

Reshaping diet in the 2020s

As the end of a decade fast approaches, the last 10 years have seen attitudes towards food alter dramatically. In the UK, more and more eateries have moved away from the traditional 3-course meal, while consumers have embraced an international palette and less formal modes of dining.

Food courts and street stalls have continued to grow in popularity, while the digital revolution prompted eateries to refocus on the aesthetic presentation and 'Instagrammability' of their dishes.

Alongside developments in how and where we eat, ethical and environmental considerations have more heavily shaped consumer decisions, particularly around diet. Vegan diet adopters in the UK rose by as much as 360% from 2006-2016, while alarm bells ring ever louder around the environmental impact of farming and industry. This Christmas, Waitrose report a 40% increase in sales of meat-free festive food options, and plant-based diet options surge in global popularity.

What does this mean, then, for the future of food, and meat? With younger eaters in particular showing willingness to play down the role of meat in their diet, and mainstream chains such as Burger King and Greggs introducing substitute options, a quarter of the British public are projected to be vegetarian by 2025. The enthusiasm is not universal however - multiple US states have passed legislation restricting the usage of terms including 'burger' and 'milk' to

animal-based products, with similar proposals brought before the European Commission. Despite changing attitudes, and the creation of companies like The Meatless Farm Company, Moving Mountains and THIS, worldwide meat consumption continues to rise with the global population.

Of particular interest over the next 10 years will be the development of artificial meat alternatives, grown in laboratories. Barclays predicts the arrival of cell-based lab-grown meat on supermarket shelves around the end of the 2020s, at which point the market for meat alternatives will also reach \$140 billion. Could this market arrival offer a compromise between ethical and environmental concerns around meat production and a reluctance to change habits?

Many consumers will hesitate to adopt a purely artificial component as a cornerstone of their diet – preference for ‘natural’ ingredients is widespread. Meanwhile legislative battles over the definition of ‘meat’ will prove inevitable, as they have already for existing plant-based options on the market. UK surveys suggest that 40% of Brits would refuse to consume lab-grown meat, with another 40% undecided. With some restaurant options expected to arrive very soon, for a price, changes in accessibility and consumer attitudes will determine whether food grown in a bioreactor will have a role in the diet of the future.

Regardless of the popularity of artificially grown produce, discussions around sustainability, health and morality will no doubt continue to shape the dietary trends of the next 10 years. As a new generation of eaters challenges long-standing assumptions around food, it remains to be seen if these trends will prevail in the face of rising population, legislative barriers and entrenched industry.

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