

**Title:** “The pig didn’t do anything wrong”: Emerging food-systems knowledge and attitudes from early childhood to adolescence.

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**Abstract**

There may be a window of opportunity, during childhood, within which to integrate meat-reduction strategies to safeguard human and environmental health. Compared with adults, children in early and middle childhood are less speciesist and more condemning of animal slaughter. They also struggle more than adults to identify the animal-origins of food, which could partly explain their elevated levels of moralisation. Very little is known about the developmental trajectory of food-systems knowledge, particularly the processes involved in converting food sources into products. This talk will present and discuss the findings from a mixed-methodological study investigating the developmental trajectory of food-systems knowledge and emerging attitudes towards meat production and plant-forward consumers. The study samples from early and middle childhood (4–6-years, 7–11-years), and adolescence (12–16-years), aiming to recruit a total of 315 participants ( $N = 105$  per age group). Illustrations of food alongside closed and open-ended questions were used to assess children’s animal and plant food-origins knowledge, their understanding of the processes involved in food production, the ethicality of these processes, and their motivations for eating. Attitudes towards morally-motivated and taste-oriented meat avoiders were measured using vignette-based judgments. The project aims to identify age-related differences in the understanding and moral appraisals of food systems, and emerging prejudices (vs. tolerance) towards non-meat-eating peers. We draw implications for efforts to promote healthy food choices and dietary diversity in schools.

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