Healthstudy in a Vegan settlement in Siberia / Russia

About three years ago the largest vegan settlement in Russia appeared in Siberia, where people were united by common religious beliefs. Their way of life attracted the attention of the officials who were worried about the health of the vegans. The Medical Centre for Practical Work and Research of the Vegetarian Society in Russia together with the Institute of Medical Problems of the North decided to send an expedition to the settlement to carry out a comprehensive study of the way of life, the health status and the eating habits of the vegans. The medical team included doctors of different specialisations and laboratory specialists.

Blood control

The settlement is situated on the banks of a mountain river in a picturesque place in the virgin forests of Siberia. The only neighbours are some local people in a small village.

The study included a diagnostical check-up, blood counts, urine tests, ultrasound check up. The way of life, eating habits and the type of food eaten were studied during the talks with the people and through questionnaires. 110 people were involved in the study: 84 were vegans and 26 were villagers who use a traditional diet including meat, fish, dairy products. The latter served as a control group. The vegans were divided into four age groups: 18-39, 40-59 and 60-74.

Formerly, the vegans belonged to an urban population, 55% of them are college and university graduates, they have various professions but at present they have to do a different kind of work – they are engaged in agriculture, construction, handicrafts. Although the living standards in the settlement are rather low, there prevails a positive emotional atmosphere and great enthusiasm.

The members of the vegan group have been *vegans* for 0.5-5 years; the average term – 2.2 years; they keep to a *vegetarian* diet for a longer period: from 1 to 20 years. They became vegetarians for religious and ethical reasons. The vegans stick to a healthy way of life: they do not smoke or take alcohol. Most of them do physical work. Previously, 21% of them were smokers and 76% occasionally drank alcohol. The change in their way of life benefited their health: they lost extra weight, their sleep improved (12% of the vegans formerly suffered from insomnia and took pills), they became more fit. 65% of the vegans state that they became more balanced emotionally and their family relations improved. Most of the people attribute this to the vegan diet.

Prof. Dr. Irina Medkova

People in the vegan settlement

The diet of the Siberian vegans includes rye bread, often home-made; wheat bread is seldom used. The diet includes also various cereals: buckwheat, millet, rice etc. They also eat beans, peas, lentils, soy. Most of them (91%) do not use pastas. The people in the vegan settlement not only eat without fats or butter but they seldom use oil (sunflower or olive oil), 86% do not use even these. They use such vegetables as potatoes, carrots, beatroot, radish pumpkins, cabbage onions, garlic, tomatoes, squash, sweet pepper. They also widely eat the greens: parsley, fennel and others.

Of berries they eat strawberries, black currants, blackberries; they have such fruit as apples, sometimes oranges

and lemons also dried fruit. Mushrooms, honey, herb tea and nuts are also part of their diet.
The studies showed that the vegan diet improved the lipid metabolism in the vegans (their cholesterol level is very low) and normalised their weight and their cardio-vascular systems. No Vitamin B12, deficiency and no iron deficiency was found in their blood. On the other hand a calcium deficiency was observed, evidently, due to the lack of dairy products in their diet.
Some disturbances of the liver and pancreas were observed as well as of the renal system both in the vegan and in the control group, which can be attributed not so much to diet as to ecological factors – the mineral content of the drinking water. On the whole the health of the vegans is better than that of the control-group – the local population living on a mixed diet.

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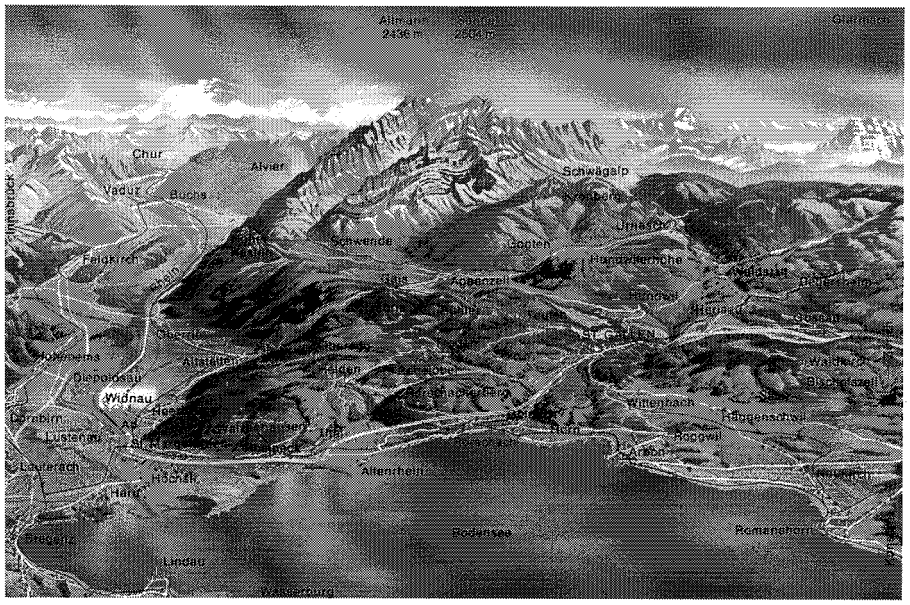
Vegan children in Siberia

Modern man does not experience himself as part of nature but as an outside force destined to dominate and conquer it.
He even talks of a battle with nature, forgetting that if ever he won the battle he would find himself on the loosing side.

E.F. Schumacher, Economist

EVU Congress News

The preparations for the 7th EVU Congress 18-23 July, 1999 in Widnau/St. Gallen, Switzerland are proceeding very well.
There is a great interest shown by speakers as well as by participants from all over the world and we are working hard to enable you to take part in an unforgettable vegetarian meeting in the beautiful Rhine Valley here in Eastern Switzerland.
Probably by the end of May of this year registration for one of the major European vegetarian events will be already possible.
(See also 'Agenda' on page 3)
Sigrid De Leo, Honorary Secretary of the EVU