

As 71% of Americans Dabble in Plant-Based, 2022 Will Be a High-Stakes Brand Battleground

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It's a great time to be a flexitarian in America, where consumers who mix and match a diet of animal protein with faux meat and dairy alternatives can find plant-based options at popular mainstream chains like KFC, Burger King, Starbucks and even McDonald's (which has finally joined its rivals with a trial run of the McPlant burger).

The same is true at upscale chef-led restaurants—not just in coastal enclaves—and Gordon Ramsay recently set TikTok on fire with a vegan bacon recipe.

For home cooks, grocery channels from Walmart to Safeway now stock a wide variety of egg alternatives, frozen veggie-friendly meals, vegan cheese and meatless burgers, chicken and sausage. Tuna-free tuna and seafood-less crab cakes? They're not just in specialty stores anymore.

The abundant supply aims to meet a growing demand: 71% of U.S. adults reported trying at least one plant-based product in 2021, according to Datassential, and 48% look for products labeled “plant based,” per the Hartman Group, while 67% have tried non-dairy milk, says Morning Consult, citing that one in three consumers drinks it at least weekly.



Impossible Foods

Pandemic gains, quality control

The plant-based sales momentum established during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic is expected to continue this year, if not at the lofty triple-digit gains reported by some brands during 2020's lockdowns. (Supply chain issues are impacting the plant-based space, too.)

Sales of faux meat and poultry are projected to reach \$2 billion by 2024, says a study from Packaged Fact, and the more-established alternative dairy category is pegged to top \$5.2 billion in the next two years.

Aggressive startups like Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods are jockeying for position with conglomerates such as Tyson, Hormel and Kellogg, along with legacy brands like Quorn and Dr. Praeger. Meanwhile, grocery giants are increasingly developing their own plant-based private label products at tough-to-beat price points.

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—Allyson Fish, Archer Daniels Midland

In fact, there's been a quantity-over-quality focus that needs correcting, according to Allyson Fish, president of alternative proteins at Archer Daniels Midland.

“It's been a race to the finish line, with companies pushing out products—the faster the better,” Fish told Adweek. “For 2022 and beyond, we'll see improvements and innovation around flavor, texture and nutritional profiles. And the competition is going to get more

intense.”