

Balanced Proteins



State of the Category, 2025

Balanced Proteins

State of the Category, 2025

Author

Tim Dale

Director, Category Innovation | Food System Innovations

Contributors

Foodvalley | The Netherlands

Disclaimer

This report was prepared by Tim Dale at Food System Innovations (FSI) as a high-level overview of the business and consumer opportunities for Balanced Proteins. It is not legal advice, and readers should consult qualified legal counsel before making any regulatory, compliance, or labeling decisions.

The report draws on both primary and secondary research, with all sources cited accordingly.

All monetary values in this report are expressed in U.S. dollars (USD) unless otherwise noted.

All information reflects the landscape as of November, 2025. While the report focuses primarily on the U.S., it includes selected international examples. Relevant policies, standards, and agency interpretations may have changed since publication.

For questions, please contact Tim Dale, FSI's Director of Category Innovation, at Tim.Dale@FSI.org.

About Food System Innovations

Food System Innovations (FSI) is a philanthropic impact platform investing in a humane and sustainable future of food. As an impact platform, FSI is a strategic hub that accelerates change by combining multiple tools and approaches, acting as both a funder and operator, directly implementing programs while empowering others through grants, investments, and capacity building.

Learn more at www.fsi.org.

Suggested Citation

Food System Innovations. Balanced Proteins: State of the Category 2025. n.p.: Food System Innovations, 2025.

Copyright © 2025 Food System Innovations. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution–Non-Commercial 4.0 International License.

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction | |
| Why Balanced Proteins Matter | 4 |
| Report Overview | 5 |
| Executive Summary: | |
| Category Momentum | 6 |
| Defining The Category | 9 |
| The Category Promise | 10 |
| Category Landscape | 19 |
| Market Opportunity | 19 |
| Major Players | 21 |
| Investments Trends | 23 |
| Commercial Signals | 23 |
| Foodservice..... | 23 |
| Retail..... | 28 |
| Co-Manufacturing & Industry Partnerships..... | 31 |
| Other Notable Achievements | 32 |
| Customer | |
| & Consumer Insights | 33 |
| Consumer Drivers & Barriers | 34 |
| Consumer Segments & Value Propositions | 36 |
| Stakeholder Actions | |
| What Is Needed To Scale | 40 |
| The Collective Impact..... | 42 |
| Conclusion | |
| & 2026 Outlook | 43 |
| Endnotes | 44 |

Introduction: Why Balanced Proteins Matter



Fable Food Co.

Food System Innovations defines Balanced Proteins as **meat and poultry, dairy, egg, or seafood products that substitute at least 30% of the animal-based ingredients for ingredients made from plants, cultivated animal cells, and/or microbial fermentation.**

Our food system has urgent needs and substantial opportunity for improvements across affordability, nutritional diversity, and emissions reduction. Inflationary pressures, supply-chain volatility, and climate-related disruptions have pushed food prices to historic highs. In 2025, the average retail price for ground beef reached multiple all-time peaks,¹ with industry leaders projecting continued upward pressures.²

At the same time, American diets remain calorie-dense but nutrient-poor. Nearly all U.S. children fail to meet recommended intake levels for key nutrients such as dietary fiber,³ contributing to long-term public health risks. Environmentally, food and agriculture account for roughly one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions,⁴ with livestock production using nearly 80% of agricultural land⁵ and an estimated 24-32% of agricultural water.⁶ As global protein demand rises, the current production model cannot scale without exacerbating these already unsustainable pressures.

To address all these challenges, we must diversify how protein is produced and consumed. Food innovators are already responding, pushing forward extraordinary advancements. Yet transforming a \$1.55 trillion global industry takes time—perhaps more time than rising costs, nutritional gaps, and climate constraints permit.



That is why solutions must work with existing consumer behaviors and operational practices, rather than attempt to replace them. Balanced Proteins offer a fast, scalable path forward. By making the foods people already love more delicious, affordable, and nutritious, Balanced Proteins deliver measurable gains in public health and emission reductions without asking consumers to change their habits.

Food cultures around the world have long combined meat with vegetables, grains, legumes, and mushrooms to add flavor and improve nutrition. Balanced Proteins revive that wisdom for the modern era, creating a familiar, scalable strategy for a more resilient food future.

Report Overview

This report brings together commercial data, consumer insights, R&D breakthroughs, and investment trends into a cohesive snapshot of the Balanced Protein category. Though Balanced Proteins can span meat, dairy, eggs, and seafood, this report is largely focused on red meat and poultry because red meat is the highest emitting animal product and together these are the most consumed animal meats in the United States. Similarly, it focuses on opportunities for the U.S. market—where Food System Innovations is based—with the help of some global examples.

By quantifying the pace of innovation and capturing lessons from early adopters, this report aims to signal to industry leaders,

investors, and policymakers how best to support and participate in this emerging category. It also translates early lessons into actionable guidance to help operators and manufacturers launch Balanced Proteins effectively.

This report is designed to educate and inspire those:

- **Bringing Balanced Proteins to market:** operators, retailers, and manufacturers
- **Driving innovation:** existing and emerging Balanced Protein companies
- **Funding or supporting the category:** investors, philanthropies, policymakers, NGOs, and media

Executive Summary: Category Momentum



Defining the Category

Balanced Proteins deliver on the attributes that matter most to consumers and operators: taste, price, nutrition, familiarity, operational feasibility, and sustainability.

- **Taste:** Balanced products have outperformed conventional meat in blind taste tests.⁷
- **Price:** Increasingly, Balanced Proteins are closing, and in some cases winning, the price gap.⁸
- **Nutrition:** Balanced products seamlessly add nutrients while reducing undesirable components (e.g., saturated fats and cholesterol) without sacrificing taste or, in some cases, protein content.



Category Landscape

The market research agency Schaefer and FSI estimate the **Serviceable Obtainable Market (SOM)** for balanced red meat and poultry products in the United States at **\$5.3 billion**,⁹ equivalent to the size of the U.S. retail frozen pizza market.

The category is rapidly expanding with **more than 60 Balanced Protein product or ingredient companies globally**.

Since 2023, **more than \$60 million has flowed into the Balanced Protein sector** from a mix of high-conviction private investors—such as **Future Ventures**—and strategic government funders including the **U.S. Department of Defense**.¹⁰

While total investment remains modest relative to the category's potential, early commercial wins suggest the Balanced Protein sector is **meaningfully under-capitalized** and poised for outsized impact with additional funding.



Commercial Signals

The Balanced Protein category is gaining meaningful traction across both foodservice and retail:

Foodservice Momentum (2024-2025)

Balanced Proteins are being adopted at scale across some of the world's most influential institutional foodservice operators:

- **Compass Group Australia** converted 30% of minced beef to a balanced beef product from Fable Food.
- **The U.K. National Health Service** partnered with Quorn on 50/50 products¹¹
- **Disneyland** swapped all kids' meal burgers for the BOTH burger.
- **Multiple universities** (including UCLA, Vanderbilt University, and others) replaced conventional beef with balanced beef from a variety of suppliers.

This institutional pull demonstrates that Balanced Proteins meet operator needs on taste, cost, and performance at scale.

Retail Momentum (2025)

The strongest 2025 gains came from Europe, where retailers are beginning to normalize the category:

- **Lidl Belgium:** 1 in 4 burgers sold are now balanced protein burgers¹²
- **Albert Heijn:** Launched 15 balanced products in 2025¹³
- **Lidl Netherlands:** Priced its balanced beef 33% below conventional beef, driving trial and adoption¹⁴

In the U.S., the category is slowly finding its footing, driven by familiar, flavorful, and family-oriented product positioning:

- **Family-oriented, Balanced Protein products** like Perdue CHICKEN PLUS® and KidsFresh continue to resonate with parents looking for better-for-you options, garnering sustained retail placements despite their premium prices.
- 2025 saw **new product launches** with Fable Food and SMASH It! launching new balanced beef and seafood products at Central Market in Texas.

U.S. retail continues to be an under-served market compared to the estimated serviceable obtainable market size.

The Better Meat Co. secured its largest letter of intent to-date from a major South American meat producer, supporting a projected **\$13M in annual revenue**.



Consumer Insights

Research across +4,000 U.S. consumers shows broad appeal for Balanced Proteins when framed around taste, health, and familiarity rather than restriction.¹⁵

The top-performing value propositions were **Flavor Enhancement**, **Budget Stretching**, **Stealth Health**, and **Macro Maxing**, each resonating with distinct consumer segments.¹⁶



What's Needed to Scale







To fully realize its potential, the Balanced Protein category must evolve from proof-of-concept to proof-of-category. Success will require coordinated progress across six critical levers:

1. **Product Performance:** Sustained improvements in sensory quality and operational excellence so every consumer interaction strengthens trust
2. **Consumer Buy-In:** A sharper, more compelling narrative that builds excitement and drives trial
3. **Industry Buy-In:** Strong engagement from chefs, operators, retailers, and brands to normalize Balanced Proteins across menus and assortments
4. **Manufacturing:** Expanded co-manufacturing and market penetration of ingredient-based formats to reduce cost and increase production capacity
5. **Distribution:** Securing broadline distribution access and ensuring consistent, reliable supply across foodservice channels
6. **Investment:** Catalytic and impact funding to close infrastructure and R&D gaps

Defining the Category

Food System Innovations defines Balanced Proteins as **meat and poultry, dairy, egg, or seafood products that substitute at least 30% of the animal-based ingredients for ingredients made from plants, cultivated animal cells, and/or microbial fermentation.**

To understand the Balanced Protein category, it helps to view the full spectrum of protein formats (i.e., meat and poultry, dairy, eggs, and seafood). Balanced Proteins occupy the middle of this spectrum, combining familiar meat ingredients and formats with emerging protein innovations and/or other whole-food ingredients.

| Protein Source(s) | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|
|  | Conventional Animal | Products that meet the USDA standards of identity for meat and poultry, dairy, eggs, or seafood products |
|  | Balanced | Meat and poultry, dairy, eggs, or seafood products that swap at least 30% of the animal-based ingredients for ingredients made from plants, cultivated animal cells, and/or microbial fermentation |
|  | Cultivated | Meat and poultry, dairy, eggs, or seafood products produced by cultivating animal cells |
|  | Hybrid (Cultivated-hybrids) | Meat and poultry, dairy, eggs, or seafood products produced with a combination of cultivated and plant-based ingredients |
|  | Fermentation-Derived | Meat and poultry, dairy, eggs, or seafood products produced through traditional, biomass, or precision fermentation |
|  | Plant-Based | Meat and poultry, dairy, eggs, or seafood products made from plants |

Balanced Proteins draw on a diverse set of ingredients such as whole foods, upcycled ingredients, mycoproteins, and more. Each ingredient type contributes distinct functional, sensory, nutritional, and sustainability benefits. By combining protein and ingredient innovations within familiar animal-based formats, these products optimize taste, cost, nutrition, performance, and sustainability.

Similarly, Balanced Proteins reach the market in two main formats: finished products and pre-mixed plant ingredient bases to add to conventional animal products. These different ingredient combinations and product formats enable manufacturers to tailor products to specific use cases, consumer preferences, and production constraints.

↗ Balanced Proteins bridge the reliability and familiarity of conventional meat with the innovations and benefits of other ingredients. With both finished products and ingredient bases, Balanced Proteins can scale quickly and integrate more easily into existing commercial ecosystems.



50/50 Foods Inc.

The Category Promise

Balanced Proteins deliver on taste, value, nutrition, familiarity, seamless integration, and sustainability.

Promise 1 →

Taste

Balanced Proteins can meet or surpass the sensory experience of conventional meat and poultry products.

