

It's fair to say that plant-based diets are having a moment. While the number of fully-fledged veggies has remained fairly static at around 2% of the population for the last decade or so (according to the latest Vegetarian Society figures), numerous surveys indicate that a growing number of Brits – younger people in particular – are interested in eating less meat, more of the time.

What was once a lifestyle choice largely influenced by concerns around animal welfare is now part of a much wider awareness of all sorts of environmental issues, says Nadia Morse, director of Just Wholefoods, a brand which has been producing vegetarian food since 1989.

"It exploded with the *Blue Planet* generation," she says, referencing the extraordinary impact of the BBC documentary series on our thinking around responsibilities towards the natural world. "These days people are so much more aware of what it means to consume meat or dairy products."

But just because consumers are thinking more about the consequences of what they're eating doesn't mean they have all the answers as far as the health or nutritional impacts of those decisions. On the contrary – there's still a lot of confusion around plant-based diets. The World Health Organization may recommend that people 'eat a nutritious diet based on a variety of foods originating mainly from plants, rather than animals' as part of its



Protein goes green

From the humble pea to the mighty sunflower, plant-based sources of protein are gaining ground. **Jo Caird** examines the market and reports on a new public-facing campaign aimed at educating protein consumers

'12 steps to healthy eating', but it's not always easy to put such advice into practice.

"The number one question that I get asked if I'm seeing vegan clients is, 'Where do I get my protein from?'," says nutritionist Tamara Jones, who says she is seeing more and more people from all walks of life seeking information on different types of protein, particularly from plant-based sources.

A numbers game

It's not just which proteins we should be eating to stay healthy, but how much and how often, says Jones, with the answers to those questions dependent on a number of individual factors including body mass, activity and existing health concerns.

As a rule of thumb, men should be consuming around 55g and women around 45g of protein, spread over the course

of a day. While the proteins found in meat and dairy products are 'complete' – ie they contain all the essential amino acids that our bodies can't make but are vital for health – most plant-based proteins are 'incomplete', meaning that to get your full daily complement of amino acids you need to eat a range of them.

This is where a new generation of plant-based protein products comes in, helping consumers meet their nutritional needs with a minimum of effort. In March 2017 the Vegetarian Society responded to the increased interest in plant-based diets by launching a new vegan trademark to complement its existing mark for vegetarian products. Between them, the two trademarks now appear on over 12,000 items on supermarket and health food store shelves.

"Veganism is massive. We're talking 1,000% growth in vegan products," says Victoria Perks, technical director at Cardiff-based health food store Beanfreaks, which has three stores across the

Welsh capital. "If I'm looking at any new products coming in, 'Is it vegan?' is my first question," she says, keen to find products that will meet increased customer interest in plant-based diets.

Plant-based proteins, she goes on, are gradually gaining ground. "It's still a developing market, we're just seeing it coming through."

Sunflower power

The numbers of products available may be relatively small at this stage but the innovation shown by the brands dipping a toe into these waters is undeniably exciting. Take Just Wholefoods, which launched an Organic Sunflower Mince in October 2018 as an alternative to products like Quorn mince (a no-no for vegans as it contains eggs).

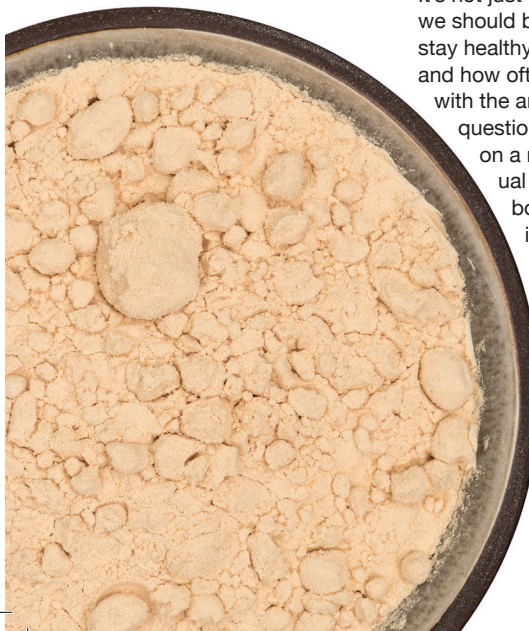
Just Wholefoods' mince contains only sunflower – a boon to customers seeking to mimic the experience of cooking with meat mince, believes Morse. "The fact that it's a single-ingredient product gives you confidence that you don't have to worry about anything else being in there like added salt or added sugar."

The decision to make the product from sunflower as opposed to any of the other plant-based proteins available was based on environmental factors. "Sunflower caught our eye because it's not an exotic seed, unlike soya for example, which comes from further afield. Our sunflower seeds come from Europe," says Morse.

