



Meatless Monday: Meet Esther, the Wonder Pig

By Jenny Abel

If you're at all like me, you can be forgiven for missing the commotion over Esther the Wonder Pig. I spend very little time on YouTube and social media, so it was only earlier this week that I learned about the pig with her own [YouTube channel](#), [web site](#), [Facebook page](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) accounts, and more than 170,000 followers.

Esther's two human dads, Steve and Derek, thought they were adopting a mini pig. Esther weighed only three pounds when they brought her to their Toronto home. Two years later she was 670 pounds but they decided to keep her. Along the way they learned how smart and social pigs are and decided that they couldn't bear to eat meat any longer. They both became vegans and have spurred lots of Esther's followers to take that step as well.



YouTube is full of videos of Esther taking a bath, playing with her two dog friends, lounging in her kiddie pool, and brightening the lives of her adopted family. Steve and Derek receive lots of comments from Esther's fans, among them a story from a woman who was in the grocery store with her meat-and-potatoes-loving husband. He picked up a package of bacon and started to put it in the cart but then placed it back on the shelf. When she asked him why he said "For Esther."

The majority of meat that you can find in the grocery store comes from animals raised on Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, or CAFOs. The Michigan chapter of the Sierra Club has a site with lots of information about CAFOs: <http://www.sierraclub.org/michigan/why-are-cafos-bad>. Pigs raised in CAFOs are confined to small cages in which they aren't able to turn around and where they don't have access to vegetation, sunlight, or fresh air. These naturally social animals also don't get the chance to spend time with their fellow pigs.

Animals most commonly raised on CAFOs are pigs, cows, and chickens. According to the Michigan Chapter:

- The amount of urine and feces produced by the smallest CAFO is equivalent to the quantity of urine and feces produced by 16,000 humans.
- CAFO waste is usually not treated to reduce disease-causing pathogens, nor to remove chemicals, pharmaceuticals, heavy metals, or other pollutants.
- Over 168 gases are emitted from CAFO waste, including hazardous chemicals such as ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, and methane.

Fortunately we have lots of tasty alternatives to meat and dairy products. This month's recipe comes from the Esther's Kitchen feature on her website: www.estherthewonderpig.com.

Italian Bella Meatballs

Prep Time: 15-20 minutes

Bake Time: 20 minutes

Serves: 14 meatballs

Author: Linda Del Pizzo

Ingredients

1 lb (454g) unrinsed baby bella portobello mushrooms caps with stems, mushroom caps and stems finely minced or processed in food processor to resemble ground beef
1/2 cup (125ml) traditional rolled oats, may use certified gluten-free (GF), ground into oat flour
1-1/2 cups (375ml) precooked quinoa
5 Tablespoons (90ml) panko breadcrumbs, may use GF
1-1/2 teaspoons (7ml) salt
1/2 teaspoon (2ml) ground black pepper
2 teaspoons (10ml) onion powder
1 teaspoon (5ml) garlic powder
5 Tablespoons (90ml) flax meal
1-1/2 teaspoons (7ml) Italian seasoning blend
1/2 teaspoon (2ml) crushed red pepper flakes, optional
1/2 cup (125ml) minced fresh cilantro or parsley leaves
1 teaspoon (5ml) olive oil for meatball mixture
2 teaspoons (10ml) olive oil for baking tray
1-3/4 (8ml)teaspoons olive oil, divided into 1/8 teaspoon (1ml) measures per meatball for baking

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Line a medium size baking tray with aluminum foil. Spread 2 teaspoons olive oil on the foil with your fingers. Set the baking tray aside.
2. Add the rolled oats to a blender or food processor. Process the oats into a course flour. Commercial oat flour may also be used.
3. The portobello mushrooms (caps with stems) can be finely minced with a knife or in a food processor. Add the finely minced Portabello mushrooms, oat flour, precooked quinoa, panko breadcrumbs, salt, ground black pepper, onion powder, garlic powder, flax meal, Italian seasoning blend, crushed red pepper flakes, cilantro or parsley and 1 teaspoon olive oil in a large mixing bowl. Stir the mixture by hand with a spatula or spoon until all ingredients are combined. Set the mixing bowl aside.
4. Place the baking tray on your workspace. Use 1/4 cup (60ml) level measure of meatball mixture per meatball. Roll the 1/4 cup (60ml) mixture in your hands and place each rolled meatball on the baking tray. The rolled meatballs will feel damp and soft. They will firm up while baking. Note that the last meatball measured slightly under 1/4 cup (60ml). Pour 1/8 teaspoon (1ml) olive oil over each meatball.
5. Bake the meatballs for 20 minutes, uncovered. Use a metal spatula to gently lift them off the foil once they are baked. Serve warm with marinara sauce over pasta.
6. Store leftover meatballs in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to four days. The prebaked meatballs can also be frozen for up to 3 months.

This content originally appeared in the March 2017 issue of the Mount Vernon Sierran, the Mount Vernon Group's quarterly newsletter. Opinions expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Mount Vernon Group or the Sierra Club. For more information about the Mount Vernon Group, please visit virginia.sierraclub.org/mvg/.