

Emerging “Blended Burgers” Category Has a Lot of Potential

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Consumers are increasingly interested in purchasing so-called “blended burgers” – which feature half meat, half-plant ingredients, reports The Hartman Group.

Even though current consumer thinking around healthy, mindful eating includes attempts to eat less red meat, the cultural love affair with burgers continues unabated.

One barometer is the ongoing popularity of McDonald’s (2018 global sales of USD38bn), Burger King and Wendy’s (both of which did over USD8bn each in revenues in 2018). And yet, the concept of blended burgers resonates with consumers today, since many admit they are interested in reducing animal products from their diets.

The Hartman’s Group “Food and Technology 2019: From Plant-based to Lab-grown” report has found that 56% of plant-based product purchasers are interested in buying a “blended” burger (or are already acquiring them). Even among consumers who don’t currently purchase plant-based products, 30% say they are interested in buying blended burgers.

Reflecting demand, food manufacturers are stepping up offerings in blended burgers at retail. For example, in March 2019, Applegate Farms, a subsidiary of Hormel Foods Corp., introduced hybrid “blend burgers,” which aim to “reduce the organic beef or turkey in a burger patty and fill it out with organic mushrooms.”

As an emerging sub-category within proteins, “blended burgers” are an underdeveloped bright spot with significant potential. This is because blended meat products have one big advantage over plant-based protein alternatives relating to perceptions of taste.

The Food & Technology report found in multiple data points that a significant barrier to the consumption of plant-based proteins related to negative taste perceptions. Of interest, even among non-buyers of plant-based products, there is strong, “common sense” thinking that consuming plant-based alternative proteins and be healthier and better for the environment. But what’s holding them back are perceptions relating to taste.

Whether currently buying plant-based proteins or not, “blended burgers” are viewed as potentially the best of both burgers worlds. Interested consumers feel that the blended burger compromise is likely to give them most of the flavor of meat that they crave but may also enable them to eat in alignment with their health and ethical aspirations. This phenomenon is occurring as innovations in the meat analog sphere, like the Impossible Burger, are garnering attention and business investment. Meanwhile, many consumers are indicating they appreciate simpler ways to cut back on meat without giving up on it altogether.

Going forward, it is highly likely that blended meat products (notably, but not exclusively burgers) will become part of the mainstream diet. This is not to say that they are replacing to replace meat (consumption of which is continuing to grow). Instead, products like blended burgers are going to just be another choice reflective of experimentation with customized diets and new eating approaches. Blended burgers will thus become yet one more way to experiment and explore new tastes, new formats, and new diets and will possibly be included in everyday eating routines.