



# CHANGING DIETS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

*Wave 3 research*

*2022*

 The  
**Vegan Society**  
One world. Many lives. Our choice.



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# INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, the UK entered its first national lockdown to help control the Covid-19 virus.

Since then, the world has gone through many unforeseeable events, each impacting our lives in different ways. Though there are now limited lockdown restrictions across our four nations, the impact of Covid-19 will have a lasting effect on our shopping habits, both as food citizens and food consumers. At the same time, at the time of writing (April 2022), the UK is going through the highest levels of inflation in 20 years. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has further increased food and fuel prices, with [global wheat prices soaring](#) by 19.7% during March of this year. This soaring cost of living is already impacting huge numbers of people in the UK, with many of us concerned about how we will afford basics such as petrol, heating and food and drink. Indeed, [research suggests](#) that members of the public are now more concerned about the cost of living than they are about catching Covid-19.

The Vegan Society has always had a particular interest in looking at changing diets and, more recently, whether current affairs have had any effect on the global vegan movement.

In April 2021 we published the [Changing Diets During the Covid-19 Pandemic](#) report, which focused on how many UK citizens were reducing their consumption of animal products, which vegan products they were trying for the first time and which they will continue to purchase in the future. This report was developed from an initial survey we ran right at the start of the pandemic in 2020. This year, Wave 3 of the research uses a near identical survey design and approach to the 2021 report, with further improvements and additions to insights and analysis. We will be referencing the 2021 report throughout this report.

## SPRING 2021

In April, our research found that **19.5% of Brits** said they had reduced their meat consumption since the start of the pandemic and **12.3%** said they had reduced their dairy/eggs consumption.

**85.6% of reducers** did so out of concern for the environment, animal rights or personal health – the key three reasons for people to embrace a vegan lifestyle.

In May, Co-op announced that it will be introducing more vegan meals in its stores after committing to achieving price parity between vegan and non-vegan products.



## SUMMER 2021

The government-commissioned [National Food Strategy for England](#) report was released in July 2021. The report explicitly states that "developing and manufacturing alternative proteins in the UK, rather than importing them, would create around 10,000 new factory jobs and secure 6,500 jobs in farming (to produce protein crops and other inputs)".

In July 2021, Wicked Kitchen, the UK-founded plant-based food range, launched into the US market in 2,500 stores following sales figures of over 300%.

## 2021 AND THE STRENGTH OF THE VEGAN FOOD INDUSTRY



## AUTUMN 2021

In September 2021, [The Guardian](#) reported that one in three (32%) consumers now drink plant-based milk, up from 25% in 2020. This was even higher among 25-44 year-olds at 44%.

[Wagamama](#) became the first UK restaurant chain to make over 50% of its menu vegan.



## WINTER 2021-22

Over 629,000 people from 220 countries and territories signed up for the [Veganuary 2022](#) campaign.

In November 2021, [Ocado](#) reported that 84% of its customers considered veganism an attractive diet.

[Aldi](#) reported a rise of 500% in sales of its plant-based products in January 2022 compared to 2021.

[Tesco](#) reported a 40% increase in vegan meat alternatives and dessert sales since January 2021. Plus, its plant-milk sales grew 100% and their vegan pasta and soups rose by a staggering 140%.





# AUDIENCE AND MOTIVATIONS

The Vegan Society has partnered with Attest – a global surveying platform that has access to millions of people across the world. Responses through Attest go through multiple layers of respondent quality control, such as automated audience checks, technical checks to monitor respondent speed and engagement and regular data validation. The Vegan Society is an evidence-based charity, and collaborating on research ensures we have unbiased, realistic and externally validated results.

## Survey one

Survey one (conducted 9th-11th April 2021) asked 1000 people from the UK (working age nationally representative) if they had experienced any behaviour changes during the Covid-19 pandemic.

