Should We Eat Anything With A Face?

Wednesday night, the <u>Intelligence Squared U.S.</u> debate series took on vegetarianism and animal rights with the motion "should we eat anything with a face?" So who won?

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Summer Anne Burton, BuzzFeed Staff

The team that argued for the motion, "don't eat anything with a face":

On the left, Dr. Neal Barnard, clinical researcher and author. On the right, Gene Baur, president and co-founder of Farm Sanctuary.

And arguing against the motion:

On the left, nutritional researcher/blogger Chris Masterjohn. On the right, alternative farmer and author Joel Salatin.

The debate spanned nearly 90 minutes and covered nutrition, environmental concerns, animal welfare and ethics.

One thing that was established early on in the debate is that all of the panelists are against industrial factory farming, so discussion of that industry's ethics were off the table completely — even though 99 percent of all farmed animals raised and slaughtered in the United States are from factory farms.

What they did discuss was the following:

Health
Dr. Barnard argued that Dr. Dean Ornish's studies have shown that a vegetarian diet reduces

the risk of cancer, diabetes and heart disease, and that switching to a vegetarian diet can actually reverse heart disease and improve diabetes. Masterjohn argued that many people can't get everything they need from a vegetarian or vegan diet, and that vegetarians are more likely to develop mental disorders. Both sides admitted that it was hard to prove causation, with Masterjohn jokingly asking, "Does vegetarianism cause mental disorders or do mental disorders cause vegetarianism?"

Nature
A big element of the pro-meat side's argument is that people are meant to eat meat and that we are predators, not prey animals. The vegetarians argued that people only began eating meat in the stone age, and that if we "needed" meat there wouldn't be so many healthy vegetarians. They also pointed out that the way we eat meat today, and what we eat, is pretty far removed from the wild scavenging or even hunting of our ancestors.

Economics
Salitin pointed out that in many parts of the world, vegetarianism is not a viable option and animals are an important portable form of wealth. An audience member also pointed out that in the U.S., it is more expensive to maintain a vegetarian diet. Dr. Barnard and Baur countered with the argument that meat would not be nearly as affordable if tax money didn't go to subsidizing the industry, and that meat production itself is actually much more expensive on the scale we do it. They did seem to acknowledge that vegetarianism might not yet be an option for everyone in the world, but Baur maintained that didn't change the ethics of the decision for people who do have a choice.

Ethics
In his opening statement, Baur referenced the Salem witch trials. "When the executioners at the Salem witch hunts were charged with killing witches, they were told, 'Don't look into their face, because if you do, they'll cast a spell on you, and you won't be able to kill them.' Basically, when you look into their face, there's empathy, there's a connection, there's an understanding that there's a living creature there." He repeated one line throughout the debate, "If we can live well without causing harm, why wouldn't we do it?" Salitan countered by calling such arguments "a segregated view towards life," saying, "plants are sentient beings. They attack, communicate, respond, and build communities."

You can watch the whole thing here:
http://fora.tv/2013/12/04/Dont_Eat_Anything_With_A_Face

Read the transcript here.

After the debate, the audience determined the winner based on how many people voted differently after the debate than before.

DECLARED WINNER: FOR THE MOTION

PRE-DEBATE POLL RESULTS
24% FOR | 51% AGAINST | 25% UNDECIDED
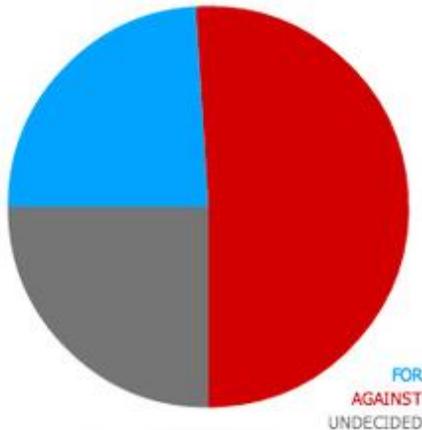
POST-DEBATE POLL RESULTS
45% FOR | 43% AGAINST | 12% UNDECIDED

FOR
AGAINST
UNDECIDED
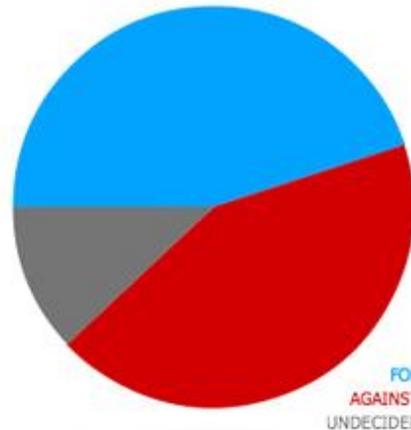
intelligencesquaredus.org

The audience determined that the argument for the motion "don't eat anything with a face" was the winner of the night. How many of them will actually become vegetarians is undetermined.

Who do *you* think wins this debate?