

Alt-Meat®

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PER SPEC TIVE

Cargill's Sarah Frick takes the helm of the ag giant's plant-based meat business.





Juicy BUT NOT dripping'

OUR TASTE TESTERS GENERALLY ENJOYED MORNINGSTAR FARMS STEAKHOUSE STYLE BURGERS, THOUGH THEY COULDN'T AGREE ON WHETHER THE PATTIES ARE OVERPRICED FOR THEIR SIZE.

Photo credit: MorningStar Farms

Summer is the time of year for savoring a juicy burger from the grill. But sometimes we get conscious of eating too much meat — or some don't eat meat at all but still want to share in this social experience. That's where new MorningStar Farms Steakhouse Style Burgers come in.

These frozen quarter-pound burgers are made with 100% plant protein, and each patty boasts 21g protein. According to their website, the burgers have a “just-like-meat taste and juicy texture in every savory bite.” Let's see if our tasters agree.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Most of our testers are people looking for plant-based options to cut back on their “real” meat consumption, along with three long-time vegetarians.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

“It seems bigger than most veggie burgers,” observed an occasional alt-meat eater. “The image on the package is very carnivore-friendly. It suggests ‘steakhouse.’”

“I find it interesting that they give five different ways to cook these burgers: In The Oven (juiciest), In The Skillet (classic), In The Air Fryer (crispiest), In The Microwave (quickest) and On The Grill (smokiest),” noted a female food enthusiast.

Another vegetarian added, “I prefer frozen items that come in resealable bags like this, and they take up less room in the freezer. I was surprised at how large the burgers were. Usually, photos on the front make them look bigger than they really are, but this photo accurately depicted their size, texture and color.”

A 32-year-old male who loves trying new products indicated, “The packaging was nice; fits the MorningStar Farms brand with the clean, modern look and green as the primary color. At first glance, I noticed the burgers are much darker and bigger than the normal MorningStar burgers.”

“I like most MorningStar Farms products, but the packaging on these really caught my eye,” shared another vegetarian. “The picture of the burger

looks really good, and it has the words ‘juicy’ and ‘vegan’ on the front, which commanded my attention.”

A female vegetarian remarked, “I wasn't sure what the difference was between a burger and steakhouse-style burger, but I'm always up for trying a different veggie burger. The burger on the package looked tasty and I'm always glad to see a high protein amount on plant-based items. I liked that it said ‘a good source of fiber’ and ‘42% less fat than a regular burger.’ If I saw them in the store, I'd want to give them a try based on that.”

APPEARANCE, FEEL, TASTE, TEXTURE

A traditionally meat-eating male commented, “It tastes like a beef burger. I wouldn't know it wasn't if someone served it to me. The consistency and texture were the same as any fast-food burger. It wasn't dry but didn't have juices coming out of it. The outside is a little crunchy when cooked in the skillet.”

“I made it two ways: oven-baked and skillet prep,” said a curious female taster. “Both smelled like popcorn

Taste Test

while cooking, probably because of the soybean oil.”

“I cooked mine in the microwave, and it was super easy,” said a young, adventurous male. He also noted, “I ate it on a roll with ketchup, and overall enjoyed it. The texture seemed very close to a beef burger, and in some bites, it even tasted similar. But some bites had that ‘fake’ burger taste. I liked how it’s bigger than other plant-based patties, which are generally thin.”

“We grilled it, and the directions were worthless. There’s no sense of when the product is cooked since neither fat nor blood dripped out,” a husband-and-wife team complained. “It was mealy and dry. No juiciness despite the front of



the package stating, ‘juicy steakhouse style.’ We also tried the oven method, which was supposed to be the ‘juiciest,’ and it wasn’t any better than the grill — in fact it had less flavor.”

A 65+ female thoughtfully

commented, “I grilled it because that’s how I usually cook my burgers, but I had to watch it. I cooked it to 165° because I could see it could easily get overcooked. The outside of the burger was crispy, which I kind of liked, but as I chewed, the inside was a little gummy. It did have a good flavor.”

