



Our Hen House Podcast: Transcript for Episode 705, Interview with Dr Faraz Harsini

Mariann Sullivan:

Welcome to Our Hen House, Faraz.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Thank you so much for having me. I know that your audience is both vegans and non-vegans and I really hope that both crowds can find what I say helpful, but I'm so honored to be here. Thank you.

Mariann Sullivan:

Oh, we're very honored to have you. I have lots of things I want to talk to you. I would say most of the people out there are probably vegan. We're a pretty passionate lot. We won't focus on turning people vegan, but I definitely want to focus on the amazing work you're doing in universities because I think it's unique and greatly needed.

And there's a lot of things I want to talk to you about. But let's start with that. It's called Allied Scholars for Animal Protection, which means that the acronym is ASAP, which is such a great acronym! *laughing* Congratulations on thinking of that. That's really good. Because we need to do this ASAP, that's for sure. And it just seems to fill this very needed gap in the organizational structure of the movement. You know, you kind of don't realize there's something missing. until somebody fills it. Tell us about ASAP and its mission.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Exactly what we were just talking about. Yes, maybe there are a lot of vegans around, but really our goal should be having motivated vegans who can speak up, and they're trained to either use their voice or go out there and use their careers to change the system. So when we are talking about animal advocacy, there is always a challenge, right? Should we focus on the system, or should we change on individuals? And I don't think that we should focus on either of them as an individual. We can do both.

So with ASAP, what we are trying to do is to organize, unify, and structure the animal rights movement in universities. So what I really want to see is strong, unified, organized, and sustainable animal advocacy in universities. What that really means, in simple words, is I'm just so sick of animal rights organizations, student organizations, becoming inactive because of lack of support, lack of infrastructure, lack of mentorship, and you really think about any other student organization that is active and effective and you realize that they are always on campus, they have a very unified structure. For instance, the Federalist Society, whether you...

Mariann Sullivan:

laughs Yeah, talk about active...

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Yeah. Whether you like what they do or not, they are active, right?

Right now, six Supreme Justices are affiliated with the Federalist Society, and they've been doing that for only 40 years. So not that long, but they are very active, and they have that support.

So our goal is to bring this support and mentorship and have sustainable animal rights advocacy on every college campus.

Mariann Sullivan:

I think this is so desperately needed, as I said before. And I mean, the added problem for university organizations is that people come and people go. People come, and people go.

You have to have a really strong structure to withstand the fact that you might have a great leader one day, but then they graduate. And you have to always have that structure to constantly rebuild.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Yeah, that's absolutely the problem. So when I say we want a sustainable animal advocacy movement on campuses, that's exactly what we mean. Because every two or three years, you have a student who's active. They do something, then they graduate, and everything dies down. And that just slows us down.

So basically, the way we are approaching it is with three areas. We focus on three areas. One is outreach. The other one is education and empowerment. And third one is by working with dining halls to go plant-based and make veganism more accessible for everybody. But I also wanna really emphasize the first and second one, outreach is so important because without outreach, we can't really get new vegans, and student organizations just fall apart.

So ASAP chapters, the goal is to have a chapter in (the) top hundred universities in the US. And they're all are gonna be called ASAP chapters. They're gonna be registered student organizations within the university. And the way they're gonna do advocacy is gonna be consistent throughout the entire country. And so outreach is to make new vegans, is to reach out to a lot of other vegans who just, you know...When you're talking about this, we are talking about a lot of 18, 19, 20-year-olds who just became vegan. They don't know anything about advocacy. They might be very isolated. They don't have the support, right? A lot of them go back to not being vegan just because they don't have that community. So we really want to reach out to them first.

And the second is education and empowerment. So that's both to bring something like plant-based nutrition to medical schools. to talk about the environment and climate to all the students, but also train and, what I generally say, activate vegans. So a lot of vegans, they look at it as a diet. They just became vegan, they don't have this sense of urgency. So our goal here is to show that they can take whatever they're interested in, such as their passion for whatever they're studying, and use that in animal advocacy. So choose careers that long-term change the system with our support. So that's why education and empowerment is very important.

All I say is that we know that there are tons of vegans in every university, except that they don't know each other.

Mariann Sullivan:

Exactly.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

There is no community. We want to bring everyone together and train them.

