

# The Meatless Farm Co. CMO Talks Plant-Based Diets and Restaurant Partnerships

## ARTICLE |

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**A**fter launching in 450 US Whole Foods locations, plant-based meat company The Meatless Farm Co. is eyeing the restaurant scene. Earlier this week, it announced a partnership with New York City-based Italian restaurant Pomodoro Rosso.

We spoke with Lone Thomsen, who was recently appointed global CMO of The Meatless Farm Co. The former head of media and communications at The Coca-Cola Co. discusses the brand's new partnership, its US market expansion and why plant-based diets are becoming so trendy.

### **Tell me a bit about The Meatless Farm Co.**

The Meatless Farm Co. was launched in 2016, and it was born out of a sustainable mission. Founder Morten [Toft Bech], his wife and three kids were struggling to find the right meals and diet for the whole family. He started looking into whether he could start doing something within the plant-based area—something that was healthy and sustainable.

When we started, we worked with a researcher from Oxford University on this project called The Meatless Consumption Target. We wanted to see what it would mean if every UK household swapped red meat for

plant-based foods—and if that would decrease CO2 emissions. We found that it decreased the CO2 emissions in the UK by 8.4%, which is equal to taking 16 million cars off the road.

We then took this to the US and Canada. We're waiting for the last results from the US, but basically it shows how every single person can make a difference by changing their dietary behavior.

**There are many companies doing the same thing. Beyond Burger has teamed up with fast-food places like Burger King, Impossible Foods has an exclusive partnership with The Cheesecake Factory, and Nestlé is coming out with its own plant-based products. What's your competitive advantage?**

We are working with customers in retail as well as customers in food service and restaurants. So, at the moment, we're building some of those partnerships. We're also working on strategic partnerships, not just with food service and quick-service restaurants [QSRs] and retailers, but also other brands.

**How did you end up partnering with Pomodoro Rosso?**

We identified the restaurant to be a great partner to reimagine Italian signature dishes with our plant-based meat alternative for weekly Meatless Mondays. We kicked off the partnership with an influencer event in the restaurant last month, where we invited a mix of influential NYC vegans, vegetarians and flexitarians [those who reduce their meat consumption without completely giving up meat-based products]. Pomodoro Rosso is just the beginning of driving a new way of thinking within a traditional cuisine, such as Italian food.

**There's so many food trends out there. Why this sudden emergence for plant-based products? What's driving the growth?**

A couple of things are driving growth, one of which is the environment. When the UN climate report came out, there was a lot of focus on how bad it is. When we see that the Amazon rainforest is on fire, the glaciers are melting and temperatures are increasing, that gets on people's minds in terms of how bad it really is and what they can do by changing their own diet.

Another primary driver and trigger for people to make that swap to plant-based is health. There's a lot of research around health and how plant-based diets can help from a physical and mental health perspective.

**What obstacles will there be in terms of getting people to try out these products?**

Clearly, behaviors are not changing overnight. It's really difficult to change a behavior, and that requires education. It requires people to try it.

A behavioral change needs to happen. When you look at Barclay's projections, [the plant-based industry] will grow to \$140 billion in the next decade. There's a super fast growth in this area, but there's still work to be done. For shoppers navigating in-store and [trying to find] the product on shelves, there's a lot of ... challenges to make this growth really happen.

**You mentioned educating people. How are you doing that?**

We are using a lot of PR, and it's one of our primary drivers. We are also using influencers—digital and social—and our own media. Our packaging will be a primary source of education for consumers, and that will be the one thing they see on shelf.

**Are you primarily working with influencers on Instagram?**

We are using influencers on Instagram, but we're also working with influencers for events and experientials. We've had a couple of events where we've worked with one of our influencers inviting other influencers to cook [some of our products]. We do a lot of experiential as well, so we've been part of festivals, food shows and trade shows. We focus on driving that trial of the product because we know that people need to try it to adopt it into their diet.

**What have you learned from these events? Are consumers connecting with you on different platforms or channels to continue that discussion?**

In general, there's a lot of positivity around tasting our product and surprise about a plant-based meat alternative tasting exactly like meat. The events are a great way of creating that traction among our consumers. A lot of our influencers are even organic influencers who are tasting our products and posting it. So, it's not just paid influencers. It's actually genuine interest from our consumers, and that shows how this audience is really engaged in the plant-based movement.

### **Where do you see the plant-based market heading in 2020?**

We see an exponential growth in flexitarianism as there's an increased focus on living a healthier and more sustainable life. Approximately a third of the US population are flexitarians or meat reducers. That equates to roughly 100 million people, which is a significant figure. There's still some education and inspiration to do, which is partly why we partnered with Pomodoro Rosso.