

Transitioning to a meatless, plant-based future is a win for the environment — but means major upheaval for farm and meatpacking workers

A largely plant-based future would be a win for livestock, 99 percent of which is raised in factory farms, and the environment, as industrial animal agriculture is a major source of pollution. But it would also cause a massive shift in a huge part of the economy — one that could lead to dislocation and upheaval for the hundreds of thousands of farmers and meatpacking workers who make their livelihood from raising and slaughtering animals. What does the future look like for them?

[A recent paper](#) from the Breakthrough Institute, a nonprofit that advocates for technological solutions to environmental problems, tried to answer that question. The report surveyed 37 experts on the challenges ahead for a potential plant-based future and found three types of people whose livelihoods could be most vulnerable: farmers who grow soy and corn for animal feed, contract farmers who grow pork or poultry for Big Meat, and meatpacking plant workers.

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Their position is not unlike what coal miners and oil workers faced a couple of decades ago before natural gas, wind energy, and solar power took over a big chunk of the market. In recent years, some have trained to become wind farm technicians or to install solar panels, while others have been unable to find work in the renewable energy sector.

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