



# Influence Finder

Protein Diversification Category

March 2021

# What is an Influence Finder?

OWL Research Partner's Influence Finder research methodology identifies and explains the channels of influence - including conversation drivers, platforms and voices – that are shaping a market or category.

The following sample report evaluates channels of influence within the protein diversification market.

# Project Objectives & Approach

Protein Diversification encompasses ongoing efforts to reduce the consumption of traditional factory farmed meat through the development of alternative protein sources.

The protein diversification market seeks to sustain awareness and interest across an increasingly diverse set of audiences, from health-conscious meat eaters to dedicated vegans. However, given the market complexity, brand players in this space must have a strong understanding of the influence landscape to effectively engage in the protein diversification conversation.

With this context in mind, this report explores the protein diversification category via the following sections:

**Conversation Drivers:** What are the topics or themes appearing in conversations about protein diversification?

**Platforms:** Where do conversations about this market appear most frequently or with the greatest depth?

**Influential Voices:** What type of influencers have an impact on the conversation? Are specific influencers leading the conversation?

# Influence Opportunities

Brands looking to influence and lead discussions of protein diversification can effectively engage with the current state of the market and media narrative via the following:

**Highlight Consumer Benefits to Drive Conversations.** Protein diversification aims to reduce reliance on intensive animal production that harms the environment. However, the negative impacts of factory farming and animal agriculture are already well-established and understood. As attention shifts away from defining the problem to highlighting solutions, brand players can follow suit, promoting wide-spread protein diversification and sustaining category momentum. Health and nutrition messages offer a compelling and personal reason for consumers to choose plant-based options, while sustainability and innovation could appeal to those interested in emerging cultured meat alternatives.

**Tailor Platform Strategies Based on Category and Topics.** Conversations about plant-based and cultured meat alternatives are heavily segmented. Plant-based topics are more likely to appear in food industry media publications and via consumer conversations on social. By contrast, cultured meat mentions are more limited in scope to business/investing, or trades in the areas of agriculture, science and technology, with limited footprint and less favorable reactions on social media. Brands seeking to engage with various platforms should tailor communication strategies based upon the topic focus.

**Leverage Partnerships with Existing Influential Voices to Build Awareness.** Given the emerging nature of the protein diversification market, brands play a significant role influencing the conversation. In addition to alternative protein producers, traditional brands such as McDonalds and Tyson are either entering the market or partnering to offer alternative proteins. Brands entering the crowded market may want to consider partnerships as a path to broader consumer awareness and market share.



# Conversation Drivers

What are the topics or themes appearing in conversations about protein diversification?

# The Protein Diversification Market

Protein diversification broadly describes ongoing efforts to reduce the consumption of traditional factory farmed meat through the development of alternative protein sources.

A variety of protein alternatives are already available to consumers or currently in development, including plant-based products and cultured meats. The latter refers to animal protein grown in a lab.

While plant-based protein alternatives have been available for decades, more recently brands have begun to move toward a more meat-like experience in terms of product taste and texture. Cultured meat startups are similarly focused on reproducing the experience of eating farm-raised meats, but without the agricultural impact.

As a result, both alternative protein categories are seeing an explosion of innovation and R&D, with brands racing to be the earliest to market with a meat replacement that is indistinguishable from the original.

# The Protein Diversification Market

Plant-based proteins dominate the conversation, although cultured meats are carving out share of voice

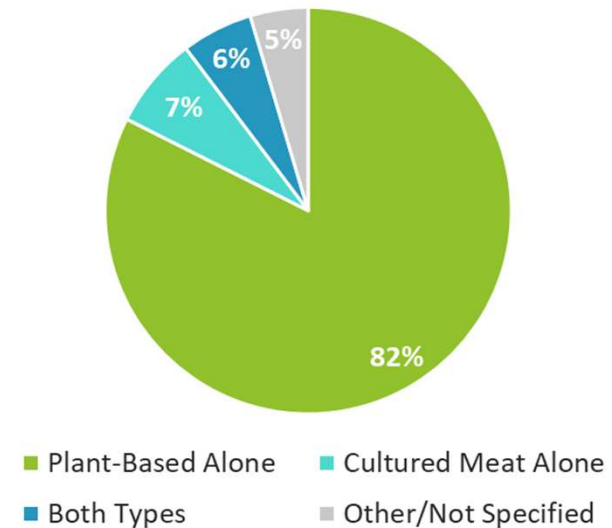
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Protein Diversification Conversation