“I cooked it exactly as the air fryer instructions stated, and it was perfectly done,” said a vegetarian. “I tried a piece of burger plain first. It tasted very much like a real meat hamburger to me (or what I remember from 10 years ago). The texture was slightly softer but still similar. I ate it as a ‘patty melt’ using sliced Italian bread, avocado, cheese and hot sauce. I liked it better this way

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Taste Test



PRODUCT:

MorningStar Farms
Steakhouse Style Burger

PRICE:

\$7.94 - \$10.00/4 patties

NUTRITION PER SERVING:

Calories 230, Total Fat 14g, Saturated Fat 2g, Cholesterol 0mg, Sodium 450mg, Total Carbohydrate 11g, Protein 21g.

by Anna Marie Cesario and Jennifer Vahalik, U&I Collaboration, LLC.

Food product development and consumer research veterans, Anna Marie Cesario and Jennifer Vahalik, join *Alt-Meat* magazine as contributors to our regular "Taste Test" column. Here's how the program works: The alternative meat item is distributed to consumers, including the core demographic, for preparation in their own homes. No instructions are provided to the consumer, other than to write their overall impressions of the product, as well as to evaluate the flavor, texture, packaging and ease of use. Cesario and Vahalik look for common threads by using Getting It!®, a system developed to listen to consumers about products. The sample of people is not intended to be a "taste test" in a controlled setting, nor is it intended to simulate a focus group. Others are doing both. Rather, the intent is to interpret the response of the people who might purchase a product like this and use it, simply based on their encounters with the product in their individual, unique home environment. That is how U&I has been developing cutting-edge product and people understanding since 1999.

because the other flavors toned down the beef flavor a bit. The texture was even throughout the burger. It was slightly juicy but not dripping, which is a positive for me."

"It had the look of a typical veggie burger," our adventurous young male said. "The patties were a nice size, and they didn't fall apart while eating like some veggie burgers. It was easy to grill. I prepared it like I would eat a typical burger, on a bun with ketchup, mustard and pickles. The taste was really good, somewhere between an Impossible burger and a traditional veggie burger, which I liked."

A female who enjoys both meat and plant-based options told us, "I prepared it using the 'juicy method' (oven-baked) and the burger squirted out of my bun, but it wasn't juicy like a real burger. Before I topped it with caramelized onions and Swiss cheese, I could taste the 'plant-based.'"

Another vegetarian added, "On a bun with a few condiments, it had good flavor and texture but seemed like other patties. I made it again in the air fryer, and it appeared juicy with lots of moisture oozing out. It had a good crunch on the outside but was a little dry on the inside. The flavor fell a little short too. It needed the ketchup to add moisture and enhance the overall flavor."

CONCLUSION

"I liked the oven-prep better than the skillet prep because I liked the outside less crispy," one of our male participants said.

One vegetarian concluded, "We do a lot of grilling in the summer, so these will be a nice addition to my rotation of plant-based burgers. I'll definitely get them again."

Another vegetarian concluded, "I probably

wouldn't purchase because there are other options that I enjoy more. But I absolutely would eat them again. I just don't see what sets them apart from the competition."

"This product comes at a great price point, especially for how large the burgers are," concluded a vegetarian. "I probably wouldn't buy it again simply because I'm not looking for that beef flavor. But I would buy it if I was hosting a BBQ. I would also buy this over its competitors because it is a better price point, and I like the taste and texture better."

Our couple disagreed. "This is way overpriced. We would not buy these because there was no flavor and no juiciness."

"This may be the best plant-based burger I've had," said a 65-year-old female. "I may keep a bag of these in my freezer for when I want an alternative or when I have a BBQ and someone else would like an alternative option."

After hearing these diverse comments and insights, especially from the three distinctively different vegetarians, one can only imagine the conundrum the alt-meat industry encounters when developing a plant-based product and determining their target audience.

The MorningStar Farms Steakhouse Style Burger fills a desire for some. Inspired by the enticing front-of-the-package serving suggestion image, most personalized their burgers with a variety of toppings, which may have helped mask some of their concerns about its texture.

The alternative meat market continues to evolve, and new products like this from MorningStar Farms will continue to draw interest in the category while supporting incremental sales opportunities.