Taste is the primary driver in consumer food purchase decisions. **91% of U.S. consumers rank “Taste” as very-to-extremely important** for food purchase decisions.¹⁷

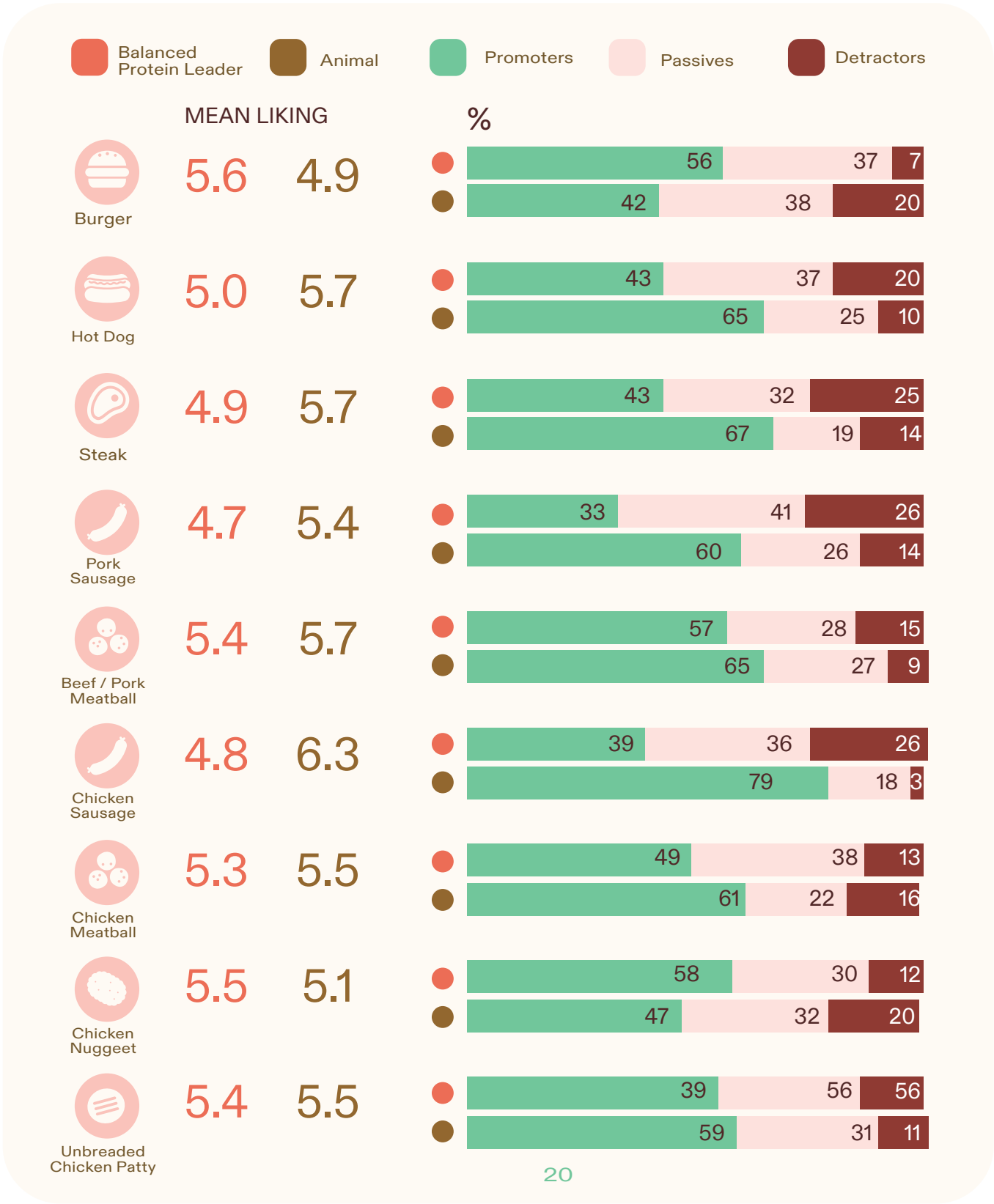
The NECTAR 2024 *Future of the Industry* report found that **four Balanced Protein products achieved or surpassed taste parity with conventional meat among omnivore consumers.**¹⁸ Similarly, NECTAR

and The Good Food Institute APAC’s 2025 study, *Enhancing Meat with Plants*, found that one Balanced Protein product in APAC achieved taste superiority versus the leading conventional meat in that category.¹⁹

These studies demonstrate the Balanced Protein category’s potential in improving the taste of conventional meat products with the meaningful inclusion of animal-free ingredients.

Overall Liking Scores for the Balanced Protein Category Leader vs. Animal

Source: NECTAR, Future of the Industry, 2024 N=1,192



Promise 2 →

Value

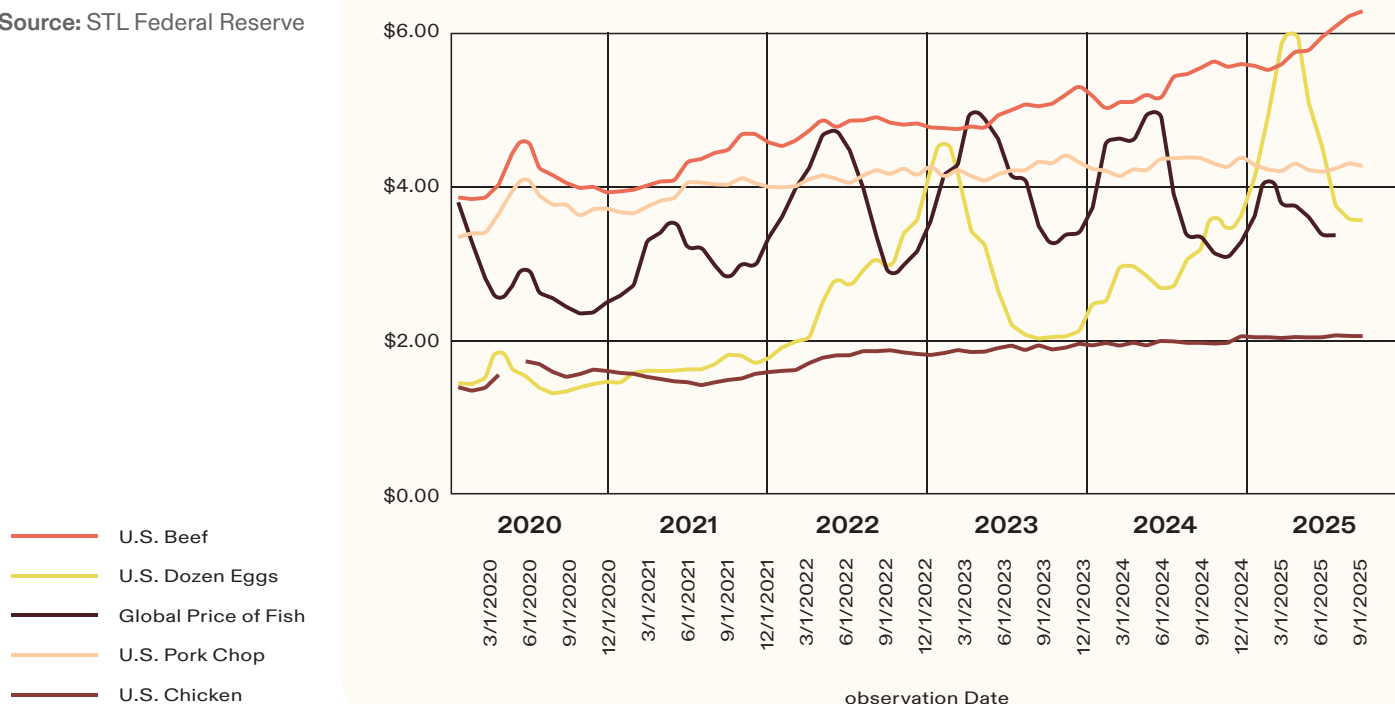
Balanced Proteins can help stabilize costs in conventional animal ingredient supply chains, providing margin relief for operators and affordability for consumers.

The cost of animal ingredients continues to rise as feed crop failure, pests and disease, and geopolitics strain supply chains and cause price volatility. In August of 2025, the average U.S. retail price of beef hit an all-time high at **\$6.32/lb.**²⁰ JBS, one of the largest meat packers in the world, anticipated that elevated prices will remain through 2027.²¹

In contrast, within just a few years, Balanced Protein pioneers have brought products to market that are now priced at or below conventional beef. Similarly, major retailers in Europe have priced balanced beef products as much as **33% less than their conventional counterparts.**²² For manufacturers and consumers alike, this means better value and greater price stability.

Retail Prices of Common Animal Proteins Over Time

Source: STL Federal Reserve



Promise 3 →

Nutrition

Balanced Proteins improve nutrition without asking consumers to give up the products they love. Product qualities such as higher fiber content and extra lean meat cuts contribute to better public health outcomes.

Most U.S. consumers consume adequate (and often excessive) amounts of protein, while remaining broadly deficient in dietary fiber.²³ The 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans identify the lack of dietary fiber as a public health concern for the general U.S. population.²⁴ Today, **97% of children fail to meet the daily recommended fiber intake**²⁵ despite this deficiency being linked with type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, bowel diseases, and some cancers.²⁶

Balanced Protein products **optimize nutrition by enhancing the products with added nutrients, such as fiber, while reducing cholesterol and saturated fat,**

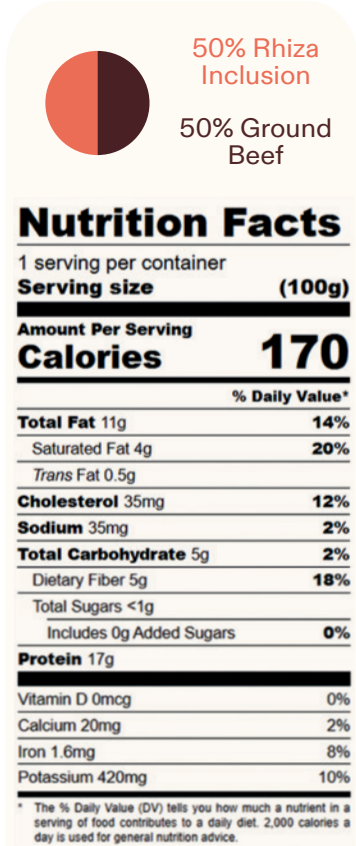
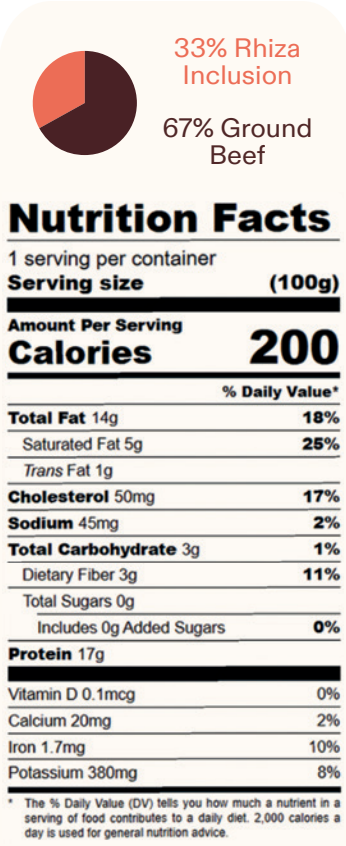
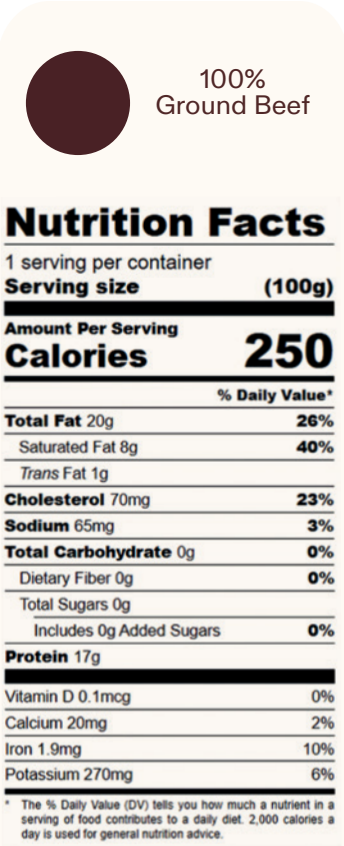
helping close critical nutrient deficiencies.

This compelling nutritional value proposition resonates with consumers, as demonstrated with **Perdue’s CHICKEN PLUS®** which promises ¼ cup of veggies in every serving.

Similarly, the **Better Meat Co.’s mycelium-based ingredient “Rhiza”** demonstrates how Balanced Proteins pave a path to improved nutritional content for meat without compromising on quality. For the Better Meat Co., substituting up to 50% of ground beef with Rhiza **delivers the same protein content while adding 5g of fiber and cutting cholesterol and saturated fat in half.**

Better Meat Co.’s
Nutritional Fact Panel with
Various Inclusion Levels of
Their Mycelium-based
Ingredient Rhiza

Source: Cooked
Nutritional Fact Panels,
The Better Meat Co.



Promise 4 →

Familiarity

Balanced Proteins deliver the format, flavor, and experience consumers already understand, with added benefits.