Mariann Sullivan:

I can't tell you how much I love this idea. So you anticipate this being- each university would have a university-wide organization, and then maybe there would be sub-chapters within different graduate schools or in the undergraduate school, but they would all be somehow tied together.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

It's going to be basically one ASAP chapter per university or college. So, kind of an example of that is ALDF, which I have a lot of respect for, but they're just focused on law schools, right?

Mariann Sullivan:

Right, they're just law schools, yeah.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Yeah. So, this is going to be a university-wide chapter for undergrads and graduate students and pretty much everybody. But it's going to be one chapter for all the students. But the idea is that this chapter does the exact same thing as any other chapter in the country.

So just to give you an analogy, right now, the animal advocacy movement in university, imagine a band made of a couple of musicians. They are out of tune, they are out of rhythm, everyone is playing a different song, there is no conductor, and they're not trained, right? They're just figuring out how to play by themselves. But think about an effective band, which is like a symphony orchestra. Musicians are trained. There is a good conductor that organizes everything, right? So that's how they're effective. And that's the structure that we think is lacking.

Mariann Sullivan:

So I actually teach. I'm an adjunct professor, and I teach at Cornell, which is a school that has an unbelievable number of graduate schools. It's like thousands, *laughing* I don't know, there's so many of them.

I just want to tell the story. I teach a course in the law school, animal advocacy, and I had two students who sort of unofficially audited it, who were at the business school. They weren't allowed to take my course officially. And they said there was nothing at the business school, so they wanted to take my course because they want to go into an animal-friendly business, a food business. And they found so little support.

This is immediately what I thought of when I started reading what your organization was about. *laughing* They had to kind of sneak into my class to just take it. And it was ridiculous. I had students who were. passionate vegans, there was no real interaction between them and these other students. It just seemed like this organization could really help rectify that.

I'm also thinking if students at the law school wanted to put together a program, they would be so helped if they could get the resources of the animal-friendly person at the vet school who could come and talk. Or if the animal-friendly folks at the vet school wanted to find out more about what's going on legally for vets... they can cross-pollinate each other. It just seems so important.

Well, I'm just talking *laughs* about my ideas, not about yours. And I really wanna get into a few more specifics on the three areas that you mentioned. You mentioned some of the specifics, but I wanna know more about what these activities would be.

So, all right, your ASAP chapter has been set up for a while. It's very established. There are lots of students involved. What kind of programs are going on at this university that are enabled because it's there? Let's start with education and empowerment. I assume that would have a lot to do with setting up programs or what else?

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Yeah, that's a great question. So education and empowerment includes something that you just mentioned. I think having a course is very important. And we on our advisory board actually have vets, we have lawyers, we have physicians, we have a lot of scholars and academics. So we are trying to build the movement by bringing over literally 200 years of experience, combined experience in all these different fields, and give it to students.

So lectures are one thing. So just tomorrow, we have Dr. Michael Klaper coming to UT Austin to talk to medical students about plant-based diets and nutrition, and preventive medicine. And the way we do it is it's organized at the medical school. So we are trying to bring this education to future physicians, but we advertise the event, and the event is open to all students. Whether they're vegan, whether they're not vegan. And the event is not even advertised as a vegan event. So it's like open to everybody. They come and learn how to prevent the top causes of death. So we have that. We just had another event with Dr. Milton Mills on food injustice. I saw that you interviewed him for your podcast.

Mariann Sullivan:

He was very recently on the podcast. Yes.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Yeah. Yeah, so we just had like a national event, virtual, with all universities that we are helping with Dr. Milton Mills to talk about food injustice. So yeah, empowerment and education includes that, as well as activating vegans. So these are basically workshops where we train vegans how to talk about veganism and how to choose careers that are impactful. And another part of it is also vegans are told to stay quiet.

Mariann Sullivan:

laughs That's for sure.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

And some of us might have been in the movement longer, and so we have found our voice. But when you're talking about the younger generation, especially they're being told that they're isolated, they're told that don't be rude, don't speak up. So we really wanna bring that up and encourage the students to find their voice and use it. And put it in action, whether it's through, you know, doing activism or whether it's through careers, and we really want to support them throughout the entire thing. So yeah, education and empowerment, that's what it's about. So to bring environmental education, plant-based nutrition education, workshops about veganism, and all of that to universities.

Mariann Sullivan:

When you think about it, most of these students, of course, haven't been vegan for very long, probably because they're kids! *laughs* They haven't been anything for all that long. And they probably came to it... And it's understandable when you're first starting out in something, if you're a relatively modest person, to not think of yourself as an expert. But they have to

understand that they're now the experts because there just aren't that many. And they know a lot more about this than other people.

