



University  
of Exeter

## Food & Drink Insights March 2025

### Vegan Voyage

#### What?

Building on the success of the 2024 engagement event, Vegan Voyage 2025 expanded to provide a larger platform for showcasing vegan food and plant-based options within the Eat & Shop operation.

#### Who?

The Eat & Shop culinary team, University of Exeter (UoE) students and staff.

#### Why?

- To highlight the expertise of in-house chefs.
- Exposure to products and dishes that will enable consumers to make conscientious decisions around sustainable food.
- To broaden staff and student perspectives on plant-based diets, ingredients, and cuisines.

#### When?

January 2025, during Veganuary.

---

#### Event Concept

Vegan Voyage 2025 was a vibrant celebration of plant-based cuisine and sustainable living at the Forum Kitchen, coinciding with Veganuary to inspire dietary shifts among staff and students. It highlighted the culinary team's skills and reinforced the university's commitment to sustainability and health. By attracting those keen on ethical consumption, the event supported Exeter's Strategy 2030, addressing climate and ecological crises and empowering sustainable lifestyle changes. Blending education with an immersive food experience, it raised awareness of plant-based options, showcasing their accessibility and appeal.

#### Key Features

##### Tasting Stations:

- Sample-sized portions of innovative vegan dishes
- Pulled Redefine alternative protein soft taco with green tomatillo salsa, smashed avocado, and crispy onions.
- Turkish Pide flatbread with spiced vegan mince, tahini sauce, and a tomato-pomegranate salad.
- Vada Pav – Indian street food classic.

##### Live Demonstrations:

- Baristas showcasing oat and soya milk in lattes, flat whites, and hot chocolates.
- Chefs demonstrating techniques for creating flavourful plant-based meals, inspiring attendees to explore vegan cooking at home.
- Live latte art demonstrations, highlighting plant-based milk's versatility.



# University of Exeter

## Strategy

The Vegan Voyage 2025 event successfully attracted academic and professional services staff, students and researchers, who were motivated by an interest in sustainability, ethical consumption, and plant-based diets, directly reflecting the University of Exeter's Strategy 2030 mission.

This mission's purpose emphasises using education and research to create a sustainable, healthy, and socially just future, with a strong focus on addressing the climate emergency and ecological crisis. By engaging attendees with innovative vegan dishes, live demonstrations, and practical insights into plant-based cooking, the event encouraged participants to adopt more sustainable dietary habits. This supports the purpose by aiming to foster critical and creative thinkers who can lead societal change.

Furthermore, the event's focus on inclusivity — providing accessible opportunities for attendees to learn about plant-based diets — resonates with the University's commitment to creating a fair and inclusive society. The overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants (see below) underscores how the event not only reinforced sustainability goals but also inspired individuals to take meaningful action in their own lives, thereby advancing the University's broader vision of environmental leadership and social responsibility.

## Direct Feedback

The Vegan Voyage 2025 event received unanimously positive feedback, with all guests rating their overall experience 5 out of 5. The most appreciated aspects of the event included tasting stations, live cooking demonstrations, and opportunities to engage with chefs and the front-of-house team.

All participants emphasised the importance of universities promoting plant-based eating and sustainability, unanimously rating this initiative as "very important."

Natalia Lawrence, Associate Professor of Psychology at UoE, specialises in behaviour change for healthier, more sustainable diets. She leads the "Future Food" Grand Challenge course and serves on the University's Climate Advocate Taskforce and Health & Life Sciences Sustainability Committee:



Encouraging people to eat less meat and dairy and more plant-based meals has huge benefits for human health and the environment. Plant-based diets have 75% less impact on the environment (in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity loss, land and freshwater use)<sup>1</sup> and could reduce a quarter of deaths worldwide<sup>2</sup>.



Diets rich in plants and wholefoods reduce cardiovascular disease, cancer, type 2 diabetes and obesity, and could potentially save the NHS £6.7B a year<sup>3</sup>. Recent surveys suggest that half of UK adults are trying to reduce their meat intake but key barriers to changing diets are taste, cost and convenience<sup>4</sup>. **The Vegan Voyage** was a fantastic way to tackle these barriers and introduce UoE students and staff to delicious plant-based meals at low cost. Huge thanks to the chefs and catering team for putting on this exciting and innovative event, and demonstrating that nutritious, sustainable food can be a feast for all the senses!



# University of Exeter

## Lessons Learned

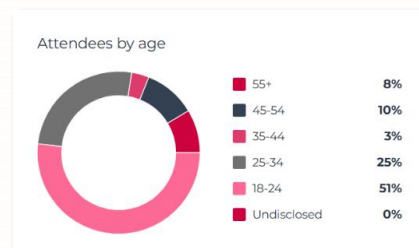
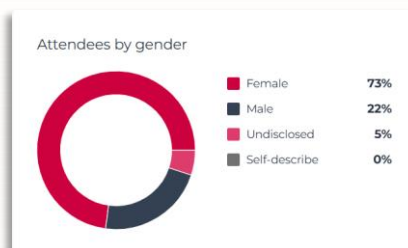
The unanimous 5/5 rating confirmed the event's success in engagement. Valued elements included tasting stations, demos, and team interaction, which should remain central.

The finding that over half of attendees were "very likely" to eat more plant-based meals indicated potential for lasting change, aligning with the University's Strategy 2030 focus on health and sustainability.

Participant suggestions for future improvements included better marketing via QR codes, low-cost tasting portions to encourage broader participation, and pop-up locations to expand reach. These lessons emphasise the need for continuous adaptation to maximise impact.

## Future Plans

Key recommendations for future improvements included enhanced marketing strategies (e.g., QR codes and broader promotional efforts), offering low-cost tasting portions, and expanding accessibility through additional locations, such as pop-up stalls within the Forum. The overwhelmingly positive response suggests strong support for the continuation and expansion of similar initiatives at the University of Exeter.



<sup>1</sup>Scarborough, P., et al. (2023). Vegans, vegetarians, fish-eaters and meat-eaters in the UK show discrepant environmental impacts. *Nature Food* 4:565-574;

<sup>2</sup>Willett, W., et al. (2019). Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. *The Lancet* 393:447–492; <sup>3</sup><https://www.ohe.org/insight/could-plant-based-diets-transform-health-care-spending/>; <sup>4</sup><https://www.foodmanufacture.co.uk/Article/2023/11/07/Almost-half-of-UK-consumers-are-reducing-meat-intake/>