Familiarity is a major driver of consumer food choice: **55% of U.S. consumers say that *familiarity* is a top consideration when deciding what to eat**, nearly as high as nutrition (63%) and on par with convenience (55%).²⁷

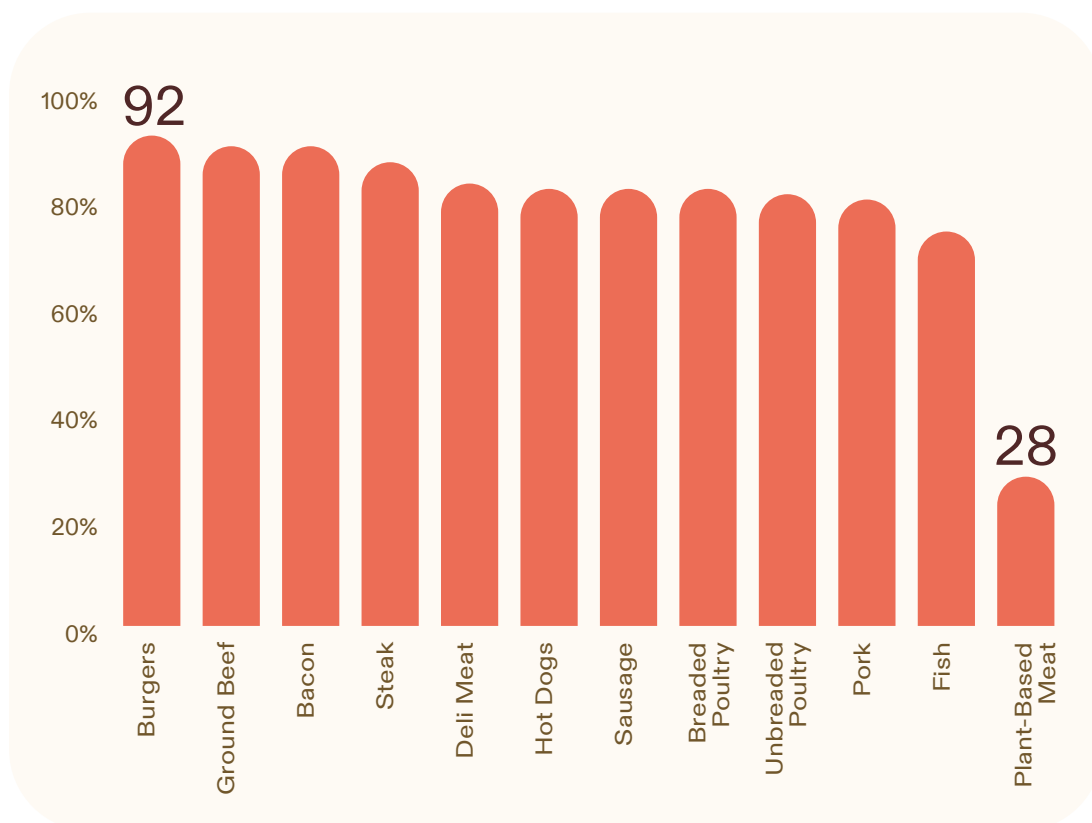
Today, a familiarity gap exists between conventional meat and alternatives. Nearly **92%** of consumers know what to expect when they order a conventional burger, but only **28%** feel the same about plant-based meats.²⁸

By featuring animal ingredients as a key component of the products, Balanced Proteins build on the sensory qualities and preconceived notions of conventional animal products, which makes them **uniquely suited to overcome the familiarity barriers that prevent consumer adoption**.

With clear communication around taste, texture, and nutrition, these products can reassure consumers that they are getting the products they love with added benefits.

Familiarity by Meat Type
Somewhat-to-Very Much
Agree with Statement:
“I know what to expect
when I order this item.”

Source: Food System Innovations, “Balanced Proteins: How to Build a Functional, Familiar Category,” 2025



Promise 5 →

Seamless Integration

Balanced Proteins are streamlined for manufacturer and operator adoption.

Many Balanced Protein products integrate seamlessly into existing manufacturing and foodservice infrastructure, with little need for retraining new capital investments. While some ingredients like soy are considered a top 10 food allergen, **other allergen-free, Kosher, and Halal certified ingredients are widely available that can fit with existing manufacturing plans.**

Adding plant-based ingredients to conventional meat can improve food waste and product quality. Balanced Protein formats like burgers, meatballs, and taco fillings have demonstrated **increased yield, improved moisture retention, and longer hold times**, making them especially appealing to foodservice operators.²⁹



Fable Food Co.

Promise 6 →

Sustainability

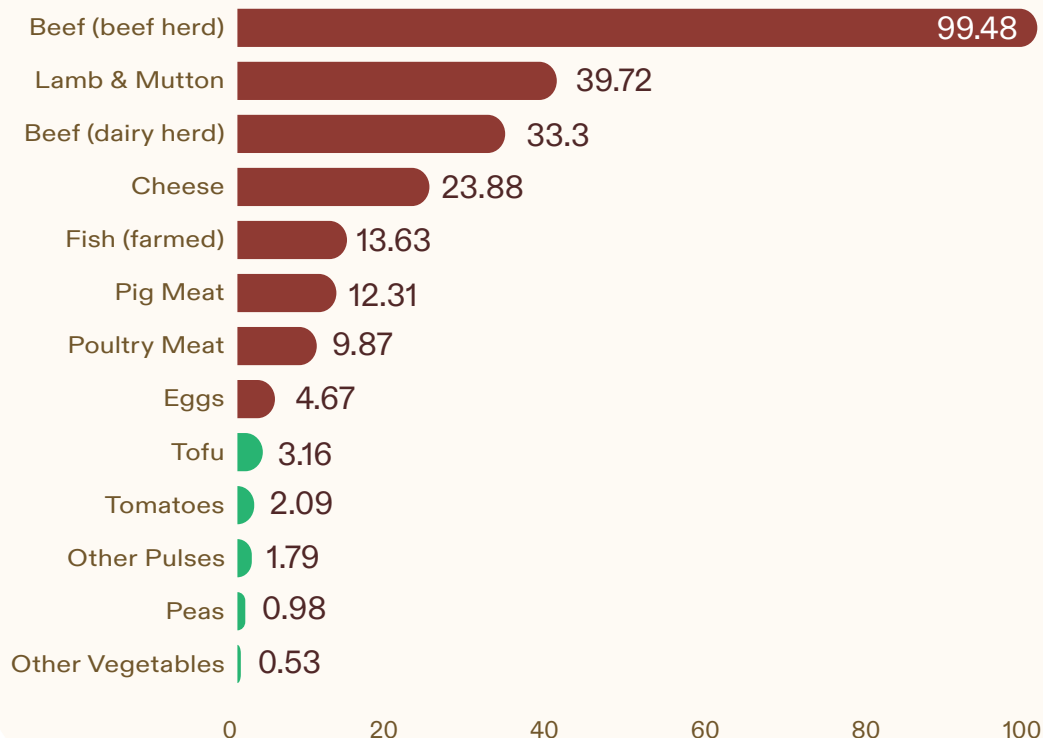
Balanced Proteins offer a practical pathway to measurable sustainability gains without requiring a radical shift in consumer behavior.

Animal agriculture contributes an estimated **~12-20% of global greenhouse gas emissions**³⁰ and is a sizable contributor to **Scope 3 (indirect) emissions** for retailers and foodservice operators.

Balanced Proteins companies demonstrate that these products can significantly cut animal-related emissions, depending on inclusion rate and ingredient mix. **This impact is most dramatic when plant-based or alternative ingredients substitute beef due to beef's outsized emissions** compared to other proteins. A lifecycle analysis from **50Cut**, a Balanced Protein company using a proprietary blend of roasted mushroom and mycelium, reports a **49.6%** reduction in greenhouse gas emissions when comparing a burger made from 50% beef and 50% 50Cut compared to a 100% beef burger.³¹ Based on the average greenhouse gas emissions for common food ingredients, it is easy to see why.³²

Average Greenhouse Gas Emissions per kg of Major Food Products Worldwide (in kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent)

Source: Hannah Ritchie, Pablo Rosado, and Max Roser (2022) - "Environmental Impacts of Food Production"





Fable Food Co.

Delivering on the Full Category Promise

Balanced Proteins give companies a practical way to **improve margins and future-proof their portfolios**. They can offer lower-cost and more price-stable ingredients, stabilizing or reducing input costs while **delivering on-par or superior sensory performance** with seamless integration across the value chain. Because Balanced Proteins begin with familiar animal ingredients, they **avoid consumer adoption barriers** seen in new product introductions.

For companies under pressure to manage costs, meet sustainability targets, maintain consumer trust, and differentiate their offerings, **Balanced Proteins offer a high-return, low-friction solution.**

Category Landscape



Upcycled Plant Power ('UPP') Limited

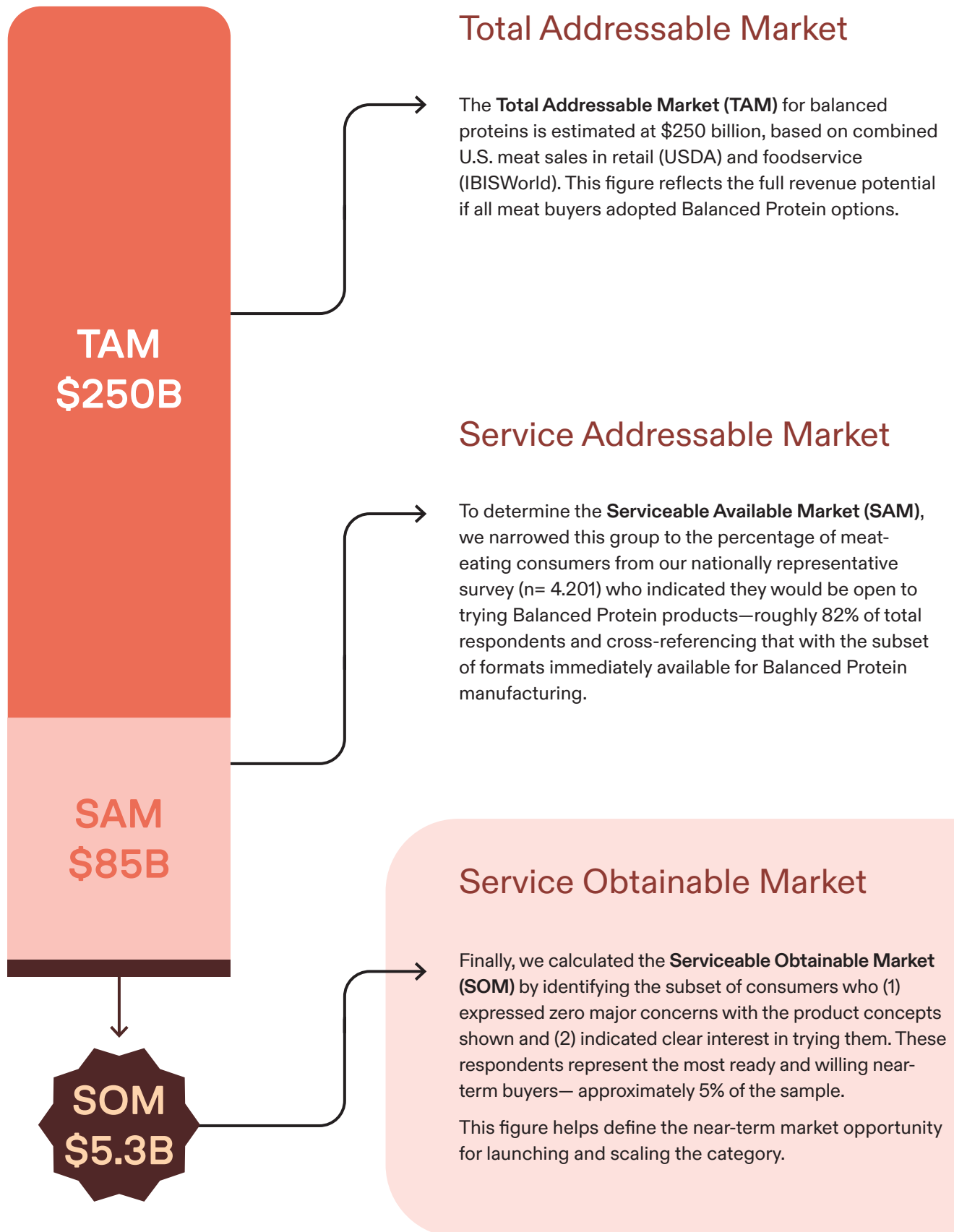
As Balanced Proteins transition from culinary innovation to commercial scale, a clearer picture of the category is beginning to emerge. Demand indicators, retail and foodservice activity, and early investment into enabling ingredients collectively suggest that a meaningful market is taking shape. This section maps the core building blocks of the category, illustrating how Balanced Proteins are evolving into a distinct, scalable, and material segment of the broader protein industry.

Market Opportunity

Early indicators point to meaningful latent demand for balanced proteins. To approximate the economic implications of this demand, FSI partnered with **Schaefer**, a food and beverage market research agency.

