



LIFTING THE LID ON THE DAIRY WARS

As new legislation forces plant-based brands to remove any mention of dairy from their packaging, *WH* asks if it's time to reassess your choice of the white stuff

WORDS MINI SMITH

EAT SMART



Given this decade started with apocalyptic, threat-to-existence vibes, it's easy to pine for noughties life. But we'll wager that one thing you won't miss is requesting soya in your Americano, only to watch the

milk curdle and split as it reaches the coffee and being told, with a shrug, that's 'just what it does'. These days, you'd feel short-changed if the establishment's alt-milk count is sub five, you'll find tiger nut milk in your local corner shop and you can even have oat milk delivered to your doorstep, courtesy of Lancastrian brand Oato. Alternative dairy, in 2021, is anything but.

But while you may see this as a win – for choice, convenience and taking dairy off your climate guilt list – not everyone is popping a cork. In October last year, the European Parliament voted to amend the EU's farming policy, making it illegal for plant-based products to compare themselves with dairy in terms of both nutrition and sustainability. The legislation was in final negotiations at the time of writing, and while it won't affect UK producers in a post-Brexit world, with companies such as Oatly and Alpro – Swedish and Belgian, respectively – being titans of the alt-milk aisle, you can bet your British fridge will feel the effects. As the war between the white stuff begins to curdle once more, is it time you picked a side?

SPILT MYLK

The UK's had a long love affair with dairy; a 2019 study found animal milk proteins in the teeth of British farmers who lived 6,000 years ago, the earliest direct proof of non-human milk consumption anywhere in the world. In the 18th century, as the tea industry boomed, milk was said to be used for keeping fancy china from cracking with the heat, while disguising the bitterness of cheaper blends. Milkmen began to pop up around 1860, after expanding railway networks meant milk could be carried quickly and cheaply from farms to cities, and free milk in classrooms dates back to a Labour policy of 1946 – a tradition so firmly imprinted on British hearts that it earned Margaret Thatcher her 'milk snatcher' moniker after she slashed the scheme for over-sevens in 1971. These days, 96% of households buy dairy milk on a regular basis; 92% buy cheese and 81% buy yoghurt*, with the industry worth £9.2billion overall.

As for the non-dairy kinds? They're older than you might think. In the UK, the Plantmilk Society was founded in 1956, which saw the launch of the first commercially viable plant milk: soya, fortified with calcium and vitamins B2, B12 and D2. But the dairy industry then – as now – wasn't happy; manufacturers were required to lose 'soya milk' on the label, rebranding instead as 'liquid food of plant origin'. This evolved to the more familiar 'soya plantmilk', but remained mostly consigned to dusty cartons on the bottom shelf at Holland & Barrett, joined, in the 1990s, by rice alternatives. Things picked up in 2010, when consumer analysts at Mintel predicted the plant milk sector's rapid growth; sure enough, they've charted a 30% growth in the sale of plant milks between 2015 and

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2019. In 2020, *The Grocer* reported that 62% of adults in the UK had bought one kind or another.

It was during these years of rapid ascension that relations between dairy and the alternative kind began to sour once more. The story begins with the German dairy-free brand TofuTown. After a regulatory group responsible for combatting unfair competition argued that its 'tofu butter' and 'plant cheese' were infringing upon real dairy, the case ended up in the European Court of Justice, which, in 2017, ruled against the use of dairy names such as 'butter' or 'milk' on non-dairy products. Cue some hasty vowel removal (see Rebel Kitchen's semi-skimmed 'mylk') and many a prudently placed asterisk (in the case of Nush's Almond M*lk Ch*ese). The new amendment goes further still; not only are alt-dairy manufacturers banned from riding on dairy products' coat-tails with

their naming, the legislation would also prevent them making any direct comparison to dairy in terms of nutrition or climate credentials (more on these later). Gone are claims of being 'yoghurt style' and, while you're at it, even familiar packaging such as yoghurt pots and milk cartons could be banned, too. 'Non-dairy products cannot hijack our dairy terms and the well-deserved reputation of excellence of milk and dairy,' the European Dairy Association (EDA) said in response to the ruling.