So I agree there's so much discouragement of vegans speaking up and just offering their opinions. The joke, I just can't hear it too many times... How do you know somebody's a vegan? *sarcastic voice* They'll tell you.

People tell me stuff all the time. Why shouldn't they tell you? But aside from being willing to speak up, what other tips do you give students on being effective in advocating for veganism? Taking into account that everybody has their own style, so there's no absolutely one way to do it. But what are your general tips?

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Absolutely. So something I mentioned earlier is we can both change individuals and change the system. So when you're talking about changing individuals, one way is to go on the street and just leaflet random strangers, right? And they go about their day, maybe they become vegan or maybe not. But that's a very different story when you do advocacy on college campuses and when you make new vegans in universities. And when you make vegans in universities understand the urgency of veganism.

So the pro, in this case, is that now they have their entire career in front of them where they can go and become the future Cory Bookers, Dr. Kim Williams, Eric Adams, people who can go become future lawyers, future politicians. But a lot of them don't even know how urgent this problem is. And they don't know that they can use their careers in a way that is relevant to animal advocacy. So they can pursue their passion (and) at the same time, do something that is very meaningful.

And generally, every time I have a talk, something that I always emphasize is that no matter what you're working on, whether it's the environment, whether it's public health, whether it's biomedical sciences, you name it, the root cause is animal consumption. So you can make it relevant. So if you're working on pandemics, I would say there are tons and tons of people working on drugs. What no one is working on is, "Hey, these pandemics are caused by animal consumption." So you can dedicate your career to that.

Pursuing public health, pursuing medicine, you know, become the future, I don't know, Michael Klaper, right? So that's a goal, to not only change individuals but also change the system at the same time. It's a long-term investment, but it's completely lacking right now. And we need to have that infrastructure.

Mariann Sullivan:

Yeah, no, people are so naive about animal agriculture. It boggles the mind.

So you said you want, I guess you want every university to have an ASAP chapter. But what kind of rules are there? Like if somebody wants to set up an ASAP chapter at their university. What would be the requirements for membership in the chapter? And what kind of infrastructure support does your organization offer? And what do they need to do on their own?

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

That's a very good question. So generally, the process starts with them contacting us. And all it really takes is one or two students who have that fire. That's all it takes really to do something meaningful on campuses.

So we have bylaws. We have all the structures set in place because we are a student organization. Every university has kind of a lot of different rules. For instance, some require faculty advisors, some don't, et cetera.

So we basically help them to get this information. We support them throughout the process to get registered. And then the club is open to vegans and non-vegans, but definitely, people who run the club typically happen to be vegans because who else would go out of their way to fight for animals?

Mariann Sullivan:

So, what kind of infrastructure support do you provide? Do you help them find speakers? What do you do about this problem of the best person graduating, who's coming up next? You had mentioned earlier that you might even be helping students find or at least identify careers. Are those all things that the main organization is planning on doing for chapters?

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Absolutely. So for careers, we definitely have seminars and workshops to talk to students about it. But the way that this becomes sustainable, which is the problem that it's not right now, is because there is no outreach. So I tell you, right now in the US, maybe there are like three or four student organizations that do...animal rights student organization...that do any kind of outreach whatsoever. And even when they do, it's generally different things. Some do cage-free campaigns, some do different focuses. And the rest of them, if they do anything at all, is generally like potlucks, right? So with potlucks and going to a restaurant and things like that, you're not gonna make new members.

Mariann Sullivan:

Right.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

And that's why outreach is so critical. So we basically support them to have these outreach events. Generally, the way it works is that we give students choices. So we give them some options for the types of events that they can have. And then we support them. We do all the graphic design for them. We give them money. If there is free food, we provide free food. So they don't have to do graphic design. We just make it so easy for them. So all they have to do is to attend and basically get it done. Because that's another problem that we saw. Students get busy, then there is like this break, that break, summer...

Mariann Sullivan:

Exams.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Yeah, exams. And it just doesn't work, right? So we wanna make it so easy for them and give them the guidelines. And the other thing is we really want to have a person, like boots on the ground, that's the difference. So we don't wanna guide students virtually, but we want to have boots on the ground. So someone from ASAP would be local in that area to actually go to universities and help these students. Because when you do it virtually, a lot of times, you lose that connection with the students. And that's why a lot of other organizations, like animal rights organizations that want to work with universities, can't be as effective because they can't make those connections virtually, right?