# Market Categories

Protein alternatives share common goals of reducing animal agriculture, simplifying the food supply chain and minimizing the environmental impact of protein production

## Plant-Based Proteins

Plant-based proteins have been part of the food system for decades, often marketed to vegetarians or those seeking a healthier diet. New entrants are transforming the category with a focus on products intended to be indistinguishable from farmed meat – an effort to appeal to meat eaters. Plant-based proteins are perceived as good for the environment as well as consumer health.

**Unique Goal:** Eat Healthier

**Leading Brands:** Beyond Meat, Impossible Foods

## Cultured Meats

Cultured meat – also known as lab-grown, cell-based, cultivated or clean meat – is a cutting-edge area of food science attempting to grow palatable meat products from cells, eliminating the need for animal production while still offering animal-based meat products. Brands face regulatory hurdles to bring cultured meats to the market, although the first approved products are now available outside the U.S.

**Unique Goal:** Eat Meat Without Guilt

**Leading Brands:** Mosa Meats, Eat Just

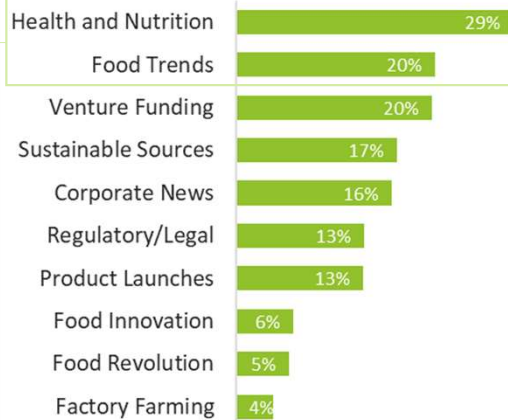


# Conversation Drivers

The topics driving media conversations about the two types of protein alternatives diverge, although both are experiencing a significant influx of venture funding and are acknowledged as sustainable food sources

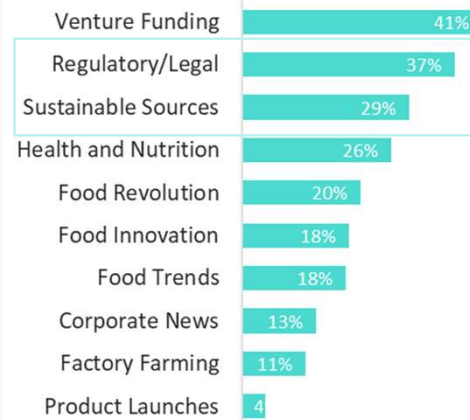
## Plant-Based Proteins

Plant-based alternatives are seen as healthier than traditional meats and tap into current food trends such as rising interest in vegetarian or vegan lifestyles



## Cultured Meats

Because cultured meats are just entering the market, questions about safety and policy drive many conversations, while interest is fueled by the potential to replace animal agriculture with a sustainable process





# Platforms

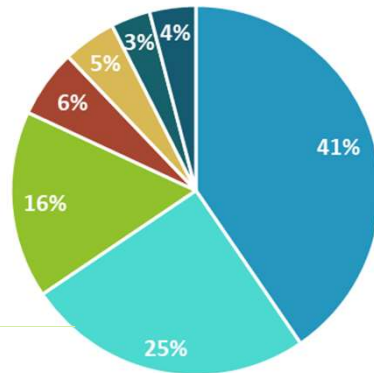
Where do conversations about this market appear most frequently or with the greatest depth?

