

# Youth Build “Green” House

(environmental website, 2010)

[Environmentally-friendly home building](#) is not a new concept. The construction practices, low-impact and recycled materials, and advanced technologies that make up a holistic approach to building homes have moved from drawing board to construction site in recent years. Yet building green is sometimes a more expensive choice (mainly because it is a niche market). Individual homebuyers with the assets can choose firms that will build a green home, but those below a certain tax base have been left with few affordable options. Today, green homebuilding comes to everyone, inspired by advocacy groups and the new tenant in America’s first home: The White House.

In Washington, DC, First Lady Michelle Obama inaugurated a green homebuilding event on the national mall to demonstrate environmental home construction for affordable housing. The model homes were built with the assistance of young people in YouthBuild, an inner-city job skills program. One house was built for a family who lost their home in the aftermath of Katrina in New Orleans.

The First Lady visited with the more than 100 disadvantaged youths who came to the national mall to build a green house. [Michelle Obama said](#), “The work you've done here is quite impressive, and the evolution of your work to include green building, something that we're talking more and more about as a nation, energy-saving practices, and environmental awareness, it demonstrates how YouthBuild has endured as a leading non-profit organization, keeping up with the times, making sure that the training and education that you get is current.”

The event was a showcase for how the practices of homebuilding with environmentally-conscious design, construction, and technologies can be [economical for low-income housing](#). The benefits of green homebuilding include reducing heating/cooling costs, efficiently using and recycling water, avoiding toxic construction materials and waste, and savings from energy-efficient appliances.

The YouthBuild house installed rooftop gardens that help regulate temperatures, solar electricity panels, windows that exchange heat efficiently, innovative plumbing that reduces water waste, and used smaller pieces of lumber from managed forests, where new trees are planted after others are cut down.

# FDA Panel Affirms BPA Dangers

(non-profit e-newsletter, 2010)

A Food and Drug Administration panel, appointed to review an earlier FDA decision that deemed the chemical Bisphenol A (BPA) safe, has recommended that those findings be thrown out. The FDA's own Science Board panel determined that research studies demonstrating the harms of BPA—used in baby bottles, infant formula containers, aluminum cans, plastic bottles and many other household products—were negligently ignored. Many independent reports have shown that BPA poses serious health risks. The FDA should at least reduce the amount of BPA that could be considered safe by a factor of 10, the Science Board recommended.

The FDA under the Bush Administration gave a green light to BPA despite that its own research confirmed independent studies of the health risks. This led to congressional inquiries and a new assessment by the Science Board asserting that BPA, at current human exposure levels, may be toxic to the brain and damaging to the prostate gland of fetuses, infants and children. The Food and Drug Administration under President Obama has yet to make any announcements on BPA use in consumer goods since the panel offered these recommendations.

Bisphenol A is a synthetic estrogen used to harden polycarbonate plastics and epoxy resin. The chemical prevents plastics from absorbing the flavors and colors of foods and drinks. However, the mounting scientific evidence has exposed the serious and sometimes irreversible damage to health, even at low doses to which people are routinely exposed.

An estimated six billion pounds of BPA is fabricated into thousands of products, including safety equipment, eyeglasses, computer and cell phone casings, water and beverage bottles, and epoxy paint and coatings. The problems occur because BPA breaks down easily, particularly when the plastic is heated, washed with strong detergent, or broken.

Due to the proven dangers, health scientists and advocates have been sounding the alarm and asking the FDA to accept the scientific consensus. The industry has taken notice. Several major companies around the world have voluntarily stopped using BPA in their plastics. American manufacturers have been less inclined to self-regulate. State governments in California, Connecticut, New Jersey and Delaware have called on baby bottle makers to stop using the chemical, and the Canadian government has banned BPA in all children's products.

Manufacturers that offer BPA-free baby bottles and other products include Nalgene, CamelBak and Playtex. Wal-Mart and Toys "R" Us have announced their intentions to discontinue selling BPA-based plastic baby bottles and food containers.

# The End of Red Meat

(AGreenEra.org, 2009)

A recent study from the National Cancer Institute unequivocally blamed the consumption of red and processed meat for greatly increasing the risk of cancer and heart disease. Doctors and health advocacy groups have told us for years to cut out red meats. Yet there have only been modest changes in Americans' diets; the red meat dinner is a deeply entrenched cultural habit.