So I just give you one example. We did one week of events at UT Austin just last month. It was called The Save Week. So save the environment, people, and animals. That's what it is. We were on campus every single day for eight hours for an entire week in the most crowded place

at UT Austin. And UT Austin has like 40,000 students. So that's how many eyes we captured, and then we had different events. One of them was, you know, debate. You can't say you love animals and eat them too. And a lot of students came by and see what was going on.

One of them that I honestly didn't think it would do that well, but it just went crazy and I want to replicate that in other universities, is Elwood's dog meat.

Mariann Sullivan:

laughs Oh, yeah?

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

It was amazing. how many people stopped by, how many people changed on the spot.

Mariann Sullivan:

Wow.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

We literally had, yeah, we had somebody who was, like, who actually came and started...he got really upset for a couple of seconds. And then, the moment he realized what was going on, he actually became vegan. We're gonna share that video, so look for it on my YouTube.

Mariann Sullivan:

And probably most people are familiar with Elwood Dog Meats, but just explain a little bit? I mean, I've seen her on Twitter, and she's a social media personality, and she just constantly is advertising the meat as if she has a dog meat company. *laughs* She gets so much pushback from people, and of course, it's all a spoof.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Yeah, it's a complete satire. So a lot of people get upset, but the whole point is if you're upset about dog meat, why are you consuming other animal products? But even on her website... her name is Molly, and she's fantastic. On her website, on the surface, it's all about dog meat, but there is like a frequently asked questions, then it actually tells you that this is satire and all that.

Mariann Sullivan:

Right.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

But we had a very good setup. We had tents. So we were the biggest student organization on campus. We had tents, we had banners with dog meat, and students were posting this on Reddit, and it was like all over. The journals wrote about it in universities. It was like all over the place. Everyone was talking about it. And having done this for a week, we came across like... you know, thousands upon thousands of students. And we captured some like 40 vegans who actually showed up in our event. Forty students is a lot if you think about like student organizations for vegans. It's generally like 10.

Just from this week. So that's what we want. And then, we want to replicate that in other universities. I was actually just on a tour at MIT, Harvard, Columbia University. We were talking to students, and I think we're going to replicate this in those universities as well.

Mariann Sullivan:

Yeah, that's exactly what I was going to ask you because, obviously, Austin is where you are and presumably, some other people who you're working with. And so, obviously, that's the

place you start. And it sounds amazing. But it's more difficult to imagine, you know, how you're going to grow this to the extent it really needs to grow. So are you finding people in each of these cities who are interested in being the ASAP pioneer and putting it all together?

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Absolutely. We started from Texas because... two reasons. It's actually home, so we get to be there in person. But second, also Texas is very neglected because a lot of animal advocacy happens on the East and West Coast, right? And there is almost none going on in Texas, while Texas has some of the biggest and best universities in the country.

So right now, we are at UT Austin, Texas Tech University. We are starting a chapter at Texas A&M, and with a few other universities, we are going to cover basically a large population of students in the country just from Texas. But the idea is, yes, we already have other people, other volunteers, and part-time employees in New York City. So sometimes we travel. Sometimes we actually bring the team here. So for the events that we did at UT Austin, we actually brought other people from other cities that work with us, and we all came to one place at UT Austin, and that's why it was such a huge success.

Mariann Sullivan:

Wow.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

So that's what we wanna do. We want to support students, like literally physically. So it's not just gonna be virtual help and mentorship. It's gonna be physical help.

Mariann Sullivan:

I'm so excited about this. And you know, so often, we've heard of good ideas, and they start out good ideas, and then they don't make it. I mean, I just really want this to. You know, that moment of building the infrastructure of building it up, making it big. That's a moment where you know, both companies selling foods...everything, there's that moment when you have to grow that is really hard, and it sounds like you're up for it. I'm really rooting for it.

You've talked about focusing both on short-term and long-term changes. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Absolutely. The short-term changes would be, basically, to grow the community, vegan community in universities. So this is going to happen between a year to five years from now. So we keep establishing ASAP chapters in different universities. We grow the vegan community, and the direct result is we're going to make new vegans and find existing vegans and bring them together. So that's the short-term effect.

