

# An interview with Meatless Farm founder, Morten Toft Bech

Meatless Farm (or M\*\*\* F\*\*\*, its provocative billboard pseudonym) makes mince, burgers and sausages that are meat-free but not taste-free. It's one of the British brands at the forefront of plant-based innovation.

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We spoke to founder Morten Toft Bech about partnering up with Real Madrid, the tongue-in-cheek branding that's come to define the vegan food sector, and Pret's new Meatless Meatball wrap.

## **How did it all begin? What did you see as the downfalls of the existing meat replacement market?**

I started *Meatless Farm* because my wife and I understood the importance of reducing meat consumption, and it was becoming increasingly difficult for us to create easy meals for the whole family.

We'd tried some meat alternatives, but these were often a mixed bag so it was never easy to create a meal that everyone would enjoy and more importantly finish!

I began to research what was on offer and the wider issues around meat

reduction. One of the biggest things that struck me was discovering how what we eat impacts the environment. This is the core of Meatless Farm today where our mission is to reduce the world's dependency on intensively farmed meat.

## **Do you eat meat and dairy products yourself and if so why/why not?**

I infrequently eat meat and if I do it's a good quality piece. Our focus is on reducing the consumption of intensively farmed meat; this is one of the single biggest ways we can reduce our impact on this planet.

As a business, we're not anti-meat or strictly vegan — we want a wider audience to make more sustainable choices like swapping out intensively farmed meat for plant-based food even if it's once or twice a week. A larger pool of people making small changes will have a better impact on this planet than a few making drastic ones.

*The environment depends on us all eating differently.*

## **Is the vegan food sector a competitive or collaborative place to be operating in?**

We view it as collaborative. We all have the same common goal: to reduce meat consumption. There are vast meat volumes for us to penetrate and that's not something we can do alone!

## **How have you gone about cementing products with Pret, Leon and other big**

## high street names?

Our partnerships with key foodservice brands such as Pret and Leon illustrate how mainstream plant-based has become.

The demand for plant-based alternatives is there, and these big brands are recognising that. I think what's important to note is that we're not totally reinventing the wheel with them — we're taking some of their most iconic and best-selling menu items and are putting our Meatless twist on them.

Take Pret for example, we created a plant-based version of its best-selling Swedish Meatball Wrap — the Meatless Meatball Wrap. The fact that this became one of Pret's bestselling menu items in its launch week — is really testament to the strength of demand for plant-based food.

## **Your branding is tongue-in-cheek but hard-hitting. Could you talk about campaigns you've been particularly proud of and how you came to decide on Meatless Farm's tone of voice?**

Meatless Farm's tone of voice came from this idea where we didn't want to alienate people by being extreme or worthy — it's about putting the joy into meat free.

The M\*\*\* F\*\*\* campaign is a great example of this; it is a step change in communication, not just for Meatless Farm, but for the entire plant-based category. It specifically targeted meat-eaters and aimed to disrupt the cultural norm that going meat free is unexciting and tasteless.

We wanted to turn that convention on its head showing that our products are interesting, taste great and are easy to swap to without compromise. We needed to provoke and change people's mindset about going meat free.

When we launched this campaign, it was off the back of a plant-based boom as consumers looked for healthier and more sustainable food post lockdown. We wanted to get to those consumers who were trying or considering making the swap to meat free. As a young innovative brand, we also needed to show personality and attitude, which runs through everything we do and especially as we continue to grow.

# **Unfortunately 95% of people still eat meat, despite the ethical and environmental implications. Do you think a meat-free future is feasible? Is it something you'd like to see?**

I think people are becoming increasingly aware of the urgent need to change the way we eat. Looking forward, we see an opportunity for plant-based proteins to replace 60-70% of the intensively farmed processed meat market.

What are the key challenges facing plant-based food? Whether that's policy, public attitude, logistics, or something else.

One of the biggest challenges is reaching mainstream audiences, beyond vegans and vegetarians. That's one of the reasons why our new partnership with Real Madrid C.F. is so important.

*We have the potential to reach 600M people worldwide. If every single one of those people swapped in more plant-based food, imagine the positive impact that could have on our planet.*

It's also important to note the need for balancing taste and texture with nutrition and sustainability. We know the two biggest barriers to consumers eating more plant-based alternatives are taste and texture but we also know that health and sustainability are major drivers for consumers choosing it. Getting the balance right is critical and it's something we've invested a lot of time and capital into.

Cost and efficiency of ingredients can be a challenge for the category too as we're building supply chains that the meat industry has had decades to optimise. However, since launching we've always ensured price parity with meat — we strongly believe that eating more sustainably shouldn't be a privileged choice.

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