they've been doing this in the same way for many years. So the whole industry has optimized the system to make it very cost-effective. And right now, the most cost-effective way of obtaining omega-3 is from fish oil.

But at the end of the day, the fish are getting the oil from the algae. So in our case, in Terraseed, we're using an ingredient that is omega-3, also has both DHA and EPA, which are the two forms of fatty acids in omega-3, and we are taking these from algae directly. So we are taking this from algae that is grown indoors in South Carolina in this case and is in a very controlled environment with no impact on natural marine ecosystems.

And we are taking the oil from the source, that is the algae. And it's a very pure form of omega-3. The issue here is that it's more expensive, right? And that's why a lot of supplement brands are not using this source of omega-3 because it's way more expensive.

The supplement industry is full of these tricks like these shortcuts to try and make the manufacturing process more cost-effective. But that doesn't mean the ingredients they use are pure or cleaner or more effective. It's just cheaper. And that's a shame.

In this case, for example, it takes up to a hundred fish to create one single pill bottle of fish oil. A hundred fish, which is crazy, right? When we can go to the source, that is the algae. And not even that, you can grow this algae indoors with no impact to the environment.

So, that's why we are creating Terraseed, and that's why we are promoting a new way of building supplements. Not just for vegans, but for everyone. And that's the core of our mission, actually, is to stop animal suffering in the supplement industry.

And there is a lot more data around the impacts of this industry on animals and the environment that I'm happy to share with you.

Jasmin: Yeah, actually, I would love that.

Maria: It's very shocking.

Jasmin: I'd love to hear about it. Yeah, tell us. Shock us.

Maria: Well, everything started with my own experience as a vegan. I had been a vegetarian for many years, and I always wanted to go fully vegan, but I'm a long-distance athlete, marathon runner. And I was always like, "Oh, if I go fully vegan..." You know, like all these fears that you get in your head, right? Like, "Maybe I'm missing something if I'm not eating eggs or cheese or..."

So, I decided to go fully vegan, but I decided to supplement. I said, "Okay, I'm going to do this, and until I figure out my nutrition, I'm going to take supplements." So I started buying these supplements, and it was such a horrible experience, like all this plastic. That's the first thing that was very shocking.

I'm a vegan for the animals and environment, and I was like, "I hate this plastic." I didn't like the experience. And then I found out a lot of supplements were made with animal-derived ingredients. And I was like, "What?" I didn't know anything about this. So I started researching more, and that's when I decided, "Okay, I want to build a supplement that is fully aligned with the values and the lifestyle of a vegan person like me."

So, that's how I started building Terraseed. And it wasn't easy at all. It was very challenging in many, many ways. Not only finding sustainably-sourced ingredients that were coming from plant-based sources but also the packaging. Putting together packaging that wasn't made with plastic, that was a hundred percent biodegradable.

It took us quite a while, but we managed to put together this amazing product that has been made with a lot of love and care for people, and the animals, and the planet. And the next thing we did was to try to understand the impacts of the supplement industry on animals and the environment.

Jasmin: Yeah, I'd love to hear more about that.

Maria: Yeah. So we actually made a desk report, and this is sort of a first step into doing a more thorough report. There are around a hundred thousand supplement products in the US that are sold every year. So we started researching about all these products, and there are databases and places you can go and study what ingredients they are using and what type of packaging they are using.

So we found out half of supplements that are sold in the US today contain at least one animal-derived ingredient. Normally there are two ingredients that you will find in your supplements. The first one is gelatin, right? A lot of capsules are made with gelatin, and gelatin comes from the bones, fat, and tendons of pigs, cows, and sheep.

And that's something a lot of people don't know, partly because the FDA doesn't require manufacturers to indicate in supplement facts labels if they are using animal-derived ingredients. So unless they say this is specifically vegan if they don't say anything, chances are that they are using animal-derived ingredients, but they don't have to list it.

And then we started researching how many fish are required to make fish oil supplements and everything. So basically, this industry is killing 24 billion fish every year. 24 billion with a b.

Jasmin: Wow.

Maria: And we were like, "Oh my God, this is insane."

And then, on top of that, the same industry is using millions of cows, pigs, and sheep to make gelatin. And also another ingredient that is used to manufacture

supplements is something called magnesium stearate. This is an ingredient that is used in the machines, the equipment that manufactures the pills. And it's an ingredient that is used, so the pills don't get stuck in the machines. It's just to make the whole manufacturing process very smooth. It's not to add any nutrients to the pills or doesn't have any nutritional value. It's more like a substance that is used to make the whole manufacturing process smooth. And that's also made with the byproducts of cows, sheep, and pigs. These are the two most common animal-derived ingredients that this industry is using right now.