# Traditional Media Profile

The conversation around protein diversification is gaining momentum in consumer-facing media, led by general news outlets, food trades and business/investor publications

## Plant-Based Proteins

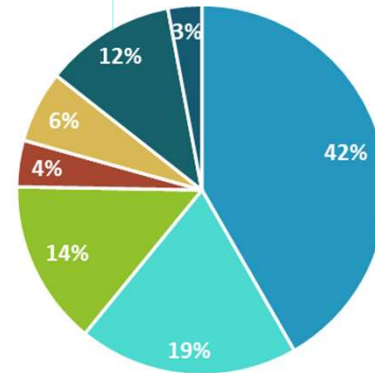
Content Share by Outlet Type



With a stronger presence in food industry publications, plant-based options are of strong interest to consumer trend-watchers and food distributors or sellers

## Cultured Meats

Content Share by Outlet Type



Cultured meats have an outsized presence in agriculture and farming trades, indicative of the closer comparisons between this category and traditional meat production

■ News ■ Food ■ Business/Investor ■ Tech/Science ■ Sustainability/Lifestyle ■ Agriculture/Farming ■ Health

# Publications with Broad Influence

Mainstream news, business and technology outlets reach a large audience of consumers and can raise awareness about protein diversification efforts as well as specific protein alternatives



*The Times (UK)* is the most prolific writer on protein diversification among major news organizations, covering related themes at least weekly. Protein diversification is introduced through the lenses of sustainable agriculture and healthy living. Given this focus, plant-based proteins are more likely to be favored over cultured meat.

- [I've no beef with meat-eaters, but a plant-based diet is the way forward](#)
- [Billion Dollar Burger by Chase Purdy review — your dinner's in the lab](#)



*The Guardian* is among the highest volume news outlets covering cultured meats but has a slightly smaller footprint among plant-based conversations. Despite the focus, it takes a skeptical stance toward cultured meats, suggesting that plant-based alternatives are the better long-term choice for a greener planet.

- [What's the point of lab-grown meat when we can simply eat more vegetables?](#)
- [If we can grow cruelty-free meat in a lab, what is there to beef about?](#)



*The New York Times* is less likely than other major news publications to produce significant stories about protein diversification and is more likely to focus exclusively on cultured meats. Plant-based proteins are usually mentioned in the periphery, such as a discussion of legal challenges to labelling of protein alternatives.

- [What if We Could Have Meat Without Murder?](#)
- [Singapore Approves a Lab-Grown Meat Product, a Global First](#)



The most frequent contributor from tech and science publications, *CNET* covers protein diversification with a focus on the brands innovating the space. Though more likely to cover plant-based brands, *CNET* has expressed interest in cultured meat from the perspective of whether consumers will adopt this alternative.

- [Is plant-based meat science or food?](#)
- [Beyond the impossible: Meat grown from cells is better for the planet -- if you'll eat it](#)

# Publications with Niche Influence

Food industry trade publications offer direct access to industry leaders and illustrate the rising prominence of alternative protein brands in industry conversations



*WRBM* includes a suite of food industry and publications in the grocery and food manufacturing industries. Its newswire, *WRBM Global*, is the most prolific publisher of news from alternative protein brands or traditional brands moving into the protein diversification markets.

- [With a heightened sense of healthy and conscious snacking, Gen Z's are demanding 'different': What does this look like?](#)
- [Molecular farming for food: How Moolec Science taps 'the best of plant- and cell-based' to develop alternative proteins](#)



*New Hope Network* focuses on healthy lifestyle products, including within the food and beverage category. New Hope regularly covers company news, especially product launches or funding, with an emphasis on plant-based brands and both health and environmental impacts.

- [Meatless Farm raises \\$31M to fund growth post lockdown](#)
- [AKUA launches carbon-sequestering Kelp Burger via crowdfunding campaign](#)



*The Grocer* is a long-running publication for the food manufacturing industry in the UK. Its recent coverage of protein diversification considers consumer interest, connections with sustainability, and company news or investments, whether from niche brands or traditional manufacturers.

- [Finnebrogue adds meat-free bacon NPD to plant-based Naked range](#)
- [Planty secures seed investment from Veg Capital](#)



*Just-Food* is an industry research firm focused on the food industry. Though based in the UK, *Just-Food* has a global perspective and has recently covered the plant-based protein markets in Europe as well as the US. Its focus is on company news, especially entries into new markets and investing.