The long-term effect is basically what the Federalist Society has done, right? So we really want these people then to go to places like FDA, USDA, become federal judges, become future lawyers and politicians. And I also have a position at GFI, Good Food Institute, as a bioprocessing senior scientist. Part of my job is basically working on cultivated meat as a scientist. But, we need more scientists like that, right?

Mariann Sullivan:

Right.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

So, that's another way that we are active. So the long-term effect would be producing more people like myself who become future scientists, future physicians, whatever they want to do. So that's why I think the way that we can change the system is by investing in the young generation.

Mariann Sullivan:

Yeah.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

So far, I think we are wasting, in my opinion, a lot of resources to change the system. But there is a lot of pushback because the system itself is not vegan-friendly. None of the politicians, except very few, is vegan-friendly. So, of course, what we are doing is a lot more long-term, but it's going to make everything so much easier when these people... And just think about it, when we do that with Harvard, MIT, Brown, you know, A&M, UT Austin, many of these students, ten years from now, are going to have powerful positions, whether we like it or not, right? So if we can influence them, if we can train them, that's how we can change the system long-term.

Mariann Sullivan:

Yeah, it's really such an important goal. It's very easy to say, well, we can't just go for individual change; we have to change the system. But you can't change the system if you don't have a movement that is effective. Like, how would you do that?

The next thing I wanted to talk about was your position at GFI. And I was wondering what Bioprocessing Senior Scientist meant. You sort of mentioned that you're working on cultivated meat. Can you give us a little bit more without confusing us completely?

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Yes. So basically, the current challenge with alternative proteins... Let me tell you this first. I guess alternative proteins are basically categorized into three things. One is plant-based food or plant-based proteins. We're familiar with that Beyond Meat, Impossible Meat, all that, Gardein. Then you have fermented products that are egg or dairy that is animal-free. And the third category is cultivated meat, AKA lab-grown meat. So we don't call it lab-grown meat because, you know, it really doesn't come from a lab. So when I say cultivated meat, that's what it is.

So my focus is mainly on cultivated meat. And in my position, we are looking at technical and scientific challenges that are holding us back. So we are trying to see how we can reach the scale to replace meat because we can produce cultivated meat okay. We are already there scientifically. The problem, the challenge, is to scale up, and that's where my area of expertise is.

Mariann Sullivan:

That's the exact same problem with your organization. That's always the problem. It's one thing to have a good idea, but scaling up...

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

But you're absolutely right when you mention it.

I know that I have a big mission ahead of me, but I can tell you that I ran my own student organization for six years during my master's and doctorate, and I didn't have any support,

barely had support. I had to figure out a lot of things by myself...wasted time. And as much as I tried, the moment I graduated, everything died down. And it was like my baby.

Mariann Sullivan:

Yeah.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

So I'm sitting here very frustrated because it's a very personal issue to me. And I see it as one of the biggest things that our movement has missed. That's why I know it's a big goal, but all I can tell you is that I'm going to fix it or die trying. There is no...that's how much I believe that this is important.

Mariann Sullivan:

laughs Well, I hope you fix it.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

both laughing I hope so too.

Mariann Sullivan:

Well, get back to... I interrupted you. You were talking about not the scaling up of ASAP, but the scaling up of cultivated meat. We keep hearing two years! We've been hearing two years for ten years!

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Yeah, I think it's fair to expect cultivated meat to become available in very certain, like specific restaurants, you know, higher-end restaurants for people to try within a year or two. But that's not really what we were talking about, right?

Mariann Sullivan:

Right.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

We want to replace meat. And for that, there are really serious challenges that we have to overcome in terms of scaling and cost. So scaling is fine, but when you scale up, it generally becomes costly. And the main issue here is we are using pharmaceutical-grade material.

And in pharma, everything is very expensive, and there are very different standards for pharmaceutical-grade material because they're gonna go inside somebody's blood, right? But with food-grade material, to make it really simple, imagine if a beer or wine company was using pharmaceutical-grade material, then the cost of beer would be probably, I don't know, \$20 or \$40 per bottle.

Right now, what we are doing is we are using pharmaceutical-grade equipment for cultivated meat. But cultivated meat is gonna be used for...it's food, right? So we need something that is food-grade. But these specifications are not really set in place yet. And the equipment that we are using is all for pharmaceutical companies. So there is a degree of- engineers have to come reinvent some of these technologies for the purpose of cultivated meat, change the specifications, and so many other things.

