

A Rise in Plant-based Eating...

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18 May 2018 | [Julia Glotz](#)

The Grocer logo, featuring the word "The" in a small font above the word "Grocer" in a large, bold, white font on a black background.

How should UK meat producers respond to a rise in plant-based eating?

Tesco and Waitrose announced further expansions of their vegan and vegetarian offerings with new lines and a dedicated vegan fixture in store for Waitrose.

At the same time, the ethics, sustainability and health credentials of the meat industry are under growing attack. Campaigners and a slew of high-profile documentaries are encouraging consumers to ask probing questions about meat and cut down consumption.

Most respondents say the trend is not a threat to their businesses, but, "As a beef producer, it will have a knock-on effect if it continues."

The meat industry must take plant-based seriously

Phil Stocker, CEO of the **National Sheep Association**, agrees the

Jane King, AHDB is less than convinced of meat companies' ability to be agile in the face of the plant-based trend. "They won't make the leap," she says. "New types of businesses will innovate. The meat companies' culture is old school, wanting to make as much money as possible."

"The meat industry is doing a good job, but it's not communicating it well," says **Caroline Drummond**, CEO of LEAF. "The younger generation is very interested in food. We need to get the facts to them, so they are well informed and stay engaged."

National retailer says, "We are creating more vegan and vegetarian products and reacting to what customers expect: It's an opportunity."

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There are opportunities as well as threats...

While total volumes could come under pressure, several respondents see an opportunity to drive consumers towards higher-value options. "Consumers are looking for

Long-term significance of the trend remains to be seen...

"Current consumer interest in plant-based eating is still low," says **Richard Cattell**, head of communications and marketing at Red Tractor Assurance.

Jane King, CEO of AHDB, stresses action is needed. "The meat trade needs to respond by reviewing its offer to consumers," she says.

"The industry needs to understand the scale of the challenge," adds **Andy Richardson** of the **Protein Challenge 2040**. "That is the greatest issue right now."

"It is notable that there is some significant work going on amongst industry leaders who have taken the rise in plant based eating very seriously," says **Carolyn Hudson**, **England Marketing**.

"We know that health and well-being is being taken

industry must listen more.

“There is a need to be trusted,” he stresses. “Agriculture has created a mystery around the industry. It’s become a bit un-transparent and disconnected. It’s not been good at listening to the public.”

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higher quality and now are having more substantial portion sizes, though they are limiting their intake by having meat less frequently,” says **Russell Parsonage**, managing director of **Russells of Smithfield**.

“When they decide to have meat, they are looking for more premium meat.”

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seriously by many consumers and plant-based eating sits well with that.

“However, what is striking about this research is that there are some interesting contradictions: The rise in childhood obesity continues, there is a heightened desire for more protein, and an appetite for even more fast food and food-to-go. Meanwhile we seem unable to meet the recommended daily intake of five a day which has remained virtually static, at around 3.5 portions in the UK, for a number of years. Set this against the reported rise in plant-based eating and you realise there is some way to go before we can predict exactly what next.”



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