

CHANGING DIETS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

May 2021



BACKGROUND

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

Over the last 12 months nearly every aspect of our lives have been affected. From socialising to working, travelling to studying, wherever we turn we have had to adjust. 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 vegan movement.

Research on the public opinion of eating habits over the last year has been abundant. Whilst many of us have been simply trying to get from one day to the next, for many, longer-term “trends” include a focus on personal health and increased home cooking – two areas where an interest in vegan food and drink can arise.

In February 2021, we published an infographic that highlighted the many success stories that the vegan food and drinks industry in the UK had to offer throughout 2020. We found that public interest in vegan food and drink had soared – from takeaways and ready meals to home cooking and Christmas dinners.

Plus, some of the biggest names in the industry (including retailers, brands and manufacturers) made public commitments to upping their vegan offerings.

You can read our full blog, [here](#), and access the full infographic, [here](#).



OUR RESEARCH

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 three layers of respondent quality control: 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 1

Survey one (conducted 9th-11th April 2021) asked 1,000 people from the UK (working age nationally representative) if they had experienced any behaviour changes over lockdown.

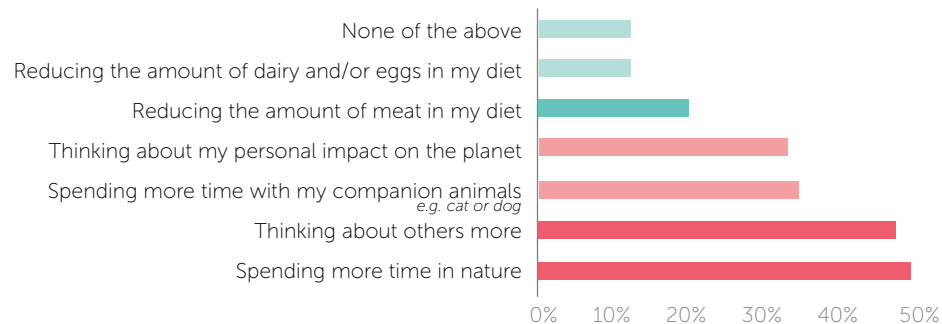
Audience

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%)

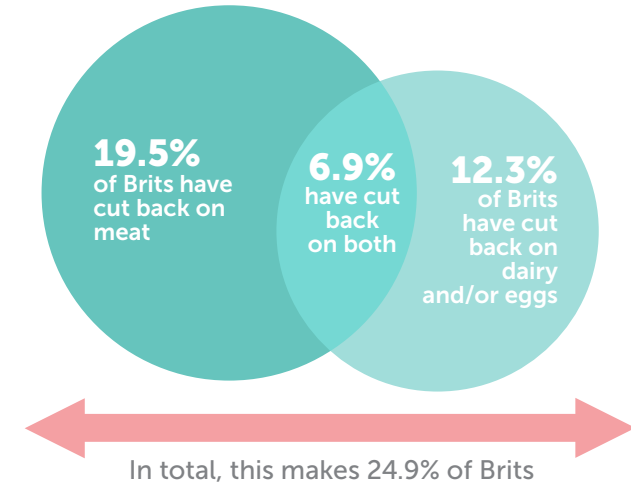
Has the COVID-19 pandemic led to any of the following behaviours?



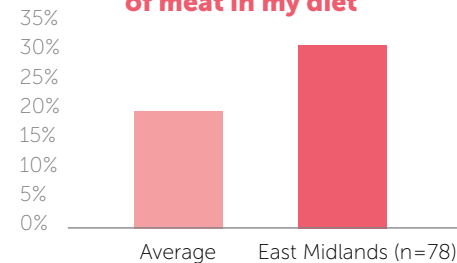
This research found 19.5% of Brits (one in five) saying they had cut back on meat, and 12.3% (one in eight) saying they had cut down on dairy and/or eggs

With 6.9% selecting both options, this resulted in 24.9% of respondents cutting back on some form of animal products over lockdown

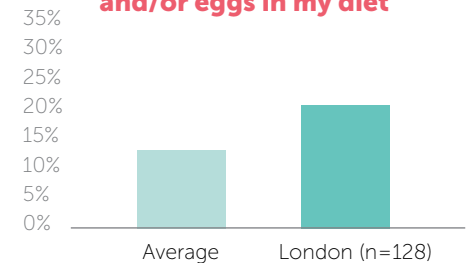
Since the start of UK lockdown...



