

A close-up photograph of a child's hand holding several fresh, bright orange carrots with green leafy tops. The child is wearing a textured, mustard-colored sweater. The background is softly blurred, showing more of the sweater and the carrots.

VEGAN FOOD FOR CHILDREN

*Parents show support for
plant-based provisions*

2022

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing global momentum around veganism and plant-based diets shows no signs of slowing down. With increasing acceptance, accessibility and uptake amongst the public, it is inevitable that our changing lifestyles and philosophies can leave a lasting positive impact on the next generation.

In January 2022, Veganuary reported that a record breaking 629,000 had taken part in their global pledge to commit to veganism for one month.

Young people are often considered to be leading the vegan movement forward. Teenagers and young adults are less fixed in their shopping and eating habits, and may be more open to trying new dishes and products. The younger generation are also more aware of the global climate crisis, which is vitally important as they are the people who will feel its impact the most. Sadly, this awareness has also produced increased negative emotions within young people, sometimes dubbed "eco-anxiety". In [September 2021](#), 10,000 people aged 16-25 in 10 countries were surveyed on how they felt about climate change and government responses to it. The results found that most respondents felt either "extremely" or "very" worried about climate change, with the top emotions being "sad", "afraid", "anxious", "angry" and "powerless".

Within the complexities of this topic, there is always a reason to be hopeful. In September 2021, [BBC Good Food](#) surveyed 1,000 children in the UK aged 5-16 and found that:

- 8% of children said that they followed a vegan diet
- A further 15% said that they would like to follow a vegan diet
- 13% of children said that they followed a vegetarian diet
- A further 21% said that they would like to follow a vegetarian diet

Further [research by YouGov](#) from 2019 found that 29% of 11–18-year-old meat eaters want to reduce their meat consumption, but they are not finding this easy to do. Children said that some of the primary barriers were not enough plant-based options in canteens and too much advertising for fast food that contained meat. Also in 2019, research commissioned by Linda McCartney Foods found that 70% of British children want to see more meat-free meals on their school menu. The recent success of the vegan movement is also evidenced by [research by YouGov](#) (2020), who found that most parents and guardians (67%) would be supportive of their child going vegan, and, there has been some recent [support from local councils and schools](#) to facilitate this uptake.

Children and young people have a lot on their plates, and thankfully, despite this, there is clearly a willingness and openness to dietary change. Eating a vegan diet is one of the most effective ways that we as individuals can help to mitigate the climate crisis, yet there is often a reluctance from decision-makers to prioritise this as a solution.

Whether it is for environmental, ethical or health-based reasons, The Vegan Society wishes to support people of all ages on their vegan journey through evidence-based research, including [nutritional guidance](#). In the following research, we asked 500 parents and guardians their thoughts on current vegan food provisions for children, and how much they support the uptake of plant-based diets in schools. The results are hugely promising, and just the start of the momentum needed to pursue more work in this area.

The younger generation are more aware of the global climate crisis, which is vitally important as they are the people who will feel its impact the most.



INSPIRING YOUNG PEOPLE

OMARI MCQUEEN

became the youngest award-winning vegan chef in the UK aged 12, and founder of vegan food company Dipalicious.

GRETA THUNBERG

high profile activist who started protesting about climate change aged 15.

GENESIS BUTLER

vegan activist, one of the youngest people to give a TEDx Talk (at just age 10), and founder of Youth Climate Save.

14% of the panel live with vegan children.

7.6% said that some of their children were vegetarian.

THE PANEL

Between 19th and 22nd November 2021, The Vegan Society used Attest to survey 500 parents and guardians with children aged 15 or younger.

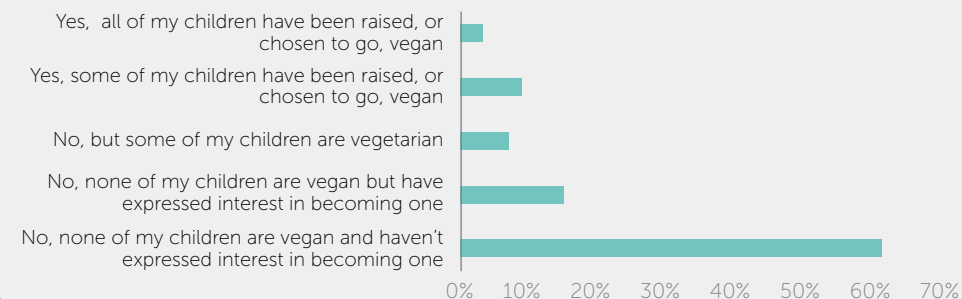
Demographics

Age: 18-30 (26.8%), 31-40 (47.8%), 41-62 (25.2%)

Gender: Female (76.6%) and male (23.4%)

Home region: East Midlands (6%), East of England (13%), London (16.6%), North East (9.4%), North West (8%), Northern Ireland (1.8%), Scotland (6.2%), South East (12.4%), South West (10%), Wales (5.2%), West Midlands (8.8%), Yorkshire & Humber (2.6%).

Thinking specifically about the children aged 15 or younger in your household, do any of them stick to a vegan diet?



The first question asked about the current diets of the panelists children. Most of the panel (61.8%) said that their children were not vegan and that they had not expressed an interest in becoming vegan. A fair percentage (15.7%) said that though their children were not currently vegan, they had expressed an interest in veganism. 10% of the panel said that some of their children had either been raised or decided to go vegan, and a further 4% said that all their children had either been raised or decided to go vegan. This means that 14% of the panel live with vegan children. Finally, 7.6% said that some of their children were vegetarian.

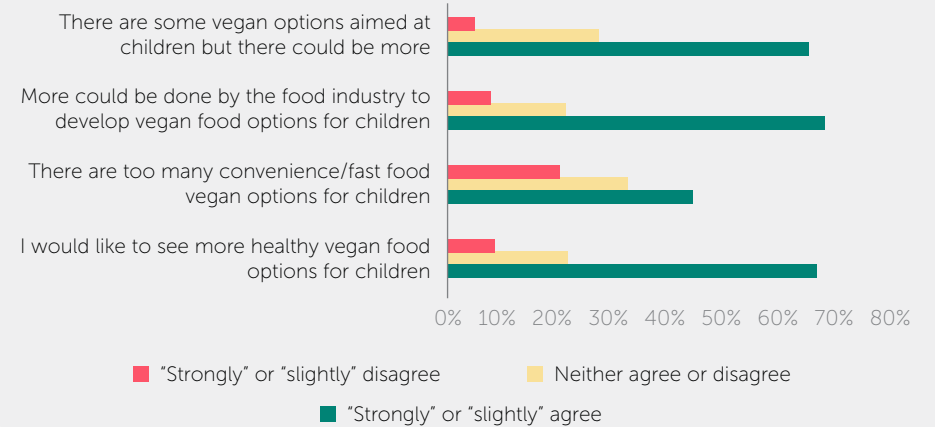
Overall, these results are promising, and are generally in line with the previously mentioned research by BBC Good Food.



CURRENT VEGAN FOOD OPTIONS FOR CHILDREN

We then asked the panel for their opinions on the current vegan food options aimed at children. There were some levels of uncertainty from respondents, but the majority showed support for more vegan innovation.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



“There are some vegan options aimed at children but there could be more.”

65.1% of the panel said that they either “strongly” or “slightly” agreed with the above statement.

“More could be done by the food industry to develop vegan food options for children.”

68.3% of the panel said that they either “strongly” or “slightly” agreed with the above statement (29.6% said strongly support).

“There are too many convenience/fast food vegan options for children”

44.9% of the panel said that they either “strongly” or “slightly” agreed with the above statement.

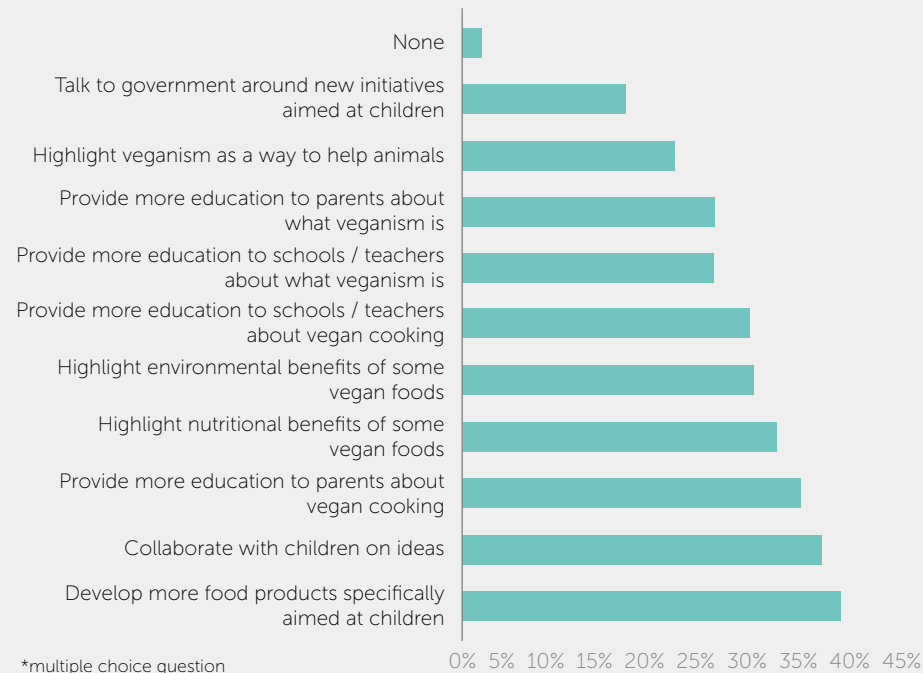
“I would like to see more healthy vegan food options for children”

66.9% of the panel said that they either “strongly” or “slightly” agreed with the above statement (31.2% said strongly support).

Very few people said “strongly disagree” for any option.

Following this, we asked parents and guardians how they thought the food industry could encourage children to eat more vegan food.

How do you think the food industry could encourage children to eat more vegan food?*



The most popular option, selected by 39.1% of parents and guardians, was to develop more vegan food products specifically aimed at children.

Marketing food towards children can be a complex topic, and it is not the intention of this report to add further to this debate. The Vegan Society understands that convenience, taste and price are three of the most important factors when food shopping.

The Vegan Society's nutrition team state that "some vegan convenience foods such as [plant-based meats](#), tend to be lower in saturated fat and higher in fibre, fitting a better nutrient profile than animal-derived alternatives. Some vegan convenience foods do however contain a lot of salt, which is linked to high blood pressure. If children are eating these types of foods often, it is a good idea for parents to [check food labels](#) as a guide to making healthier choices".

In recent years, food businesses have started to develop a wider range of vegan products aimed at children. One example of this comes from 2018, when Nush launched a range of Frube-style vegan yoghurts created from almond milk. The snacks make a convenient choice for both adults-on-the-go and children's lunchboxes.

Another example is Strong Roots, who launched their Little Roots children's frozen

It is a good idea for parents to check food labels as a guide to making healthier choices.



line in April 2020, inspired by the founder struggling to find options for his own child. The brand is focused on vegetables and high-fibre content.

Lastly, in April 2021, Quorn launched their vegan Dinosaur shaped nuggets – Roarsomes. The launch is thought to be inspired by [market research](#) that found more than 50% of 7-15-year-olds eat chicken nuggets every fortnight.

The second most popular option was for food businesses to collaborate with children on ideas, with 37.1% of the panel selecting this. At present, we are unaware of any examples of this in the vegan market, so it could be an option for businesses to explore in the future.

35% of the panel said that the food industry could provide more education to parents about vegan cooking. Plus, 26.4% said that they would support the food industry providing more education to parents about veganism in general. Involving regulated experts like dietitians can help to ensure that messaging is evidence-based and promotes health and good nutrition.

Highlighting the nutritional (32.9%) and environmental (30.6%) benefits of some vegan foods also scored highly amongst the panel, whereas highlighting veganism as a way to help animals scored lower (23.3%).

More education for schools and teachers about vegan cooking (30.4%) and veganism in general (26.6%) were also favoured by the panel. Luckily for schools in the UK, The Vegan Society has recently appointed an Education Officer to provide CPD accredited, whole staff training sessions on vegan inclusion. This training aims to show educators why a family or student may have chosen to identify as such and what they can do to become vegan-inclusive in their everyday practice. Plus, The Vegan Society's [Catering for Everyone](#) campaign aims to help ensure that good vegan food is on every school menu by providing information for educators, caterers and families. ProVeg UK also run a programme called [School Plates](#), where they offer a range of menu support services to local authorities and schools, including plant-based chef training workshops.

Talking to government around new initiatives aimed at children was selected by 18.1% of the panel. Though this was the least popular of the options given, this could also be down to a lack of awareness of how government can influence people in their dietary choices.

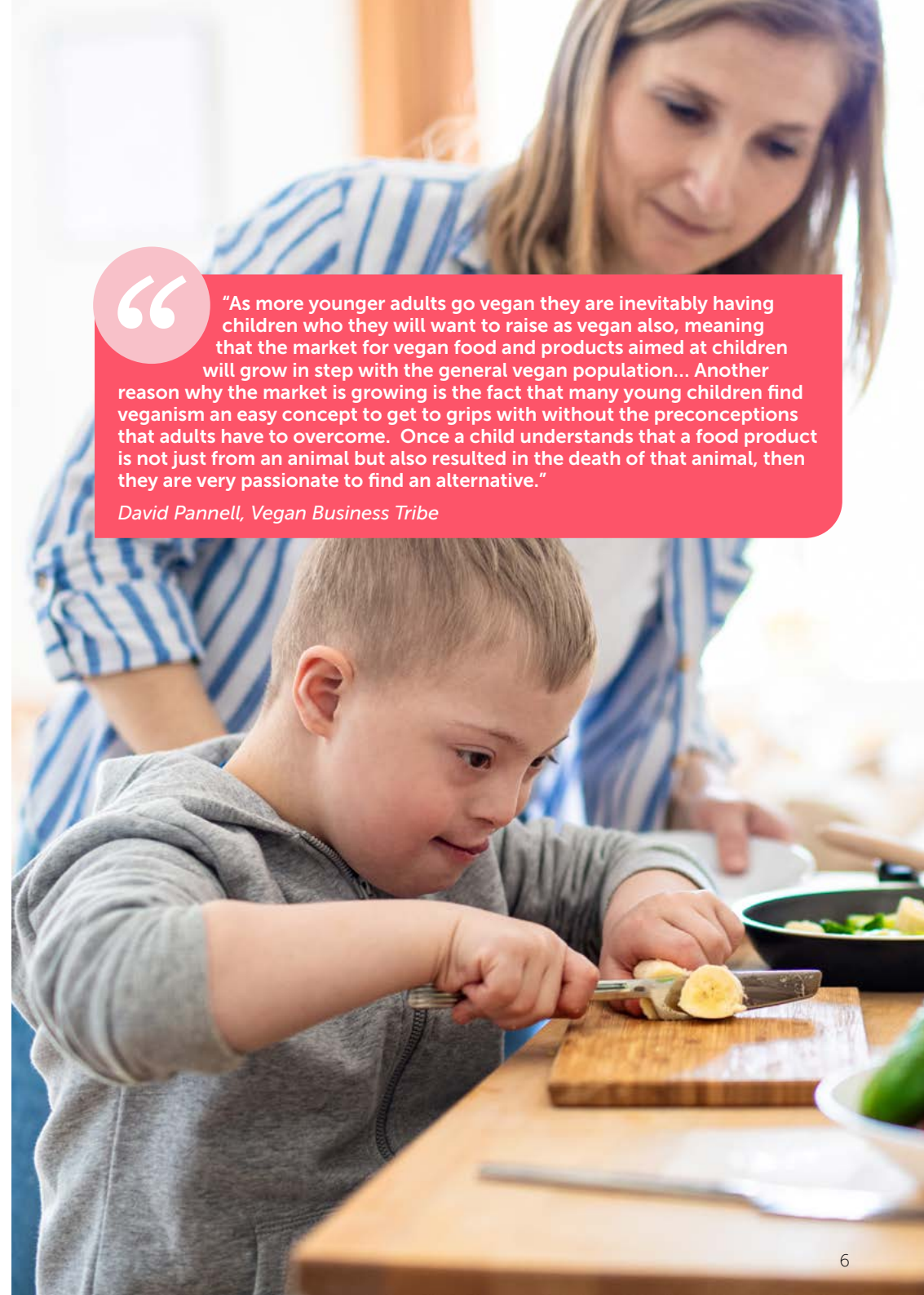


Strong Roots Spinach Bites

“

“As more younger adults go vegan they are inevitably having children who they will want to raise as vegan also, meaning that the market for vegan food and products aimed at children will grow in step with the general vegan population... Another reason why the market is growing is the fact that many young children find veganism an easy concept to get to grips with without the preconceptions that adults have to overcome. Once a child understands that a food product is not just from an animal but also resulted in the death of that animal, then they are very passionate to find an alternative.”

David Pannell, Vegan Business Tribe





VEGAN RIGHTS

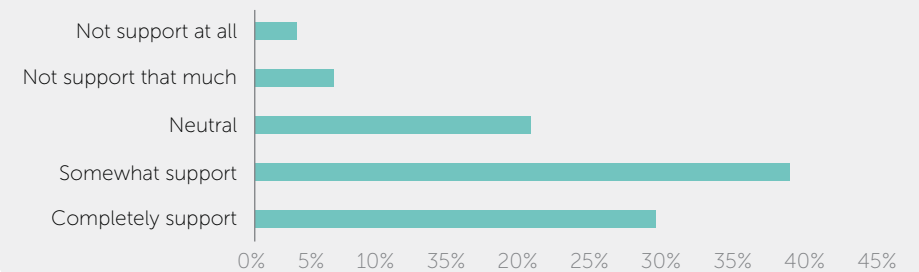
Veganism has been found to come within the scope of international human rights provisions and vegans in the UK are protected under human rights and equality law. This means that schools have an obligation to ensure that they do not interfere with a vegan's right to freedom of conscience, and a responsibility under the Equality Act 2010 to avoid any discrimination on the grounds of veganism.

VEGAN FOOD IN SCHOOLS

Schools play a crucial role in setting healthy eating habits for children from an early age – ensuring vegan options in public sector institutions, such as schools for example, can promote inclusivity, sustainability, and good nutrition. It can also normalise an ethical food culture which does not rely on animals, but embraces tasty protein-packed and fibre-rich vegan staples such as lentils, chickpeas and beans. This is all good news for parents, as data from the [National Diet and Nutrition Survey](#) suggests that UK children are not eating enough fibre. Plus, foods such as lentils, chickpeas and beans are cost-effective as they can be bought in bulk, have a long shelf life, and are easy to store as they do not require refrigeration.

In this section of the survey, we asked the panel the extent they would support schools increasing the amount nutritionally balanced vegan options on offer to children, and what types of meals they would like to see.

To what extent would you support schools increasing the amount of nutritionally balanced vegan / plant-based food options on offer to children?



The majority (68.6%) of parents and guardians sampled said that they either "completely" (29.7%) or "somewhat" (38.9%) support schools increasing the number of vegan options on offer to children. 20.8% of the panel were neutral, and just 10.6% said that they did not support it. Following this, we gave parents and guardians an open text box to explain why they would support schools offering more vegan options.

Around a third of the answers mentioned that vegan foods can be healthy for children. Other key topics were around the cost effectiveness and environmental benefits of vegan meals, giving children more options so they can make their own choice, and using meals as a way to educate children about their food choices. Interesting quotes were numerous, and included:

"It provides well balanced meals for children, encourages creativity with cooking and ingredients, and helps inform them of different lifestyle choices"

"I myself am vegan and 2 of my children have allergies, so often have vegan food. It would be great if they had the choice in school"

"We need to teach our children more about the planet we are living in and we have a responsibility to protect it"

"Better for the environment, healthier, can be tastier, can be a nice alternative to other meals, sometimes you can't taste the difference so why not mix it up a bit!"

