

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

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the questions.

1. What is your favourite source of protein? Why?
2. Have you ever eaten 'fake meat'? If so, what did you think of the taste? If not, would you try it? Why (not)?
3. What are some positive and negative aspects of 'fake meat'?

2 Key words

a. Write the correct words from the wordpool below to match the definitions. Then, find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

carnivorous	collective	cultivated	eliminate	faux
flavour profile	genetically engineered	implication	nutritional	ominous
pitfall	regulated	texture	ultra-processed	vegan

1. something fake or artificial but is supposed to look real _____
2. packaged foods made predominantly from fat, sugar, and preservatives, for example, frozen meals, fizzy drinks, hot dogs, crisps, sweets, etc. _____
3. controlled through rules _____
4. something that has had its DNA changed by scientists _____
5. eaten by someone who does not eat any animal products, such as milk, eggs, or honey and who does not use animal products, such as leather or wool _____
6. describes someone who eats meat _____
7. connected to the process of receiving the food needed to grow and be healthy _____
8. a danger or difficulty, especially one that is not noticeable at first _____
9. a possible effect or outcome because of an action or a decision _____
10. suggesting something bad may happen in the future _____
11. something shared by a group of people or a whole society _____
12. the combination of flavours, spices, and ingredients found in a dish _____

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13. the way something feels when you touch or eat it, for example, how hard, soft, or crunchy it is _____

14. remove or get rid of something _____

15. grown on a farm or in a lab, for example, mushrooms, to be sold _____

b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences. You may need to change the form of some words.

1. The _____ for Indian food includes cardamom, coriander, tamarind, saffron, garam masala, yoghurt, and coconut milk.

2. Most doctors agree that eating a lot of _____ foods, such as frozen dinners, isn't healthy.

3. She was a vegetarian for a long time, but now she's fully _____ and doesn't eat any animal products at all.

4. Are these tomato seeds natural, or were they _____ to produce more fruit?

5. At the cheese tasting, we tried cheeses with different tastes and _____. The soft and creamy one was my favourite.

6. Do you think we can _____ carbon emissions by 2050?

7. A Venus fly trap is a _____ plant. It eats flies and other bugs.

8. The _____ of climate change for our planet are very serious.

9. We have a _____ responsibility to take care of the planet for future generations.

10. He knows there is no _____ value in those sweets, but he likes how they taste!

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Sales are falling due to nutritional and environmental concerns – but also because it just doesn't taste that good

Aine Carlin

10 August, 2023

- 1 Faux meat is failing. Once seen as a way to fight the climate emergency, protein alternatives are now struggling, with plant-based pioneers Beyond Meat reporting net revenue losses of nearly 31 per cent in the second quarter of this year.
- 2 I could say I'm surprised, but the truth is I'm only amazed that our love affair with fake meat lasted as long as it did. I was once a fan, but standing in front of a towering wall of hyper-processed meat alternatives in my local supermarket last year, I couldn't help but think: are vegan burgers that bleed really the answer to our meat consumption woes?
- 3 Climate scientists have been sounding the alarm over how food production systems are contributing to global heating for decades. Eating less beef, pork and chicken is a vital element of the fightback, creating 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." And I'm inclined to agree.
- 4 Not long ago, we were in love with everything that vegan alternatives promised, as a way to "do our bit" without sacrificing our carnivorous instincts. But the nutritional and environmental pitfalls of processed protein have slowly made themselves apparent. Swapping meat with Beyond Meat resulted in some impressive health findings, according to one study, including reduced LDL (or "bad") cholesterol and body weight. But while these plant-based products don't appear to be immediately damaging to our health, they are ultra-processed. In the long term, the implications of eating industrially produced vegan products on a larger scale are unclear.
- 5 In June 2023, UK vegan producer Meatless Farm ceased trading before it was rescued from administration, while sausage company Heck reduced its vegan range, citing a lack of consumer demand. In the US, vegan chicken nugget startup Nowadays recently closed "due to an inability to raise venture funds in this market", an ominous forecast for the industry.
- 6 The cost-of-living crisis has been cited as one significant reason for poor sales of vegan meat products. 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 its prices and cutting jobs. But I wonder if lower sales aren't more likely to be linked to a shift in our collective feeling towards these products.
- 7 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 flavour profiles of meat alternatives. Beyond Meat remains the strongest competitor to real meat when it comes to taste and texture. Nobody can convince me meatless protein is tastier or more appealing than lentils. And if they aren't tastier, then why are we bothering?
- 8 Perhaps another reason for the decline in sales of these products is that the general public are arriving at a different position on our current meat production processes and their plant-based alternatives. In 2022, meetings on the role of meat in society were held in Dublin, with 1,000 scientists coming together to sign the Dublin Declaration, which states that "livestock systems ... are too precious to society" and "must continue to be embedded in and have the broad approval of society."
- 9 Vegan media was quick to dismiss the declaration, claiming it was full of "animal industry bias". But the fact that the meetings even took place speaks volumes. Professor Michael Lee, a leading 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".

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- 10 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 alike.
- 11 Whether you view fake meat companies as innovative or otherwise, for those wanting to eliminate meat from their diets, these 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. Just look at the cultivated meat industry, where animal meat cells are grown in a lab to replicate the real deal.
- 12 The future for fake meat looks uncertain, but that's not to say with advances in food technology, it will be gone forever.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Why were protein alternatives (faux meat) popular initially?
2. How much did Beyond Meat report in net revenue losses in the second quarter of 2023?
3. What created the gap in the market for meat alternatives?
4. What three reasons does the Center for Food Safety in the US give for why faux meat is problematic?
5. Why were people excited about faux meat in the beginning?
6. What were the effects on health when people ate Beyond Meat products instead of real meat?
7. What is one significant reason named for poor sales?
8. How does the author feel about the taste and texture of faux meat?
9. What did Professor Michael Lee say about the meetings in Dublin?
10. What is Michael Pollan's seven-word motto on eating healthily?

4 Key language

a. Match each prefix to its definition. One definition fits two prefixes.

hyper-

ultra-

under-

anti-

pro-

1. in favour of or 'for' something
2. beneath or below
3. against something
4. beyond what is ordinary, excessive

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b. Add the prefixes from task a to make new words. Some words have more than one answer.

1. _____ estimate
2. _____ sensitive
3. _____ sound
4. _____ bacterial
5. _____ resourced
6. _____ active
7. _____ ventilate

c. Write sentences using some of the words from task B.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Fake and cultivated meat are the way of the future."
- "Livestock, such as cows, sheep and pigs, use too many resources."
- "Eating a plant-based diet is the healthiest way to live."

6 In your own words

a. Do some online research about the faux meat industry.

- What ingredients do companies use?
- What health benefits do they claim?
- What environmental impacts do they claim?
- Do the nutritionists and scientists agree? Why (not)?

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- b. Report your findings to the class and share your opinion. Here are some phrases to help you when you talk about facts.

According to the research, ...

Studies show ...

The expert's opinion is ...

The facts/data show ...

In reality, ...

Here are some phrases to use when stating your opinion.

I believe that ...

In my experience, ...

From my perspective, ...

In my understanding/opinion, ...

I'm (not) convinced that ...