Additionally, the plant doesn't require much water and can be used effectively in rotation with other crops to ensure good soil health. With customers 'more aware of supply chains' than ever before, such details can have a big impact on the success of a product.

Many of those looking to go more plant-based will be able to meet their daily protein requirements through diet alone, whether that's simply eating a greater range of protein-rich pulses, beans, grains and nuts or experimenting with products such as sunflower mince. For peo-

"There is an opportunity to look at producing plant-based proteins as an alternative to whey-based products"



ple who want to combine a plant-based diet with frequent or intense exercise, however, protein supplements can be an effective and convenient route to getting the nutrients the body needs while meeting their fitness goals.

From an industry perspective, the market for plant-based protein supplements is still in its infancy. “There is an opportunity to look at producing plant-based proteins as an alternative to whey-based products,” says Dr Adam Carey, chair of the European Specialist Sports Nutrition Alliance (ESSNA). “That is growing, and it’s growing on the back of vegetarian populism.”

More to life than whey protein

On the ground, the situation is promising for plant protein. Beanbreaks sells very little whey-based protein supplements these days, says Perks, whereas rice proteins, soya proteins and combination protein products such as the vegan brand Sunwarrior are on the rise with customers.

It’s a development that Perks puts down partly to the success of increasing numbers of vegan athletes in elite contests such as Ironman. “You’re seeing really high-class athletes saying that they are on a completely plant-based diet, and that is filtering through – people are starting to understand that there’s more to life than whey protein.”

Of course, the increasing demand for plant-based proteins is just one of the ways that the sports nutrition market is changing; the other major factor, as reported previously in *NPV*, has been the mainstreaming of protein supplements. What used to be seen as the sole preserve of body-builders is now embraced by everyone from marathon runners to yoga aficionados and Zumba enthusiasts.

As protein supplements have become more widespread, however, so has confusion around their safe and proper use. So much so that ESSNA felt it was time to take action, and last year launched Watch Your Protein – the industry body’s first ever public

facing campaign to empower consumers to better understand the products on offer.

“A lot of people see these products and they’re not so well informed. For them it’s really about having a simple

“You’re seeing really high-class athletes saying that they are on a completey plant-based diet, and that is filtering through”

user guide: what protein should I go for, why I should consume it, how much should I consume at a sitting? All of these really simple questions,” says Carey.

Watch Your Protein was designed to help anyone considering supplementing with protein – from elite athletes to Sunday cyclists and from raging carnivores to the strictest vegans. But the timing of the launch is certainly serendipitous in terms of the current trend towards plant-based diets.

In addition to providing advice on how to read the nutrition information on protein supplement products and a list of questions consumers should ask before taking the plunge with a particular product, the campaign has published a cheat sheet on the attributes of eight of the major sources of protein found in supplements, including several vegan options: hemp, pea rice and soya.

Safer supplementation

On top of that, a few months after the Watch Your Protein campaign was launched, ESSNA introduced a new kite mark to indicate that a brand has signed up to the organization’s code of conduct and can therefore be trusted in terms of how it manufacturers and labels its products. The hope is that this will, in combination with the campaign, make it more difficult for unscrupulous makers of unsafe or overpriced products to bamboozle consumers.

It’s still early days for both initiatives, but Carey reports good feedback so far from ESSNA members, consumers and other stakeholders across

Europe. One thing is certain: if the campaign and kite mark can help people make better, safer choices about supplementing with protein – whether they’re going plant-based or not – it will have been worth the effort.

Perks is positive about efforts to educate consumers online – “There’s been a lot of misinformation about protein,” she says – but stresses the crucial role health food store staff can and do play as trained, knowledgeable figures to help guide their customers.

People will often come into Beanbreaks having ‘done their homework online already’ she explains, but they ‘like having somewhere they know is safe’. “They can come in and ask, and you’ll still be there next week to give feedback,” she adds.

With the trend towards more plant-based diets showing no sign of letting up, it’s good to know that the health food industry – from manufacturers and nutritionists through to health food stores – is ready to step up and help consumers puzzle their way through the protein problem. There’s never been an easier time to go plant-based.

Hot Stocks

Life in motion

Brand new from Motion Nutrition, two organic vegan protein powders launch this month, available in Fresh Blueberry Morning and Chocolate Spice Evening variants. Sugar- and gluten-free, the protein powders contain real food ingredients for an invigorating kick-start to the day or a restorative way to wind down at the end. Made from 100% plastic-free packaging, each box contains 12 grab-and-go biodegradable sachets sporting a vegetable-based ink design.

Sweet and salty

Combining single-origin dark chocolate with a twist of indulgent salted caramel, BRAVE Foods’ roasted peas are a new protein-packed snack which contain 5%

less sugar than chocolate-covered nuts. Sweet, salty and crunchy all at once, the Chocolate & Salted Caramel Roasted Peas come in handy pouches and are dairy-free. The chocolate used is sustainably sourced and the peas are UK-grown.

