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More than half of university students surveyed have tried a meat alternative

Top reasons for trying meat alternatives were liking to try new foods, hearing a lot about alternatives, and being curious, according to a new study in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior

Philadelphia, July 7, 2021 – Fifty-five percent of Midwest university students had tried a plant-based meat alternative and attributed this choice to the enjoyment of new food, curiosity about the products, and environmental concern, according to a [new study](#) in the [Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior](#), published by Elsevier.

For several decades, there has been a steady growth in consumer concerns about the environmental sustainability of the global food supply, animal welfare ethics, and human health consequences of red meat intakes. To assess the prevalence of plant-based alternatives to meat consumption in students; describe associations between demographics, environmental concern attitudes, and consumption; and determine variables statistically associated with trying the plant-based alternatives, researchers studied enrolled students aged 18-30 at Iowa State University.

“Among the 1,400 students surveyed, we found about 55 percent had tried a plant-based alternative to meat. Individuals who ate plant-based products were more environmentally conscious, more likely to be vegetarian, and more likely to be out-of-state students—so not from Iowa,” said lead author Elizabeth Davitt, MS, Food Science and Human Nutrition, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, College of Human Sciences, Iowa State University, Ames, IA.

When evaluating why there is a correlation between out-of-state students and willingness to try plant-based alternatives to meat, Davitt suggests considering where the study is conducted. “This university in-

state is well known for its agriculture degree programs. Iowa is also a top producer of hogs and chickens as well as a top grower for livestock feed. So, that could add some nuance to that result.”



Caption: Positive environmental attitudes are predictive of plant-based alternative consumption among Midwest college students according to a new study (Credit: iStock.com/vaaseenaa).

Respondents' motivation for trying plant-based alternatives to meat also included enjoying and trying new foods, being curious about these products, thinking they would taste good, and receiving encouragement from family and friends. Individuals who did not consume plant-based alternatives to meat had a less favorable view of meatless meals.

“There are many reasons people chose the foods they eat, but we did find that having a more positive attitude about the environment was associated with having tried a plant-based meat alternative in college students,” Davitt said.

Notes for editors

The article is “Predictors of Plant-Based Alternatives to Meat Consumption in Midwest University Students,” by Elizabeth D. Davitt, MS; Donna M. Winham, DrPH; Michelle M. Heer, BS; Mack C. Shelley, PhD; and Simon T. Knoblauch, BS (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2021.04.459>). It appears in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, volume 53, issue 7 (July 2021), published by [Elsevier](#).

The article is openly available at [https://www.jneb.org/article/S1499-4046\(21\)00586-8/fulltext](https://www.jneb.org/article/S1499-4046(21)00586-8/fulltext).

Full text of the article is also available to credentialed journalists upon request; contact Eileen Leahy at +1 732 238 3628 or jnebmedia@elsevier.com to obtain a copy. To schedule an interview with the author(s), please contact Donna M. Winham, DrPH, at dwinham@iastate.edu.

An audio podcast featuring an interview with Elizabeth D. Davitt, MS, and other information for journalists are available at www.jneb.org/content/media. Excerpts from the podcast may be reproduced by the media with permission from Eileen Leahy.

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