



**Best
of both
worlds**

Flexitarians skew towards plants but mix in meat proteins, too

BY **ANDY NELSON**

SOURCE



In one corner, meat eaters, touting the benefits of paleo. In the other, vegans and vegetarians, trumpeting heart and other health benefits and the wellbeing of the planet.

Maybe not a fight that's always going to end well. Fortunately, there is a middle ground: flexitarianism.

Amy Marks-McGee, founder of consultancy Trendincite LLC, defines a flexitarian as a person who eats primarily a non-animal based diet such as vegetables, fruits, grains, pulses, legumes, nuts, and seeds, instead of meat, poultry, or fish.

According to multiple research studies, she said, their ranks are growing. According to the Hartman Group, 41% of plant-based purchasers thought of themselves as people who were limiting meat, and 1 in 5 described themselves as carnivores. Only 12% of plant-based purchasers described themselves as vegetarians, while 41% of them described their eating styles as "omnivore."

"Consumer interest in plant-based products is being driven by a variety of factors," Marks-McGee said. "Veganism and vegetarian diets are not the driving force behind consumer interest in plant-based products. Instead, consumers with a wide range of lifestyles and flexitarian diets are pursuing plant-based products, driven by flavor, texture, wellness, and desire for variety."

On trend

Flexitarianism is front and center in Naperville, Ill.-based KeHE Distributors' list of trends to watch in 2022.

Under the trend heading "Blurring Diet Lines," KeHE says that shoppers are "choosing to eat more of a flexitarian diet with less meat and more plants rather than committing to becoming a vegan or vegetarian. This holds true for other popular diets like Keto as well, choosing lower carb over low carb."

Sparked by habits adopted during the pandemic, consumers are looking to be more proactive with their health while remaining flexible in their diets, according to KeHE. This has led to the trend of picking and choosing from diet fads and customizing it to the consumer's personal need. Shoppers are no longer following strict diets, rather they are cherry-picking what best suits their bodies. And increasingly, that means flexitarianism.

Room for all

The rise in flexitarianism is not hurting the meat industry, Marks-McGee said. In fact, it could wind up supporting an industry that has been beset by shortages as well as concerns over the environmental impact of raising animals for food. If those trends continue, consumers may need to cut back on their animal proteins and become more flexitarian.

Looking ahead, plant-based meat, poultry, and fish alternatives should continue to expand at retail grocery, Marks-McGee said. To tap into this trend and compete, grocery retailers are working on their own private label alt protein brands. For example, Kroger offers a variety of plant-based meats in the brand's Simple Truth line.

For deli counters and prepared foods, meanwhile, Marks-McGee has seen stores partner with established plant-based brands to create ready-to-eat meals using alt proteins such as chicken and tuna. For example, Whole Foods Market partnered with Greenleaf's Lightlife brand to offer plant-based chicken alternatives in the

brand's hot bar, cold salad bar and grab-and-go offerings.

In addition, Whole Foods offers Good Catch plant-based deli-style tuna salad by the pound in the prepared food sections at select stores.

Expect to see flexitarianism stick around, Marks-McGee said —though it may go a different name or names.

"I think flexitarianism is here to stay. However, the term "flexitarian" is the en vogue buzzword and I think the term may evolve."

Going mainstream

New research from Chicago-based ADM shows that a flexitarian approach to eating has become mainstream as consumers look to functional, wholesome, plant-based nutrition to support healthy, environmentally friendlier lifestyles.

Alternative proteins are likely to account for 11% of the total protein market in 2035, ADM said, driven primarily by Covid, which has accelerated interest in plant-based as a health-forward alternative for consumers who are paying attention to their body's nutritional needs.

Plant-based lifestyles, clean and transparent sourcing, and sustainable goodness are among the eight trends ADM sees fueling current and future global growth — and flexitarianism will play a central role in it.

Drawing on research from its Outside Voice consumer insights platform, the company's top trends for 2022 point the way for ADM's innovation, renovation and development platforms, the company said.

"Consumers today continue to navigate a tumultuous environment that has uprooted every aspect of their lives," said Brad Schwan, vice president of category marketing at ADM. "This



2nd only to Mediterranean

As usual, the Mediterranean Diet was chosen the best diet of the year by US News. (It's won five years in a row).

What didn't get as much press was the runner-up: The Flexitarian Diet, which tied with The DASH Diet for the No. 2 spot.

Flexitarian is a marriage of two words: flexible and vegetarian, according to US News. The term was coined more than a decade ago by registered dietitian Dawn Jackson Blatner in her 2009 book "The Flexitarian Diet: The Mostly Vegetarian Way to Lose Weight, Be Healthier, Prevent Disease and Add Years to Your Life."

"Blatner says you don't have to eliminate meat completely to reap the health benefits associated with vegetarianism — you can be a vegetarian most of the time, but still enjoy a burger or steak when the urge hits," according to US News.


has led forward-thinking brands to develop new solutions purpose-built to help consumers establish a sense of normality for themselves, their families and their pets. We're seeing everything from foods, feeds and beverages that promote gut health to plant-based meat and dairy alternatives to biodegradable packaging."

In 2022 ADM expects consumers to be more proactive about supporting their mind and body through a balanced approach to diet and lifestyle.

The coronavirus pandemic has placed renewed interest on mental well-being, and ADM said it expects more consumers to seek effective ways to cope with stress and anxiety. Thirty-seven percent of global consumers expect the snacks they eat to improve their mental well-being, according to ADM's Outside Voice research.

Blended: a natural flexitarian fit

Hatfield, Pa.-based pork specialist Clemens Food Group believes that while plant-based has made a big splash in recent years, it's "plant-forward" that more consumers are looking for.

Like flexitarians themselves, plant-forward is OK with both meats and non-meat protein substitutes. Call it a "flexitarian product." Hatfield's own plant-forward entry into the marketplace is its Hatfield Recipe Essentials Blended Ground Pork with Mushrooms, which combines roasted button mushrooms with all-natural ground pork. 

Flexitarianism driving Lightlife

plant-based expansion

"Flexitarian consumers continue to drive growth in the plant-based category, and we're excited to expand our partnership with Walmart to make delicious, simple plant-based products even more accessible," said Dan Curtin, president of Chicago-based Greenleaf Foods, SPC. Greenleaf is now distributing its Lightlife brand's Plant-Based Burgers, Plant-Based Breakfast Links and Plant-Based Breakfast Patties at select Walmart locations nationwide. The plant-based breakfast items will be sold in the refrigerated breakfast meat section, the first time the retailer will offer a plant-based option in that part of the store. They offer the same taste and texture as traditional breakfast sausages with less saturated fat.