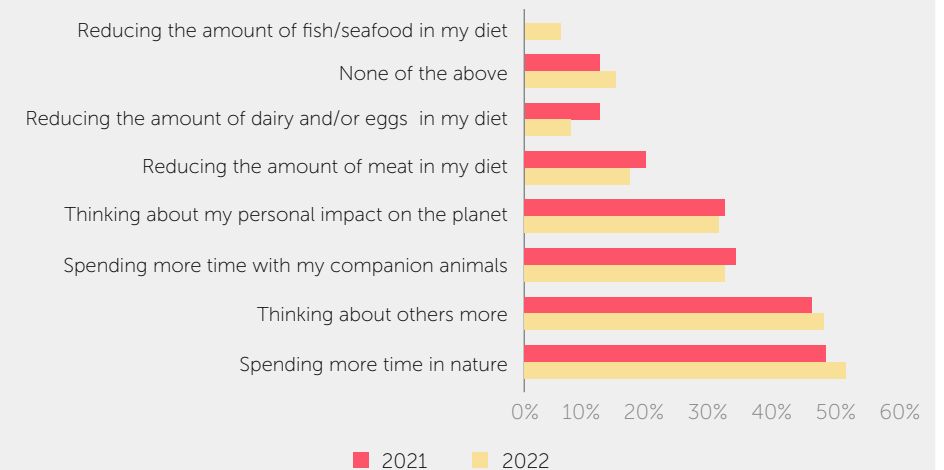
## Audience

**Gender:** Female (51%), Male (49%)

**Age:** 18-24 (15%), 25-34 (20%), 35-44 (24%), 45-54 (22%), 55-64 (19%)

**Home Region:** Scotland (7.8%), North West (11.8%), North East (4.8%), Yorkshire & Humber (8.8%), East of England (8.8%), West Midlands (8.8%), East Midlands (7.8%), Wales (4.8%), Northern Ireland (2.2%), London (12.8%), South East (12.8%), South West (8.8%)

## Has the COVID-19 pandemic led to any of the following behaviours

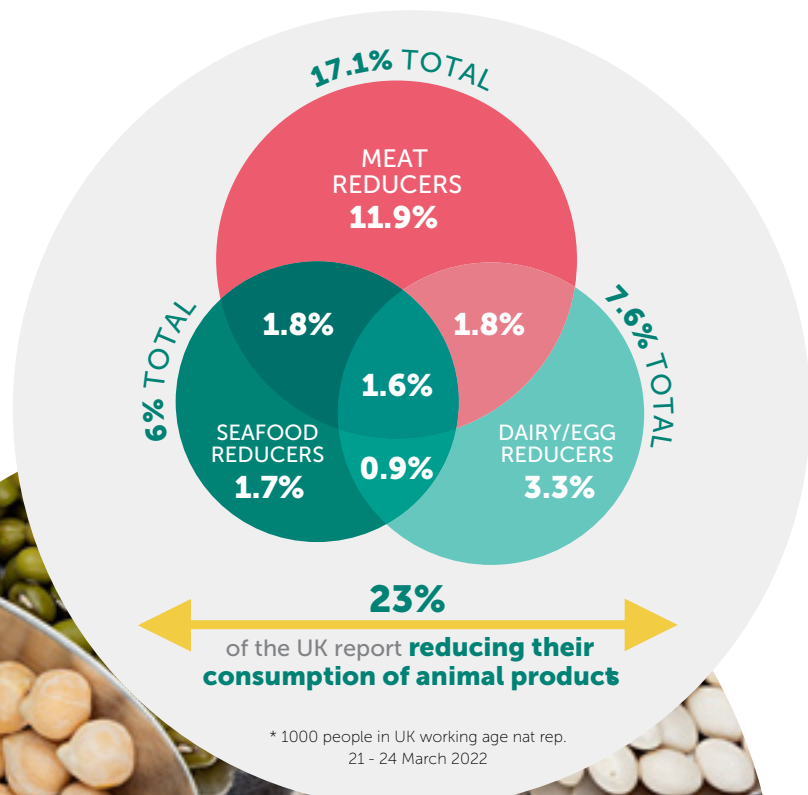


In general, similar patterns of behaviour change can be observed in 2021 and 2022. In 2021, 19.5% of the panel said they were reducing meat and 12.3% said they were reducing dairy/eggs.

In 2022, the percentages dropped slightly, with 17.7% of the panel saying they had reduced meat and 7.6% saying they had reduced dairy and/or eggs. This year we also included an additional answer to the question – “reducing the amount of fish/seafood in my diet” – which 6% of the panel selected. Overall, this means 23% of panelists said they had reduced their consumption of animal products since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Younger respondents were more likely to say they were reducing their consumption of dairy/eggs and fish. For those aged 18-25 (n=163), 11.7% said they were reducing their dairy/egg intake and 9.2% said they were reducing their fish/seafood intake.

It is important to note two things here: in terms of overall percentage these are marginal differences and show that interest in moving towards a vegan diet is remaining steady. Also, this does not consider respondents who may already be vegan or have turned vegan in the last year. This is a separate piece of research that The Vegan Society hopes to publish soon.