It's not a problem that we can't solve. I personally when I think about it, if we put a man on the moon, this is not a scientific challenge that we can't fix. It's all a matter of when.

And we just need more investments by the government, more investment by donors, et cetera.

Mariann Sullivan:

Well, that sounds relatively hopeful but also realistic. So that's very helpful.

Before I let you go, I just want to talk about your own past because you cover this pretty interesting trajectory from the research I did before I interviewed (you). I'm going to put it in a nutshell, you went from chemical engineering to cancer to veganism to animals. Does that capture your life story? And can you just expand on it a little bit if so?

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Yeah, I think it took a couple of turns in my career. I would say maybe I didn't have the right answer for a long time, but I had the right question, which was, how can I do the best, the most impactful thing in my life?

And when I was working as a chemical engineer, I was very concerned about the environment. Then I was a clinic clown, so I used to go to hospitals and play music for patients suffering from cancer. And that motivated me to do cancer research because, again, I asked myself, Hey, I want to do something more meaningful. I want to save lives.

But then, you know, I realized that 40% of cancers are preventable, and you're not talking about that. Then I became vegan, and I realized even if I wanted to save people, the most number of people, I still have to focus on veganism. Not that veganism is just about human health. Of course, the main focus is animals. And that's another thing. When I learned about the scale and depth of suffering that our food system is causing, there is nothing like that.

Mariann Sullivan:

Yum.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

So if the question for me is how can I save the most number of lives? How can I reduce the most amount of suffering in the world? The answer is just veganism, promoting veganism. And especially given the environmental impact, given public health issues, antibiotic resistance, pandemics.

I think every time that we have a little meat, a little cheese, a little dairy, we become more and more responsible for the future pandemics, for the future global issues. And because of that, I think there are just a lot of people working on the temporary solutions, working on bandages, but really the root cause of all of that is animal consumption. And that's why I think no matter what you are interested in, whether you're a filmmaker, artist, you know, student, you can always use your career to tackle these issues through veganism.

Animal consumption is a root cause of a lot of these diseases.

Mariann Sullivan:

Yeah.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

That's why I'm so passionate about this I always say show me something that is more impactful. I will quit my job today. I will go do that, but there is not

Mariann Sullivan:

I couldn't agree more. And I really, you stated so profoundly, and I'm really glad that given all of your experiences and all of the different roads that you started to go down, that this is the road

that obviously opened up and, oh my God, it's like, we have to fix this. It's at the root of so much evil. So thank you for doing that.

And thank you for joining us today. on Our Hen House, I'm super excited. You have to make this work because I'm so super excited about it. It's just so...

I think I said this at the beginning of the interview, but I'm gonna repeat it. There are some things that until somebody says, this is what we need, it never occurred to you that this is what we need, but this is so definitely what we need. So really, really important.

Tell me where people can find out more about you and about your work.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

So if any students or anyone needs help, I always say I'm here to help. So Twitter would be one good way. It's DrFarazHarsini or our website, which is alliedscholars.org. But we are on other social media. I'm sure you're going to post it.

Mariann Sullivan:

Yeah, we'll post it in the show notes, yeah.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

I have to say it's, you know, again, I've been asking myself, how can I help our movement? What is that thing that no one else is doing? And I finally found it, and it's such a big gap in our movement. I can't even believe how we missed it. That's why I'm so passionate about it.

And something else I kind of wanted to touch base on is, I guess, I talked about the environment. I talked about public health, but it's also, I think I see what we do to animals as a root cause of human oppression as well. Because the reason that we oppress other people, it's always because we focus on our differences. Like when you look back in history, we see we focus on the difference between our races, our languages, our cultures, our religions. And by focusing on that, we lost empathy. And that's how we justify doing terrible things to each other, from genocides to so many other terrible things that we've done.

And I see that to be the problem with animal rights and with speciesism. And that's why I think it's a moral urgency of our time. I do care about so many other causes. I'm LGBT myself. I'm from Iran, I can't actually go back to my home country because I get killed myself.

But I see what we are doing to animals as something that is literally on another level, because if I go on the streets and tell people, "Do LGBT folks deserve rights?" Everyone says yes.

If we say, "Do you really think like a black and white person, they have the same rights?" Most people agree that they do. No one is going to question a black and white person (if) they feel pain differently. But in today's world, we have to be on the streets talking about plants' feelings versus other mammals like cows versus... that's how people ridicule veganism. And that's why it's a moral urgency. And I see it as a root cause of other forms of oppression as well.

