



From Vegan Outreach to Institutional Action: The Strategy Manny Rutinel Said Could Transform Agriculture

When animal rights groups have been attempting to convert the public to a vegan lifestyle, much of the public discussion of animal rights activist groups has focused heavily on personal behavior. Activists distributed vegan literature, conducted online troll campaigns, protested, harassed customers of grocery stores, butcher shops, and restaurants, and promoted plant-based lifestyles as the primary means of reducing the use of animals in agriculture.

At the 2024 Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) Student Convention, Colorado State Representative Manny Rutinel outlined a different strategy. He said the “movement” was shifting away from an emphasis on individual changes and toward institutional action. In his view, legal requirements, ballot initiatives, legislation, corporate policies, government programs, and investment strategies could achieve far greater results than persuading individuals to change their diets one at a time. That distinction provides essential context for Rutinel’s recent statement that he is no longer vegan.

Personal Diet Was Not the Primary Goal

During the ALDF convention, Rutinel criticized veganism as a purity test within the animal movement. People hold complicated and sometimes competing beliefs, he explained, and very few people are truly vegan. Rutinel argued for a “very big tent” that would allow people to contribute without adopting a vegan diet. Suggested activities included donating money, joining protests, attending movement gatherings, and contacting legislators. He went so far as to say he would rather have a person donate \$300 each year to an organization such as Animal Outlook than become vegan without publicly discussing animal agriculture or contributing to movement activity. The implication was clear: personal consumption mattered less than organized influence.

The Move Toward Institutional Action

When discussing the future of animal law, Rutinel said he saw the movement shifting toward institutional action rather than individual change. He recalled entering animal advocacy during a period when vegan leafleting was common. By 2024, he said, more of the movement's thinking and resources were being directed toward institutional strategies because pilot programs had demonstrated their power. His primary example was California's Proposition 12.

Proposition 12 as a Political Action Model

Proposition 12 bans the sale of certain pork, eggs, and veal in California unless produced according to the state's standards, including products from outside the state. Rutinel highlighted the gap between consumer choices and political decisions by noting that, before the ballot, only a small portion of eggs were cage-free, yet many voters supported laws requiring that. He claimed that this shows the difference between individual purchasing and support for industry-wide laws. He stressed that advocates should target institutional leverage points, which can have a much greater impact, ten, a hundred, or even a thousand times, than individual actions.

Rutinel explained that animal rights ballot victories in states like California and Massachusetts could influence policy elsewhere. Advocates might use a win to pressure lawmakers by highlighting opponents' costs and offering extended implementation time. He noted the public favors animal rights, but legislatures, influenced by rural farm interests, do not reflect this.

Carbon Markets as Institutional Action

Rutinel's Yale farm-transition proposal aimed to use carbon markets to influence farmers to replace animal operations with plant-based businesses by funding this switch through carbon-offset programs. The goal was initial acceptance by voluntary registries, then government markets. Though different from Proposition 12, the strategy was similar: alter institutions, incentives, or rules to change individual choices.

Why "I'm No Longer Vegan" Does Not Resolve the Policy Question

In July 2026, Rutinel told The Colorado Sun he hadn't been vegan for years and now eats meat. He said he no longer holds early Reddit animal liberation views. These statements show his personal beliefs and practices have changed, but his 2024 remarks explain why they don't answer the larger policy question. Rutinel said veganism shouldn't determine animal movement membership and argued that institutional action could do more than individual dietary changes. Thus, eating meat doesn't mean he's abandoned institutional strategies he promoted. Do he still support Proposition 12 as a model? Favor ballot initiatives for production standards beyond borders? Support carbon-market incentives over livestock? Believe animal advocates should prioritize legal and political power over consumer persuasion? These questions matter to producers whose businesses, property, and communities could be affected by his policies.