

Innovation on shelf as plant-based food market grows

From conscientious animal lovers to health-conscious flexitarians, vegan food is gaining traction both locally and globally. Ongoing innovation at listed food group Libstar means more vegan options are available for South Africans adopting this lifestyle trend.



Sales of plant-based food products are growing across the world, jumping 31.3% between 2017 and 2019 in the United States alone, [according to Forbes](#). Veganism is not a fad, and it's also not just for 'tree-huggers' or environmental extremists.

While the South African Vegan Society lists environmental, ethical and health reasons for following a plant-based diet, the fact is that most people who eat vegan burgers (95% in the US, according to [Market Watch](#)) aren't even vegan or vegetarian. In South Africa, many are either opting for a more balanced diet or simply enjoying a Meatless Monday.

South Africa had the eighth-highest number of sign-ups to the global Veganuary campaign in January 2020, highlighting the country's growing vegan scene.

"I've been vegan for eight years, and back then I was the only vegan I knew," says Ilse de Lange, of the South African Vegan Society's East London Chapter. "Now, even in a small town like East London, there are loads of vegan restaurants and retail options. I used to have to explain what veganism was, but now most people are familiar with the term – and many are trying it out themselves!"

De Lange says that while many people choose a vegan diet for ethical or environmental reasons, there are health benefits to it, too. “Ethics tends to be the most defensible argument, but there’s also an economic argument for adopting a plant-based diet, if you do it right.”



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Growing variety

Category growth in the meat-alternative and plant-based market has exploded globally, according to Samantha McChesney, brand manager at Denny Mushrooms, which is a member of the Libstar group. “Denny has been watching these trends very closely and has been working on perfecting our new product range which launched in May 2020.” Denny’s plant-based range includes five product lines: plant-based patties, sausages and mince, as well as shiitake mushroom crisps and mushroom biltong.

Cape Herb & Spice, meanwhile, has responded to the plant-based trend by developing a vegetable seasoning. “We’re all about cooking trends, and this was definitely a response to the vegan and vegetarian trend,” says Cape Herb & Spice marketing manager Shelley Barnard. “We also recently launched a range of spices for a private label customer, which includes a vegan-friendly falafel spice. While some of our products may be used as seasoning on animal protein, none contain any animal products.”

Rialto Foods recently introduced strictly plant-based pasta sauces to its range. “The inspiration was twofold,” says Janice Carthew, product development manager at Rialto Foods. “One was the obvious trend for more plant-based products; and the other was that we needed to differentiate our offering. In a sea of tomato-based pasta sauces, how could we add something different, while delving more into the health and plant-based arena and ensuring fantastic flavour and quality delivery?”

The answer, according to Carthew, is ensuring that the vegetables are the hero. “We added wonderful colours of green and orange to the mix with a vegetarian spinach and ricotta sauce, as well as a butternut and sage sauce. In the vegan space, we have a mushroom stir-through sauce; a cheese sauce using vegan cheese combined with cauliflower, sweet potato and butternut to enhance the vegetable content; and a vegan bolognese using soya as a meat replacement.”



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Hayley Richardson 7 Sep 2020



Growing the market

Rialto has other vegan-themed innovations in the pipeline, including a branded range of vegan tuna and vegan meals; and Denny is continuously refining its plant-based range. Rialto Foods’ vegan range is exclusive to Woolworths stores, while Denny’s plant-based products are available at Spar stores nationwide, and Checkers in the Western Cape. Cape Herb & Spice’s vegetable seasoning is available at selected retailers.

With more and more vegan products on the shelves of leading SA retailers, vegan, vegetarian and flexitarian South Africans keen to sample meat-alternatives now have more choice.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>