## Survey two

In a separate survey, run in conjunction with the first, we spoke to 1,000 people who said they had cut back on their consumption of animal products and asked questions about their motivations, plus present and future buying habits for vegan products.

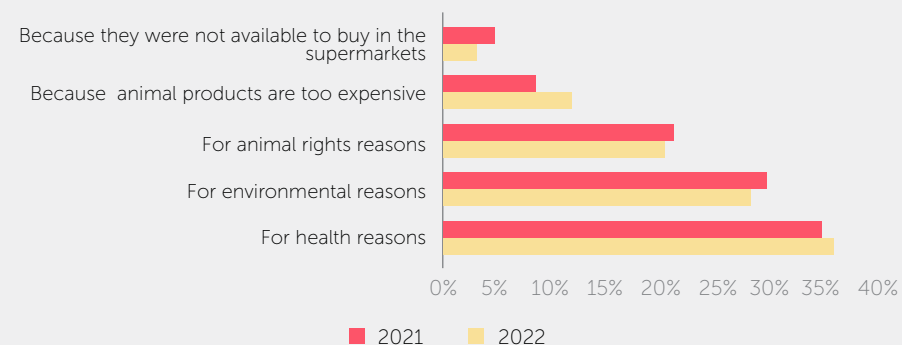
## Audience

**Gender:** Female (83.7%), male (16.3%)

**Age:** 17-24 (18.2%), 25-34 (41.2%), 35-44 (24.6%), 45-54 (9.4%), 55+ (6.6%)

**Home region:** Scotland (6.7%), North West (12.4%), North East (9.8%), Yorkshire & Humber (2.7%), East of England (10.4%), West Midlands (9%), East Midlands (6.4%), Wales (4.9%), Northern Ireland (1.7%), London (13.9%), South East (14.1%), South West (9%)

### What is the primary reason you have reduced the consumption of animal products in your diet?



### Motivations have remained steady between 2021 and 2022.

Among those on the panel, 35.8% said their primary motivation for cutting back on animal products was health reasons, 28.2% said the environment and 20.3% said animal rights. Combined, this means 84.3% of people cutting back on animal products throughout the Covid-19 pandemic are doing so for the same three primary motivations people give in their decision to go vegan.





# LIVE VEGAN FOR LESS

In April 2020, The Vegan Society launched the Live Vegan for Less Campaign – a new initiative to showcase a more cost-effective way of preparing nutritious vegan meals, showing that vegan living can be affordable for all.

In 2022, there was an increase (from 8.4% to 11.9%) in people saying they were cutting back on animal products as they were too expensive. With the cost of living soaring in the UK, this finding is worth noting, but we must be realistic. It is true that some branded vegan products are more expensive than the products they intend to replicate. This is due to several reasons such as the way the food system is subsidized and the cost of scaling up plant-based manufacturing. But things are changing.

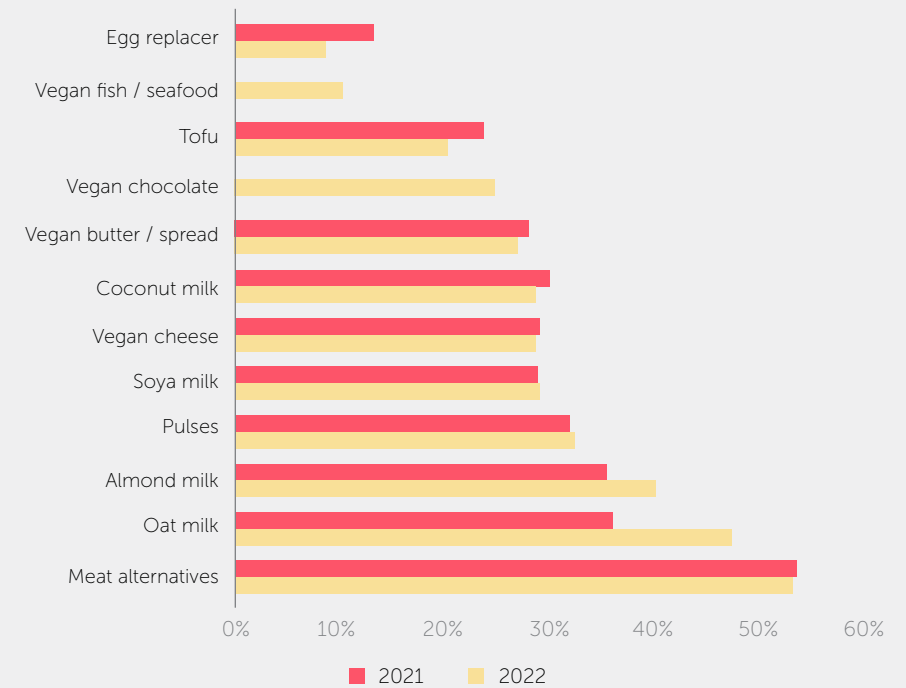
The price difference between vegan products such as plant milk, meat alternatives and vegan cheeses and their non-vegan counterparts is starting to narrow. At the time of writing, Asda sells their own-brand Vegan Trademark certified unsweetened soya milk for £1 per litre.

