



Fellows Broadsheet

The Institute of Hospitality Fellows Broadsheet is a monthly thought-leadership article written by a member of our esteemed College of Fellows. Celebrating the wealth of professionalism, knowledge and expertise within our diverse, worldwide hospitality family. The Fellows Broadsheet is published on the first Sunday of every month, exclusively for members.

Vegan, Vegetarian and Plant-Based Food: Good for the environment and your bottom-line

Martin Kubler FIH has been a member of the Institute of Hospitality since his undergraduate days in London in the 1990s. Since then, he has worked and lived in the UK, the UAE, Qatar, and, most recently, Sweden. Martin is an active participant in the Institute's Mentor Me scheme and also supports the industry through his consulting activities and work with universities in Europe and the Middle East.

In this Fellows Broadsheet, Martin looks at vegan, vegetarian, and plant-based foods, which, in recent years, have left their somewhat niche existence to become menu 'must-haves'.

The rising popularity of plant-based F&B and the purchasing power of its consumers makes many restaurateurs keen to find out more about plant-based eating, how to attract and cater to customers looking for plant-based meals or, are interested in reducing their meat consumption.



History and background

The American biochemist and nutrition expert Dr. T. Colin Campbell coined the term 'plant-based diet' in the 1980s. But it wasn't until the latter half of 2010 that plant-based eating, vegetarian, and veganism really took off in Europe, the United States, and many other countries around the world. The Economist declared 2019 'The Year of the Vegan' (1) and in the U.S. plant-based food sales reached the US \$5 billion mark with year-over-year growth of 11.4%, compared with 2.2% growth for total U.S. retail food sales. Fast forward to 2021 and plant-based food sales reached US \$7 billion in the U.S. (2) and £1.1 billion in Great Britain (3).

In January 2020, in the UK, there were as many Google searches for 'Veganuary' as for the much longer established 'Dry January'. Data shows that 20% of Gen Z is already following a meat-free diet in the UK with a further 26% planning to adopt one in 2021 (4).

Restaurateurs and caterers were quick to adapt to the changes in consumers' eating habits. In 2018, 52% of all restaurants in the UK had at least one vegan menu option (5). Vegan meals are now the UK's fastest growing take-away choice with orders up by more than 300% since 2016. Orders for vegetarian food has also increased by 136%.

2020 saw plant-based going mainstream with Greggs introducing its vegan sausage roll to the UK High Street and Pret A Manger began rolling out its 'Veggie Pret'.

The key differences: Plant based, vegan and vegetarian

Previously, 'vegan' and 'vegetarian' were already established terms. But in recent years, many more have emerged, and it is important to know the differences, not just from a food-labelling perspective, but also so you can market dishes correctly.

In the UK, there is currently no legal requirement or basis under which food is to be labelled as vegetarian or vegan (6). Although both the Vegetarian Society and the Vegan Society offer certification schemes which allow food producers to put their trademarks on their product labelling.

Vegetarian: According to the Vegetarian Society, a vegetarian is someone who does not eat any meat, poultry, game, fish, shellfish, or by-products of animal slaughter. Some vegetarians include dairy, honey, and eggs in their diets and might fall into one of the following sub-categories:

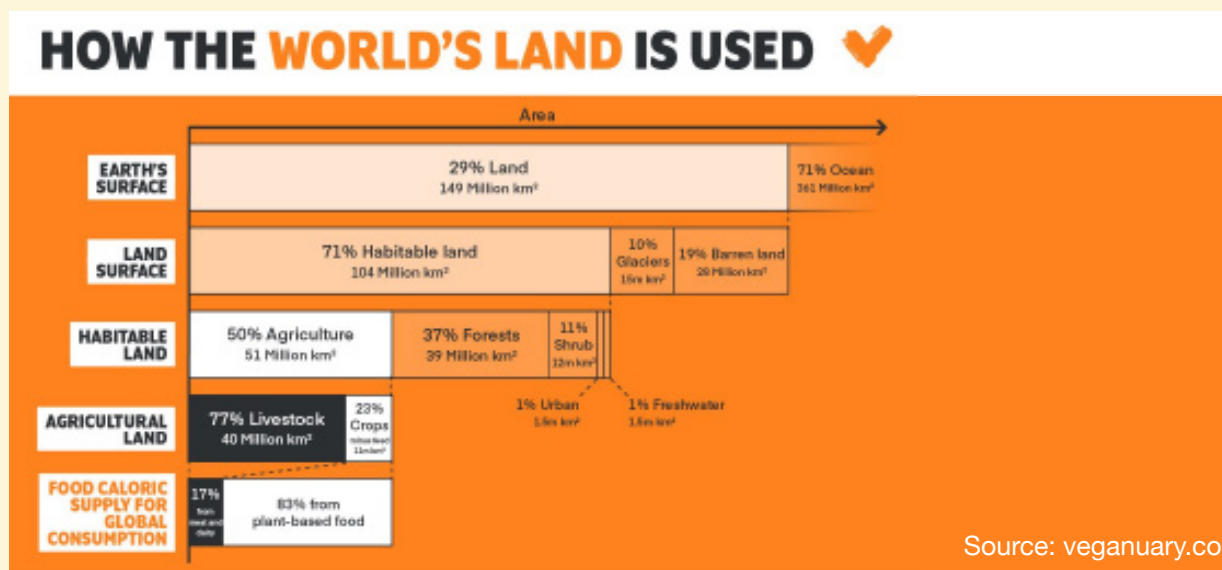
- Lacto-Ovo Vegetarian: Vegetarians who avoid all animal flesh but do consume dairy and egg products
- Lacto Vegetarian: Vegetarians who avoid animal flesh and eggs but do consume dairy products
- Ovo Vegetarian: Vegetarians who avoid all animal products except eggs.

Flexitarian: 'Part-time' vegetarians, i.e. people following a semi-vegetarian diet centered on plant foods with the occasional inclusion of meat

Pescatarian: People who do not eat meat or poultry but do consume fish & seafood

Vegan: Veganism is currently defined by the Vegan Society as a way of living that attempts to exclude all forms of animal exploitation and cruelty as much as possible. So a vegan diet not only excludes meat, but also dairy, eggs, and other ingredients that come from animals, e.g. gelatin, honey, carmine, pepsin, shellac, albumin, whey, casein, and some forms of vitamin B3

Plant-based: Plant-based or plant-forward eating patterns focus on foods primarily from plants. This includes not only fruits and vegetables, but also nuts, seeds, oils, whole grains, legumes, beans, and all meat and dairy alternatives, e.g. soya milk. Also, meat alternatives like 'Impossible Burger' or 'Beyond Meat', or seafood alternatives like 'Tuno'. The term 'plant-based' simply describes a food preference, without assuming a particular ethical lifestyle background, i.e. someone might prefer a plant-based diet without necessarily labelling themselves as vegan.



Reports suggest that there could be as many as 7.2 million adults in the UK who follow either a vegetarian, pescatarian, or vegan lifestyle with veganism growing faster than other plant-based eating choices. Additionally, there's a predicted 22 million flexitarians in the UK (7 & 8).

For many, vegetarianism and particularly veganism are more than just diets. They are ethical lifestyles centered around avoiding all animal products and by-products and also refusing to spend money on clothing, beauty products, or entertainment that involves the exploitation of animals.



Adding more plant-based options to your menu

Firstly, of course, they are in demand. Research from Tastewise, a food industry data, statistics, and trends platform, clearly shows a continuing significant increase in demand for plant-based dishes by consumers. Which constitutes increased sales of vegan and vegetarian food in restaurants (9).