NO WHEY

So does the rise of alt-dairy really represent a 'hijack'? Not quite, in terms of the industry's size (£234million to dairy's £9.2bn). But dairy producers are dropping – from just over 30,000 in 1999

THE WHITE STUFF: A HISTORY



4000 BC
The emergence of farming sees prehistoric Brits tucking into dairy products from cows, sheep and goats – as discovered by University of York researchers.



1226
Plant milk gets its first mention in literature, as almond milk is referenced in recipes of medieval Arabic cookery book, *The Book Of Dishes*.



1860
Milkmen begin to appear across Britain, with deliveries mainly made via horse-drawn carts and milk ladled into tin cans from churns.



1946
The School Milk Act is introduced, providing a free third of a pint of milk each day to children under the age of 18 – in 1968, it was scrapped in secondary schools.



1971
Margaret Thatcher earns the nickname 'the milk snatcher' after withdrawing free school milk for children over seven while she was education secretary.



2008
The first refrigerated almond milk, Almond Breeze, is produced by Blue Diamond. By 2013, almond overtakes soya as the best-selling plant milk in the US.



AUG 2019
US brand Live Real Farms launches its new range of lactose-free milks, featuring 50:50 blends of dairy with oat or almond milks.



JAN 2020
Cafe chain Pret a Manger ditches its plant milk surcharge, after vegan charity Veganuary called it a 'tax on climate-conscious customers'.



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to under 9,000 in 2019 – as farmers wrestle with falling milk prices, while the average Brit's milk consumption has dropped by 50% from 1974 to 2018. But this isn't just about profits and losses; this is a culture war. 'It's strange that products wanting to distance themselves as much as possible from dairy try to be as close as possible in marketing,' says Hélène Simonin, director of food, environment and health at the EDA, referring to everything from the shape of the packaging (see: alt-milk cartons) to the images you'll typically find on the front (cups of coffee; breakfast cereal). 'Dairy has an important place in nutritional recommendations, but these alternatives are different.'

She has a point; 37% of 16 to 24-year-olds gave health as their reason for reducing their dairy consumption in a 2019 report by Mintel. It's a trend dietitian Karine Patel (nutrition synergy.co.uk) has seen among her clients, too – who cite everything from worries about hormones in milk to suspected lactose intolerance. But such concerns are largely unfounded, she explains. 'No scientific studies have proven that milk is bad for you – there's no strong evidence to support worries about hormones in dairy affecting people's health or that drinking milk could lead to cancer, as has been reported in recent years.' As for lactose intolerance, it's less common that you might suspect, at least in the UK. While a 2017 meta-analysis suggested 68% of the global population are lactose intolerant, only 8% in Britain fall into this camp. Far from being harmful, dairy's nutritional profile is difficult to match. Take milk; a natural source of calcium and protein, as well as vitamin B12 and

iodine, neither of which are found naturally in most plant-based milk. Forgo dairy, and you'll need to find those nutrients elsewhere.

And yet, to focus on the nutritional profile of dairy is to ignore the elephant in the room; the elephant that may not be in the room much longer if climate change continues unabated. The number of Brits swerving animal products has quadrupled in recent years, from 150,000 in 2014 to 600,000 five years later. And while motives for making the switch are myriad, animal welfare and planetary health frequently come out on top. 'There's been a paradigm shift in recent years, where people consider the planet more when choosing their food,' says Cecilia McAlevey, director of sustainable eating at Oatly, who argues that the latest ruling will only make it harder for those who swerve dairy for ethical reasons to do so. 'Does not contain milk' and 'dairy-free' will both be banned – though a vegan logo will still be allowed.