Schaefer determined that the **Serviceable Obtainable Market (SOM)**, the portion of the market that the balanced meat and poultry category can reasonably capture based on current consumer signals and manufacturing capabilities, equates to roughly **\$5.3B in the United States**. This estimate takes a deliberately conservative approach, multiplying the share of consumers who show clear purchase intent and no objections to the category by the current size of the ground meat and deli meat markets (two viable segments for Balanced Proteins).³³

At \$5.3B, the balanced protein category roughly **equates to the size of the frozen pizza category³⁴ and 2% of the total U.S. meat market**. While that may appear modest at first glance, the estimate only represents the consumers who would proactively choose a product *because* it is balanced. It does not account for the full foodservice opportunity where operational fit and product performance drives adoption; nor does it represent the broader potential of retail as distribution expands and category framing matures. It is a credible minimum that the category can capture today and not the upper bound of what this category could achieve in the **\$250 billion dollar U.S. meat market**.



Source: Schaefer + Food System Innovations,
Balanced Protein Consumer Study,
July 2025, N=4201

Major Players

As of November, 2025, Food System Innovations has identified **65 companies actively operating in the Balanced Protein sector** (both product manufacturers and ingredient suppliers).

This count excludes upstream R&D partners whose innovations support the broader category and focuses instead on companies that are publicly and commercially engaged in Balanced Protein product or ingredient development.

The Balanced Protein ecosystem is evolving rapidly, and FSI aims to maintain a living repository of organizations contributing to category growth, available at <https://www.balancedprotein.org/find-products>.

If your company is active in this space and would like to be included, contact Tim@balancedprotein.org

| Company | HQ Country | Company | HQ Country |
|---|------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| 50/50 Foods | USA | Beneo | Germany |
| 50Cut | | MyriaMeat | |
| Carnéa | | Nosh.bio | |
| DUO (Fusion Foods) | | Planteneers | |
| Fable Food Co | | Tillman's | Israel |
| Grateful Eats | | RiLBiTE | |
| Hatfield Blended | | Fileni | Italy |
| Hills Bay Classic | | Nanka | Malaysia |
| KARANA | | Albert Heijn (private label) | Netherlands |
| KidFresh | | ALDI Nord (private label) | |
| Little Spoon | | Cosun | |
| Perdue Chicken Plus | | Farm Dairy | |
| Phils Finest | | Fiber Foods (PrimeJack) | |
| Seemore | | Gro | |
| SMASH It! | | Jack's Secret | |
| The Better Meat Co | | Lidl (private label) | |
| The Jackfruit Company (The Better Burger Blend) | | Olijack Foods | |
| The Spare Food Co. | | SelektMeat | |
| Harvest B | Australia | SNX | |
| V2 Foods | | Van Loon Group | |
| Rebel Meat | Austria | Van Zandergen | |
| Colruyt Group (private label) | Belgium | Vegan Visboer | |
| BUMP | Canada | Mara Bio | New Zealand |
| Maia Farms | | Quality Meat | Singapore |
| Fidesse | Chile | Cocuus | Spain |
| Maggi Rindecarne (Nestlé) | | ODS Protein | |
| Danish Crown | Denmark | Heck | United Kingdom |
| Organic Plant Protein | | Marlow Ingredients | |
| PlanetDairy | | MOR Food | |
| Summ Ingredients | | MYCO | |
| | | Quorn | |
| | | Smug Dairy | |
| | | Tesco: Meat & Veg (private label) | |
| | | Upcycled Plant Protein | |
| | | William White Meat Ltd | |

Investments Trends

Between 2023-2025, Food System Innovations has calculated

>\$60 million

of investment into the Balanced Protein category.³⁵

Note: This figure accounts for the companies publicly operating in the Balanced Protein category of which Food System Innovations is aware. It excludes companies operating solely in plant-based or alternative protein but not marketing themselves as Balanced Protein products or ingredients. Investment in these sectors has direct application to Balanced Protein sector growth. **As ingredient companies continue to proliferate, FSI believes this \$60 million figure undercounts the total investment that's applicable to the Balanced Protein sector.**

Balanced companies raised modest sums compared to the \$1.1 billion invested in alternative proteins in 2024.³⁶ **Despite low category investment, Balanced Proteins delivered strategic growth in this time frame.**

Between 2023-2025, the category saw a mix of **seed to Series B rounds**, with investments ranging from **\$2-31 million**. Notable raises include:



- **The Better Meat Co.'s \$31 million Series A and 50Cuts' \$3 million infusion from Lever VC**, signaling investor confidence in mycelium-based fermentation.
 - » Notably, other mycelium-based companies that haven't yet publicly signaled participation in the balanced category are attracting large capital sums. One example is **Infinite Roots** which raised **\$58M** in a **Series B** round in 2024.



- **Fable Food Co.'s \$8.6 million Series A and The Jackfruit Company's \$5 million Series B**, showing investor interest in companies that provide fully plant-based and Balanced Protein ingredients with novel supply chains.

Fundraising updates for the past 3 years for companies pursuing business in the Balanced Protein category (Based on FSI Tracking)

| Company | Category / Focus | Last Known Round | | | | Total Raised (USD) |
|------------------------------------|--|------------------|-------------|----------------|---|--------------------|
| | | Year | Round Type | Amount Raised | Lead Investor | |
| The Better Meat Co. | Mycelium Ingredient Supplier (Rhiza Mycoprotein) | 2025 | Series A | \$31 M | Future Ventures, Resilience Reserve | ~\$42 M |
| | | 2024 | Grant | \$1.4 M | U.S. Department of Defense | |
| | | 2023 | Grant | Unknown | BIRD Foundation | |
| The Jackfruit Company | Plant-Based / Whole-Food Ingredient Brand | 2024 | Series B | \$5 M | Creadev, Grosvenor Food & AgTech, Investeco Capital | ~\$33 M |
| Fable Food Co. | Fungal Protein / Balanced Meat Product | 2023 | Series A | \$8.6 M | K3 Ventures | ~\$14.9 M |
| 50CUT | Balanced Protein / Mycelium Ingredient (Mushroom root blend) | 2024 | Undisclosed | \$3 M | Lever VC | ~\$10.5 M |
| | | 2023 | Grant | \$6.2M | Viola Ventures | |
| Harvest B | Plant-based ingredient producer | 2025 | Grant | \$2.3 M | Business.gov.au | ~\$7.7 M |
| | | 2025 | Seed | \$2 M | Mandalay Venture Partners | |
| Maia Farms | Mycelium Ingredient | 2025 | Seed | \$3.75 M (CAD) | Genome British Columbia's Industry Innovation Fund | ~\$8.8 M (CAD) |
| | | 2024 | Pre-Seed | \$2.3 M (CAD) | Joyful Ventures, PIC Investing Group, Koan Capital | |
| Nosh Biofoods | Fermentation & Mycelium Ingredients | 2024 | Unknown | Unknown | ApolloCapital, CHECK 24 Impact GmbH | ~€3.2M |
| Upcycled Plant Power (UPP) Limited | Upcycled plant proteins from broccoli crop | 2023 | Grant | £800K | Defra, U.K. Research & Innovation | ~£2.1M |

Source: Crunchbase, October 2025

↗ Balanced Protein companies are using their funds to methodically build a category, but current capital flows do not yet reflect the category's impact potential.

Commercial Signals

Across 2024–2025, dozens of Balanced Protein success stories emerged; many of them in foodservice, where measurement is difficult but momentum is tangible—proving that Balanced Proteins work at scale.

In U.S. retail, activity has been limited following early pandemic-era launches, but the category’s fundamentals remain promising.

Meanwhile, Europe has surged ahead, with retailers such as Lidl, Albert Heijn, and Tesco expanding balanced meat and dairy products across hundreds of stores.

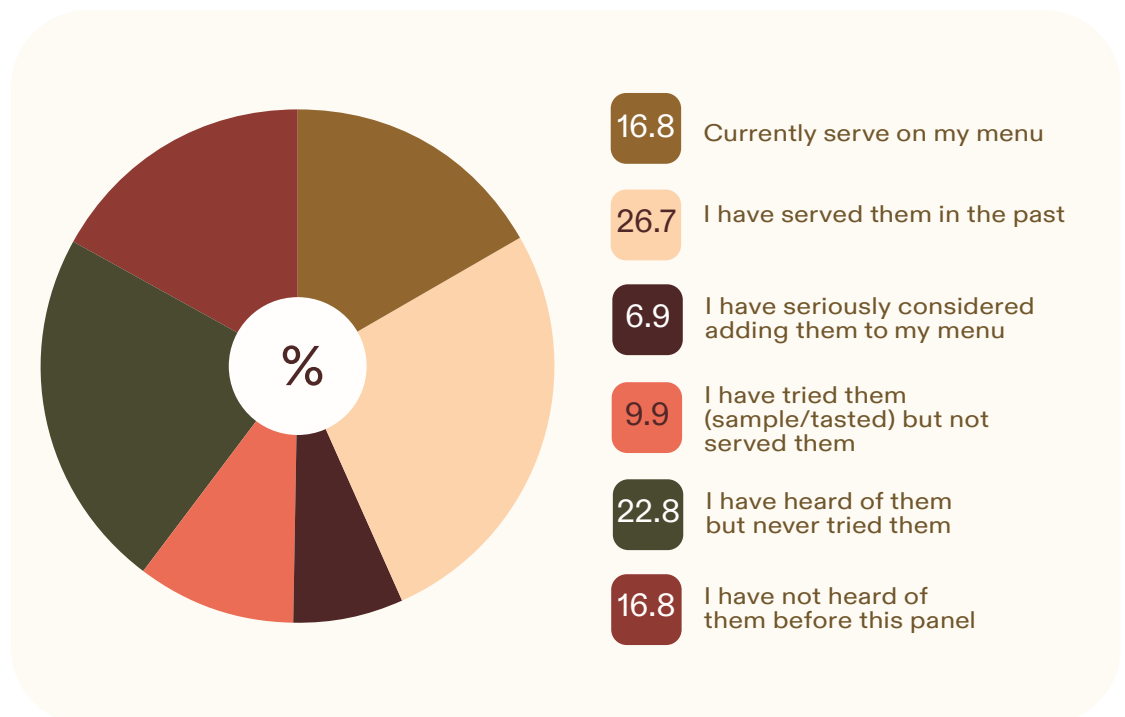
These dual signals suggest that Balanced Proteins are crossing the threshold from experimentation to durable commercial execution.

Foodservice

Today’s resurgence of Balanced Proteins builds on more than a decade of culinary advocacy. Since at least 2014, institutions like the **Culinary Institute of America**, the **Mushroom Council**, and the **James Beard Foundation** have promoted protein diversification as a way to enhance flavor, performance, and environmental outcomes.³⁷

Breakdown of
Chef Awareness (N=30)

Source: Palate, Balanced Protein Operator Insights Survey, September, 2025, N=30



That leadership shaped a broad baseline of awareness in the industry. In a recent small-scale **Palate Insights** operator study, **83% of the chefs polled** were either aware of Balanced Proteins as a concept or have had direct experience serving them on menu.

Through this expanding network of culinary influencers, the concept is gaining traction across foodservice channels.

Non-Commercial Foodservice: Institutional Adoption at Scale

Non-commercial foodservice locations (e.g., colleges, hospitals, stadiums and more) are leading category adoption. Balanced products address core dining program needs of **cost reduction, operational fit, nutrition, and sustainability without**

sacrificing taste. Unlike retail environments where product communication has specific regulations, foodservice can use guest touchpoints such as menus, table tents, and employee interactions to position balanced products as enticing and trustworthy.

