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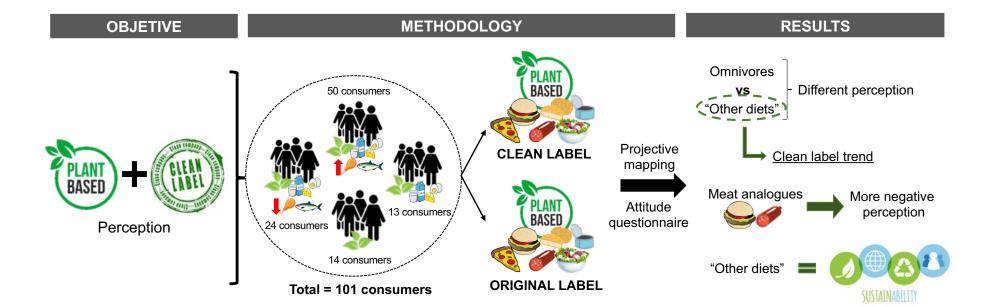


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Additional Information



Highlights

- Study has focused on clean label plant-based products.
- Participants with different diets (omnivorous, flexitarian, vegetarian and vegan) were included.
- Consumer diets affect consumer perception for clean label plant-based food.
- Consumers' attitudes with different diets were discussed.
- Future research recommendations were suggested.

- 1 Green or Clean? Perception of clean label plant-based products by
- 2 omnivorous, vegan, vegetarian and flexitarian consumers.

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Abstract

Consumers are increasingly interested in health and sustainability aspects of their diets. Meat reduction diets have gained popularity with some consumers, leading to an increase in plant-based products in the markets. Additionally, the demand for more natural and healthier products is associated with the clean label trend. But how these two trends relate to each other, has not yet been widely investigated. The aim of the present research was to explore the perception of different consumers (vegans, vegetarians, flexitarians and omnivores), towards clean label, plant-based products in order to better understand their motivations and attitudes. Consumers in Spain, followers of these four diets, participated in a projective mapping task - categorisation of twenty plant-based products (ten

clean label and ten original products) - and answered a health and sustainability attitudes survey. The results showed that according to the diet followed by the consumers, they categorised and perceived the products differently, in line with their attitudes. Meat-reducer and avoider consumers paid more attention to quality and health and presented a greater concern for animal welfare and sustainability. Also, they focused on the clean label status for product categorization, while omnivores did not separate between original and clean label products. The present study shows a first exploration of how consumers with different relation to meat (frequent consumption-reduction-avoidance) perceive clean label plant-based products, in relation to their attitudes to health and sustainability, a building block on the way to support consumers in the transition to healthier, more sustainable diets.

Keywords: plant-based, clean label, sustainability, Projective Mapping, omnivorous, vegan, vegetarian, flexitarian

1. INTRODUCTION

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44 In recent years, meat reduction diets have gained popularity with some 45 consumers striving to shift to more sustainable and healthier diets. Depending on 46 the levels of strictness and adherence to dietary meat restriction there are different diets (Eveleigh, Coneyworth, Avery & Welham, 2020). Typically, vegans 47 48 do not consume any animal-derived products, vegetarians exclude meat and fish 49 but may consume milk and eggs and flexitarians who are semi-vegetarian 50 because do not exclude meat products (red meat or other meats) but limit their 51 consumption (Derbyshire, 2017; Rosenfeld, Rothgerber & Tomiyama, 2020). 52 Lantern Study (2019) indicated an increase in Spain of 27% in this type of diets, 53 with 0.5% vegans, 1.5% vegetarians and 7.9% flexitarians, being these 54 percentages lower than in other places in Europe such as Germany and England. 55 Despite these data, 87.8% of the population declares itself omnivores (Lantern 56 Study, 2019). The health benefits of limiting or excluding meat and meat derived 57 products include a lower risk of overweight and obesity, type 2 diabetes, coronary 58 heart disease and certain cancers such as colorectal cancer (World Health 59 Organization, 2015; Malek & Umberger, 2021). Furthermore, following these 60 diets also has environmental benefits such as the reduction of greenhouse gas 61 emissions (GHG) and land use demand (Tilman & Clark, 2014; Rabès et al., 62 2020). 63 This reduction in meat consumption entails having to increase the intake of plant-64 based proteins and fresh fruits and vegetables (Kumar, 2016), thus, this 65 consumption is replaced by plant-based meat analogues. Aschemann-Witzel (2020) indicated that the term "plant-based" is used to describe a recent 66 67 consumer trend of avoiding animal-based products and choosing plant-based