Mariann Sullivan:

I couldn't agree with you more. Really, it is in so many ways. Well, maybe it's not the root of all evil because humans are capable of coming up with a lot of evil, but it's the root of a lot of it.

I'm just going to ask you one more question because I read that you said once that your values haven't changed since before you were vegan. You're just no longer a hypocrite. And having experiences personally, as you know, a lot of us have, how do you explain that so many really

good people, really, really good people who do great things much better than I've ever done in my life and who don't think of themselves as hypocrites just don't get it about animals? They do care about animals. They just don't get that they're supposed to do something about it. Or just simply, they just don't get that they're supposed to not eat them. Like it perplexes me.

I asked this question of so many people, and I don't really expect there to be an answer. I'm just interested in people's thoughts on it. I'm not sure there is an answer, but I just think it's so important for us to think about this. What is it that's missing?

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Yeah, you know, I always thought of myself as a caring person.

I fought for human rights and almost got killed in protests. And then, you know, one day, my friend held me accountable, and said, "Faraz, you say you love animals, but you eat them."

And, you know, note that I was mad at my friend. She was, by the way, she said that in the nicest way, and I still got upset.

Mariann Sullivan:

Yeah.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

So that tells you that we shouldn't really be worried about upsetting people because they're not upset at us. You can be the nicest person, say the truth, and they get upset.

Mariann Sullivan:

Yeah.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

But to start fire, you need a spark. And sometimes, you know, you need friction to start that spark. And sometimes, by us speaking the truth, it's that spark.

So people may get upset, you know. on the surface, but they will change a lot of times as I did. And I hear this story over and over, which is why it's so important for all vegans to always speak up, to always speak up at every opportunity. I guess every situation is an opportunity to speak, speak up about veganism.

Something that I really want to share with this audience is a lot of times, we lose the courage, especially when it comes to friends, when it comes to relationships, when it comes to, you know, or for some people who are not vegan, you know, they go to a birthday party, and the cake is not vegan and under social pressure and all that we bent, and we have a little cake that is not vegan. Or, maybe you're on a plane, and the only food that is provided to you is not vegan. Of course, whether you eat that or not, you're not going to save an actual animal because, you know, whatever happened has already happened, but it's important to realize every time we contribute to this, we normalize animal consumption and every time we publicly reject, that's an opportunity for someone else to see that, "Oh, what's going on, why did you reject it?"

That's an opportunity to educate. I just want to say that I know people who literally started businesses, vegan businesses, vegan restaurants, and became activists just because one day, years ago, somebody in front of them rejected animal products. So don't underestimate the power that every one of us has and the snowball effect because you become vegan, you stand, you maintain your ground, you speak about it, and someone else learns from you. I just

want to say that just because I speak up, I get so many emails, so many messages from students from other people. "Hey, you said this thing, I became vegan." But I guess more people know me, and that's why they write to me, but know that this happens with literally all of us when we speak up. So I just want to say, please don't lose that courage. I know sometimes it's hard. I know we are in the minority, but if you don't know what to do, just think about what we do to animals as a social justice movement. Something that is injustice and ask yourself what would you do if this was another form of injustice, right?

Like we may put up with a friend with a partner for not being vegan, but we would not do that with any other form of injustice. This is not to say that we should be rude to others. It's just to say that we should keep that in mind that this is a big injustice and we just have to do something about it.

All I say is that in the face of injustice, silence is not an option. So whatever we are going to do, sometimes it's friendly, sometimes it's being rude, whatever it is, I don't care. It might vary based on the situation, but the important thing is to speak up.

Mariann Sullivan:

Just do something, say something. Absolutely.

And sometimes the more somebody is pushing back, as you said you were with your friend, the more somebody is pushing back and getting annoyed with you, that might mean that you're having an impact. The person who's just like, "Oh yeah, that's great. Good for you." They probably haven't heard you at all. So it's not something to worry about.

I say to my students like, a lot of them aren't vegan coming into the class, and they're struggling when they find out what's going on. And I say, if you can't be vegan all the time, just be vegan out of the house where people can see you, and you can talk about it.

Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. Passionate, passionate talk from you. I've really enjoyed hearing it. Thank you so much, Faraz, for joining us.

Dr. Faraz Harsini:

Thank you for having me; it was my pleasure.