Notable Examples of Non-Commercial Foodservice Adoption

| Category | Operator | Market Signal | Impact |
|----------|----------------------------------|--|--|
| General | Aramark U.K. | Launched the 70/30 Meat Me Halfway burger in partnership with Fable Food Co —a balanced protein company using shiitake mushrooms. | Aramark U.K. serves more than a quarter of a million burgers annually , and the company said it will prioritize the burger as its “offer of choice.” ³⁸ |
| | Brakes U.K. | Launched 70/30 beef–shiitake burger with Fable Food Co. in the Sysco range. | At £11.83/kg , Brakes prices the product below their Angus beef burgers. ³⁹ |
| | Compass Group Australia | Served 19,000 shiitake-infused burgers with Fable Foods Co. at a pilot event. | Compass Group Australia is pursuing a policy where they swap 30% of minced beef to balanced versions. |
| | Pat LaFrieda | 50Cut —a balanced protein company using a roasted mushroom and mycelium blend—partnered with legendary New York-based meat purveyor Pat LaFrieda to create a 50/50 burger. | Pat LaFrieda prices the burger below the conventional burger. ⁴⁰ |
| | The Performance Food Group (PFG) | In late 2024, the Performance Food Group’s FarmSmart brand launched a beef + jackfruit burger in collaboration with The Jackfruit Company —operator of the largest jackfruit supply chain by volume. ⁴¹ | PFG and The Jackfruit Company sell the balanced product across the country with universities. |

| Category | Operator | Market Signal | Impact |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Colleges & Universities | An Ivy League University | <p>The university presented a mandate to the culinary team to reduce ground beef consumption in the 2025-2026 school year by 6%.</p> <p>The culinary team observed significantly less shrinkage in the final cooked Spare product (a beef and vegetable blend that uses upcycled ingredients) allowing them to switch from a 5.33oz custom beef-mushroom blend patty to a 4oz Spare Burger patty and to Spare Beef Bulk Blend to replace 100% ground beef in all their recipes.</p> | The school saved about \$0.60 per patty from improved ingredient costs and better yields while reducing beef consumption by 40% year-over-year campus wide. |
| | UCLA | Converted all ground beef to 60/40 mix of Harris Ranch + Beyond Meat. | UCLA serves 220,000 patties / 51,000 lbs of balanced beef annually. |
| | University of Vermont | Starting in the Fall 2025 semester, 50Cut partnered with the University of Vermont to create a “better burger.” | The university is converting their entire local beef program over to a 50Cut blend reducing emissions by 30% |
| | Vanderbilt University | After a successful trial of the Spare Burger on the grill station in a single dining location in the Spring semester of 2025, Vanderbilt switched almost 100% of their ground beef (burgers and bulk) to Spare at the start of the Fall semester. | Vanderbilt is on track to save 854 tons of CO2e emissions and reduce ground beef consumption by about 9,000 lbs in the 2025-2026 academic year. |
| Healthcare | Mount Sinai Hospital | 50Cut launched a pilot in Q3 2025 integrating their bulk blend into many core ground beef recipes. | The hospital is able to meet sodium reduction goals and address dietary restrictions such as gluten-free meat-loaf with the 50Cut product. |
| | U.K.'s National Health Service | Partnered with U.K. plant-based meat giant Quorn to make 50/50 products. | This partnership could feed millions of consumers yearly. ⁴² |
| Hospitality & Resorts | Disney | Launched the BOTH Burger with U.S. balanced protein. company 50/50 Foods. | Disney is expanding the partnership to all kids' meal sliders in the Disney park. |
| | Loews Hotel | Loews Hotel teamed up with 50Cut to create a new breakfast sausage that delivered on quality, flavor, and juiciness. | 50Cut breakfast sausage is the new national standard for all 26 hotels in the U.S., and Loews Hotel has since added a burger and meatball. |

| Category | Operator | Market Signal | Impact |
|--|---|---|---|
| K-12 | Austin Independent School System | Mixes 20% of lentils into all Tex-Mex recipes. | The school district served 64,000 servings on a high school burrito bowl line and about 8,000 lbs of balanced beef. |
| | The South Carolina Education Association (SCEA) | In a student taste test, 97% of students approved of 50Cut meatballs , and 94% approved of 50Cut burgers. | This result clears the way for a major-statewide procurement contract. |
| Sports, Entertainment, and Cultural Institutions | 2025 MLB All-Star Game | As a special menu item for the 2025 MLB All-Star Game, 50Cut, Pat LaFrieda, and Delaware North collaborated to create the “ Down by the Bay Burger ,” a balanced burger using mycoprotein. | The burger was a successful pilot and opened the door to expanding distribution to other stadiums. |
| | The Dutch Grand Prix | The Dutch Grand Prix is touted as “one of the most sustainable events in the Netherlands.” For the 2025 Grand Prix, the event silently transitioned all hamburgers to Olijck Foods’ “Halfway Burger,” a 50/50 formulation. | 29,000 burgers were sold in three days. By halving the amount of burger meat, the Grand Prix saved, according to its own calculations, approximately 37,500 kilograms of CO2, 300,000 liters of water, and 25,000 square meters of agricultural land. ⁴³ |
| | Levy Australia | Fable Food Co. worked with Levy Australia to introduce a Shiitake Infusion Beef Burger for a major Australian sporting event. | Up to 17,000 burgers were sold. |
| | Monterey Bay Aquarium | The Monterey Bay Aquarium decided to replace their in-house blend of mushrooms and beef with 50Cut’s pre-formed product. | The institution welcomes approximately 2 million visitors annually , and this burger is now the only burger on the menu. |
| | SSA Group | SSA created their own upcycled burger using vegetable pulp left over from fresh-pressed juices and a mushroom-beef blend. The patty was a 75% vegetable / 25% beef blend. | Guest feedback was positive with sales nearly doubling despite less beef. SSA is now testing this concept at other cultural institution locations. |

Source: Partner provided unless otherwise end noted

↗ Balanced Proteins are emerging as a category-level solution for institutional foodservice operators under pressure to reduce costs, deliver on taste, improve nutrition, and reduce emissions without rewriting menus. Their adaptability across cuisines and age groups makes them a low-risk, high-impact lever for shifting large-scale purchasing portfolios.

Commercial Foodservice: Emerging & High Potential

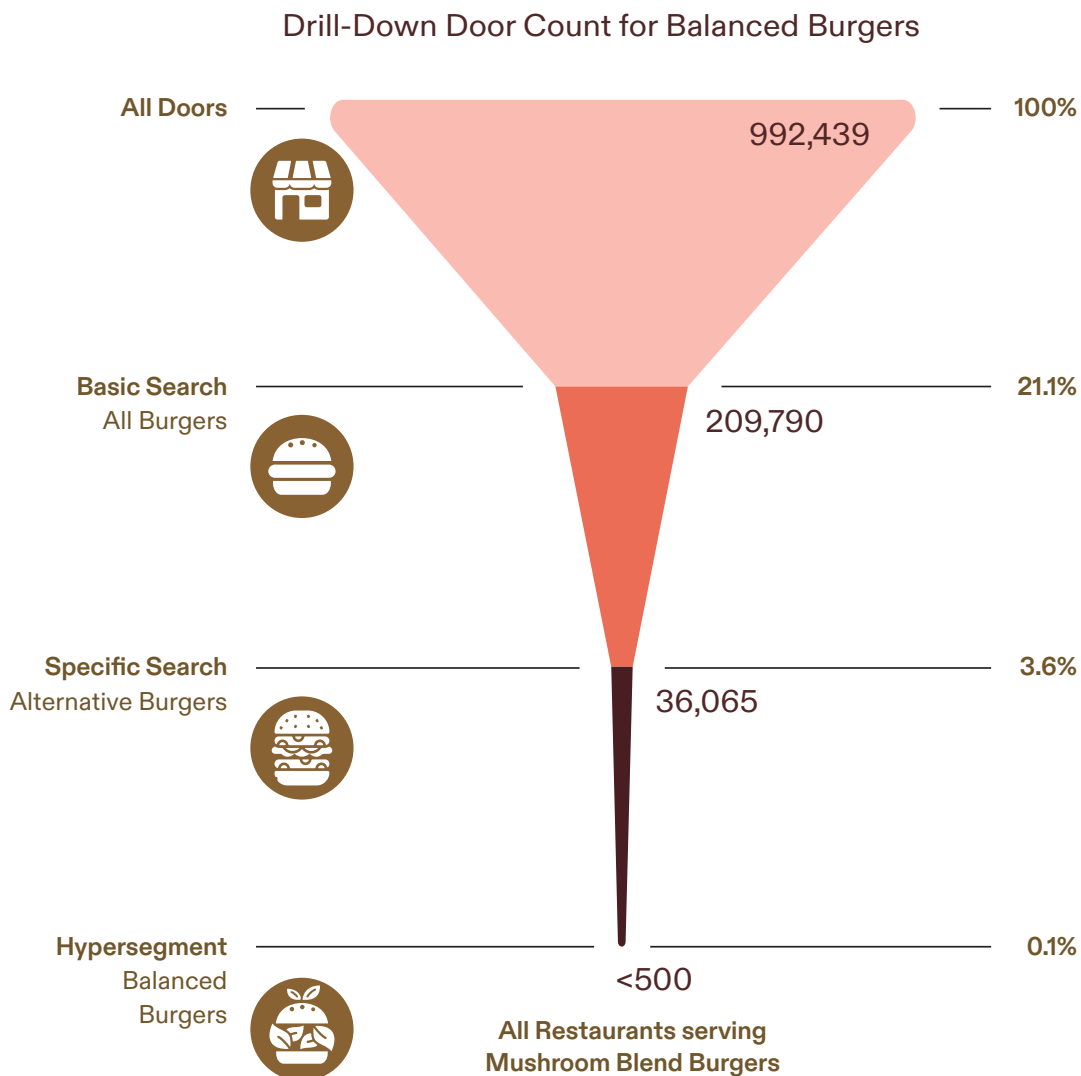
Though balanced products have a deep connection to restaurants, marquee launches in national chains have been contained to limited-time offers, including the 2019 **Sonic Drive-In Signature Slinger** and the **Cheesecake Factory's turkey-mushroom burger**.⁴⁴ Today, commercial foodservice appears to be an under-utilized or a difficult-to-measure solution.

First Bite, a foodservice business-to-business intelligence company with access to a menu database of over 200M menu items, shows very little trackable menu coverage for burgers that incorporate plant-based ingredients:

- **Just 17% market coverage for plant-based burgers** at locations that serve any burger⁴⁵
- **Less than 1% coverage for mentions of "blended"**⁴⁶

Foodservice Door Count by Different Burger Menu Items

Source: First Bite US Commercial Restaurant Data, May 2025



↗ Commercial foodservice represents a highly promising growth channel. Balanced Proteins can quietly integrate into existing menus or serve as a visible enhancement to core consumer occasions such as family-friendly, better-for-you kids' meals.

Beyond the potential price and operational benefits for commercial foodservice operators, NECTAR and FSI data show that balanced products are a strong way to stand out in a competitive foodservice industry. Consumers find these products differentiated and loyalty-driving:

- **74%** are interested or extremely interested⁴⁷
- **90%** see Balanced Proteins as a distinct offering⁴⁸
- **71%** say they are more likely to return to a restaurant that serves Balanced Proteins⁴⁹

The consumer opportunity is even stronger in the kids' meals category where operators compete intensely for family traffic.

- **80%** of parents find Balanced Proteins appealing on kids' menus⁵⁰
- **74%** would consider switching restaurants for this option⁵¹
- **58%** are willing to pay a premium⁵²

Taken together, these signals indicate that Balanced Proteins can help operators win new guests, retain existing ones, and strengthen value-driven menu positioning in an increasingly competitive market.

Retail

Retail adoption of Balanced Proteins is uneven but promising. Across 2025, European retailers drove the most visible progress, expanding balanced meat and dairy assortments across multiple chains and categories.

Meanwhile, the U.S. market is resetting from early pandemic-era setbacks, with regional launches and new partnerships signalling renewed energy.

U.S. Retail: Rebuilding Momentum

Balanced Proteins in U.S. retail faced early setbacks. Between 2019 and 2020, major processors including Tyson, Applegate, and Maple Leaf Foods introduced early balanced meat and poultry products positioned as health-oriented, more sustainable alternatives to conventional meat.



