

The growing demand for plant-based foods

A closer look at market trends and projected growth for plant-based and plant-forward options, and what this means for food service.

A look at recent growth in demand

Sales of plant-based foods across the board have grown significantly in recent years, showing serious promise for the future of the industry. The Plant Based Food Association’s [Market Report](#) for 2018 demonstrates extensive growth in this industry- a signal that consumers are looking for more plant-based options!

Growth in Plant-Based Alternatives from 2017 – 2018

Category	Dollars	Growth
Milk	\$1.6B	9%
Meat	\$670M	24%
Other Dairy (combined)	\$697M	50%
Ice Cream	\$222M	38%
Yogurt	\$162M	55%
Cheese	\$124M	43%
Creamer	\$109M	131%
Butter	\$68M	23%
Dressings	\$12M	32%
Meals	\$210M	28%
Tofu & Tempeh	\$108M	11%
Eggs & Mayo	\$42M	16%
Grand Total	\$3.3B	20%

FIGURE 1. SOURCE: PLANT BASED FOODS ASSOCIATION, GROWTH OF PLANT-BASED ALTERNATIVES BY CATEGORY

The Plant Based Food Association’s data above (Fig. 1) demonstrates some exciting findings including:

- Overall sales for plant-based products grew 20% over this period, whereas sales of all foods increased 2%. This indicates vegan foods are seeing growth **ten times** that of all foods.
- Products like plant-based cheese, yogurt, and creamer were found to have some of the largest growth, with a 50% increase overall, and as high as a 131% increase for vegan creamers. Plant-based milks now represent 15% of the total market for milk.
- Plant-based meat sales grew about 24% in 2018, while conventional meat sales increased only 2%.

Why the increased demand?

Taste has consistently been the number one driver of food purchases, illustrated by repeated consumer surveys by [Impossible Foods](#). Recent innovation in flavor and taste have upped the desirability of plant-based options.

The above survey found these three prominent drivers for demand:

- Maintaining or improving health
- Consumers report “feeling good” about eating plant-based foods
- Environmental sustainability

Who is driving the demand?

- A survey conducted by [Aramark](#) found that **all generations** are interested in having more plant-forward meals, though Millennials have showed the highest demand.
- [Forbes](#) reports that Millennials and Gen Z have led the way with vegetarian and vegan diets, but also with flexitarian and “reduce-itarian” diets that are more plant-forward and include some animal products.
- 14% of US consumers use plant-based alternatives regularly – 86% of them do not consider themselves vegetarian or vegan, a [NDP survey](#) shows.
- One third of Millennials with children surveyed by Impossible Foods reported consuming plant-based meat once a week or more often, carrying this trend through to the next generation.

Plant-based foods – not just for vegans and vegetarians anymore

While the demand for delicious, plant-based food may have once stemmed from the vegetarian and vegan population, consumers of all diets are increasingly showing interest, enthusiasm, and support for the growing plant-based industry for a broad range of reasons. The previously referenced Aramark survey found that many consumers do not necessarily want to eliminate meat from their diet, rather they would like to incorporate more plant-based foods, perhaps going meatless a few days a week or crafting more plant-forward food dishes that reduce the amount of meat or animal products consumed.

Big name food retailers like Conagra Brands, Inc., Kellogg Co., and Kroger Co. have been tapping into the alternative meat market, according to [Food Business News](#). And the trend extends beyond retail: [Grubhub's Taste of 2019](#) shared that vegetarian and vegan-friendly dishes accounted for seven of their top ten orders of the year. Plant-based foods are effectively going mainstream in response to widespread consumer demand across generations, lifestyles, and diet choices.



PHOTO BY: MARK MAKELA / FOR THE HSUS

What does this mean for food service?

For food service, this means that this trend in plant-based and plant-forward foods is growing and will likely continue with the generations to come. Judging by current retail and household trends, K-12 students are increasingly being taught plant-forward eating at home and may soon expect plant-forward meals as the norm and at the core of what is offered.



PHOTO BY: SYLVIA ELZAFON/FOR THE HSUS

The future of food service

We can be certain that demand for plant-based foods has grown in recent years and that this trend is here to stay.

[Forbes](#) claims that market and consumer data tell us this, and so do technological and financial investments – we can expect continued growth and expansion of this industry.

This is illustrated by the 19% increase in plant-based protein case shipments from distributors to food service operators from 2017 to 2018, reported by [NDP Group](#).

Additionally, the same Aramark survey found that plant-forward options are in high demand at the institutional level. Of the 5,200+ people surveyed, many stated they would choose the plant-based or plant-forward option every time or most of the time: 45% at hospitals, 53% at colleges, and 37% in workplace settings.

This demonstrates major potential for food service providers to lead the way by anticipating and meeting consumer demand. Plant-based and plant-forward food are at the cutting edge, and we are here to help food service providers stay ahead of the curve.

Find out more information by visiting forwardfood.org.



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES