

In meat-loving South Africa, climate concerns whet appetite for veggie burgers

By [Tim Cocks](#)

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In South Africa, a country where the all-day 'braai' is a national pastime, plant-based substitutes are making surprising inroads despite a deep cultural love of meat and hostility from the regulator.



Source: Reuters/Siphiwe Sibeko

That could be heartening for climate scientists, who say shifting diets from emissions-heavy meat and dairy towards more plant-based foods is vital to the fight against climate change.

Plant-based meat substitutes are growing by 6.5% a year and sales are expected to reach \$561m by 2023, according to Research and Markets - more than half Africa's share of a global market forecast to hit \$162bn by 2030.

That is still pretty niche - South Africans spent \$15bn on meat products in 2018 and is now the world's ninth-biggest per capita consumer of beef.

But the popularity of veggie alternatives would have been unthinkable even a decade ago and the market is outstripping forecast growth for meat. The shift has so unnerved South Africa's processed meat industry that in June it lobbied for - and got - [a government ban](#) on plant-based products using words like 'nugget', 'sausage' or 'burger' on packaging.



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The agriculture department at the time said the move was aimed at preventing consumer confusion. A spokesperson did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Food producers remain undeterred.

At meat processor Feinschmecker, staff pour powdered soy and pea protein into vats and rehydrate them to make its plant-based 'deli slice' - called so in anticipation of a ban on labelling it 'ham'.

"A lot of it's driven by flexitarianism. People who want to make a bit of an effort to eat less meat," Alistair Hayward, Feinschmecker managing director, told *Reuters*.

Top food producer Tiger Brands bought a stake in meat-substitute start-up Herbivore in March, while supermarkets like Woolworths have introduced their own ranges. Clearly, ethical food choices are a luxury of the relatively well-to-do - a quarter of South Africans struggle to put any food on the table.



Tiger Brands VC fund invests in SA plant-based food producer Herbivore

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Consumer climate

Evidence is accumulating that curbing consumption of meat and dairy - which the latest estimates put at around a fifth of all emissions - is key to meeting UN climate goals.

A paper in *Science* in February said ending animal agriculture could stabilise greenhouse gas levels for 30 years and offset 68% of CO2 emissions this century; another in 2018 showed switching the world to a purely plant-based diet could slash food-related emissions - which are about 30% of the total - by nearly half.

Yet forgoing cheeseburgers is not something governments, many of which dole out billions of dollars to livestock farmers, are likely to propose at this month's climate talks in Egypt.



Steers owner buys majority stake in Lexi's Healthy Eatery

30 Mar 2022



Lowering animal consumption, then, may boil down to consumers - like Angie Raphalalani, 57. She gave up meat over climate concerns and her diabetes.

"My immediate family ... were shocked," she said, after lunching at plant-based restaurant Lexi's Healthy Eatery in Johannesburg. "But probably they'll follow me. I'm quite influential in their lives."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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