Reducing the amount of meat in my diet



Reducing the amount of milk and/or eggs in my diet



There was little variance between age groups or genders, however home region did show interesting insights. Those based in the East Midlands were most likely to cut down on meat (29.5% compared to average of 19.5%). And those in London were more likely to cut down on dairy and/or eggs (20.3% compared to average of 12.3%).

SURVEY 2

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 (63.6%), Male (36.4%)

Age: 14-24 (24.6%), 25-34 (24.1%), 35-44 (23.2%), 45-54 (13.5%), 55-82 (14.6%)

Home Region: Scotland (6.7%), North West (9.9%), North East (3.6%), Yorkshire & Humber (6.7%), East of England (7.8%), West Midlands (10.3%), East Midlands (6.6%), Wales (3.4%), Northern Ireland (2%), London (21.8%), South East (13.8%), South West (7.4%)

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

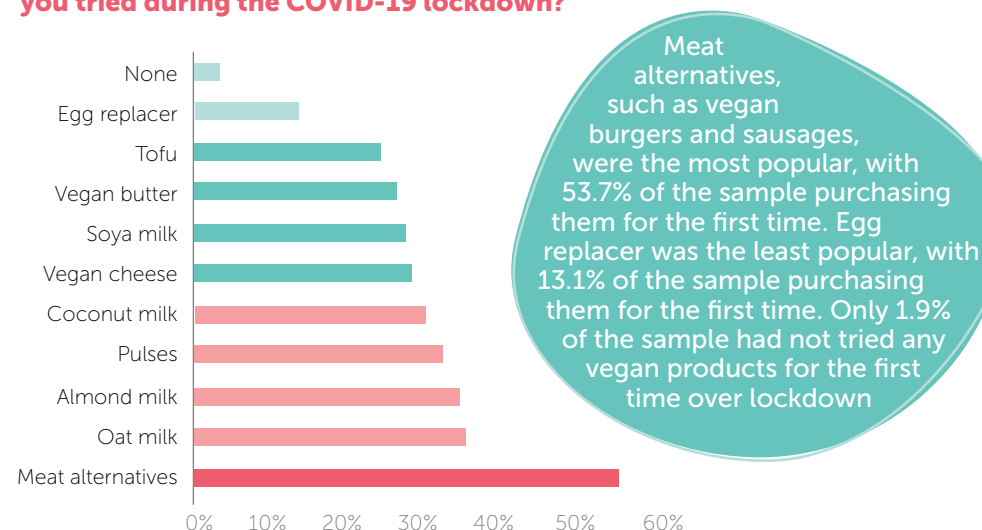


34.8% said their primary motivation for cutting down was health reasons. 29.7% said the environment. 21.1% said animal rights. Combined, this means 85.6% of people cutting back on animal products during lockdown, are doing so for the same three primary motivations people give in their decision to go vegan.

Other motivations included animal products being too expensive (8.4%) or not being available in shops (4.7%)

We then asked respondents which vegan products they had tried for the first time over lockdown, and whether they would continue to buy these products in the future.

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



Meat alternatives, such as vegan burgers and sausages, were the most popular, with 53.7% of the sample purchasing them for the first time. Egg replacer was the least popular, with 13.1% of the sample purchasing them for the first time. Only 1.9% of the sample had not tried any vegan products for the first time over lockdown

Meat alternatives

53.7% of the total sample purchased meat alternatives for the first time during lockdown. Of this group 78.1% (n=418) said they would continue to buy these products in the future.

For those who specifically said they had reduced their meat intake over lockdown (n=811) the results were even better: 58.8% of this sample (n=477) had purchased meat alternatives for the first time over lockdown. 80.3% (n=382) of this group will continue to do so in the future

Meat alternatives were also more popular for older respondents compared to younger, for example: 61.2% of those aged 45+ (n=281) bought meat alternatives for the first time over lockdown (n=172). 80.8% (n=139) of this group will continue to do so in the future.

