

So creamy, they won't believe it's plant-based.

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Veronica Fil, image supplied

Veronica Fil is a former behavioural economist, who now specialises in marketing for the alternative protein industry. She is the co-founder of Grounded Foods Co. and author of [Plant Based USA: a Guide to Eating Animal-Free in America](#).

Convenience as the forgotten factor in plant-based adoption

By Veronica Fil



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Given the monumental hype around plant-based proteins over the past few years, you might be wondering why demand for these products hasn't yet reached the fever pitch we were all hoping for.

"...we're missing one fundamental and alarmingly influential factor from the conversation, and that's convenience"

What's the hold-up? Why aren't we achieving more widespread consumer adoption of plant-based products? As more people begin to understand and accept the health, environmental, and/or ethical need for this shift in global eating habits, the market for alternative proteins is still relatively small.



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Industry commentators commonly cite taste and price as the primary reasons behind this disappointing traction.* Which I agree with. But I also believe we're missing one fundamental and alarmingly influential factor from the conversation, and that's convenience.

Convenience > nutrition

Prior to living in the United States and operating my own food company, I grossly underestimated how important convenience is to the everyday flexitarian consumer. Sometimes it's far more important than nutrition (the proliferation of **fast food restaurants** is testament to that).

Oftentimes it takes priority over taste (if it's good enough in a hurry, it's good enough). And I'm continually shocked that people are willing to bear high Instacart delivery costs just to avoid the hassle of a grocery run.



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As much as I dislike it, we live in a society where salads come pre-chopped and sealed in an airtight plastic bag that stays fresh for unsettling periods of time. Where pre-packaged apple slices are sold at the McDonald's drive thru. Where people actually load their shopping carts with the culinary abomination that is Uncrustables; a frozen peanut butter and jelly sandwich with the crusts cut off.

Because the 30 seconds that it would have taken to smear peanut butter over a slice of bread was just too much to cope with.

"...we need to address all those obstacles that make it just a little bit harder to make a plant-based choice"

That's the reality of how convenience is impacting our food choices. So if we want to increase the mainstream acceptance of alternative proteins, we need to address all those obstacles that make it just a little bit harder to make a plant-based choice.



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The surging popularity of meal delivery services indicates that, broadly speaking, it's not convenient for people to prepare their meals from scratch. In fact, according to the kids of TikTok, you'll be berated as living in an

“ingredient household” if your pantry isn’t constantly stocked with processed snacks.

Make them more convenient

It’s not convenient for people to take the time to meal-prep, or learn new skills in order to adapt to a new way of eating. Not when traditional meat and dairy products are so abundantly available at such a low cost. It’s not convenient to visit multiple stores in order to get a week’s worth of plant-based groceries—that is if you venture out to the grocery store at all. And if you do, it’s probably not convenient to have to spend an extra 15 minutes wandering around, trying to work out which aisle they hid the vegan sausages in this week.



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So how can we get these products in more mouths, more consistently, by making them more convenient? Here’s some broader strategies to consider.

- Continuing to offer plant-based alternatives in familiar formats. Yes, this includes highly processed frozen meals, treats and on-the -go snacks. Because they play an important role in making plant-based the norm, and not just a novelty.
- Making plant-based menu items a default option in schools, [cafeterias](#), hospitals and workplaces.
- Giving plant-based products equal shelf space at the checkout, in gas stations, in vending machines, and alongside their meat and dairy counterparts. Not tucked away in the shadowy recesses of the store, up the back where the light bulbs are flickering.
- Avoiding terminology and marketing messaging that discourages or isolates people from trying a plant-based alternative (such as focusing on everything it’s lacking, as opposed to its positive and value-added attributes).

Unfortunately, these are not things that can be successfully tackled by small food brands. We require the support of manufacturers, retailers, government bodies and major corporations if we're going to move towards a more sustainable food system.

Change is inconvenient too, but in this case, we need to talk about it.

*For the record, I don't agree that the demand for plant-based foods is dying (like some media outlets have suggested). It was just grossly overstated in the first place. Now that we're resetting expectations and returning to reality, it's going to continue to grow at a steady rate — as it has done for many years.

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