

Case Study

How to drive plant-based food purchasing

Key Points

- **Taste** was the attribute most likely to drive purchase intent for all age groups and diet types. Taste should be prioritized above all else.
- **Familiarity** and **tradition** were also strong positive drivers of purchase intent. Consumers were more likely to purchase products that appeared familiar to them than those that appeared novel.
- The word **plant** was part of the most successful language to describe plant-based products, especially plant paired with protein—plant-protein, plant-based protein. Of the most commonly used terms, plant-based generated the greatest purchase intent and most frequent positive associations, and vegan performed the worst.

The purpose of this research was to understand the USA general population’s perceptions of plant-based products. Specifically, this study aimed to identify the biggest drivers of purchase behavior among consumers; the effect of differing descriptive language, such as plant-based, meatless, and vegan, in this category; and differing perceptions of plant-based foods among demographic groups. The results are formulated into recommendations for increasing purchase intent of plant-based products, bringing about positive behavior change, and influencing consumers to choose plant-based products over their conventional meat and dairy counterparts.



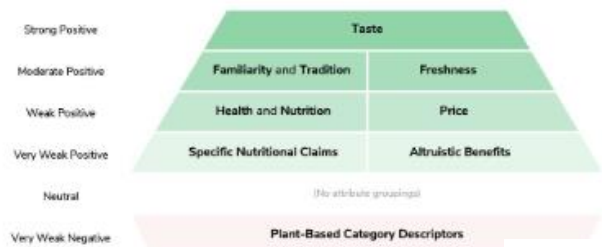
This study featured a combination of implicit tests (measuring the unconscious factors that influence people’s behavior) and explicit questions (measuring the conscious factors that influence people’s behavior).

We recruited a total of 2,518 U.S. participants over the age of 18. The sample was nationally representative in terms of demographic criteria, including race or ethnicity, age, and geographic location. We also collected data on participants’ educational backgrounds, political views, relationships to meat or food in general, and shopping habits.

What is most likely to increase purchase intent for plant-based products?

- **Taste, familiarity, and tradition** were the most influential in motivating consumers to purchase plant-based products. These were followed by the need for the products to be **fresh, nutritious, and healthy**.
- Altruistic attributes, such as **sustainability** and **animal welfare**, were less important to consumers and much less likely to influence purchasing decisions.

Primary motivators for purchasing decisions



Client Insights

Mindlab was able to help GFI select the most effective language to promote *plant-based* food and help people make healthier and more sustainable food choices.

In addition, we identified which product attributes were more likely to increase purchase intent, proving that taste was the most important factor.

Mindlab also discovered which factors mattered more to different consumer groups; older consumers cared more about familiarity and taste, while millennials cared more about convenience and ethical considerations.

Because these findings were based on implicit measures rather than simply asking people explicit questions, stakeholders could be confident that these results were strong indicators of likely purchase behaviours, rather than just due to unconscious bias.

“Mindlab’s approach allowed us to dig into not only what consumers say they like, but also their underlying preferences. This study helped us understand the terms, associations, and imagery that are likely to drive purchase intent for plant-based foods—a critical part of our core research work at the Good Food Institute.”

Emma Ignaszewski



Associate Director
Industry Intelligence &
Initiatives.
The Good Food Institute

Terms featuring plant are popular, especially those that pair *plant* with *protein*.

Plant in the descriptive language is effective in driving purchase intent, especially when paired with protein (e.g., **plant-protein**, **plant-based protein**). Such language is also effective at generating positive associations for products and especially effective at communicating the attributes *tasty*, *satisfying*, and *healthy* to consumers. Related terms, including 100% *plant-based* and 100% *plants*, were also well received.

Descriptor	Influence
Plant-protein	56%
Plant-based protein	56%
Veggie	54%
100% plant-based	53%
Plant-based	53%
Non-dairy	53%
100% plants	52%
Plant-powered	41%

People prefer plant based over *vegan*, *meatless* and *meat free*

The term **plant-based** is dramatically more effective at increasing purchase likelihood than the terms *vegan*, *meatless*, and *meat-free*. Of the 32 descriptor terms tested in this study, *plant-based* was one of the most effective and *vegan* one of the least effective.

Descriptor	Influence
Plant-based protein	56%
100% plant-based	53%
Plant-based	53%
Meatless	42%
Meat-free	42%
Vegan	35%

Compared with *vegan*, consumers saw *plant-based* as more *appealing*, *satisfying*, *indulgent*, and *filling*, all attributes that had previously been identified as influential in purchasing decisions. Therefore, it is unlikely that “vegan” will appeal to an omnivore consumer base, as this study used omnivore participants. It is likely that the word *vegan* is seen as a loaded term, not directly related to the functional attributes of the food.

What kind of package imagery is most effective?

Food not only needs to taste good, it needs to look good too. We found that taste should be communicated visually as it is more important to consumers than anything else. The use vivid imagery with serving suggestions on the pack makes plant-based products look tasty.

Familiarity is also important. If the plant-based product closely resembled the non-plant alternative, a transparent window showing off the product resonated positively with customers. Showing key ingredients on pack is the best way to make a product appear healthy.

Do	Depends	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dark colors High contrast Key ingredients Professional photos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brown Boxes and pouches Vegetable association In-context, familiar imagery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Green Red Shrink wrap and clear windows Cans