"It would widen their experience in early years and drive a healthier lifestyle"

"Its great for schools to reduce consumption of meat. Would allow schools to provide nutritionally dense meals at a lower cost. Would allow children to try new foods they may not try at home"

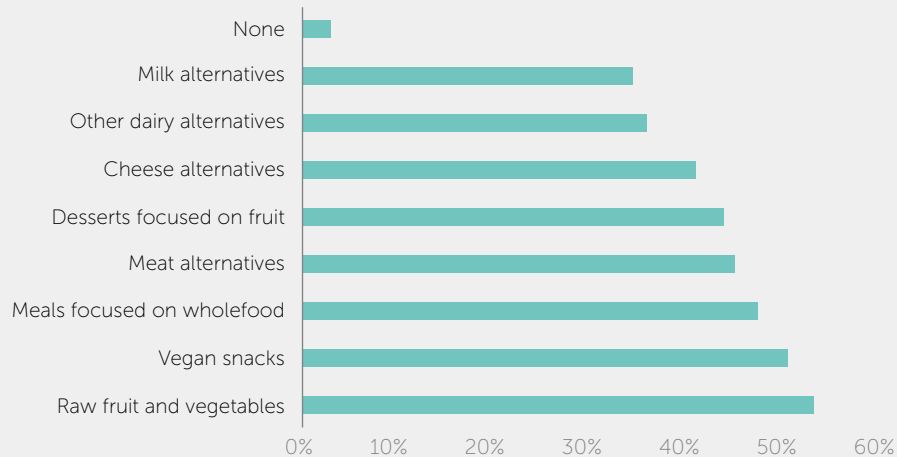
"I wish I had more options and variety when I was at school, I want my children to eat a wider variety of different foods and would prefer for them to eat healthier, more plant-based options"

"Because I want what's best for the environment, and if it comes with a benefit to my child there is nothing I can complain about"

"I think children are becoming more aware of environmental issues and they should be given the option to choose vegan foods at school so they can contribute to helping the environment"

We then asked the panelists which vegan foods they would like to see schools offering.

What types of vegan foods would you support schools offering in their canteens?*



Raw fruit and vegetables was the most popular option, with 53.3% of panellist selecting it. Many younger children receive fruit and vegetables under the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme, but these results show that there is an interest from parents and guardians in this scheme expanding to older children as well.

More vegan snacks such as fruit bars and vegetable crisps were selected by 51.1% of the panel.

Nearly half of the panel (48.3%) said that they would support more vegan meals focused on wholefoods, such as spaghetti bolognese made from lentils.

THE SCHOOL FRUIT AND VEGETABLE SCHEME

A government funded programme that entitles every child in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2, in state-funded schools, a piece of fruit or vegetable each school day. This was launched in 2004, following concern that not enough children were eating fruit and vegetables on a regular basis. There are over 2 million children on the scheme, providing 450 million pieces of fruit or vegetables each year.

Offering more meat alternatives (e.g., vegan burgers) to children also scored well amongst the panel (45.7%). The meat alternative sector has seen tremendous innovation in the last few years, with nutritional content and taste profiles improving in parallel to costs to consumers decreasing. Support from parents shows an opportunity for vegan brands and businesses. With support from nutrition experts like dietitians, brands can ensure that the nutritional profiles of their products stand out from the crowd due to higher protein and fibre contents and lower amounts of added salt, sugar and fat.

More desserts focused on fruit, such as apple crumble, were selected by 44.3% of the panel. Desserts can be easier to "veganise" than some might think; there are many cost-effective vegan margarines and spreads on the market, and eggs can be replaced with a variety of easy-to-find ingredients such as bananas or apple sauce. Plus, the market for egg replacements has been growing steadily over the last few years.