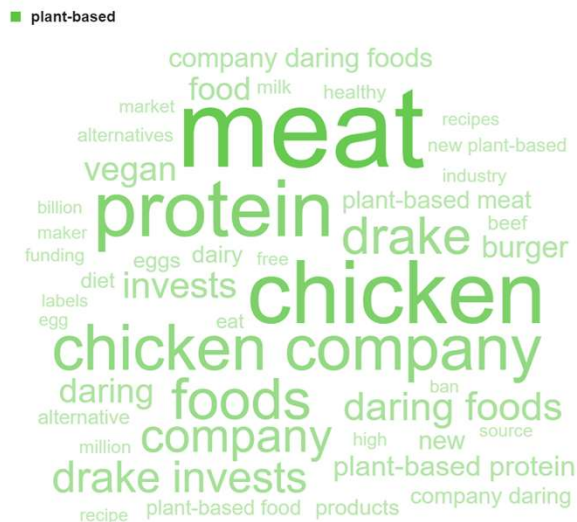
- [New name, new products as Valio eyes US expansion](#)
- [Dirty vegan to clean label – the questions facing plant-based products, ingredients and nutrition](#)

# Social Media Profile

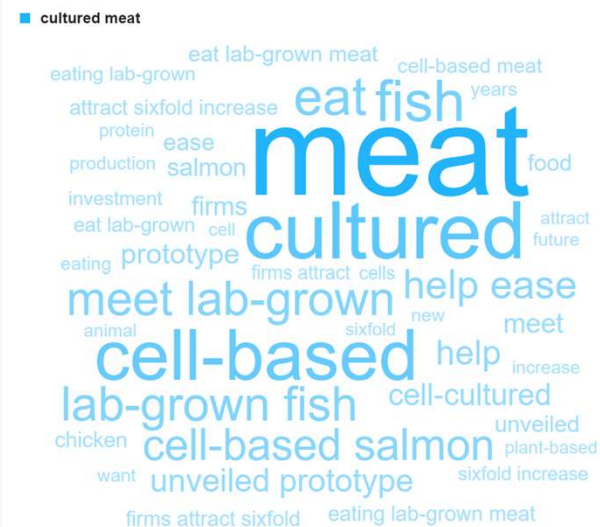
Consumer-driven social conversations are overwhelmingly focused on plant-based proteins, while cultured meats conversations remain more limited in scope to tech, media and investor circles

## Plant-Based Proteins

A recent investment in plant-based chicken by entertainer Drake led to a spike in funding conversations for plant-based foods, while benefits focus on diet and health.



## Cultured Meats



Recent cultured meat conversations on social media highlight fish and salmon but also focus on technical terms like *prototype*, *cell-cultured* and *lab-grown*. This highlights that the industry remains focused on R&D.

# Influential Channels

Protein diversification conversations in social media amplify consumer experiences rather than brand or industry news, leading to a focus on recipes, lifestyle connections and some activism



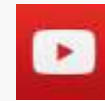
Twitter offers the most varied conversation on protein diversification among social media platforms, covering industry news, funding, health and diet, animal rights concerns, recipes and restaurant/food trends.



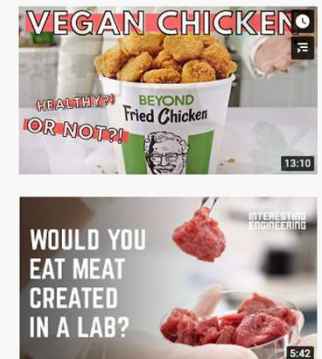
Facebook is an active platform for plant-based enthusiasts. Groups are a popular approach for sharing plant-based recipes or resources. Cultured meat conversations are rare and more likely to be news-driven and controversial.



The #plantbased hashtag on Instagram has over 34 million posts and counting, with top posts focused on vegan recipes and food images. Media brands focused on plant-based lifestyle are also prominent influencers on this channel.



Unlike other social platforms, YouTube has fewer channels dedicated to protein diversification topics. Its most viewed videos are often produced by either media or health professionals.





