Level: B2: Upper Intermediate

Skill: Reading

Fake Meat



I was a champion of fake meat: but I'm not surprised people are losing their taste for it.

Fake meat is failing. Once seen as a way to fight the climate emergency, protein alternatives are now struggling, with Beyond Meat reporting net revenue losses of nearly 31 per cent in the second quarter of this year.

The truth is I'm amazed that our love affair with fake meat lasted this long. Climate scientists have warned us for decades about how food production systems contribute to global heating. Eating less beef, pork, and chicken is vital, and this created a gap in the market for meat alternatives. But, according to US charity the Center for Food Safety, "replacing conventional animal products with ultra-processed, poorly studied and under-regulated genetically engineered products is not the solution to our factory farm and climate crisis."

Not long ago, we were in love with vegan alternatives. But there are nutritional and environmental issues with processed protein. Swapping meat with Beyond Meat resulted in some impressive health findings, according to one study, including reduced "bad" cholesterol and body weight. But while these products don't appear to be immediately harmful, they are ultra-processed. In the long term, the effects of eating them are unclear.

n June 2023, UK vegan producer Meatless Farm stopped trading, while sausage company Heck reduced its vegan range, blaming a lack of consumer demand. In the US, vegan chicken nugget start-up Nowadays closed "due to an inability to raise venture funds in this market".

The cost-of-living crisis has been given as one reason for poor sales. And these alternatives can be expensive. A pack of two Beyond Meat burgers costs 4 pounds at Tesco, while a pack of four Finest beef steak burgers is also 4 pounds – the same price for double the quantity. Beyond Meat is now reducing prices and cutting jobs. But I wonder if lower sales aren't also linked to how we feel about these products.

The reality is that many of these foods don't taste very good. As a chef who has spent my career designing vegan recipes, I've become something of an expert in the tastes and textures of meat alternatives. Beyond Meat remains the strongest competitor to real meat. Nobody can convince me meatless protein is tastier or more appealing than lentils. And if they aren't tastier, then why eat them?

Perhaps another reason for the decline in sales is that the general public are arriving at a different position on our current meat production processes and their alternatives. In 2022, meetings on the role of meat in society were held in Dublin, with 1,000 scientists signing the Dublin Declaration, which states that raising livestock and eating meat are "precious to society" and "must continue to ... have broad approval of society."

Professor Michael Lee, an expert in sustainable livestock and one of the signatories of the declaration, insists it isn't "anti-vegan" or "anti-ecology" but instead about "being pro-sustainable agriculture to feed a global population and protect our planet and all its inhabitants".

Personally, my own rules for eating healthily are inspired by the American author and journalist Michael Pollan's motto: "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants," which remains the simplest strategy we can apply to our eating habits that is good for our bodies and the planet.

Whether you view fake meat companies as innovative or not, these vegan products can be a step towards a more plant-based lifestyle. I believe we are drawn to items with the taste and texture of conventional animal foods. The future for fake meat looks uncertain, but that's not to say it will be gone forever.



LIVEWORKSHEETS

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Choose the correct words from the wordpool below to match the definitions.

alternative	conventional	environmental	lifestyle
nutritional	protein	recipe	strategy
sustainable	ultra-processed	vegan	vital

- Something found in all living things that forms the structure of muscles, organs, etc .....
- Something you can choose from two or more possibilities .....
- Necessary or essential for something to succeed or exist .....
- Following what is traditional or usual .....
- Packaged foods made predominantly from fat, sugar, and preservatives, for example, frozen meals, fizzy drinks, hot dogs, crisps, sweets, etc .....
- Eaten by someone who does not eat nor use any animal products (milk, eggs, honey, leather, wool, etc).....
- Connected to how living things receive the food necessary for them to grow and be healthy .....
- Connected to the world around us and the conditions in which people, plants, and animals live .....
- Instructions for how to cook something and what ingredients to use .....
- Involving the use of products and energy in a way that does not harm the environment. .....



LIVEWORKSHEETS