Tyson Raised and Rooted



Applegate Well Carved



Perdue CHICKEN PLUS® Chicken Breast & Vegetable Dino Nuggets



KidFresh Baked Beef Meatball

However, those products ultimately disappeared from shelves during the COVID-19 supply chain crisis, as processors prioritized core SKUs and high-demand items. Interviews with employees and category managers indicate several contributing factors including:

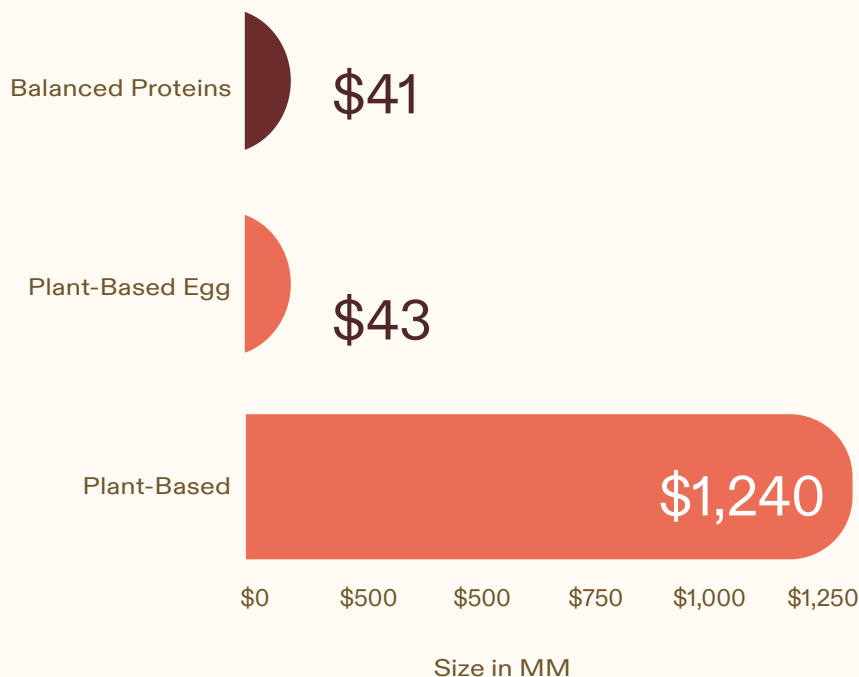
- **Supply chain disruptions** and limited co-manufacturing capacity
- **Product performance challenges**, particularly around cookery and texture
- **Lower velocity than core products**, ultimately leading to a deprioritization

Despite these early setbacks, several brands have continued to perform well. **Perdue CHICKEN PLUS®** and **KidFresh**—both family-oriented products—demonstrate ongoing proof of concept, maintaining steady shelf presence and velocity. These products lean into their Balanced Protein credentials advertising the superior nutritional properties and full serving of vegetables on front-of-pack. Their success suggests that when Balanced Proteins align with **familiar formats and family-friendly positioning**, they can sustain traction even in crowded retail categories.

In its 2024 *Category Update on Blended Meat*, the **Good Food Institute** estimated the **U.S. retail category for Balanced Proteins at \$41M**—similar in size to the plant-based egg category.⁵³ Since then, the trackable retail coverage decreased and few major national launches have occurred, likely leading to a retail category contraction year-over-year.

U.S. Retail Market Size of Balanced Protein Category as of 2023

Source: Category Update on Blended Meat, Good Food Institute, 2024





↗ Early retail setbacks reflect timing more than concept viability. Continued success in family-focused products, new launches across the U.S. and Europe, and strong value-led performance in European retail all point to a category resetting with clearer positioning and stronger partnerships. Combined with Schaefer's market sizing analysis, the signal suggests that Balanced Proteins have substantial room to grow in U.S. retail.

However, **regional launches** and further exploration of **better-for-you products aimed at improving children's nutrition** occurred in 2025. In **October 2025**, Texas-based **Central Market** introduced two new balanced protein lines:

- A **balanced beef** line combining ground beef with **Fable Foods' Shiitake Infusion** across 10 Central Market locations.
- A **balanced seafood smash burger** from **SMASH It!**, combining salmon with nutrient-dense vegetable ingredients.

Early feedback was reported as positive, potentially serving as a case study and paving the way for a steady growth trajectory for balanced products.

European Retail: Mission-Driven Growth

Europe remains the clear retail leader for Balanced Proteins. Driven by corporate commitments to increase the share of alternative protein sales, retailers such as **Albert Heijn, Aldi, Colruyt, ICA, Jumbo, Lidl, and Tesco** have significantly expanded their balanced (or "hybrid") assortments over the past two years.

- **Albert Heijn** launched **15 new balanced meat products** in 2025 alone.⁵⁴
- **Lidl Netherlands** is pricing balanced minced beef **33% lower than conventional meat**.⁵⁵
- **Lidl Belgium** reported that **one in four burgers sold now contains plant-based ingredients**, a signal that consumers are embracing balanced formats as standard meat options rather than novelties.⁵⁶
- **Tesco and Jumbo** continue to integrate balanced offerings into their core meat sets, normalizing these products in mainstream shopping routines.⁵⁷

These launches demonstrate how **value pricing, broad retail distribution, and category framing** can shift consumer norms faster than isolated pilots. By emphasizing taste and price first, European retailers are positioning Balanced Proteins as an **easy everyday choice**, and the early sales results suggest that it works.

Co-Manufacturing & Industry Partnerships

↗ Balanced Proteins give meat manufacturers a pragmatic path to reduce costs, strengthen supply chain resilience, and capture new consumer demand without overhauling their operations. Ingredient partnerships—like those led by The Better Meat Co.—show that collaboration between conventional and emerging protein companies will drive the next phase of protein innovation.

One of the most effective paths to accelerate Balanced Protein adoption is to **pair ingredient innovators with established meat producers** that already have the scale, infrastructure, and distribution. Such is the case in the Netherlands where the Van Loon Group partnered with Jumbo, and Hilton Foods partnered with Albert Heijn.

Ingredient suppliers are finding traction by offering **price-competitive, functional inputs** sourced from resilient supply chains.

A leading example from the U.S. is **The Better Meat Co.**, a mycelium-based ingredient company located in Sacramento, California. By supplying its Rhiza mycoprotein to major processors, the company enables meat manufacturers to create Balanced Protein products that deliver on taste and cost without requiring new equipment or major operational changes.

In early 2025, The Better Meat Co. signed their **largest letter of intent (LOI) to date with a major South American meat producer**. This LOI adds to four other agreements in place with other meat producers across North America and Asia.

Taken together, these agreements project **\$13M in wholesale annual revenue** for the Balanced Protein ingredient supplier.⁵⁸

Better Meat Co.



↗ Industry recognition and intellectual property milestones signal that Balanced Proteins are a practical tool for business growth, menu innovation, and operational resilience.

Other Notable Achievements

The industry recognition and intellectual property activity in 2025 add additional signals that this category is maturing from experiment to commercialization:

The Better Meat Co. Secured a patent and a TIME Innovation of the Year Award

In early 2025, **The Better Meat Co.** announced the issuance of a new U.S. patent for its Rhiza mycoprotein fermentation process which converts potato processing sidestreams into high-protein fungal biomass. The patent signals the company's leadership in biomass fermentation and expands its existing IP portfolio.⁵⁹

Late in 2025, **TIME** named **The Better Meat Co.** one of its **2025 Innovations of the Year**, citing its ability to turn food waste into functional protein inputs for balanced and plant-based foods.⁶⁰

Several Balanced Protein Companies Receive Foodservice Industry Recognition

At the Society for Hospitality and Foodservice Management (SHFM) National Conference, **50/50 Foods** took home the **People's Choice Award** for *Most Innovative Product*. The honor recognized its line of balanced burgers made with 50% meat and 50% whole-food ingredients.⁶¹

At the 2025 National Restaurant Association Show, **50CUT** earned the **FABI Favorite Award**, recognizing its 50/50 sausage made with animal meat and mycelium.

Fable Food Co., known for its rich mushroom-based ingredients, also received a **FABI Award**, further affirming that fungi-based ingredients are central to the next generation of meat innovation.



Customer & Consumer Insights



50/50 Foods Inc.

Beyond *taste, price*, and the opportunity for silent transitions, the outlook for Balanced Proteins depends on how the products are positioned. Success hinges on whether consumers understand why these products exist and whether their framing feels **relevant, appetizing, and trustworthy**.

Across multiple studies in the United States, reported interest and appeal for the concept has ranged widely from **25% to 74%** depending on how researchers introduced it.^{62 63}

When consumers see Balanced Proteins positioned as a functional extension of

familiar foods, appeal can climb **as high as 80%** When they see it as another form of “alternative protein,” interest drops sharply.⁶⁴

While acknowledging that these are different questions across different audiences, this variability still underscores that **Balanced Proteins must be positioned as a credible improvement to a familiar favorite product rather than being framed as a meat alternative**.

The following sections outline the high-level drivers and barriers, consumer segments, and value propositions shaping this category’s early momentum.

Consumer Drivers & Barriers

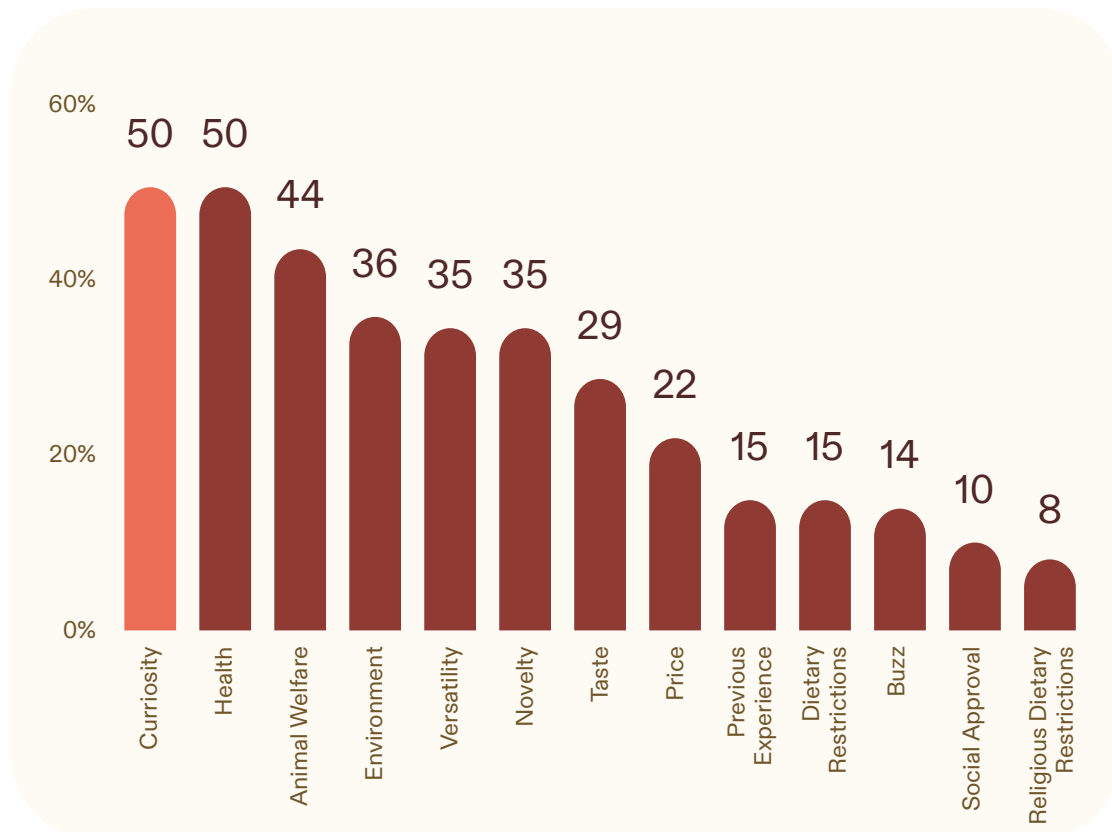
Balanced Proteins have the potential to deliver on what matters most to consumers: **taste, price, nutrition, convenience, and familiarity**. Yet, when evaluated directly, consumer perceptions of the category still mirror several of the same challenges the alternative protein sector faces.