So are those who are deserting dairy for the planet right to do so? Yes, says Dr Rosie Green, associate professor in sustainability, nutrition and health at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine – but it's complicated. She points to a 2018 University of Oxford study, which showed that producing a glass of cow's milk results in almost three times more greenhouse gas emissions than any plant-based alternative. Yes, that's cow farts, but it also includes the food and fertiliser they need. That's not all. 'Dairy

deficiencies. As we'll tell you in these pages every month, the core principle of a life-enhancing, mind/body-supporting and, crucially, *enjoyable* diet is variety. 'If you're looking to cut down on dairy to reduce your climate footprint, make small reductions, one step at a time,' advises Patel. 'That's a far better approach for a healthy state of mind than restricting yourself completely.'

What's more, there are steps you can take to ensure you're supporting the planet's health alongside your own. When buying dairy, organic options (look for the Soil Association logo) guarantee higher animal welfare and sustainable land management. As for alt-dairy, you'll need to choose a product that's fortified – with bone-strengthening calcium, energy-boosting vitamin B12 and metabolism-supporting iodine in particular. The latter – crucial for conception and foetal development – is typically found in negligible amounts in plant milks and can be tricky to find. Only M&S fortified its entire plant milk range with the mineral

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also uses a lot of land and water,' she explains. 'Alternative products tend to be more sustainable because they're made from plants, which use fewer natural resources and produce fewer emissions.' That isn't to say the alt-dairy market has perfect sustainability credentials; Dr Green points to rice and almonds as ingredients with concerns (methane production and water use, respectively). Nor is plant-based always best. 'British cow's milk has very low food miles associated with it and is produced from forage products that humans can't eat, such as grass and clovers,' says Jerry Alford, arable and soils advisor at the Soil Association, who points out that the grass fields dairy cows graze on provide stores of carbon dioxide (removing it from the atmosphere) while also supporting biodiversity. 'But if you were to consider all environmental impacts together, plant-based will generally always come out better,' adds Dr Green.

BOILING OVER

So, when all's said and drunk, whose side should you be taking? The good news is: you don't have to pick one or the other. Both Dr Green and Patel argue that there's no right or wrong; instead, it's about finding what works for you. While the evidence is unequivocal that cutting down on dairy is a positive step in reducing your carbon footprint, cutting down doesn't have to mean cutting out completely – particularly if doing so puts you at risk of nutritional

at the time of writing, though you'll find it in Alpro's soya milks and all but Oatly's organic offering. For the closest cow impersonator nutrition-wise, Patel points to a classic. 'Soya milk is naturally high in protein and contains all the nine essential amino acids found in cow's milk,' she says, adding that, while it sounds niche, pea milk is also a top contender for protein content – Mighty Pea Society's contains iodine, too. Whatever way you milk it, the choice is up to you. [VH](#)



NO DAIRY, NO PROBLEM

Ditching milk and co? Here's how to snag those non-negotiable nutrients from elsewhere



CALCIUM

What for? As well as helping you build healthy bones, calcium regulates muscle contractions (heartbeat included) and enables blood to clot normally.

Where from? Green leafy veg, tinned sardines, tofu.
How much? 700mg a day; 1,250mg if breastfeeding; 1,200mg post-menopause.



VITAMIN B12

What for? Vitamin B12 helps your body create red blood cells and DNA, while supporting your nervous system and releasing energy from the food you eat.

Where from? Meat, fish, eggs, fortified foods.
How much? 1.5mcg a day.



IODINE

What for? Iodine is used in the production of thyroid hormones – essential for various bodily processes, including growth and metabolism.

Where from? Seafood, nuts, meat, bread.
How much? 150mcg a day; 200mcg if pregnant or breastfeeding.



VITAMIN D

What for? Vitamin D helps you build strong bones and teeth, as well as protecting your muscle strength and bolstering immunity.

Where from? Oily fish, red meat, egg yolks.
How much? 10mcg a day – the NHS recommends supplementing from September to March.



PROTEIN

What for? Essential for the growth, maintenance and repair of all cells in the body – from nail beds to biceps.

Where from? Meat, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts, pulses.
How much? It depends on your goals and activity levels, but the RNI is 0.75g per kilo of body weight per day.