



What's Really Driving Plant-Based Protein Purchases?

Midan Marketing investigates the popularity of plant-based meat alternatives.

by Michael Uetz

If you've been paying attention to the happenings in Hollywood, you might think meat will have a starring role in the next big-screen blockbuster as the evil villain. Along with the Golden Globes serving a meatless entrée at its awards ceremony, prominent actors are proclaiming animal agriculture is responsible for climate change, with the implication the meat and dairy industries don't care about the planet.

The meat industry is experienced in dealing with claims that are not science-based. After all, we've heard for years about how meat is bad for our health. But now we are squarely in the sights of those who want to pin climate change largely on animal agriculture. Tie in the climate-focused marketing strategies of plant-based meat companies like Impossible and Beyond Meat, and it's easy to conclude concern about climate

change is what's driving people to seek out protein alternatives.

The why behind the buy

But is the environment truly the main driver behind the popularity of plant-based meat alternatives? At Midan, we wanted to learn more about "the why behind the buy" for these protein alternatives. This past December, we surveyed 750 meat eaters about their reasons for trying/buying plant-based protein (and cell-based meats in the future). The answers were enlightening.

Of the 415 respondents who said they might buy these products, nearly half (49%) report the primary reason for purchasing plant-based protein is their belief it is better for their overall health. The next two top reasons were plant-based protein products contain more natural ingredients (39%) and will help them manage their weight (37%).

Concern for the environment, rather than coming in first, tied with weight management in the third slot.

These findings also support what we already knew about plant-based protein eaters from our Meat Consumer Segmentation 2.0 study: One-half of plant-based eaters increased their frequency of eating vegetable/plant proteins in the past year, with 56% citing they consider it to be healthy and 48% claiming it to be all natural.

(Editor's note: Midan's Meat Consumer Segmentation 2.0 study is available at MidanMarketing.com/customer-insights/segmentation-2-research/).

Cut through the noise

I guess it shouldn't be surprising we humans are first and foremost concerned about ourselves versus the world at large. But what is the learning here for the meat industry? If you assume, based on factors like Hollywood hype and competitors' amped-up marketing tactics, the environment is leading the alternative protein charge, you'll miss the mark when communicating with today's meat eaters. Based on our research, messaging platforms that focus on the health/nutrition benefits of meat are much more likely to hit home. (To see how "real" meat stacks up against plant-based protein nutrition facts, read Danette Amstein's Meatingplace blog.)

(Editor's note: Read Danette Amstein's Meatingplace blog at Meatingplace.com/Industry/Blogs/Details/89389?allowguest=true.)

The other takeaway here, of course, is environmental concerns still factor into today's complex meat-buying equation. To that end, many participants in the meat channel are focused on strengthening their sustainability programs and sharing these initiatives to remind consumers our industry cares very much about the planet. (Our livelihood depends on the good stewardship of its natural resources.)

There will always be lots of chatter about our ever-evolving meat industry; the key is to cut through the noisy voices to get to the ones that matter. Effective marketing relies on listening and responding to today's meat eaters. You can't reach your consumer if you don't know your consumer. **HW**

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