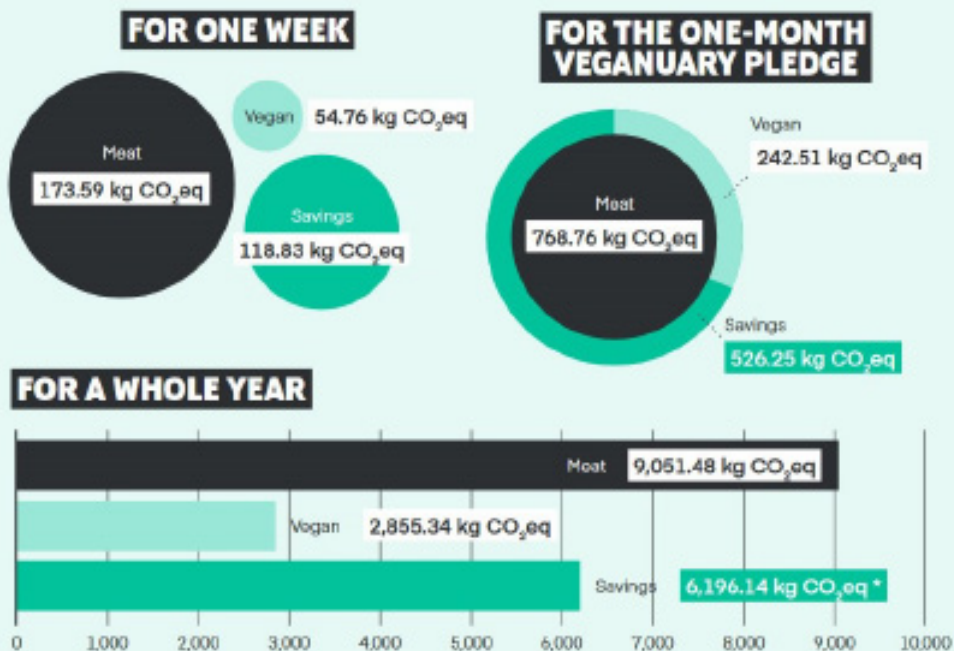
In the UK, Deliveroo reported a year-on-year increase in orders for plant-based food of 117% (10). Put simply then, customers are rapidly adopting new plant-based food items and plant-based dishes are very helpful in attracting flexitarian, vegetarian, and vegan customers looking for local restaurants with meat alternatives.

Secondly, sustainability and environmental friendliness are much more than buzzwords these days, and consumers are actively searching out eateries that 'walk the talk' when it comes to climate-friendly behaviour. Food production accounts for one-quarter of the world's greenhouse gas emissions and takes up half of the planet's habitable surface.

14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions, according to the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (11). According to Technomic's recent generational report, 27% of consumers say they are more likely to visit restaurants that try to be sustainable. This trend is slightly more pronounced in younger generations, with 31% of millennials and 32% of Gen Z expressing the importance of sustainability in restaurants (12).

Lastly, research shows plant-based meals are on average 40% cheaper to produce than meat of seafood equivalents (13). At the same time, customers are willing to pay a premium for healthy plant-based food, sometimes as much as 40% more (14).

The willingness to pay extra for plant-based options may be temporary, of course, and as supermarket prices for plant-based food items like burgers or sausages decrease, so will the customers' likely inclination to pay a premium for plant-based dishes. However, it is possible that meat and dairy prices might rise as demand slows (15) or as countries introduce carbon taxes on both (16). Current research suggests that the price of plant-based meat is projected to fall below that of conventional meat in 2023 (17).



* That's the equivalent of driving 20,843 miles in the average UK petrol car - almost as much as driving all the way around the earth!



What to avoid

Don't hide plant-based dishes among all your other menu items. It is better to group plant-based options under a common header, e.g. 'Plant-Based Dishes' or 'Vegetarian & Vegan Options'. You'll see an uptake in orders for non-meat options.

Don't overprice your plant-based dishes simply because you can. Menu prices must make sense to customers and although they are willing to pay extra for plant-based options, simply adding a premium on every plant-based dish is not recommended. Rightly or wrongly, many people think that plant-based dishes should be cheaper than meat-based offerings, so aiming for price parity is an important first step. Plus, making at least one vegan or vegetarian dish per menu category cheaper than comparable meat-based options will curry favour with many guests.