Eating a well-balanced vegan diet is certainly possible on a budget. Many vegan staples such as pasta, beans, lentils and oats are cost effective, can be bought in bulk, require no energy for storage and have a long shelf life. In fact, nutritious plant proteins are some of the most affordable on the market, as highlighted in our Live Vegan for Less campaign and accompanying [cost comparison research](#).


In 2020, [further research from Veganuary and Kantar](#) found that, on average, plant-based meals eaten at home cost 40% less than meat/fish-based meals and take one-third less time to prepare. The research also found that, on average, vegan households spend 8% less per grocery trip than non-vegan households of a similar size. Plus, just 3.7% of the amount vegan households spend on food and drink goes to meat substitutes.



## Which alternatives to animal products that you wouldn't usually buy have you tried during/since the Covid-19 lockdown?







Throughout March and April 2022, Burger King turned their flagship store in Leicester Square, London, fully vegan.

vegan meal at Burger King's Leicester Square flagship store.

# PLANT PROTEINS

## Meat alternatives

### Recent milestones

- Throughout March and April 2022, [Burger King](#) turned their flagship store in Leicester Square, London, fully vegan. New menu items included a "Vegan Cheeze & Bakon Royale", "Vegan Nugget Burger" and a "Plant-based Double Cheezeburger".
- The vegan fish category has seen an influx of new products in recent years, with vegan salmon fillets, vegan caviar, and canned vegan tuna entering the market.

In this research, 53.4% of reducers (n=533) said that they had tried **meat alternatives** for the first time since the Covid-19 lockdown, and 77.5% of these people (n=413) said they will continue to purchase in the future.

Meat alternatives were particularly popular for those with environmental motivations (n=282): 61.9% (n=174) of this sample had purchased meat alternatives for the first time since lockdown and 83.3% (n=145) of this group will continue to do so in the future.

There were marginal differences between age groups.

These results reflect the results from the 2021 survey, where 53.7% of reducers (n=536) said that they had tried meat alternatives over lockdown, and 78.1% of these (n=418) said they will continue to purchase in the future.

## Pulses

Of the reducers, 32.6% (n=325) said that they had tried **pulses** since lockdown, and 68.6% of these (n=223) said they will continue to purchase in the future.

Pulses were most popular amongst older respondents, with 42.7% of respondents aged 50+ (n=103) trying them for the first time (n=44) and 72.7% of these (n=32) saying they will continue to purchase them in the future.

These results were also similar in 2021, when 32% (n=320) of reducers said that they had tried pulses over lockdown, and 74.2% of these (n=236) said they will continue to purchase in the future.

## Tofu

Our results showed that 20.4% (n=204) of reducers said that they had tried **tofu** since lockdown, and 60.8% of these (n=124) said they will continue to purchase in the future. There were marginal differences between age groups and genders.

These results were also similar in 2021, when 23.5% (n=235) of reducers said that they had tried tofu over lockdown, and 61.3% of these (n=144) said they will continue to purchase in the future.



Tofu has a long history of association with vegan lifestyles. Though some may view tofu as less exciting than some of the newer products on the market, there has also been recent innovation in this category. Over the last few years, The Tofoo Co has tapped into consumer trends and launched a variety of exciting tofu products, such as scrambled tofu, straight to wok products, flavoured tofu (smoked, teriyaki and sriracha) and tofu falafels!

### Vegan fish and seafood alternatives – New to 2022!

In this year's research we included vegan fish and seafood alternatives for the first time.

Our research showed that 13% (n=130) of reducers had tried vegan fish/seafood alternatives for the first time since lockdown and 46.9% said they would continue to purchase in the future.