# Social Media Influencers

Media outlets and protein diversification brands have strong influence on the social conversation. Beyond Meat, Just Egg and Impossible Foods are well-known brands across all social channels



## Top Influencers

**Vegan**  
@vegan  
259,400 Followers  
The [Vegan.com](#) Twitter feed. 🌱 Sign up for my very occasional but surprisingly worthwhile newsletter. [vegan.com/newsletter/](#)


**The Vegan Society**  
@TheVeganSociety  
241,300 Followers  
One world. Many lives. Our choice. Follow our sister account [@vegantrademark](#) for vegan product news. Find us on Instagram [instagram.com/theoriginalveg...](#)


**Beyond Meat**  
@BeyondMeat  
124,700 Followers  
What if we all [#GoBeyond](#)


**Impossible Foods**  
@ImpossibleFoods  
79,600 Followers  
Makers of Impossible™ Burger and Impossible™ Sausage. Join the movement.




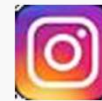
## Top Pages

**Fruits & Veggies—Have A Plant**  
Page · 1M like this  
It's that simple – Have A Plant. Delivering fruit- and veggie-packed recipes, resources + tips/tricks to your timeline. Join...


**The Sacred Plant**  
Page · 385K like this  
The Sacred Plant aims to expose, educate, and empower everyone around the world to be healthy, happy, and pain...


**Beyond Meat**  
446K like this


**JUST Egg**  
342K like this




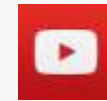
## Top Influencers

**plantd.co**  
5,294 posts · 1.4m followers · 86 following  
Plant Based Recipes  
Plant Based recipes  
healthy eating for you and the planet  
Our family @veganbowls @smoothiebowl


**beyondmeat**  
1,787 posts · 1m followers · 649 following  
Beyond Meat  
The new Even-Better Beyond Burger is here! For your health. For your planet. For your BBQ. #GoBeyond  
[linkin.bio/beyondmeat](#)


**plantbasednews**  
4,217 posts · 1m followers · 3,443 following  
Plant Based News  
Media/News Company  
The world's leading award-winning vegan news media & plant-based health/education platform.  
Founded by @robbie\_jockie & @klauom  
[tap.bio/plantbasednews](#)


**plantbasedonabu...**  
2,799 posts · 466k followers · 1,646 following  
Tori | Plant-Based on a Budget  
Tag our recipes #plantbasedonabudget to be posted. Author of Plant-Based on a Budget & Friendly Vegan Cookbook. Also find me at @toriskamato on pinterest  
[linkin.bio/plantbasedonabudget](#)




## Top Videos

**IMPOSSIBLE BURGER**  
How Impossible Foods Created the Perfect Meatless Burger— Cult...  
776K views · 1 year ago  
Eater

**Inside the Quest to Make Lab Grown Meat | WIRED**  
74K views · 10 years ago  
WIRED

**make it IMPOSSIBLE BURGER POTATO**  
How Impossible Foods Turned A Plant-Based Burger Into A \$4 Billio...  
238K views · 8 months ago  
CNBC Make It

**QUARTZ**  
QUARTZ NEWS \$1 · E43  
Is cell-cultured meat ready for the mainstream?  
127K views · 1 year ago  
Quartz



# Influential Voices

What type of influencers have an impact on the conversation? Are specific influencers leading the conversation?

# Brand Players

Plant-based companies Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods are the most vocal market players in protein diversification

## Plant-Based Producers

Plant-based producers Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods lead the protein diversification conversation with a focus on products with the appearance and taste of meat.

### Leading the Conversation:

Beyond Meat, Impossible Foods, Meatless Farm, Lightlife, Incogmeato

## Cultured Meat Producers

While most cultured meat producers are still in the startup phases of funding or research and development, Eat Just recently received approval to sell lab-grown chicken in Singapore.

### Leading the Conversation:

Eat Just, Memphis Meats, Mosa Meat, Future Meat Technology, Aleph Farms

## Traditional Producers/Retailers

Fast food restaurants are expanding protein alternative options through partnerships, while traditional food manufacturers are moving to develop their own alternatives.

### Leading the Conversation:

McDonald's, Burger King, Starbucks, Tyson, Nestle

## Advocates & Experts

No single organization dominates thought leadership in the area of protein alternatives, although the Good Food Institute has higher media share than others and is associated with both categories.