Don't just replace meat with cheese or a lot of refined carbs. Poorly planned vegetarian and vegan diets could result in low intakes of some nutrients, particularly iron, calcium, zinc, and vitamin D. Both diets also tend to contain limited amounts of vitamin B12 and long-chain omega-3 fatty acids. Although levels of these nutrients are generally lower in vegans than vegetarians (18). Vegetarian and vegan diets tend to lean heavily on fruits, legumes, and vegetables, but some items might be dairy- and meat-free yet still highly processed or high in added sugars or fat.

Don't forget about daily specials and special occasion menus. Many restaurants feature plant-based dishes on their regular menus, but neglect to add them to daily specials, monthly offers, special occasion, or other temporary menus. If you're stuck for ideas, Food Navigator (www.foodnavigator.com) is a good source for ideas and insights on the latest trends.



Educating your teams

Just like with allergens or gluten it is important that your teams know which dishes are vegan or vegetarian and whether other dishes can easily be veganised. Keep in mind that for many vegan and vegetarian customers food choices are part of a wider ethical lifestyle and they rely on getting the right information from your menus or your staff members. There are many websites with useful tips and resources, e.g. the Vegetarian Society UK, the Vegan Society, and Veganuary.

Transparency is key, particularly for restaurants that serve both meat and plant-based dishes. Many consumers are keen to know that plant-based dishes are prepared separately from meat dishes. For example, if you serve 'Beyond Meat', 'Impossible Burger', or other meat alternatives which look and feel very much like meat, it is reassuring for guests to be told or, be able to see, that these are prepared on a separate grill.

Try and think past the plated dishes too and also look at condiments, breads, and your beverage menus. Not all wines and beers are vegan. For example, having clearly marked vegan options on a wine list or in the beer section of your menu is bound to result in great feedback from vegan guests. Barnivore (www.barnivore.com) is a good resource to find out whether an alcoholic beverage is vegan or not.

Consistency is key. It does not make sense to offer a vegan burger, but serve it on non-vegan bread with dairy-based mayonnaise.

Creating awareness

An often-overlooked benefit of adding more plant-based options to your menus is that you also gain added opportunities to create awareness and reach new audiences. If you have a dedicated vegan menu or a vegan section on your menu, you can get listed on apps like Happy Cow (www.happycow.net) or Abillion (www.abillion.com). Both enable you to present your restaurant and food to thousands of vegan and vegetarian consumers. You should also update your restaurant's Google My Business and TripAdvisor listings to ensure that people looking for plant-based dishes find your restaurant online.



Summary

With organisations like Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion and others keeping climate change in the news. With governments and businesses around the world looking for ways to drastically reduce CO2 emissions, and with more and more consumers choosing to reduce meat consumption and eat more sustainably, now is a good time to increase the number of vegetarian, vegan, or plant-based options on restaurant menus.

In many cities, struggling high streets are given a new lease of life by restaurants adapting and evolving to meet greener consumer requirements such as By Chloe and Veggie Pret in the UK.

Also a host of independent UK eateries, like Hackney-based Sutton & Sons - London's first vegan-only fish and chip shop and home delivery services such as Just Eat and Deliveroo, are now continuously adding new vegan and vegetarian options.

'Vegan junk food' is a current craze, which probably won't last forever.

However, overall, plant-based dining is here to stay and based on the latest data and insights, is likely to rapidly expand further.

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About the author

Martin Kubler FIH has been a vegetarian since 2014 and increasingly eats and cooks completely plant-based (vegan) meals.

Martin spent over 20 years working in and running hotels in Europe and the Middle East. He now splits his time between Europe and the Middle East and specializes in working with start-ups, family-run companies, and businesses in customer-centric and service-critical industries.

Martin has wide interests and understands an eclectic mix of business, science and art. He teaches, mentors, and writes and runs The Gluttonous Sloth, a boutique HORECA consulting firm with attitude.

Find out more about Martin
Connect with Martin on LinkedIn



Martin Kubler FIH