There are other examples, vitamin D3 has boomed with COVID and people staying more indoors and it's a vitamin that is being sold massively in the last few years. It's normally made with lanolin, an ingredient that comes from sheep's wool.

So a lot of sheep are shaved and being removed of their skin to produce lanolin. Sheep these days are being genetically modified to produce a lot of wool. It's pretty shocking.

Jasmin: Tell us about it. I mean, I happen to know just because I wrote a book about veganism and had to go in the weeds with all this stuff.

But there are some new vegans, and there are some vegans who've been vegan a really long time and never really thought about anything beyond their food, or possibly their wardrobe.

So I'd love to hear more about it.

Maria: Yeah, and a lot of people don't know D3 comes from lanolin. We use reindeer lichen that comes from China but is sustainably harvested. And it's sort of the leftovers of this lichen that you can find in nature, and you can collect it without harming any ecosystems there.

But normally, the D3 vitamin comes from lanolin. Again, the wool industry, the way it treats sheep is just pretty shocking and horrifying, honestly. But these sheep have been genetically modified to grow a lot of skin because more skin means more wool, right? Again, it's a cost effectiveness strategy for these industries.

So they end up creating this sheep that grow a lot of wool by having a lot of skin. These sheep tend to have these issues where the skin gets infected, and flies can go and put their eggs; it's all pretty disgusting. So the health of these sheep is just really, really bad. They grow a lot of wool, and it weighs a lot. If

you don't shave that wool, they will die because they will have so much weight on their bodies. They couldn't move, they couldn't eat, they couldn't see!

So, that's how the supplement industry gets their lanolin to synthesize D3. And that's, again, something that not a lot of people are aware of, and that's why we're trying to raise awareness about this issue.

Jasmin: A lot of vegans I know don't stop at veganism. They care about sustainability beyond just their choices to go vegan. So in addition to not using animal ingredients, what do you do in order to source your ingredients sustainably?

Maria: Yeah. It's not only the ingredients in the formula, also the providers of these ingredients. Are they earth conscious? Are they focusing on sustainability? A lot of the providers that we work with are very conscious about, for example, what type of energy they use in their premises, their factories. Our, what I was just telling you, omega-3 comes from microalgae grown indoors, our D3 comes from lichen that is sustainably harvested.

Also, packaging, right? At the end of the day, plastic has an impact on animals because plastic becomes microplastic, for example, when it is in the sea. Plastic doesn't disappear; it transforms. And normally, when it's dumped in the ocean, it becomes microplastic that then is eaten by marine animals like turtles or like fish. And they get contaminated, and they get poisoned, and they die.

So plastic is another side of this story, right? For me, as part of being vegan, I try to minimize the use of plastic, especially if it's single-use plastic. In this case, with supplements, where I'm going to take my supplements, and I'm going to dump my plastic pill bottle, you know, and the reality of plastic is pretty shocking, also. Only 9% of recyclable plastic gets recycled.

So in the end, when you are seeing these claims, "Oh, sustainable packaging," and you see the plastic, chances are that this plastic will end up in landfills or the ocean. And if it is ending in landfills, it's contaminating a lot of underdeveloped countries where all this plastic is taken, and it has a lot of impact on the people living near these landfills and also animals and the environment, right? And then the plastic that ends up in the ocean also is so damaging. So plastic is a very dangerous material that we just produce and produce and produce. And because it doesn't really disappear totally, but after 400 years, it will just be integrated with the earth, but it takes 400 years.

That's crazy, right? And again, this industry they're not willing to change this because it's a system that works for them. I think consumers are becoming more aware of all these issues, and they want to buy products that are good for them and good for the planet.

With supplements, it is maybe a type of product that you don't think much about it; it's very opaque, in a way. You don't know where ingredients come from, and it's always been a very archaic and opaque industry.

So we're trying to lead a new way of doing things here, like be more transparent and more sustainable, and kinder with animals.

Jasmin: Oh, well, there's a lot to chew on there, and I'm not only curious about what you're doing, but I'm curious about you. Tell us a bit about your personal trajectory because you've had a very varied career.

What were the steps that led you here that led here? What led you to making vegan vitamins?

Maria: I think every experience in life builds up toward every project that you decide to build, you know what I mean? I've done a lot of things in my life. I've always been very, very curious about all kinds of things, and now it's more like the environment, planet, and the animals, of course.

But you know, my personal journey has been interesting. In the past, I've been a social worker. I've worked in an international corporation working in Africa and, Latin America, South America. And then I became a full-time mom, and I really enjoyed it too.

You know, I spent like five years raising my kids, but I've always loved meditation and yoga. So I created a yoga meditation online platform in Spanish, and it was acquired by a company based here in Boulder called Gaia. Then I joined them, and that's how I moved to the US with my family.