Vegan fish alternatives were significantly more popular for those who were primarily motivated by animal rights. Of this group (n=203), 21.2% said they had tried vegan fish/seafood alternatives for the first time since lockdown.



Loma Linda vegan tuna,



Sriracha tofu by The Tofoo Co.

**The Tofoo Co has tapped into consumer trends and launched a variety of exciting tofu products, such as scrambled tofu, straight to wok products, flavoured tofu (smoked, teriyaki and sriracha)**



# PLANT MILKS

## Recent milestones

- The popularity of plant milk has continued to hold throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. In March 2022, [research by Ipsos](#) found that 48% of British adults state that they use plant milk in their diet.
- Oat milk in particular has seen popularity explode in recent years, with [The Grocer](#) reporting that sales in the UK increased 49.9% between August 2020 and August 2021.
- Plant milk's popularity is reflected throughout other categories such as cold brew coffee, drinking chocolate/hot chocolate powders, and flavoured drinks.
- Recent entrants to the market include potato milk by Dug and pea milk by Wunda.

In this research, 47.7% (n=476) of reducers had tried **oat milk** for the first time since lockdown, and 66.7% of these (n=317) will continue to purchase it in the future.

Oat milk was the most popular plant milk amongst all age demographics. Millennials in particular were keen to try oat milk, with 53.2% of those aged 25-34 (n=412) trying it for the first time since the start of lockdown and 70.3% of this age group saying they would continue to purchase it in the future.

Oat milk showed the highest increase in interest between 2021 and 2022, highlighting the continued success of the category.



In 2021, **36.3%** (n=363) of people who are consciously reducing their consumption of animal products had tried oat milk for the first time over lockdown, and **67%** of these (n=242) said they will continue to purchase in the future

In 2022, this had increased to **47.7%** trying it for the first time, and **66.7%** saying they will continue to purchase in the future.

## Almond milk

For **almond milk**, 40.3% (n=402) of reducers had tried it for the first time since lockdown, and 62.7% of these (n=252) said they will continue to purchase in the future.

There were marginal differences between age groups.

The 2022 results also show an increase from the previous year. In 2021, 35.6%

Oat milk was the most popular plant milk amongst all age demographics

(n=356) of reducers had tried almond milk for the first time over lockdown, and 65.9% of these (n=234) said they will continue to purchase in the future.

### Soya milk

As for **soya milk**, 29.1% (n=290) of reducers had tried for the first time since lockdown, and 57.6% of these (n=167) said they will continue to purchase in the future.

There were marginal differences between age groups.

These results also reflected those from 2021, where 29% (n=290) of reducers had tried soya milk for the first time over lockdown, and 58.5% of these (n=168) said they would continue to purchase in the future.

Soya milk has been a popular plant milk for centuries and Alpro has been championing it for decades. In 2020, Alpro launched "My Cuppa" – a soya milk that was formulated specifically to help tea drinkers enjoy the perfect cup of tea. Other varieties of soya milk in Alpro's portfolio include a "Growing Up Drink", Barista version and a variety of different flavours.

### Coconut milk

Our research showed that 28.8% (n=287) of reducers had tried **coconut milk** for the first time since lockdown, and 59.9% of these (n=172) said they will continue to purchase in the future.

This showed a slight decrease from the previous year, where 30.2% (n=302) of reducers had tried coconut milk for the first time since lockdown, and 60.3% of these (n=182) said they would continue to purchase in the future.



Coconut Bounty drink and Oat Galaxy drink by Mars Co.







In October, it was announced that Cadburys was launching its first vegan chocolate bar. As part of this, they opened a pop-up store in London to promote the launch and tackle negative attitudes at the same time.

## OTHER DAIRY AND EGG REPLACEMENTS

### Recent milestones

- In January 2022, a vegan Babybel was launched into the UK, with the iconic red wax coating replaced with a green coating made from recycled materials.
- In October, it was announced that Cadburys was launching its first vegan chocolate bar. As part of this, they opened a pop-up store in London to promote the launch and tackle negative attitudes at the same time.
- As in October 2021, [research by GlobalData](#) found that nearly a third of global consumers are open to eating plant-based eggs instead of conventional ones.

### Vegan cheese

Our results showed that 28.9% (n=288) of reducers had tried **vegan cheese** for the first time since lockdown, and 43.1% of these (n=124) said they will continue to purchase in the future.

Vegan cheese was most popular amongst those reducing their consumption of animal products primarily for animal rights. In this group (n=203), 37.9% said they had purchased vegan cheese for the first time since lockdown, and 48.1% said they will continue to purchase it in the future.