alternatives instead, reducing the amount of animal-based foods in diets; so it can be understood in two ways, excluding or reducing animal-based products. Fardet (2017) classified "plant-based foods" into fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, nuts, and seeds; their derived processed counterparts (breads, pasta, breakfast cereals, cooked and fermented vegetables and legumes, and fruit purées, juices, and jams); and their derived ingredients (oleaginous seed-derived oils, sugars, and some herbs and spices). However, these products are usually produced using a significant amount of water, flavourings, oil or fat, binding agents, and colouring agents, apart from protein (textured and non-textured form) (Kyriakopoulou, Keppler & van der Goot, 2021), what can be perceived as negative. From a technological point of view, food additives play an important role in the development of food products, but these additive names, sometimes difficult to pronounce, give rise to the impression of unfamiliarity, which in turn results in perceptions of higher health risk (Varela & Fiszman, 2013). Thus, the trend of clean label products has led consumers to consider what components are used in the food products that they eat in everyday life (Asioli et al., 2017). This trend has emerged due to the concern of consumers about healthiness and sustainability of food products (Euromonitor International, 2016). Despite this trend, there is still no definition or specific regulations/legislation on what is considered as clean label (Aschemann-Witzel, Varela & Peschel., 2019). However, it is generally known that these products contain ingredients perceived as natural, harmless, simple, and those that consumers know and use regularly (Ingredion, 2014). In particular, many consumers trying to reduce meat consumption to shift to healthier and more sustainable diets, find it that highly

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processed, plant-based meat analogues can be a contradiction, perceiving them as not healthy, and full of additives (Varela et al., 2021). How these two trends (plant-based and clean label) relate to each other, has not yet been widely investigated. Consumer research, thus, needs to support consumers to enhance trust and acceptance towards more sustainable alternatives (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2019).

Hereby, the aim of this research was to explore the perception of consumers following different diets (vegan, vegetarian, flexitarian and omnivorous), towards clean label, plant-based products as compared with their additive-added counterparts, in order to better understand their motives and attitudes, with the view of a transition to healthier and more sustainable diets.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1. Consumers

The recruitment goal was to include both consumers interested in plant-based food products and consumers who are generally not interested in this type of food, so consumers were invited that followed different diets with regards to meat consumption (vegan, vegetarian, flexitarian and omnivorous). Participants (n=101) were recruited from vegan and vegetarian consumer groups, university areas and coffee places, who voluntarily filled out the complete survey. As the aim of this research was to find an and spontaneous product differentiations, all participants were untrained or naïve assessors (Dehlholm, 2014). Table 1 shows the socio-demographics information of the 101 respondents, the sample included 32 men, 68 women and 1 who preferred not to indicate their gender. Consumers interviewed were mostly students (46.53%) and people employed full-time

(28.71%). Many publications pointed out young people as a motor of change in the dietary green-shift (Lu, Bock & Joseph, 2013; Cerri, Testa & Rizzi, 2018; Lago et al., 2020). Additionally, 50 respondents identified themselves as followers of an omnivorous diet, 24 of a flexitarian diet (they try to reduce the meat and animal by-products consumption), 14 of a vegan diet (purely plant-based), and 13 of a vegetarian diet (they can include egg and dairy products). This implies a good representation of the followers of each diet based on the distribution by Spanish diet in 2019 (Lantern study, 2019).

2.2. Stimuli

As the global demand for more plant-based food alternatives and specially for meat substitutes and ready-to-eat food have been increasing rapidly in Europe in recent years (Lantern study, 2019; EUVEPRO 2019; Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2020). After visiting different supermarkets in Spain (specialised and non-specialised on vegan and vegetarian products), eight vegan and two vegetarian commercial products were selected, to represent a variation of widely available plant-based available products within these categories (sausages, burger, vegetable steak, salami, croquettes, meatballs, quinoa spread, *sobrassada*, pizza and quinoa with vegetables) (Table S1). The ingredient label of each product was presented on two different cards with the same product picture, but different ingredient lists, one presenting a clean label and the other the original label (see an example card in Fig. 1). In general, the intention in the clean label version was to take out additives, preservatives, allergens, and all ingredients coming from animals to represent the plant-based and the clean label trends.

2.3. Projective mapping

Projective mapping (Risvik et al., 1994) was used to study the perception of clean label plant-based products and their mainstream counterparts. This methodology was applied due to its success to study undirected, top-of-mind consumer perception, and has been applied before in relation to claims, nutritional info and other product and ingredient features in different food categories (Varela & Ares, 2012; Carrillo et al, 2012; Varela et al, 2017; Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2019). Respondents were asked to place the cards on a DIN A2 white sheet according to their perceived similarities and differences. They were asked to complete the task using their own criteria and they were told that there were no right or wrong answers. After completing the projective mapping task, consumers were asked to provide a description to the groups they made on the sheet paper, or the reason why they mapped them in that way. As a help to explain and understand the task an example of projective mapping showing the categorisation of different objects on a sheet was provided.

2.4. Attitude questionnaire

The survey was conducted through a selection of questions from different questionnaires on nutrition knowledge, food choice, and environmental concern, as described below. The participants carried out this questionnaire, using a tablet device, after finishing the projective mapping task.