But I just feel that food is something that fuels your body, and for me, it's always been really interesting how food has a certain energy. So some foods have an energy that makes me happy or stressed or like food has that energy capacity.

So if you eat a certain meal, the way you feel after eating that meal is so clear for me. You know what I mean? The energy of a glass of wine or a piece of fruit or chickpeas. You know, like each of these foods has different energies. So I

started noticing like, “Hmm, when I eat meat or fish, just doesn't feel good, you know, it's something here. I don't feel good,” but more than that digestion was difficult. More than that, I think it was more like energy-related.

So I started thinking about that, and I started removing meat and fish. It wasn't like for some people they just watched a documentary or they just, there's something that shocks them, and they decide to go vegan or vegetarian, you know, like the next day, that wasn't me.

For me, it was a longer process. But my husband was also like, “Maria, I don't like meat. I want to quit meat.” So that's how we started being vegetarians. And then suddenly, I was feeling so much better, right? Even with my athletic performance, I've been a runner for my entire life, and suddenly, as I was cutting back animal products, I was feeling better and better.

I was doing better and better, and I was recovering faster, and my performance was great. So I was like, “Wow, there's something here.” Very powerful, right? And then I started reading and investigating, and of course, your body's going to recover better.

You're going to have less inflammation in your body, and it's going to help your performance. And then my husband gave me this book called *The Plantpower Way* by Rich Roll. And, I was like, wow, you know, this is mind-blowing. So that's how I started my vegan journey. I started with these recipes, and I was feeling so much better when I removed cheese and eggs and all these other animal-derived ingredients.

It was a great experience and also felt incredible in my body. My mood, my sleep, there was even something about being more rooted or more like connected with the earth. For me, it's a little bit spiritual, and you know, being able to see a cow and look the cow in the eye and just feel like I'm connected with you, and I'm not going to harm you.

It's a little bit spiritual. I'm not going to lie, Jasmin. And all this led me to start working on a documentary actually about an activist group called Direct Action Everywhere. I read about them in a magazine, and I saw that they were trying to go to court and show everyone the conditions in these places. I became, like fascinated with their story.

So, I joined a team of filmmakers, and we've been following them for the last three years.

Jasmin: Amazing. So last question for you. You have called Terraseed a human-first company. What do you mean by that?

Maria: Yeah. Okay. the same as the supplement industry using these animals as resources, right? My experience working in certain companies is that you become a resource, right? And you become almost like a piece in a puzzle with a goal that is linked to money. Growth, but growth in a way that is not human growth; it's more money growth. For me, the challenge was to build a company that embraces my attributes of kindness and caring, and that's very present in my personality.

The way I operate is finding the strength in kindness and humanity, and love, right? So I wanted to build this company in a way where I build a team, and my team are human beings; they are not like human resources. They're not like pieces of machinery that I'm going to use and throw (away). And I really think that a company is just an organization made of people of humans with human problems and human issues. And if you don't see that person in front of you as someone who has all these personal lives and emotions and someone who you really need to respect as human, for me, it didn't make sense to be a company that wasn't honoring that and wasn't acknowledging the humanity of everyone on the team. And that's how I operate.

So here, it's really respecting the human person who is in front of you. At the end of the day, your team is dedicating the most precious resource they have, which is their time. Sometimes that's missed a little bit when people build up their teams. And so it's just really looking at that person in front of you as a human first, not as a resource.

Jasmin: Right. Well, that is a very beautiful way of ending, I think. I can't thank you enough for all that you're doing. Maria, if you could please tell our listeners how they can get your product, find you online, and support your efforts.

Maria: If you want to learn more about our product, you can go to terraseed.com, and Terraseed is [t e r r a s e e d . c o m](https://terraseed.com). And then something I wanted to mention, Jasmin, is that we are running a campaign. We've joined forces with Animal Save Movement to make up a petition to the FDA to make it mandatory to include information about the use of animal-derived ingredients in supplement facts labels.

Because now it's not mandatory, no one is doing it. So we want more transparency about the ingredients that are used in supplements. So we are

gathering signatures, and we have almost gathered 5,000 signatures, and we need to get to 25,000.

So we need a lot of help with this. You can find all the information about the campaign and sign up for the petition on our webpage. That is terraseedtransparentlabel.org. The campaign is called Transparent Label Campaign.

So, that's another thing that we are doing. We're putting our little contribution to make this world more ethical, and more kind, and more vegan.

Jasmin: Yes. That's all we want. That's all we want. Maria, thank you so much for joining us today on Our Hen House, and we will link to all of those links that you just mentioned in the show notes. We really appreciate you being here.

Maria: Thank you, Jasmin. It's been great sharing, and thank you for listening to me, and it's been a pleasure.