

## Who's Putting the "Cult" in Cultured Meat? New Research IDs Motivations and Trends

Fake meat, cultured meat, lab-grown meat, clean meat, alternative protein. No matter what you call it interest is growing in this product, which involves taking cells from animals or plants and turning them into tissue to make burgers, nuggets and more.

A recent Nielsen study conducted for the Plant Based Foods Association shows the plant-based food sector (those foods that directly replace animal products) up 20 percent in sales over the previous year, while all foods grew only 2 percent. Last year, the same study indicated plant-based foods grew eight percent in sales.

So, who's putting the "cult" in cultured meat? While "cult" may be a bit dramatic, new digital cultural insights research from [The Center for Food Integrity](#) (CFI) shows that a small, influential and well-defined group of consumers is taking a keen interest in meat substitutes as companies carefully dip their toes in the water of this niche market.

Our ability to peer into the minds of meat-alternative fans provides a roadmap to understand where to find them and how to meaningfully engage them.

### Following the Digital Breadcrumbs

Traditional ethnography is studying behavior by observing what people do – not relying on what they *say* they do.

The research is driven by a new digital cultural insight tool, the first comprehensive search engine for instant consumer insight.

We use online ethnography to perform social science analysis on millions of consumer interactions in real time related to any trend or topic.

It instantly reveals socio-demographics like age, education and socioeconomic status, dominant attitudes, motivations, values and fear that drive the topic, how quickly the trend is being adopted and the current market size versus future market potential.

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Additionally, the system can reveal the dominant influencers and brands, identify the dominant news articles related to the topic, compare statistics to national averages, examine how a trend has changed over time, compare multiple topics and trends and much more.

It's useful information for both food companies on the cutting edge of meat alternatives and those marketing the "real deal."

### **The Profile of Cultured Meat Eaters**

CFI's analysis reveals strong emotional and social motivations for those who desire cultured meat, which have little to do with the food itself.

They want to be responsible citizens and want to make a meaningful difference in society. They believe meat substitutes help them achieve a higher purpose.

The core market for meat alternatives is well-educated white women, ages 25-44, with middle and upper-middle socioeconomic status, who are either single or in a relationship without children. This market is still in the very early stages of development with a core of 15-million consumers and a potential market of 156-million.

Consumers are motivated to explore meat alternatives because they want to have control over what they eat. The top fear of consumers interested in meat alternatives is that they are not making a real difference.

They worry that despite their best efforts to live by their values (social and environmental responsibility), they are not having any positive effect on the world around them. This, they believe, is likely because the "system" is rife with corruption and collusion.

People exploring meat substitutes hold large corporations in contempt, believing they care only about profits.

Those who are opting for meat alternatives want to prove they have a higher set of values and purpose. They fear leaving the planet uninhabitable. They believe that large corporations will intentionally misinform consumers because they only care about money. They feel strongly that local, natural (however they define it), unaltered food is better.

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## **“Meat” Them Where They Are**

These online breadcrumbs help inform engagement, targeting and messaging strategy. Armed with a detailed profile of the most influential cultured meat eaters allows the food industry to engage them directly with content that speaks to them.

This is true whether you’re a proponent or critic of meat alternatives. The key is to align values, demonstrating that you understand their motivations, fears and concerns.

The approach is consistent with CFI’s foundational trust research, which reveals that aligning values is three to five times more powerful in building trust than sharing science and facts.

Some words of caution as this new market emerges.

The meat alternatives market is likely to grow, consistent with current cultural trends disrupting the food system, so disregarding it as a passing interest (the proverbial burying one’s head in the sand) could be detrimental.

Also, as a general matter, research shows that mainstream consumers respond poorly to food fights (attacks and counter attacks within the food system). While some consumers may welcome it, others are turned off by it. A circular firing squad also erodes trust in the food system overall.

## **Evolution of Consumer Research**

The evolution of consumer research is empowering a new world of consumer engagement that is more precise and effective than traditional approaches.

The ability to instantly identify the specific consumer influencers driving a topic or trend and to produce content that we know will align with their values and beliefs is a powerful capability. It is an important new tool that creates meaningful trust-building opportunities.

If you’re interested in learning more, contact CFI at [learnmore@foodintegrity.org](mailto:learnmore@foodintegrity.org).

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