Curiosity Isn't Enough

The leading motivator (*curiosity*) and the top barrier (*no clear reason to buy*) both point to the same underlying issue: **value proposition confusion**. Curiosity drives initial awareness but rarely sustains repeat purchase. At the same time, the fact that **only 8% of category rejectors cite unfamiliarity** reinforces that consumers recognize these products, but they don't know why they should choose them. "No reason" indicates that many consumers still struggle to understand **why Balanced Proteins exist or how they fit into their routines**. This underscores the need for clearer, more tangible benefits anchored in taste, health, affordability and practicality.⁶⁵

Drivers for Balanced Proteins among Consumers that Find the Concept Appealing

Source: Food System Innovations + YouGov, Feb 2025, N=2001

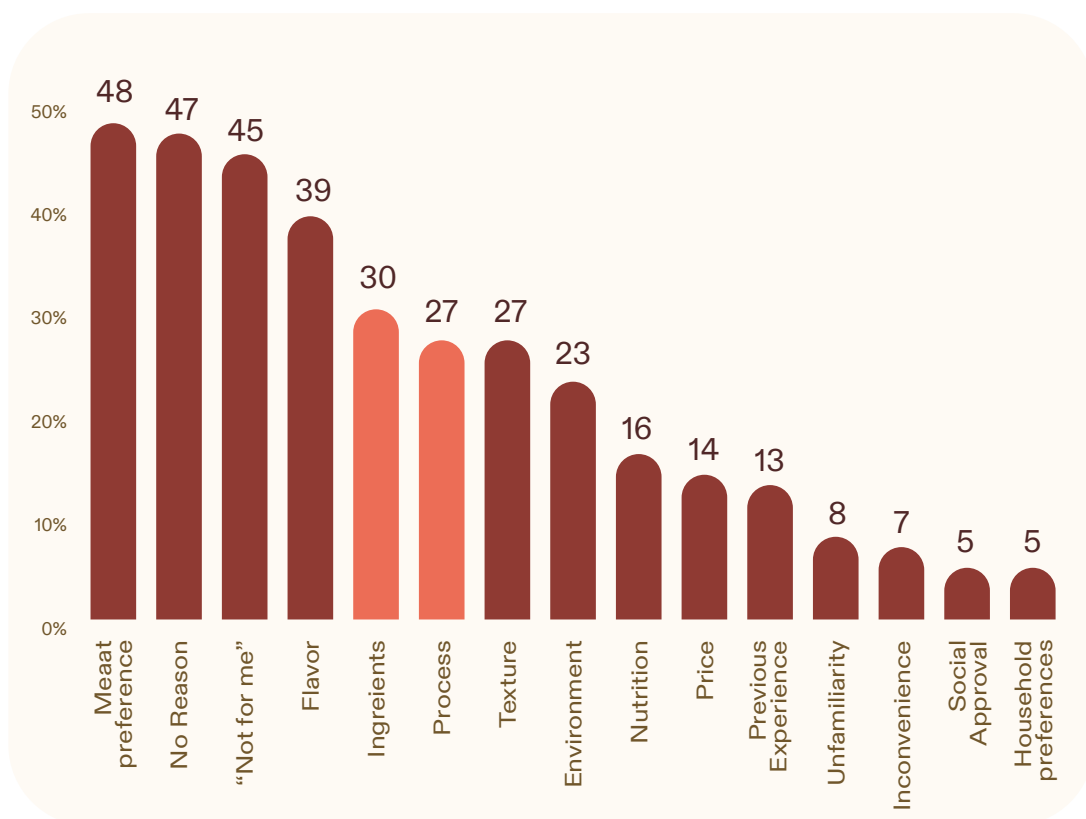


Nutrition Drives Interest, but Composition Creates Hesitation

Health consistently ranks among the top drivers (50%), signaling that consumers want protein products that feel balanced and nourishing. Yet 30% of rejectors remain hesitant about what's actually inside. This tension suggests that future communications should **connect nutritional credibility with ingredient transparency, reassuring consumers that Balanced Proteins are both healthy and trustworthy.**⁶⁶

Barriers for Balanced
Proteins among Consumers
that Find the Concept
Unappealing

Source: Food System Inno-
vations + YouGov, Feb 2025,
N=2001



DUO



Consumers Expect Value, and Ingredients Can Deliver

Consumers are **concerned about the price of animal products such as beef.**⁶⁷ *Price (51%)* is nearly cited as often as *Health (52%)* as a driving factor for meat reduction, and consumers expect that products balanced with plant-based ingredients will cost less.⁶⁸

With the increasing prices for certain animal products, **many Balanced Proteins are already delivering a value-optimized product** that appeals to a wide range of consumers.

Nestle's Maggi
Rindecarne of Chile

Translation:
Savings + Flavor + Ease
Maggi Rindecarne Seasoned
soy protein to enhance meat
dishes More Yield!



➤ The category's **biggest opportunity—and biggest challenge—is definition.** Stronger framing around purpose and composition will turn curiosity into conviction. For deeper consumer insights into this category, visit: balancedprotein.org/research-insights

Consumer Segments & Value Propositions

The concept of Balanced Proteins holds broad appeal across many consumer groups in the U.S. and globally. Like the broader meat and dairy categories, **Balanced Proteins can play multiple roles in people's lives:** comfort food, nutrition source, family meal, etc.. This diversity makes it difficult to pinpoint a single “target consumer” defined by shared beliefs, motivators, or economics but demonstrates the enormous potential of this category to grow into a mass market.

However, consumer research reveals clear signals about where and how Balanced Proteins resonate most: **among younger, more adventurous consumers and in situations where the products solve a clear, compelling consumer need.**

Understanding these differences helps manufacturers, retailers, and foodservice operators tailor their messaging, menu strategies, and product innovation to meet consumer needs.

Consumer Segments

When it comes to demographics, **Gen Z, Millennials, and households with children** are more likely to be open to Balanced Proteins.⁶⁹

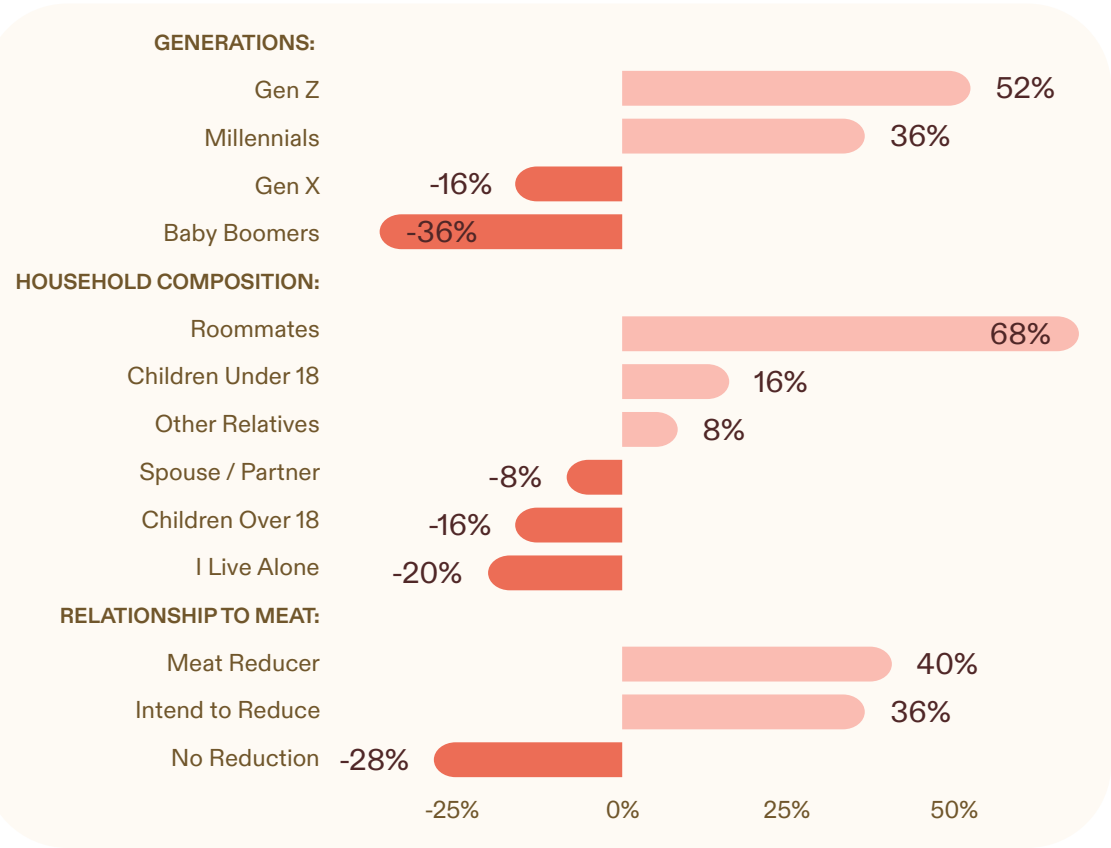
Psychographic analysis shows that consumers who see food as a vehicle for **wellness, self-expression, exploration or efficiency** are most open to the category, while those driven primarily by functionality or familiarity show moderate—but still notable—interest.

The table below draws from proprietary research conducted by **Schaefer** in 2025. The study surveyed **4,201 U.S. consumers**, segmenting them based on how they think about the role of food in their everyday lives. Participants were then exposed to six Balanced Protein product concepts to assess appeal, motivators, and potential barriers.

Overall, Balanced Protein products demonstrated broad cross-segment appeal, with roughly **two-thirds to three-fourths of consumers rating the concepts as somewhat-to-extremely appealing**.

Appeal Index Above and Below Average Based on Demographics

Source: Food System Innovations, “Balanced Proteins: How to Grow a Functional, Familiar Category,” February 2025.



| The relationship to food that most resonated with the respondent | Est. Percent of U.S. Population | Balanced Protein Aggregate Concept Appeal (Somewhat-to-Extremely Appealing) |
|---|---------------------------------|--|
| Wellness “I actively seek out healthier or more sustainable food options.” | 13% | 76% |
| Expression “I’m intentional about my food choices—they reflect my values and identity.” | 9% | 74% |
| Exploration “I enjoy trying new food, but don’t overthink it” | 11% | 71% |
| Efficiency “I primarily focus on convenience—whatever is fastest or easiest.” | 11% | 71% |
| Balance “I try to cook at home but often rely on shortcuts or prepared options.” | 17% | 68% |
| Functionality “I see food mostly as fuel—practical, efficient, no-frills.” | 8% | 64% |
| Familiarity “I eat what’s familiar and comfortable—I’m not looking to experiment.” | 14% | 63% |





Source: Schaefer, July 2025, N=4,201

↗ Across all four value propositions, **a clear and compelling consumer purpose drives appeal. Balanced Proteins perform best when framed as enhancements to foods people already love, not as a new category to learn or a habit to change.**

Value Propositions that Win

While some operators choose to silently transition conventional meat products to Balanced Proteins, other operators and channels must provide clear and compelling communication about these products.

The Schaefer work tied six product concepts to six distinct value propositions. Each concept below reflects a different motivational angle, revealing how framing influences appeal across consumer segments. While product appeal and value propositions cannot be fully disentangled, **the overall results provide direction on where further analysis is warranted.**

| Positioning | Overall Appeal | Concept Tested | Insights |
|--|----------------|---|--|
|  <p>Flavor Enhancement</p> | 73% | A burger positioned as enhancing the taste and satisfaction of a conventional burger but with more fiber and less saturated fats. | <p>Leading with taste appeals broadly across segments. 91% of consumers rank <i>taste</i> as very-to-extremely important for food purchase decisions.⁷⁰</p> <p>Balanced Protein messaging works well when paired with familiar cues and taste reassurances rather than language of compromise and reduction.</p> |
|  <p>Budget Stretching</p> | 70% | Pasta bolognese positioned as a less expensive way to deliver flavors that the family will love. | <p>Behind <i>taste</i>, <i>price</i> is a leading motivator for food purchase decisions. 76% of consumers state that <i>price</i> is very-to-extremely important in food purchase decisions.⁷¹</p> <p>As such, Balanced Proteins appeal to a broad set of consumers when positioned as a value option.</p> |
|  <p>Stealth Health</p> | 68% | Chicken nuggets positioned as a family-friendly favorite that delivers classic taste with added nutrients. | <p>“Stealth health” is a clear value proposition for Balanced Proteins—solving a tangible problem for consumers by adding plant-based ingredients to familiar meat products.</p> <p>67% of parents would like to add more vegetables to their child’s diet yet only 22% say their child willingly eats healthier foods.⁷²</p> <p>This positioning helps consumers or operators meet nutrition goals while preserving the familiar product formats and expected sensory performance.</p> |
|  <p>Macro Maxing</p> | 67% | Burrito meat positioned as a convenient, flavorful meal that satisfies meat eaters with a more complete nutritional profile. | <p>A hyper-focus on macronutrients can extend the category into consumer groups that would otherwise be unwilling to adopt new meat products.</p> <p>Consumers that claim “[they] eat what is familiar and comfortable - [they] are not looking to experiment,” had the lowest aggregate category appeal ratings of any segment (63%). However, this Macro Maxing concept garnered their highest appeal rating at 66%.⁷³</p> |

Source: Schaefer, July 2025, N=4,201

While these findings demonstrate where Balanced Proteins can succeed today, the category’s full potential across audiences, formats, and value propositions remains expansive and underexplored.

Stakeholder Actions: What Is Needed to Scale

Balanced Proteins are at a pivotal stage. There are some proofs of concept, but the category is still early in scaling. The opportunity landscape is broad: from institutional dining to quick-service restaurants, retail CPG to ingredient partnerships. Each channel presents unique levers for growth.

The next phase of growth for Balanced Proteins depends on addressing a set of solvable, system-level challenges. These barriers are interconnected, but each has a clear path forward if the right stakeholders take coordinated action.



1. Product Performance

Sustain improvements in sensory performance and operational excellence to strengthen consumer trust and category loyalty.

Taste remains the ultimate gatekeeper for long-term adoption. For both buyers and consumers, a single poor experience can shape perceptions of the entire segment.

Balanced Proteins have proven they can outperform conventional meat on flavor. However, the category's success depends on upholding rigorous product standards and consistent sensory performance across all manufacturers.

Balanced Protein manufacturers must make sensory benchmarking a non-negotiable, and supporting stakeholders such as non-profits and philanthropic organizations should help make these insights more accessible to the category.