Finally, meat alternatives were particularly popular for those with environmental motivations (n=296): 60.7% (n=179) of this sample had purchased meat alternatives for the first time over lockdown. 81% (n=145) of this group will continue to do so in the future.

Oat milk

36.7% of the total sample purchased oat milk for the first time during lockdown. Of this group **67%** (n=242) said they would continue to buy oat milk in the future.

For those who specifically said they had reduced their dairy intake over lockdown (n=500) the results were even better: **43.1%** of this sample (n=259) had purchased oat milk for the first time over lockdown. **69%** (n=147) of this group will continue to do so in the future.

Though the age group for Millennials is not categorically defined, oat milk was more popular for those aged 25-35 (n=274): **42%** of this group (n=115) purchased oat milk for the first time over lockdown. From this group **70.4%** (n=81) will continue to buy oat milk in the future.

Almond milk

35.6% of the total sample purchased almond milk for the first time during lockdown. Of this group **65.9%** (n=234) said they would continue to buy almond milk in the future.

Almond milk was particularly popular for those with health motivations (n=347): **40.1%** of this sample (n=139) had purchased almond milk for the first time over lockdown **66.7%** (n=92) of this group will continue to do so in the future.

Though the age group for Gen Z is not categorically defined, almond milk was more popular for those aged 18-25 (n=251): **44%** (n=110) of these respondents purchased almond milk for the first time over lockdown. From this group **68.2%** (n=75) will continue to do so in the future.

Pulses

32% of the total sample purchased pulses, such as lentils and chickpeas, for the first time during lockdown. Of this group **74.2%** (n=236) said they would continue to buy pulses in the future. From the total sample,

this was the highest percentage for future repeat purchase.

For those who specifically said they had reduced their meat intake over lockdown (n=811) the results were even better: **35.1%** of this sample (n=99) had purchased pulses for the first time over lockdown.

80.6% (n=79) of this group will continue to do so in the future.

More support for British grown pulses is a central part of The Vegan Society's [Grow Green](#) campaign due to the benefits they offer to our climate and soils.

Coconut milk

30.2% of the total sample purchased coconut milk for the first time during lockdown. Of this group **60.3%** (n=182) said they would continue to buy coconut milk in the future.

Coconut milk was slightly more popular for male respondents (n=363): **33.6%** (n=122) of males purchased coconut milk for the first time over lockdown. **62.3%** (n=76) of this group will continue to purchase coconut milk in the future.

Vegan cheese

29.3% of the total sample purchased vegan cheese for the first time during lockdown. Of this group **57.7%** (n=169) said they would continue to buy vegan cheese in the future.

For those cutting down on dairy for environmental reasons (n=141), vegan cheese was the most popular dairy alternative to try, even compared to plant milk: **45%** of this sample (n=63) tried it for the first time over lockdown, closely followed by soya milk (**42.9%**), oat milk (**42.9%**) and almond milk (**42.1%**)

Nielsen data released by [Smart Protein Project](#) also revealed that the vegan cheese market in the UK has seen incredible growth recently. Between 2018 and 2020, sales value grew **165%** (from €1.8 to €4.7m), and in the same period sales volume grew **154%** (from 143k Kg/L to 362k Kg/L).

Soya milk

29% of the total sample purchased soya milk for the first time during lockdown.



Of this group **58.5%** (n=169) said they would continue to buy soya milk in the future.

Soya milk was slightly more popular for male respondents (n=363): **33.6%** (n=122) of males purchased soya milk for the first time over lockdown. **60.7%** (n=74) of this group will continue to purchase soya milk in the future.

Vegan butter / Spread

28.1% of the total sample purchased vegan butter / spread for the first time during lockdown. Of this group **62.5%** (n=175) said they would continue to buy vegan butter in the future.

Though the age group for Millennials is not categorically defined, vegan butter was more popular for those aged 25-35 (n=274): **33.2%** (n=91) purchased vegan butter for the first time over lockdown.