The results have remained steady compared to the previous year, where in 2021, 29.3% (n=293) of reducers had tried vegan cheese for the first time since lockdown, and 57.7% (n=169) said they will continue to purchase in the future.

In the last few years, the vegan cheese category has continued to improve taste, texture and nutritional profiles. We look forward to more innovation in the future and more consumers purchasing (and continuing to purchase!) these products.

### Vegan butter

As for **vegan butter**, 27.1% (n=270) of reducers had tried it for the first time since lockdown and 55.2% of these (n=149) said they will continue to purchase in the future.

Vegan butter was most popular amongst those reducing their consumption of animal products primarily for animal rights. In this group (n=203), 34.5% (n=70) said they had purchased vegan butter for the first time since lockdown and 60% will continue to purchase it in the future.

This category has seen less innovation compared to others mentioned throughout this report and is mostly dominated by a few industry giants such as Upfield, which is a global leader in plant-based spreads and margarines. Product launches into the UK market within the last year from Upfield include [Vioblock](#) (under their Violife brand) and Flora Plant B+tter.

The results from this year's research reflect those from 2021, where 28.1% (n=281) of reducers had tried vegan butter for the first time over lockdown and 62.5% of these (n=175) said they will continue to purchase in the future.

## Egg replacer

Our results showed that 8.8% (n=88) of reducers had tried **egg replacer** for the first time since lockdown and 39.8% of these (n=35) said they will continue to purchase in the future.

Historically, to veganise a recipe, eggs have been replaced by different foods such as apple sauce, bananas, flaxseeds, chia seeds or silken tofu. In more recent years, a handful of specific products that intend to directly replace eggs in meals and cooking have launched. One recent example is Crack'd The No-Egg Egg – the UK's first chilled liquid egg replacement that launched in November 2020, with version 2.0 launching in December 2021.

Another example is Oggs, which launched its powdered Aquafaba in 2020 and its liquid Scrambled Oggs in 2022.

Compared to the previous year, there has been a slight reduction in the number of reducers who said they had purchased vegan eggs for the first time (in 2021, 13.1% of reducers had purchased and 53.4% said they will continue to purchase). Considering this is a burgeoning market, this is expected as the category strengthens and grows.

## Vegan chocolate – New to 2022!

**In this year's research we included vegan chocolate for the first time.**

We found that 24.8% (n=248) of reducers said that they had tried vegan chocolate for the first time since lockdown, and 52% (n=129) said they will continue to purchase in the future.

Vegan chocolate was most popular amongst those who were primarily motivated by animal rights. Of this group (n=203), 33.5% (n=68) said they had purchased it for the first time since lockdown and 57.4% (n=39) said they will continue to purchase it in the future.

The vegan chocolate category in the UK has seen tremendous growth in recent years. Mars (owner of many iconic chocolate brands) launched their vegan Galaxy bars in 2020, followed by vegan versions of Bounty and Topic bars in 2021. In June 2021, a vegan Kit Kat launched into Sainsburys. Just weeks later, a vegan crème egg by Mummy Meagz, available all year round, launched into Asda stores nationwide. The introduction of vegan confectionery from household names into supermarkets helps to normalise a category that at present is still niche or unknown to a lot of shoppers.



Galaxy White and Topic Fruit and Nut by Mars Co.



Crack'd plant-based egg replacer.



# CONCLUSION

As we conclude the third wave of this research, we can see that large numbers of people across the UK are continuing to reduce their consumption of meat, dairy, eggs and fish. This is leading to some UK consumers entering the vegan market for the first time and purchasing products that they have previously not purchased before.

Though our panel was primarily motivated by personal health, environmental concerns and animal rights, the increasing cost of living is also having an impact on our shopping and eating habits. We cannot say what the next few months will bring, but we hope to support vegans by providing cost-effective recipes, budgeting tips and helpful blogs through our [Live Vegan for Less campaign](#).

New vegan product launches throughout 2021 and 2022 have reinvigorate the vegan food scene and continue to bring excitement into the industry. With just 0.8% of animal product reducers saying that they had not purchased any vegan alternatives over the last year (down from 1.9% in 2021), there is no better time to be part of the movement.

## Questions?

If you require more information about this report, would like more information about the data, or if you are interested in personalised research for your business or research collaborations, please contact [insights@vegansociety.com](mailto:insights@vegansociety.com).