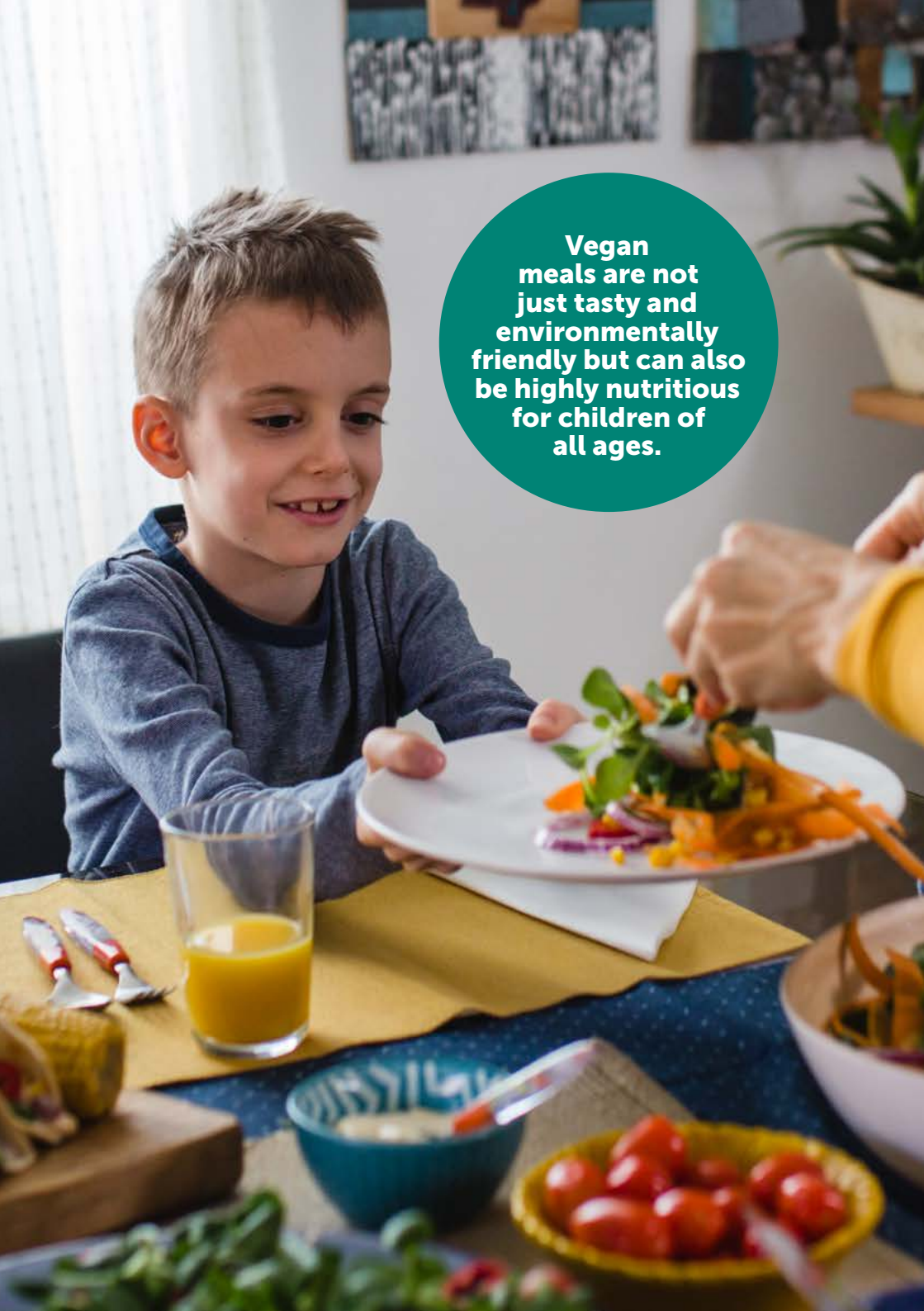
More cheese alternatives (41.6%) and other dairy alternatives (36.2%) for children were also popular amongst the panel.

Finally, though offering milk alternatives was the least popular option, it was still selected by a large percentage of the total panel (35.1%).

The Vegan Society's [Play Fair with Plant Milk](#) campaign highlights the importance of providing a fortified milk alternative in promoting balanced nutrition.

Just 3.8% of the panel selected "None".





Vegan meals are not just tasty and environmentally friendly but can also be highly nutritious for children of all ages.

CONCLUSIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

Key takeaways for parents and guardians

- The Vegan Society work with the British Dietetic Association “to show that it is possible to follow well-planned, vegan-friendly diets that can support healthy living in people of all ages”. Vegan meals are not just tasty and environmentally friendly but can also be highly nutritious for children of all ages.
- “Eco-anxiety” refers to the negative feelings than people may experience regarding climate change – children and young people have reported feeling very affected by this. Changing what we eat is one of the most effective ways to reduce our climate footprint. The Committee for Climate Change have directly stated that the ‘public sector should take a strong lead by providing plant-based options in schools and hospitals’ to encourage nutritious and sustainable diets, and the International Panel on Climate Change have explicitly highlighted that a vegan diet has the highest GHG mitigation potential.
- 36% of children aged 5-16 in the UK would like to follow a meat-free diet, and 15% would like to follow a fully vegan diet, but they are finding it difficult to do so. School canteens are a great place to start to help normalise the uptake of more plant-based meals, plus, food brands have begun to produce specific products aimed at children that are convenient for lunch boxes. By working with nutrition experts like dietitians, organisations can make positive contributions to public health by helping children in the UK to eat more fruit, vegetables and fibre and less added saturated fat, salt and sugar.

Key takeaways for food developers

- Research in 2021 by BBC Good Food found that 21% of children aged 5-16 in the UK currently follow a meat-free diet (8% are vegan, 13% are vegetarian). A further 36% of children would like to follow a meat-free diet (15% would like to be vegan and 21% would like to be vegetarian), but they are finding it difficult to do so.
- Research in 2020 by YouGov found that 67% of parents would support their child going vegan.
- In 2021 research by The Vegan Society, 65.1% of parents and guardians in the UK (of children aged 15 or younger) agreed with the statement that “there are some vegan options aimed at children but there could be more”.
- In the same research, 68.3% of parents and guardians in the UK agreed with the statement that “more could be done by the food industry to develop vegan food options for children”.
- In the same research, 44.9% agreed with the statement that “there are too many convenience / fast food vegan options for children”, and 66.9% said agreed with “I would like to see more healthy vegan food options for children”.

- Recent successes in the vegan food market for children include the Little Roots line by Strong Roots and dinosaur shaped “Roarsomes” from Quorn.
- When asked what the food industry could do to encourage children to eat more vegan food, some of the most popular choices were; to develop more products specifically aimed at children (39.3%), collaborate with children on ideas (37.2%) and to highlight the nutritional (32.8%) and environmental (30.8%) benefits of some vegan foods.
- Most parents and guardians support more vegan foods in school canteens. In 2021, research by The Vegan Society found that:
 - 51% said that they would support more vegan snacks on offer to children,
 - 45.8% support meat alternatives in school canteens,
 - 41.6% support cheese alternatives,
 - 35.1% support milk alternatives,
 - 36.1% support other dairy alternatives (such as yoghurts, custard etc.)

All of the above shows a huge support from parents and potential collaboration between families, businesses, schools and registered nutritional professionals.

Key takeaways for schools

- School Foods Standards mandate a daily milk requirement, obligating the provision of dairy milk to schoolchildren every day. Whilst plant-based milk is recognised as a ‘healthy drink’ within the standards, there is no obligation for schools to provide fortified non-dairy plant-milk. Schools however do have a duty under law to make reasonable changes. Necessary steps should be taken to accommodate the needs of vegans to prevent discrimination, and public sector policies and practices must be developed with vegans in mind to comply with the public sector equality duty.
- Providing vegan meals in school canteens can promote inclusivity, sustainability, and good nutrition, and normalises an ethical food culture which does not rely on animals. It can also help to reduce a school’s environmental footprint.
- In 2019, research found that 70% of children aged 8-16 want to see more vegan and vegetarian meals on their school menu. 44% said this was for fear for the environment, which is a growing concern for younger generations.
 - In 2021 research by The Vegan Society, 68.6% of parents and guardians said that they support schools increasing the number of vegan options on offer to children. 51% said they would support more vegan snacks in canteens, 48.4% support vegan meals based on wholefoods, 45.8% support meat alternatives, 41.6% support cheese alternatives and 35.1% support milk alternatives.



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.