For those cutting down on dairy for animal rights reasons (n=104) vegan butter was more popular: **43.3%** (n=45) of this group tried vegan butter for the first time over lockdown.

Tofu

23.5% of the total sample purchased tofu for the first time during lockdown. Of this group **61.3%** (n=144) said they would continue to buy tofu in the future.

Tofu was particularly popular for those with environmental motivations (n=296): **26.1%** (n=77) of this group purchased tofu for the first time over lockdown. **74%** (n=57) will continue to purchase tofu in the future.

UK data released by Kantar Worldpanel also found that in the 12 weeks leading to June, sales of tofu increased **81.7%**.

Egg replacer

13.1% of the total sample purchased vegan egg replacer for the first time during lockdown. Of this group **53.5%** (n=70) said they would continue to buy egg replacer in the future.

For those who specifically said they

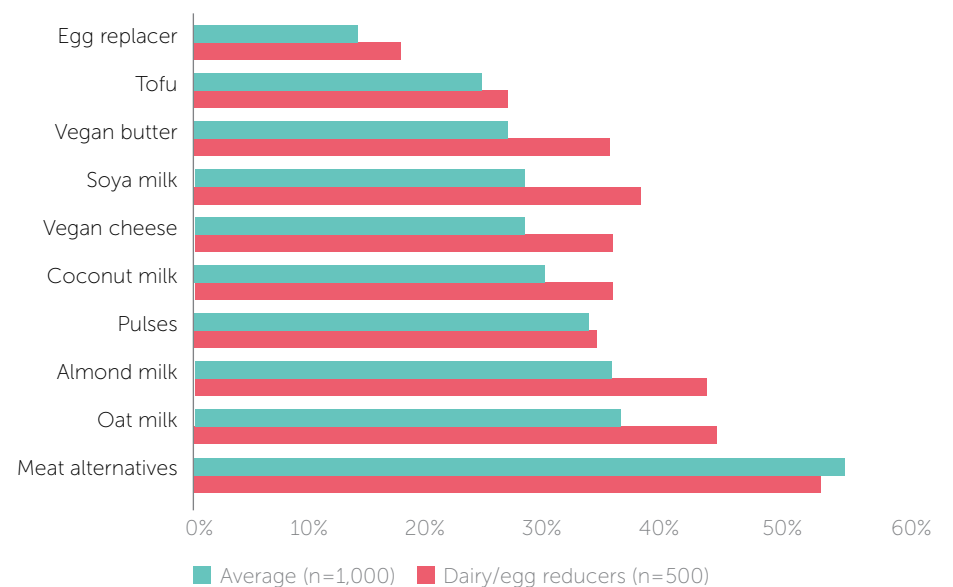
had reduced their dairy and/or egg intake over lockdown (n=500) the results were even better: **19%** of this sample (n=95) had purchased egg replacer for the first time over lockdown. **63.2%** (n=60) of this group will continue to do so in the future.

In November 2020, the UK's first vegan liquid egg replacer – [Crackd](#) – was launched. In research we collaborated on in January 2021, **98%** of people surveyed were willing to try Crackd (and most of them were meat eaters!).

DAIRY/EGG REDUCERS

Unsurprisingly, those who had specifically said they were cutting down on dairy and/or egg were particularly keen to try the dairy and egg alternatives.

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



CONCLUSION

Large numbers of people across the UK are reducing their consumption of animal products – including meat, dairy and eggs – primarily for health reasons, but also for environmental reasons and animal rights.

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.

Only 1.9% of animal product reducers had not purchased any vegan alternatives over the last year.

Whilst only one product category (meat alternatives) scored a majority for purchase rate, when looking at whether first time buyers would purchase these products again in the future, every single product category scored a majority percentage.

The highest overall percentage for future purchase rate was for pulses – a product category which The Vegan Society directly advocates for in the Grow Green campaign.

The lowest percentage for current and future purchase rates was for vegan egg replacers – with only a few products in the UK market, this is expected, and we look forward to seeing how this category will continue to develop.



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.