Consuming red meat has long been understood to be detrimental to a person's health, particularly in the quantities that most Americans eat. However, the [media continues to promote](#) red meat, and our eating culture places meat at the center of the table. The [expansive government study](#) found that red meat eaters face a greater risk of death from heart disease and cancer, putting to rest any industry claims to the contrary and nailing the coffin on red-meat lovers' rationales. The health risks of a hamburger diet are indisputable.

The research, published in the [Archives of Internal Medicine](#), studied a large group of middle aged and older people for a decade. The results shine a light on the dangers. Of the men who ate a ¼ lbs of red meat a day (compared to those who ate under 5 ounces per week), 22 percent increased their risk of dying of cancer, while 27 percent were threatened with death by heart disease. In women, red-meat eaters had a 20 percent higher risk of dying of cancer and a whopping 50 percent chance of dying from heart disease.

Health problems confirmed by research are not the only reason to be concerned about red meat. The [health costs of treating heart disease and cancer](#) is staggering and overburdens our beleaguered health care system. Cattle farming and meat production is a highly subsidized industry in America and takes an enormous amount of energy and land space. Livestock production increases greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to global warming. A plant-based diet helps maintain your health, uses resources efficiently, preserves the environment, and requires no animal be slaughtered. All this comes from simply making healthier meals.

Red meat advocates rely on erroneous beliefs that meat is the best source of protein and iron. However, the [protein in meat is an overdose](#). A single serving of meat provides roughly 25 grams of protein or half of your daily need in just one serving. Conversely, one cup of beans provides about 15 grams of protein, and a half cup of grains or vegetables provides about 3 grams. The protein in vegetables is a more manageable amount spread across three meals a day without the high cholesterol, fat, and antibiotics found in animals. Meat is a potent supplier of a very poor type of iron that our bodies cannot process, which leads to health problems. Plant foods—such as grains, nuts, dried fruits, tomatoes, and potatoes—provide the good type of iron that the body easily absorbs.

Since the risks associated with red meat are scientific fact, and a diet is healthier without it, Americans are going to have to lose their addiction to red meat. It's not a radical vegan lifestyle anymore. Meat eaters are force feeding this country to death.

# U.S. Reverses Position on U.N. Gay Rights Declaration

(JuicyRainbow.com, 2009)

The Obama administration will support an existing United Nations declaration calling for the [worldwide decriminalization of homosexuality](#) that President George W. Bush dismissed. Advocates are hopeful the Obama administration will actively support the U.N. Declaration that calls for all member countries to repeal laws that penalize gay people. White House officials said they had notified the [French U.N. ambassador's office that put forward the declaration](#), asking that the U.S. be listed as a sponsor. The Bush administration refused to sign the non-binding General Assembly statement in December 2008, amidst a storm of protests.

The United States is the only western nation that has not signed on. Conservative groups in America and the Vatican condemned the U.N. proposal, as well as several Islamic nations. The nonbinding document was signed by all 27 European Union members as well as Japan, Australia, and Mexico to a current total of 70 U.N. nations.

This is an about face from the previous administration's position on gay rights and international diplomacy. White House officials said Mr. Obama decided to sign the declaration to demonstrate that the United States supports human rights for all.

[Gay rights and human rights groups](#) called on the Obama administration to reverse Bush's decision. Advocates criticized the Bush administration when it refused to sign the declaration at the United Nations last year. Bush officials said they opposed discrimination but needed to review the declaration for legal reasons.

Mr. Bush has a long record of opposition to gay rights. During his administration, Bush supported religious groups' claims of religious freedom to discriminate against LGBT people. His administration deferred to state and local jurisdictions that allowed landlords and private employers to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. Bush upheld the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" rules that ban gays from serving in the military; hundreds of LGBT service members were fired under his term. The Bush administration and allies were aggressive opponents of same-sex marriage, civil unions, and inclusive adopt laws.

Bush officials feared the U.N. declaration, although written to pressure countries where gay people live under the threat of severe state abuse, would be used domestically to support gay rights legal cases and advocacy.

The [United Nations](#) declaration was introduced in December 2008 and immediately signed by 66 of the U.N.'s 192 member countries. It was hailed as a historic step to push the General Assembly to deal more forthrightly with anti-gay discrimination. To date, 70 U.N. member nations outlaw homosexuality, which can be punished by execution.