

The inside scoop

The global plant-based food market is predicted to be worth a staggering US\$132,207.38 million by 2032. We talk to Noel Clarke, SVP of Impossible Foods, to learn how the hospitality industry should take note

Impossible Foods aims to create “a truly sustainable global food system”. What would this look like?

We want to champion a global food system that is more reliant on plants than it is on animals. People have said this is a lofty goal, but more than a decade later, Impossible is proving that progress is achievable. Plant-based meat products offer a seamless replacement for the animal meat that consumers know and love, significantly lowering the barrier to entry for curious meat-eating consumers to try more plant-based options. We're confident that once people experience for themselves how delicious and nutrient-dense it can be while also being better for the planet, they'll see no reason to go back to animal meat. That's where the opportunity lies – with every meat eater converted into a plant-based believer, our positive impact on the planet grows.

Plant-based foods have been around for a long time. What do you think made them boom in recent years?

It's simple: there are more, better-tasting options. The biggest misconception about plant-based meat is that it's designed for “someone else” or that you have to compromise on taste. Maybe that was true years ago, but now, there are products like ours that are intentionally designed to replicate the crave-worthy experience of eating animal meat. Better products coupled with increased availability has opened up the door for many more consumers to come into this space, and they're realising that these options aren't just for vegans and vegetarians – they're for anyone who enjoys food. And as the category continues to evolve, we can only expect to see more growth.

How do you think this will affect the F&B industry moving forward?

It's normal to see some scepticism with new innovations and to question their staying

power. We saw this with plant-based dairy and now, as the category has matured, these options have become just as commonplace as conventional dairy products. We expect to see the same happen with plant-based meat. We're just getting started and we still have a long runway of growth ahead of us. To guarantee the longevity of this space, it's incumbent on us and the rest of the plant-based category to continue raising the bar when it comes to delivering great-tasting, nutrient-dense products. We have an advantage over the animal when it comes to product evolution, so we all have to keep innovating and improving. Our peers' success is our success if it means that consumers are more likely to have a positive first impression of plant-based meat.

Are some markets more receptive to plant-based foods than others?

We've seen firsthand how this movement varies from market to market. In Europe, the plant-based meat sector had a years-long head start and is a much more mature industry, especially in markets like the UK and Germany. The US category has faced some headwinds, though we continue to persist as Impossible is outpacing the growth of the rest of the category. The Middle East is starting to see exponential growth in population year on year, thus the demand for plant-based options has grown in tandem. Every market is different in that cultural traditions, preferences, and lifestyles all vary. What's important is that we tailor our strategy to meet local consumers where they are.

What are the key reasons to opt for plant-based – vegan or not?

People choose plant-based options for a variety of reasons – whether it be for animal welfare, the environment, or their health. Regardless of the reason, what's great about products like ours is that they tick a lot of the boxes. They offer the same delicious flavour as

animal meat but without the high saturated fat or cholesterol, and they're better for animals and the planet. It's hard to argue with that, whether you're vegan or a flexitarian.

How do you see plant-based options being offered in the travel and hospitality industry in the future?

Unique dining environments like hotels and airlines demonstrate just how seamlessly plant-based meat can fit into various eating occasions. We've already seen success in this sector in the US by partnering with popular airlines like Delta and United, and we see a lot of room for continued growth. The more versatile applications we can serve our products in, the more we can open consumers' minds.

What's your favourite destination?

That's such a difficult question – I love to travel and visit new cultures and places. Protecting those places and ensuring my kids can enjoy them as much as I have is one of the key reasons I work at Impossible. When I think of my favourite places, it's French Polynesia for unspoilt beauty, Thailand for the friendly welcoming culture, and of course Ireland (home) for the craic!

What would you never travel without?

It seems obvious, but my camera has to be top of the list. It's a privilege to be able to travel, but it's always over far too quickly – and the videos and pictures you take along the way allow you to transport back to some of those incredible moments. I use noise-cancelling headphones for the flight and to maintain my sanity through busy airports. And whenever possible, my family: I do a lot of business travel alone, but am happiest when on adventures with the gang and seeing the world through the kids' eyes. **BT**

NOEL CLARKE, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, IMPOSSIBLE FOODS



Impossible Foods is one of the world's leading developers of plant-based meat products, such as its signature Impossible Burger