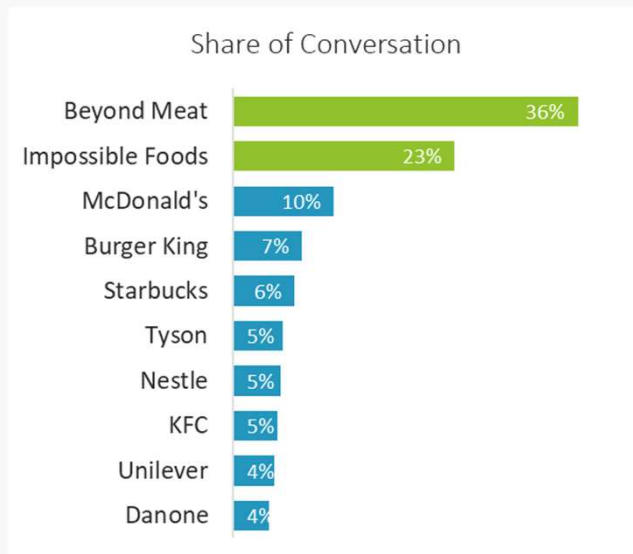
### Leading the Conversation:

Good Food Institute, FAIRR, Plant Based Foods Association, WWF, UN Food and Agriculture Organization

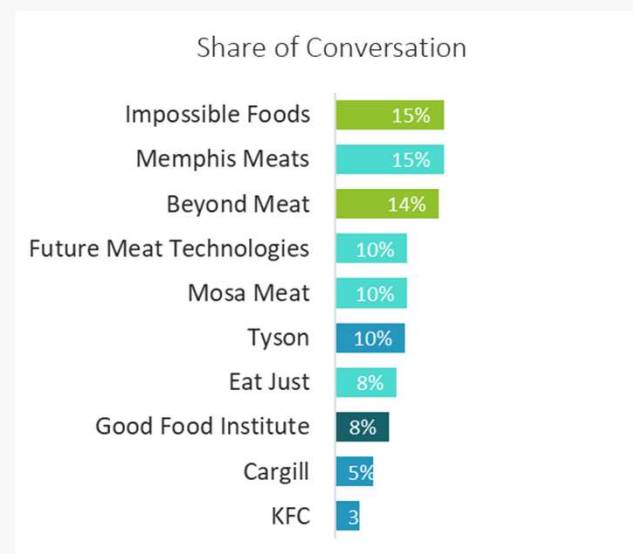
# Top Players in Category Conversations

Traditional companies are increasingly engaging in conversations about plant-based alternatives, while the cultured meat discussion remains more isolated amongst cultured meat producers

## Plant-Based Proteins




## Cultured Meat



# Thought Leaders

Sampling of high visibility influencers actively engaged on topics related to sustainability and the future of food via speakerships, targeted initiatives and social media channels


Danielle Nierenberg

 @daninierenberg



Danielle Nierenberg is president of Food Tank and a world-renowned researcher, speaker and advocate on all issues relating to our food system and agriculture. She co-founded Food Tank – a nonprofit organization focused on building a global community for safe, healthy, nourished eaters – with Bernard Pollack in 2013. She has written extensively on gender and population, the spread of factory farming in the developing world and innovations in sustainable agriculture.

Christiana Musk

 @christianamusk



Christiana Musk is the founder of Flourish.ink where she curates and catalyzes conversations on the future of food through research, events, advocacy and a podcast on The Future of Meat. Previously, Musk was the Executive Director of the Food Choice Taskforce initiative on sustainable diets and led the food system program for Avatar Alliance Foundation (both founded by James Cameron & Suzy Amis Cameron).

Gunhild A. Stordalen

 @g\_stordalen



Founder and executive chair of EAT, Gunhild Stordalen is a driving force linking climate, health and sustainability issues across sectors to transform the global food system. A medical doctor and published scientist, Stordalen sits on several boards and advises on councils including the United Nation's Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Lead Group, and the World Economic Forum (WEF) Stewardship Board on Food Systems.



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Research  
Partners

Interested in learning more about protein diversification? Curious about the influencers in a different industry or market? Want to learn more about OWL?

Email us: [theowls@owlresearchpartners.com](mailto:theowls@owlresearchpartners.com)

Visit our website: [www.owlresearchpartners.com](http://www.owlresearchpartners.com)