

Researchers see lower meat consumption after veggie month at student canteen

July 19 2024



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

What effect does a vegan/vegetarian month have on a student canteen? For this experiment, the Studierendenwerk Bonn sought scientific support from researchers at the Universities of Bonn and Kassel. They

found that the impact could still be felt up to eight weeks after the campaign month had ended: As a result of the vegan/vegetarian month, the amount of meat consumed in the canteen fell by 7% to 12% compared to the level recorded beforehand.

In addition, about half of the people surveyed agreed with the idea of one meat-free month a year, while more than 80% said that canteens should offer more vegetarian options. The findings have been published in a [working paper](#) prepared by the ECONtribute Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bonn.

"It clearly tastes better than people expect," is the conclusion drawn by the economists Anna Schulze Tilling from the ECONtribute Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bonn and Charlotte Klatt from the University of Kassel.

The Studierendenwerk Bonn had declared May 2023 a meat-free month in its Hofgarten canteen and spread the word on social media. The offerings in the CAMPO-Mensa in Poppelsdorf and the Venusberg Bistro were kept completely unchanged and served as a benchmark.

The researchers looked at [sales figures](#) from the three canteens before, during and after the [vegan](#)/vegetarian month. "We were particularly interested in the proportion of meat dishes out of the total number of main meal components that were sold after the meat-free month," Anna Schulze-Tilling explains. To investigate this, they used the anonymized cashier data, which covered more than 117,000 portions consumed by more than 4,500 guests.

"The key question was whether an initiative like this can also change people's behavior in the long term," adds Charlotte Klatt, a doctoral researcher. The researchers also ran a survey prior to the meat-free month and another about eight weeks after it, in which about 900

canteen guests took part.

Whereas the first survey covered topics such as people's views on eating meat, the second focused on whether respondents were intending to keep on choosing more vegan or vegetarian options in the future and what they thought about being offered a meat-free menu for a limited time.

The data from the counters showed that meat options made up a much lower percentage of total sales in the Hofgarten canteen in the two months after the vegan/vegetarian month than they would have without the initiative. "We estimate that, due to the intervention, the proportion of main meal components sold that contained meat decreased by 7% to 12%, compared to the situation beforehand," Schulze-Tilling reports.

The researchers found that, following the veggie month, even regular canteen customers are not picking the meat dish as often as they used to on average, even though they are taking lunch in the canteen just as frequently as before. "In other words, the intervention really does seem to have influenced guests' consumption behavior," Klatt concludes.

Discovering new dishes the chief motive

The surveys suggest that the main reason behind the fall in [meat consumption](#) was the fact that, during the vegan/vegetarian month, canteen guests discovered dishes that were new to them, that they liked the taste of and that they would like to enjoy again. About half of the people surveyed would be happy with the idea of one meat-free month a year. No fewer than 75% were in favor of having a veggie day every single week, while 80% would like to see a wider selection of vegan and vegetarian options.

"We can't use our study as a basis to make any recommendations as to how canteens at universities, schools or businesses should design their

menu," Klatt comments. However, the study results could aid decision-makers who are considering changes to their menus.

Schulze-Tilling says, "Our study demonstrates that even short-lived initiatives can help reduce meat consumption over the medium to long term if they prompt people to try out new dishes, for example."

"The vegan/vegetarian campaign month encouraged everyone simply to try a [plant-based diet](#) for once," says Jürgen Huber, Managing Director of the Studierendenwerk Bonn. "And, clearly, it worked. We're happy about the results, and they're spurring us on to keep going."

"Our University Gastronomy activities are undergoing a transformation toward greater sustainability. We want to impress people with a balanced and varied offering that gives them good quality at fair prices. We need to bring our customers—the students and staff of the University—with us every step of the way on our journey to delivering a sustainable canteen fit for the future. Put simply, less CO₂ means less meat."

More information: Tastes better than expected: Post-intervention effects of a vegetarian month in the student canteen.

www.econtribute.de/RePEc/ajk/a...tribute_315_2024.pdf

Provided by University of Bonn

Citation: Researchers see lower meat consumption after veggie month at student canteen (2024, July 19) retrieved 19 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-07-meat-consumption-veggie-month-student.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.