



# The integration of more plant-based foods in our diet: Reformulating our assumptions about consumption

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## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Food service providers across the nation are beginning to integrate more plant-based menu options into their dining halls in an effort to transition towards more sustainable food systems. While the implementation of these meat-reduction strategies at the systemic level is vital for large and fast diffusion, a lack of consumer acceptance could impede the success and sustainability of these transitions.<sup>1</sup> This research seeks to fill an identified gap in better understanding the consumers' perspectives, attitudes and behaviors towards this shifting of menu options to increase student buy-in and sustainability.

## METHODS

250 surveys were conducted among students at George Mason University, James Madison University and Liberty University in Washington DC, Maryland, and Virginia.



At left: the 3 research sites

The research focused on what **framing methods** the students align with, what **approach for increasing plant-based menu options** was preferred by students, and whether **collaboration with student groups on campus** increases their support for increasing plant-based menu options into the dining halls.

## Framing

- Personal health is the leading narrative (see figure 2)
- Price and local products should play a pivotal role in policy formation

## Approach

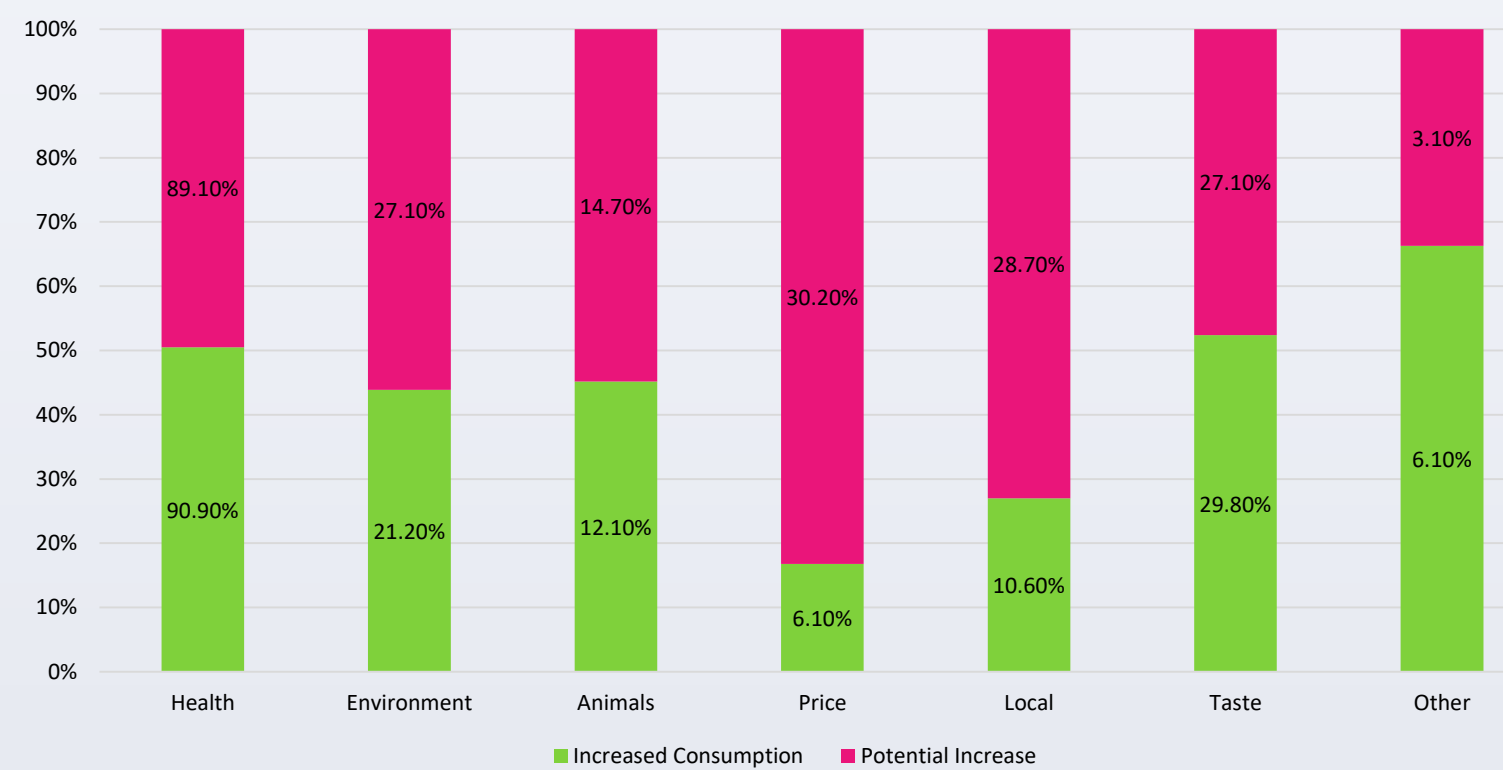
- Integrating plant-based options into the menu ranked highest, versus having separate menus. (See figure 3)
- All three subgroups ranked plant-based only days extremely low.

## Collaboration

- Collaboration should be highlighted, strengthened and expanded. (See figure 4).

