



GOOD, BETTER, BEST:

Higher expectations for
plant-based products

It's easier than ever for consumers to live a plant-based lifestyle. From the growing number of convenience products in the grocer's freezer, to highly promoted burgers at restaurants, meatless options abound. As a result, today's consumers have high expectations.

The market for plant-based products is large and gaining momentum. U.S. retail sales of plant-based foods grew 11.3% in the past year, according to a SPINS report commissioned by the Good Food Institute and the Plant Based Foods Association.¹ And according to Mintel, one in five U.S. consumers now identifies as a flexitarian.²

Formulators can improve their chances of success in this growing market by delivering on what consumers really want.

Focus on health

While there are three primary reasons consumers choose to follow a plant-based lifestyle – health, environment and animal welfare – health is the primary driver for most consumers. The best way to reach this audience is to address the reason they transitioned to a more plant-based diet.³ According to Amanda Topper, associate director of foodservice research at Mintel, “Leading with health messaging will resonate with most consumers.”

Emphasize taste

Formulators need to remember, however, that taste remains the main purchase driver for all food and beverage purchases.⁴

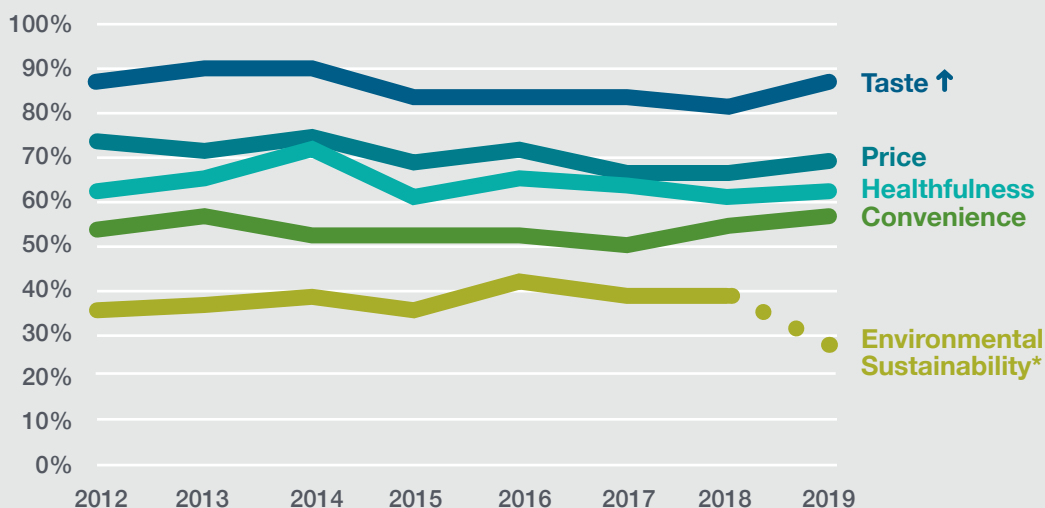
The novelty of a plant-based product may drive trial, but unless it's “craveable,” it won't inspire repeat purchases. For some, this area needs work. Only 27% of consumers who eat vegetarian or vegan dishes believe restaurants “do a good job of providing options that taste good.”⁵

Think about the environment

Melanie Bartelme, Mintel Global Food analyst, says consumers are becoming more critical of vegan products. “It's not going to be enough to just be plant-based. There's going to have to be a reason, some sort of benefit that these products are providing. For a lot of consumers so far that's been health, but in 2020 I expect to see the conversations shift and focus a little bit more on the environmental impact.”

Purchase Drivers Over Time

% 4-5 Impact out of 5
 “How much of an impact do the following have on your decision to buy foods and beverages?”



* Prior to 2019, Environmental Sustainability was asked simply as “Sustainability”

Source: IFIC 2019 Food and Health Survey.

Be trustworthy

When asked what formulators should do to attract European customers, Mintel Global Food and Drink Analyst Edward Bergen issued a challenge: “If they say the product is healthier and vegan, it actually has to be. Formulations are going to be tested. That’s exactly what consumers want.”

Formulators should pay attention to sugar and salt content, as well as their ingredient list. While consumers may be more forgiving of a longer list in processed plant-based convenience foods, they are still mindful of ingredients they may be trying to limit.

Rely on a trusted partner

Cargill’s large portfolio of label-friendly ingredients can help formulators develop products that meet modern consumers’ stringent demands for quality, healthfulness and sustainability.

Meat alternatives

Textured soy products and soy flours function well as meat substitutes and can be used in plant-based and high-protein baked goods, snacks and cereals. Traditional and non-GMO* solutions are available. Non-GMO pea protein is ideal for convenience foods and snacks, as well as bars and cereals. This consumer-friendly ingredient is grown using eco-friendly farming practices that strengthen cropland and benefit our planet.

Texturizers and sweeteners

Cargill’s label-friendly starches, texturizing options and sweeteners can help formulators develop plant-based products that meet consumer demands. These ingredient options can deliver products with a satisfying mouthfeel and the reduced sugar content that consumers crave. Complementary options such as chicory root fiber can add nutritive fiber and also support sugar reduction goals.

* There is no single definition of “non-GMO” in the USA. Contact Cargill for source and processing information.

References

¹ The Good Food Institute. SPINS retail sales data released July 16, 2019. <https://www.gfi.org/marketresearch>

² Mintel. U.S. Plant-Based Proteins Market Report. May 2019.

³ Mintel. “Targeting the Plant-Based Consumer: Promote Craveability and Taste Above All Else.” December 9, 2019. <https://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/Article/2019/12/09/Targeting-the-plant-based-consumer-Promote-craveability-and-taste-above-all-else>

⁴ The International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation’s 2019 Food and Health Survey.

⁵ Technomic. “2019 Center of the Plate: Seafood and Vegetarian Consumer Trend Report.” <https://www.technomic.com/newsroom/consumption-meatless-dishes-remains-strong-consumers-increasingly-follow>