2. Consumer Buy-In

Build excitement through sharp, compelling narratives to drive trial.

Consumers express curiosity but struggle to understand the “why” behind the category. This lack of clarity dampens consumer drive which in turn affects operator interest.

Manufacturers, vendors, and other stakeholders must provide clear value propositions and thoughtful communication in order to generate excitement around Balanced Proteins from consumers.



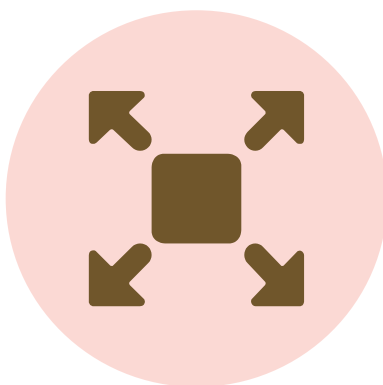
3. Industry Buy-In

Cultivate strong engagement from chefs, operators, retailers, and brands to normalize Balanced Proteins across menus and assortments.

Across retailers, foodservice operators, and food manufacturers, incumbent players control the infrastructure, relationships, and decision pathways that determine whether Balanced Proteins scale.

While the category aligns with core business incentives, widespread adoption will only occur once the perceived risk is lowered.

Until then, progress depends on equipping internal champions with the data, tools, and proof points needed to make adoption a clear, low-friction decision.

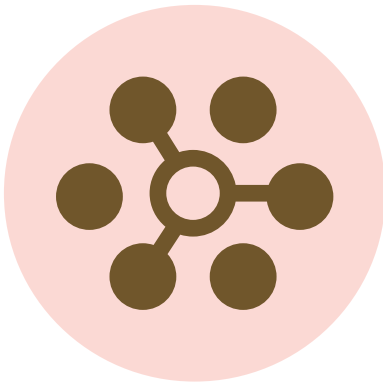


4. Expanded Manufacturing Capacity

Expand co-manufacturing and market penetration of ingredient-based Balanced Protein formats to reduce cost and increase production capacity.

Price continues to be a major barrier for both operators and consumers. While Balanced Proteins can sometimes leverage existing meat infrastructure, limited co-manufacturing capacity and early-stage ingredient supply chains constrain scale.

As consumers increasingly seek more affordable options, the category can accelerate the scale and cost reductions by aligning production inputs with existing production infrastructure.



5. Distribution & Market Access

Secure broadline distribution access to ensure consistent, reliable supply across foodservice channels.

Even when products are ready, distribution bottlenecks slow growth. Many Balanced Protein SKUs are still absent from major broadline catalogs, forcing regional or one-off sourcing.

Distribution is the bridge between pilot success and mainstream adoption. Unlocking consistent supply and distributor participation will allow operator enthusiasm to translate into sustained purchasing.



6. Investment

Leverage catalytic and impact funding to close infrastructure and R&D gaps.

With the exception of a few notable 2025 raises, capital deployment in Balanced Proteins remains limited. The category faces familiar food business headwinds: unclear demand, modest margins, and uncertain exits.

Balanced Proteins require targeted investment to scale pilot capacity and value chain web development, but their fast commercialization and measurable near-term climate impact may be appealing to catalytic and impact investors.



The Collective Impact

The next phase and trajectory of category expansion will depend on the actions across various stakeholders: nonprofits, investors, manufacturers, and operators. By aligning incentives and investments along these adoption pathways, the industry can accelerate impact and bring Balanced Proteins from promising innovation to normalized components of the protein portfolio.

Conclusion & 2026 Outlook

In 2025, Balanced Proteins gained meaningful traction in markets across the globe. Early evidence suggests that Balanced Proteins can meet or improve upon the core demands of **taste, cost, and nutrition** while delivering emissions reductions. Concurrently, ingredient companies advanced technologies that make scaling possible, and new investment activity reflected growing confidence in the category's long-term potential.

The year ahead will be pivotal in determining whether Balanced Proteins progress from **proof-of-concept** to **proof-of-category**, emerging as a defined, organized segment of the meat industry with broad market participation.

2026 will be defined by four priorities:

1. **Validation:** Generate measurable performance data (e.g., sales, cost, taste, and nutrition) to establish credibility and benchmarks for future growth.
2. **Market Engagement:** Expand awareness across channel buyers with category-level marketing, trade presence, and case studies. Building momentum and buy-in from consumers.
3. **Infrastructure:** Strengthen co-manufacturing and ingredient supply partnerships to lower cost and improve access across channels.
4. **Investment:** Attract catalytic and commercial funding to move from pilots to scaled programs in both institutional and commercial settings.

If achieved, these priorities will position Balanced Proteins as a core building block of the modern protein industry. Food System Innovations invites partners across the supply chain—manufacturers, operators, funders, and policymakers—to help accelerate this category. Share your data, pilot your products, and collaborate on defining what success looks like in this growing field. **Let's grow the category together.**

➤ For partnerships or inclusion in the 2026 State of the Category Report, contact Tim Dale, Category Innovation Director, at Tim@balancedprotein.org

Endnotes

- 1 STL Federal Reserve, "Average Price: Ground Beef, 100% Beef (Cost per Pound) in U.S. City Average," September 2025.
- 2 Reuters, "JBS sees US cattle cycle improving from late 2027," August 2025.
- 3 Finn K, Jacquier E, Kineman B et al. Nutrient intakes and sources of fiber among children with low and high dietary fiber intake: the 2016 feeding infants and toddlers study (FITS), a cross-sectional survey. *BMC Pediatr* 19, 446 (2019).
- 4 Crippa, M., et al. 2021. Food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions. *Nature Food* 2, 198–209. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00225-9>.
- 5 Aleph 2020, "Land Use and Biodiversity," 2025.
- 6 The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, "The Livestock Ladder's Water Footprint," March 2019.
- 7 NECTAR, "Future of the Industry," 2024.
- 8 Vegconomist, "Lidl NL Permanently Reduces Plant-Based Prices, Adds Pea Protein to Beef Mince for Blended Product," August 2024.
- 9 Schaefer + Food System Innovations, Balanced Protein Consumer Study, July 2025, N=4201.
- 10 Crunchbase, October 2025.
- 11 FoodBev, "Quorn to supply mycoprotein for hybrid meat products in U.K. hospitals," July 2024.
- 12 Lidl, "Belgians seem to like 'hybrid' meat: 1 in 4 burgers sold at Lidl is hybrid," August 2025.
- 13 Ahold Delhaize, "Albert Heijn Introduces Innovative Product Line for Healthier and More Sustainable Eating," July 2025.
- 14 Vegconomist, "Lidl NL Permanently Reduces Plant-Based Prices, Adds Pea Protein to Beef Mince for Blended Product," August 2024.
- 15 Schaefer + Food System Innovations, Balanced Protein Consumer Study, July 2025, N=4201
- 16 Id.
- 17 Food System Innovations, "Balanced Proteins: How to Grow a Functional, Familiar Category," Feb, 2025.
- 18 NECTAR, "Future of the Industry," 2024
- 19 Ahold Delhaize, "Albert Heijn Introduces Innovative Product Line for Healthier and More Sustainable Eating," July 2025.
- 20 STL Federal Reserve, "Average Price: Ground Beef, 100% Beef (Cost per Pound) in U.S. City Average," September 2025.
- 21 Reuters, "JBS sees US cattle cycle improving from late 2027," August 2025.
- 22 Vegconomist, "Lidl NL Permanently Reduces Plant-Based Prices, Adds Pea Protein to Beef Mince for Blended Product," August 2024.
- 23 U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025. 9th Edition. December 2020. Available at [DietaryGuidelines.gov](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov).
- 24 Id.
- 25 Finn K, Jacquier E, Kineman B et al. Nutrient intakes and sources of fiber among children with low and high dietary fiber intake: the 2016 feeding infants and toddlers study (FITS), a cross-sectional survey. *BMC Pediatr* 19, 446 (2019).
- 26 Balanced.org, "Fiber FAQs," 2025.
- 27 Food System Innovations, "Balanced Proteins: How to build a functional, familiar category," February 2025 .
- 28 Id.
- 29 Mushroom Council, "The Blend™," 2025.
- 30 UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). 2023. Pathways towards lower emissions: A global assessment of the greenhouse gas emissions and mitigation options from livestock agrifood systems. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc9029en>; Ccacainiro, Costa, et al. 2022. Roadmap for achieving net-zero emissions in global food systems by 2050. *Scientific Reports* 12, 15064. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-18601-1s>; Grossi, et al. 2019. "Livestock and climate change: impact of livestock on climate and mitigation strategies." *Animal Frontiers* 9, no. 1: 69–76.
- 31 50Cut, "Climate Impact Report," March, 2024.
- 32 Hannah Ritchie, Pablo Rosado, and Max Roser (2022) - "Environmental Impacts of Food Production" Published online at [OurWorldinData.org](https://www.ourworldindata.org).
- 33 Schaefer + Food System Innovations, Balanced Protein Consumer Study, July 2025, N=4,201.
- 34 Grand View Research, "U.S. Frozen Pizza Market (2023 - 2030)."

Endnotes

- 35 Crunchbase, October, 2025.
- 36 The Good Food Institute, “Investing in Alternative Proteins,” 2025.
- 37 Jane Black, “The Meat-Mushroom Blend Makes Sense,” Washington Post, August 2024.
- 38 Alt-Meat, “Fable Food partners with Aramark,” March 2025.
- 39 Brakes, Sysco Premium Beef & Shiitake Mushroom Beef Burger, 2025.
- 40 LaFrieda 50Cut Burger - Beef & Wild Mushroom 50/50 Blend, 2025.
- 41 Performance Food Group, “Performance Food Group’s FarmSmart® Brand Launches Innovative Beef & Jackfruit Burger in Collaboration with The Jackfruit Company to Offer a Delicious, Healthier, and Sustainable Burger Option,” November, 2024.
- 42 FoodBev, “Quorn to supply mycoprotein for hybrid meat products in U.K. hospitals,” July 2024.
- 43 de Correspondent, “Tens of thousands of meat lovers have been eating seaweed without knowing it,” October 2025.
- 44 Amy Guttman, “Make Room for Mushrooms: Fungi Compete With Meat In Burgers,” NPR, November 2013.
- 45 First Bite US Commercial Restaurant Data, May 2025.
- 46 Id.
- 47 NECTAR, “Future of the Industry,” 2024.
- 48 Id.
- 49 Id.
- 50 Food System Innovations, Feeding Our Future, Oct 2025.
- 51 Id.
- 52 Id.
- 53 The Good Food Institute, “Category Update on Blended Meat,” 2024.
- 54 Ahold Delhaize, “Albert Heijn Introduces Innovative Product Line for Healthier and More Sustainable Eating,” July 2025.
- 55 Vegconomist, “Lidl NL Permanently Reduces Plant-Based Prices, Adds Pea Protein to Beef Mince for Blended Product,” August 2024.
- 56 Lidl, “Belgians seem to like ‘hybrid’ meat: 1 in 4 burgers sold at Lidl is hybrid,” August 2025.
- 57 Green Queen, “While Plant-Based Meat Sales Are Faltering, Blended Proteins Are Back in Vogue,” August 2025.
- 58 Green Queen, “Ahead of \$15M Fundraise, The Better Meat Co Secures Mycoprotein Deal with South American Meat Giant,” March 2025.
- 59 Vegconomist, “The Better Meat Co. Receives Patent for Potato-Based Mycoprotein Production,” April 2025.
- 60 TIME, “The Best Inventions of 2025,” October 2025.
- 61 Society for Hospitality and Foodservice Management, “Awards,” 2025.
- 62 Food System Innovations “Balanced Proteins: How to Grow a Functional, Familiar Category,” 2025.
- 63 NECTAR, “Future of the Industry,” 2024.
- 64 Food System Innovations, “Feeding Our Future,” 2025.
- 65 Food System Innovations + YouGov, Consumer Insights Study, 2025, N=2001.
- 66 Id.
- 67 NPR, “Why beef prices are higher than ever (and shoppers are finally resisting),” September 2025.
- 68 Food System Innovations, “Balanced Proteins: How to Grow a Functional, Familiar Category,” February 2025.
- 69 Food System Innovations, “Balanced Proteins: How to Grow a Functional, Familiar Category,” February 2025.
- 70 Food System Innovations, “Balanced Proteins: How to Grow a Functional, Familiar Category,” Feb, 2025.
- 71 Food System Innovations, “Balanced Proteins: How to Grow a Functional, Familiar Category,” Feb, 2025.
- 72 Food System Innovations, Feeding Our Future, Oct 2025.
- 73 Schaefer + Food System Innovations, Balanced Protein Consumer Study, July 2025, N=4,201.