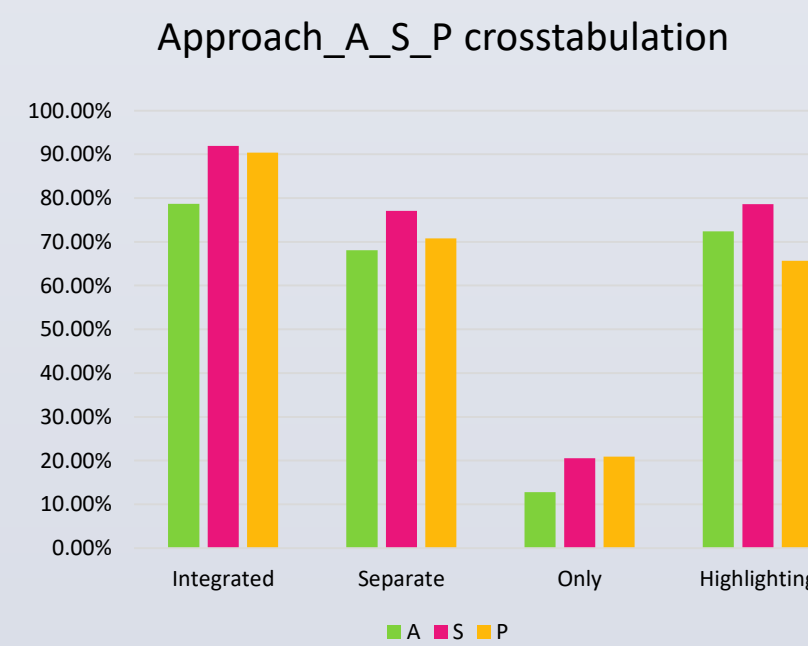
## RESULTS

Figure 2. Differences of Motivations for Consumption and Potential Consumption



\*Increasers (those stating their consumption of plant-based foods has increased). Potential increasers (those stating their consumption of plant-based foods has not increased). Consumers (those who primarily consumed plant-based meals)

Figure 3. Differences in Approach Perspective by Subgroup



\*A= Plant-based Abstainer, S=Standard Consumer, P=Plant-based Consumer. Plant-based Abstainers (those who rarely consumed plant-based meals), Standard Consumers (those who consumed a mix of plant-based and animal-based meals), and Plant-based Consumers (those who primarily consumed plant-based meals)

Figure 4. Participants Perspectives on the Effectiveness of Collaboration

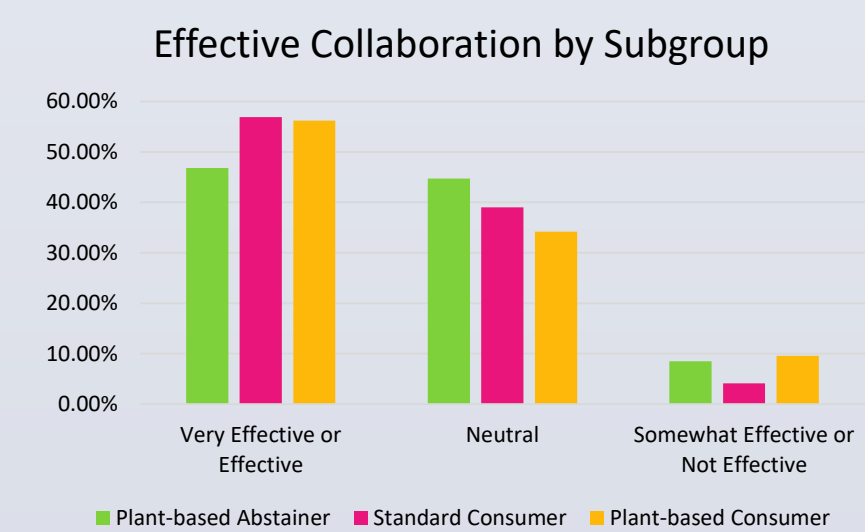


Table 1. Identified Themes in Open-ended Sustainability Question

Theme	Frequency of theme	Percentage of responses
Awareness and promotion of plant-based options	47	20.9%
Increased variety	47	20.9%
Taste	34	15.17%
Health and health benefit awareness	24	10.7%
Getting students invested	23	10.26%
Approaches	14	6.25%
Local sourcing	11	4.9%
Price and incentives	11	4.9%
Access	7	3.12%
Environmental benefit awareness	5	2.23%

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase awareness and widely promote **benefits to health**.
- Increase **variety**, as this is integral to increasing demand and sustainability.
- Utilize surveys and social media to determine **students' preferences**.
- Highlight **local products** used and strengthen connections with local farmers.
- **Consider incentives** for plant-based consumption, such as a price decrease for consumers eating only plant-based.
- **Integrate and highlight** plant-based options into the menu and provide a separate station.
- Promote **multi-level collaboration** between food service providers and student groups/centers.
- Create a dietary guide focused on **reframing the narratives of 'proper meals'** through a plant-based lens including: how to eat a healthy plant-based diet and the positive impact that plant-based foods has on the local farmers, the environment and the animals.

## REFERENCES

1. Lentz, Connelly, Miroso, & Jowett. (2018). Gauging attitudes and behaviours: Meat consumption and possible reduction. *Appetite*, 127, 230-241.