Tasty tricolore

Launched by Free From Italy, “Rice Style” Rice Shaped Legumes have been created to provide a versatile rice alternative which is high in both protein and fibre. They are available in four variants: Chickpea, Red Lentil and Green Pea, which each contain only a single ingredient; and Tricolore, in which all three legumes are combined. The grains are organic and take less than four minutes to cook.

Pro-penne

Packing a protein punch and providing an alternative to traditional egg- and wheat-based pasta, Green Pea Penne and Red Lentil Penne from FREEE by Doves Farm are organic sources of protein and fibre for pasta lovers. The Green Pea variant is made from 100% green pea flour, while the Red Lentil option contains 100% red lentils.

Breakfast like a pro

From British jam-maker F Duerr & Sons comes the new HI-PRO Peanut Powder, containing defatted ground peanuts – a byproduct of peanut oil, ground down once the oil has been removed to provide a high-protein product which can be added to smoothies as a lower fat alternative to peanut butter, or used as a replacement

for flour in gluten-free pancakes.



Just Wholefoods Product Range

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Plant-based producer Just Wholefoods celebrates its 30th anniversary with rebrand unveiled at NPE19. The company has rebranded its multi-category, 19-strong product portfolio, which is now fully vegan certified and palm oil free. At the core of the redesign is the brand's mission to make the best inclusive plant-based food that's easy to prepare and fits with a modern lifestyle. The packaging reflects this with simple but vibrant livery, conveying a distinctive brand essence to life-long vegetarians, millennials and the v-curious looking for more sustainable food choices. With a fresh look and recent successful launch of its organic and vegan Sunflower Mince, Just Wholefoods is at the forefront of the increasingly popular plant-based movement.

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Sunwarrior

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Sunwarrior has had a makeover with its new updated design. Classic, Classic Plus & Warrior Blend are all now colour coded making product & brand differentiation easier for consumers. Each one remains everything you have come to expect from Sunwarrior; Amazing proteins made from quality plant-based ingredients. Emma Wight-Boycott, Nutritionist, Head of Sales at Global by Nature, the exclusive UK distributor for Sunwarrior said; "The rising popularity of Vegan diets is propelling the growth of the Vegan protein market. The global plant-based protein market was estimated at £3.14 billion in 2017 and is projected to grow by 7.9% from 2019-2025."

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At Boostball we like to keep our recipes simple. Each Boostball is made with just 7 natural ingredients, high in protein and available in 4 amazing flavours. A perfect energy snack anytime of the day. This year see's the launch of Boostball Protein Peanut Butter, available in 3 natural, delicious variants. Unlike most peanut butters these are made with no palm oil. The Boostball range is available in retail from Aldi, WH Smith, Welcome Break, Aramark, www.boostball.com, independent health stockists, Yumbles and Amazon. Also available for wholesale from: Delicious Ideas, Tree of Life, CLF, DDC, Tropicana, Blakemore, Albion and Bewleys.

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Garden Of Life Raw Organic Fit offers 28g of complete plant protein with 13 organic sprouted grains, seeds and legumes plus 3 billion CFU of live bacteria, 13 digestive enzymes, and clinically studied ingredients, including Svetol® Green Coffee Bean Extract, Raw Food Created Chromium and Organic Cinnamon. All Garden Of Life's plant proteins are produced at low temperatures, preserving their complete amino acid integrity. Certified by Informed Choice, all Garden Of Life proteins are tested and trusted as a clean supplement for competitive sport. USDA/Ecocert Organic, non-GMO Project Verified, gluten-, dairy-, soy- free and vegan.

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Link Nutrition's premium vegan protein powder provides 23.6g of plant-based protein in every scoop. Containing a bespoke blend of pea, rice, sunflower and pumpkin protein, it delivers a diverse nutritional profile. With no artificial colours or flavours, it delivers a subtly sweet chocolate fudge flavour, alongside a smooth consistency whether shaken or blended. Vegan Protein is perfect for those whose dietary restrictions prevent them from getting enough protein on a daily basis, and for those who need protein to fuel and recover from workouts.



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RXBAR is the fastest growing nutrition brand in the US and has recently launched in the UK with the top 4 selling protein bar flavours; Coconut Chocolate, Chocolate Sea Salt, Blueberry and Peanut Butter. Each bar is made with a few simple ingredients; 12g of egg white protein, nuts and dates. They contain no gluten, no added sugar, no artificial flavours and no fillers. They're perfect for breakfast on the go, pre/post-workout or just as a healthy snack! Our bars come in a box of 12 with no minimum order quantities and free next day delivery on rxbar.co.uk.

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Available in 3 varieties: Chick Pea Gnocchetti, Red Lentil Fusilli and Green Pea Penne, 250g each, RRP £2.79.

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