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Ready meals - plant based progress, but not in all supermarkets

A survey of 2404 ready mealsⁱ published today by Eating Better shows that many supermarket's plant-based options have come a long way. 16% of ready meals on the shelves at the 11 largest supermarkets are now plant-based, a big increase on the figure of 3% in 2018. But, more than 4 out of 5 ready meals still include meat, fish or cheese.

The survey shows that more plant-based meals have been making their way to supermarket shelves. Ocado's rangeⁱⁱ shows the most balance, with meat free options making up 40% of ready meals. Morrisons, Asda and Aldi doubled the size of their meat free range in the last two years.

However, plant-based meals can come at an unwelcome premium over other options. Tesco, Sainsbury's and Co-op plant-based ready meals are on average more expensive than meat, fish and vegetarian ranges.

Despite Iceland's sustainability commitmentsⁱⁱⁱ, they are still lagging behind with just 11% of their range being meat free.

Simon Billing, Executive Director of Eating Better says:

'Like it or not, ready meals are a mainstay of British eating. While there are now some exciting options from retailers, you're still going to have to hunt around to find plant-based options. Supermarkets should cater for consumer demand for more plant-based options at a price point that is more affordable than the meat range.'

Anna Taylor OBE, Executive Director of The Food Foundation says:

'The Food Foundation's Broken Plate^{iv} report illustrates much more action is required (and quickly) to transform our food system to deliver health, sustainability, and equity. Our typical diets are currently not delivering on any of these outcomes and the choice provided by food retailers is a big part of that picture.'

Ready meals aren't just a convenience option, they have become essential in many households where cooking fresh food is difficult. Research has shown that there are millions of people living without the basic appliances needed to cook a meal from scratch^{vi}.

Eating Better wants to see retailers reducing meat-based options so that they make up no more than 50% of the range. This is in line with Better by half: a roadmap to less and better meat and dairy, which sets out 5 actions for retailers to take^{vii}.

Notes for editors

ⁱ Eating Better (2020), Ready Meals 2020 Snapshot Survey, www.eating-better.org/ready-meal-survey-2020 [link to go live on 8 September]

ⁱⁱ Survey conducted in March 2020 prior to Ocado stocking M&S produce.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Grocer (2019) We must make sustainability achievable for all shoppers, not just rich ones, <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/environment/we-must-make-sustainability-achievable-for-all-shoppers-not-just-rich-ones/597847.article>

^{iv} Food Foundation's Broken Plate report to be published on 8 July 2020. <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/>

^v Turn2us has revealed over two million households (4.8 million people) are living without essential household appliances, such as cookers, freezers and fridges.

^{vi} Turn2us (2020) Living without: the scale and impact of appliance poverty

<https://www.turn2us.org.uk/T2UWebsite/media/Documents/Communications%20documents/Living-Without-Report-Final-Web.pdf>

^{vii} Better by half: a roadmap to less and better meat and dairy (2019) <https://www.eating-better.org/betterbyhalf>

About the Ready Meal Survey

Eating Better surveyed 2,404 ready meals in 11 UK supermarkets (including Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrisons) during March 2020. These are meals sold as a hot main dish, and included both own-brand and branded meals, chilled and frozen options.

Working with the University of Oxford's foodDB team, the ingredient text for each ready meal was then analysed to see which products contained meat or fish, or could be categorised as either vegetarian or plant-based (vegan).

About Eating Better

Eating Better is accelerating action for less and better meat and dairy for health, environment, animal welfare and social justice. We inspire and equip people, business and government, so that we can all eat better.

We are an alliance of [over 60 civil society organisations](#). We want to change the way meat and dairy is produced and consumed by:

- [Driving progress](#)
- [Inspiring action and equipping people](#)
- [Tracking change](#)