This report looks at the following areas:

- Dietary restrictions, and how they inform plant-based dining at restaurants
- Diners’ perception of plant-based proteins on restaurant menus
- Menu items that diners want to see plant-based proteins in
- Strategies for successful plant-based menu launches

Plant-based proteins are not star attractions on restaurant menus. Most diners are carnivores and omnivores and have very few reasons to actively seek them out. While plant-based proteins have a health halo, the high prices and perceived lack of desired tastes and textures make it difficult for diners to add them to their routine dining habits: only 21% feel comfortable paying higher prices for plant-based proteins.

Economic uncertainty and shaky financial health have forced diners to be more cautious about how they spend their dining dollars. In these circumstances, restaurants need to make a much more compelling case for ordering plant-based proteins to drive trial. Diners enjoy the idea of making healthy, environmentally conscious, and ethical choices, but when it comes to ordering plant-based proteins at restaurants diners are too far removed from the impact of these choices on everyday life to spend the extra money.

Ultimately, the final verdict on any dish is delivered based on taste, and diners don’t think that plant-based proteins are on par with meat based dishes yet. Still, diners are interested in seeing more plant-based items on menus. Operators have an opportunity to leverage this curiosity and lean into the novelty of plant-based dishes. Building ordering frequency with plant-based proteins will take time, but simply rooting menu development in the goal of delivering a great tasting dish will help move the needle.

“For diners, plant-based proteins aren’t winning against meat on core factors that define a great meal. Operators need to aim beyond the goal of simply achieving taste and texture parity with meat, and offer diners something worth coming back for.”
– Varchasvi, Analyst, US Foodservice and Mintel Menu Insights
## Table of Contents

**OVERVIEW**
- What you need to know
- This Report looks at the following areas
  - Definition
  - Market context

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**
- Top Takeaways
- Consumer trends
- Competitive strategies
- Market predictions
  - Figure 1: Category outlook, 2023-28
- Opportunities
- Freshen up indulgent favorites with plant-based protein swaps
  - Figure 2: Interest in plant-based menu items – Select items, 2023
- Justify premium prices with unique flavors
  - Figure 3: Plant-based menu attitudes – Select items, by generation, 2023
- Ingredient and nutritional information can drive trial
  - Figure 4: Plant-based menu perception – Select items, 2023

**MARKET DRIVERS**
- Plant-based proteins aren’t serving a massive need
  - Figure 5: Dietary preferences, 2023
- Budgetary constraints are headwinds for plant-based menu item trial
  - Figure 6: Changes to AH and AFH dining, March 2023
- Cell-cultivated meat ready for launch in restaurants

**COMPETITIVE STRATEGIES AND MARKET OPPORTUNITIES**
- The case for eating plant-based isn’t convincing enough
- Plant-based proteins must fit into consumers’ desired dining experience
- Fan favorites go plant-based: Spotlight on Taco Bell and Panda Express
- Celebrating the “plant” in “plant-based”: Spotlight on Chick-fil-A and Shake Shack
- Personalization as a route to plant-based menu items:
  - Spotlight on vegan-friendly restaurants in Chicago

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**What’s included**
- Executive Summary
- Full Report PDF
- Infographic Overview
- Powerpoint Presentation
- Interactive Databook
- Previous editions

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• Making plant-based ordering approachable: Spotlight on Chipotle and Blaze Pizza
• Familiarity and novelty are not mutually exclusive: Spotlight on unique plant-forward menu items

THE PLANT-BASED DINER – FAST FACTS
• Taste and health are the top considerations when ordering plant-based proteins.
• Omnivores and carnivores form the bulk of all diners. Plant-based dishes that deliver on taste give them a way to occasionally make the healthier choice.
• Plant-based proteins will bring novelty to familiar, indulgent favorites, and this is where most consumers want to see plant-based options.
• Diners conflate plant-based foods with health, while meat wins on taste and value.
• Diners value uniqueness in the dining experience, and this outlook drives their interest in trying plant-based dishes.

PLANT-BASED ORDERING FREQUENCY
• Accessibility drives ordering frequency at LSRs
  Figure 7: Plant-based ordering frequency – NET, 2023

PLANT-BASED ORDERING MOTIVATORS
• Taste is king, even in plant-based world
  Figure 8: Plant-based ordering motivators, 2023
• Dietary restrictions change how consumers approach dining
  Figure 9: Select plant-based ordering motivators, by select dietary preferences, 2023
• Value benefits are a must for mass appeal
  Figure 10: Select plant-based ordering motivators, by household income, 2023

INTEREST IN PLANT-BASED MENU ITEMS
• Plant-based proteins will shine in familiar, customizable formats
  Figure 11: Interest in plant-based menu items, 2023
• Plant-based shareables will win with younger consumers
  Figure 12: Interest in plant-based menu items, by generation, 2023
• Establish family appeal with versatile plant-based menu items
  Figure 13: Interest in plant-based menu items – Select items, by parental status, 2023
PLANT-BASED MENU PERCEPTION

- Plant-based proteins don’t yet offer true “alternatives”
  Figure 14: Plant-based menu perception – Taste, 2023
- Personalization and ease of access will improve perceived value
  Figure 15: Plant-based menu perception – Value for money, by generation, 2023
- Diners equate “plant” with “health”
  Figure 16: Plant-based menu perception – Health, 2023
- Robust nutritional information will guide plant-based choices
  Figure 17: Plant-based menu perception – Nutrition, 2023
- Versatility can be an easy win for plant-based menu items
  Figure 18: Plant-based menu perception – Select items, 2023
- Environmentally friendly choices enhance the “feel good” factor of dining
  Figure 19: Plant-based menu perception – Environmental concerns, 2023

PLANT-BASED MENU ATTITUDES

- Taking risks is the safe bet with plant-based proteins
  Figure 20: Plant-based menu attitudes, 2023
- Plant-based proteins need more compelling reasons to warrant premium prices
  Figure 21: Plant-based menu attitudes, by generation, 2023

APPENDIX – DATA SOURCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

- Data sources
- Consumer survey data
- Abbreviations and terms
- Abbreviations
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