

Market Intelligence Digest

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Residual effects of COVID-19 in Meals, Pizza, and Soup

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Post-pandemic, when consumer behavior begins to 'normalize', some changes will be longer lasting and will have an impact on category innovation.



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Mintel recommends

COVID-19 could fuel flexitarianism

After all the meat panic buying will come the post-pandemic analysis, and meat consumption could suffer somewhat due to links being made between COVID-19 and animal consumption. It is unlikely, however, that a whole new cohort of vegans will be converted.

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Consumers' health requirements will change

Links between obesity and vulnerability to death from COVID-19 will renew focus on healthier options. Also, a desire to boost immunity via food could lead to increased innovation in this area, especially for seniors.

Meal kit expectations may change forever

Consumers might grow accustomed to the convenience being offered by foodservice operators that have had to focus more on home delivery to survive, and more of them are turning to meal kit delivery services like Hello Fresh.



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COVID-19 could become another reason for some consumers to limit meat intake

It has been widely reported that COVID-19 originated in a wet market in Wuhan, China, and there have been some inaccurate claims that eating meat causes coronavirus (at present there is no evidence to support this).

While the latter was widely refuted, it does remain that 60% of known infectious diseases in humans are transmitted from animals according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Damage may have already been done in terms of knocking some consumer confidence in meat.

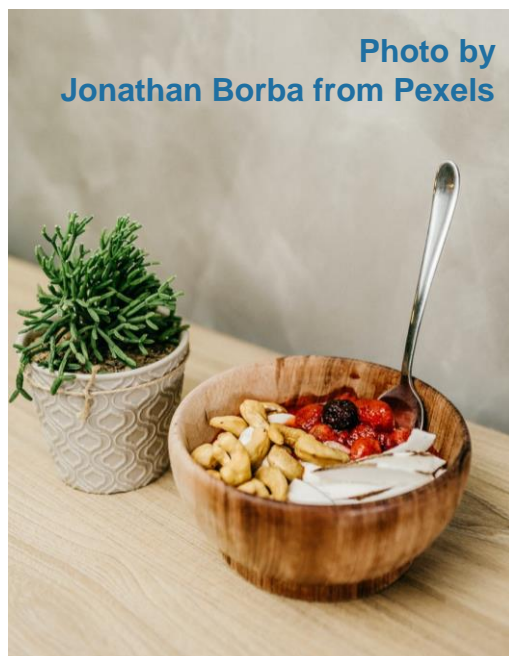
The biggest motivator for limiting meat intake is health, followed by ethical concerns. After the stockpiling and panic buying subsides, for those consumers already limiting/interested in limiting meat, links between meat and COVID-19 (proven or unproven) could become yet another reason to reduce meat consumption.

Post-pandemic, manufacturers should continue to focus on flexitarians

Interest in plant-based diets has grown steadily over time because of important shifts in consumer behavior and sentiment; plant-based diets with less animal protein are not a fad.

While there are reports of meat shortages currently, it's unlikely that long term, those already interested in plant-based diets will give up on those aspirations in favor of increasing meat.

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Jonathan Borba from Pexels



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Conversely, despite some consumers fretting over links between COVID-19 and meat, and studies reporting plant-based diets could help the vulnerable during the pandemic, it's unlikely the COVID-19 pandemic will create a new cohort of vegan consumers.

What will happen is what was already happening: a general interest in leveraging the benefits of a plant-based diet, while enjoying the taste and texture of meat less frequently. There are two key caveats to this post COVID-19 flexitarianism. Firstly, consumers will want to know more about where meat has come from, perhaps less from an ethical standpoint, and more from a health and safety perspective.

Secondly, if (as is speculated), the COVID-19 pandemic triggers a global economic crisis, manufacturers will struggle to justify some of the price premiums currently being charged for plant-based foods, especially if the key driver for purchase is basic health as opposed to higher ethical/environmental concerns.



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Is it time to get real regarding meals targeting seniors?

Outside of the Asia Pacific region, food and drink brands hesitate to cater directly to the needs of older consumers out of fear of offending them by treating them differently to younger consumers. Any highlighting of products that would suit older consumers is often done subtly and covertly.

COVID-19 has highlighted just how vulnerable seniors are to disease. Up to 3 April, the majority of UK deaths involving COVID-19 had been among people aged 65 years and over (3,588 out of 4,122), with 39% (1,396) of those occurring in the over-85 age group.

This could be the time to overtly target concerned seniors with products that can support the normal function of the immune system given the number of European consumers aged 55+ who agree that boosting the immune system motivates them to use functional food and drink.

The opportunity

During these tough times, it is important to look to the future and anticipate the evolving wants and needs of consumers on the back of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the meals, pizza, and soup categories, consumers' expectations of 'healthy' food may well change with a refocus on obesity and immunity.



Photo by Trang Doan from Pexels

The flexitarian trend already being observed globally may be boosted by concerns over meat consumption, and lockdown has presented some interesting innovation angles for meal kits, as well as highlighted the potential for retailers to take a second look at online subscription models.