2.4.1. General nutrition knowledge

The questions about nutrition were selected from the 'General Nutrition Knowledge Questionnaire' (GNKQ) described by Parmenter and Wardle (1999). Selected questions were relevant to plant-based products consumption. The

selected questions from the dietary recommendations section was "Do you think health experts recommend that people should be eating more, the same amount, or less of these foods?"; from knowledge of food sources, that is, which foods contain which nutrients were "Do you think these are high or low in protein?", "Do you think these are high or low in fibre/roughage?", "Do you think experts call these a healthy alternative to red meat?" and "Which one of the following has the most calories for the same weight?"; from the dietary choices were "Which would be the best choice for a low fat, high fibre snack?" and "Which would be the best choice for a low fat, high fibre light meal?"; and from the diet- disease associations were "Are you aware of any major health problems or diseases that are related to a low intake of fibre?", "Do you think these help to reduce the chances of getting certain kinds of cancer?" and "Do you think these help prevent heart disease?".

2.4.2. Motives underlying food choice

The questions about motivational factors were selected from the 'Food Choice Questionnaire' (FCQ) developed by Steptoe, Pollard and Wardle (1995), which involved nine motivational dimensions (or factors). However, in this study just seven factors were chosen (health, mood, convenience, sensory appeal, natural content, price and ethical concern) and their respective items to evaluate were selected. The survey was evaluated by answering the following question: 'It is important to me that the food I eat on a typical day...'. In order to know more about the ethical food choice motives, the ethical concern factor was expanded, and the animal welfare factor included according to Lindeman and Väänänen (2000). As described Carrillo, Varela, Salvador and Fiszman (2011) all the questionnaire items were answered on a seven-box scale, labelled from 'not at

all important' to 'very important', to increase the ability to discriminate among food choice motives.

2.4.3. Health and Ecological concern

In order to understand the health concerns related to the naturalness of foods, the Factor 3 labelled Natural product interest from the 'Health and Taste Scales' (Roininen, Lähteenmäki & Tuorila, 1999) was selected. This factor was composed of six items involving an interest in eating foods that do not contain additives and are unprocessed. Additionally, to explore general environmental attitudes, 6-items from the 'New Ecological Paradigm Scale' (NEP) described by Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig and Jones (2000) were chosen. These items were selected to tap into each of the three facets of an ecological worldview: the reality of limits to growth ('the earth has plenty of natural resources if we just learn how to develop them' and 'the earth is like a spaceship with very limited rooms and resources'), anti-anthropocentrism ('plants and animals have as much right as human to exist'), and the possibility of an eco-crisis ('humans are severely abusing the environment', 'the so-called "ecological crisis" facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated' and 'if thing continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe'). All the statements were scored on a 7-point scale with the categories ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

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2.5. Data analysis

- 214 All analyses were performed using the software XLStat 2021.2.1 (Addinsoft,
- 215 USA).

216 **2.5.1. Projective Mapping**

The x and y coordinates form each product were recorded in the projective maps from all respondents, measured in centimetres as the distance from the lower left corner. Data were collected and recorded for each consumer group (omnivores and other diets). Terms generated in the descriptive step of the PM were categorized by consensus of two researchers, considering word synonyms and the interpretation of each map as described Aviles et al. (2020), the frequencies of mention of the categorized attributes were counted across all consumers and for each experimental group of the consumer panel, for being able to analyse the results for all consumers and each group separately. To reduce the number of descriptors, only those mentioned by at least 10% of the respondents (in each dietary group) were used (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2019). A Multifactor Analysis (MFA) was used to analyse the projective mapping task for each consumer group.

2.5.2. General knowledge questions

- In order to analyse the GNKQ, the number of correct answers for each section were counted for each consumer group and an analysis of variance was conducted to observe the differences between the groups.
- 2.5.3. Attitude questions

- 234 An analysis of variance was performed for each item and factor of the FCQ,
- 235 'Health and Taste Scales' and NEP. A factor analysis (FA) with varimax rotation
- was conducted to study the factor structure.

2.5.4. Consumer segmentation analyses

Data were analysed based on the *a priori* consumer segmentation, focused on understanding consumers following different diets. Some analyses compare two groups: omnivores vs "other diets", to explore the differences in perception between omnivore consumers and those who completely avoid animal products,

avoid or reduce their meat consumption (vegan, vegetarian and flexitarian). This was also to have stable sample configurations in the projective mapping outcomes, having 50 consumers in each group (Vidal et al., 2014). For having more details on the perception of the products and the different consumer motivations by the "other diets" group, it was divided for further analysis into vegans/vegetarians and flexitarians (the vegan group was too small to draw conclusions on its own).

3. RESULTS

It is important to point out that the purpose of this research was not to draw conclusions on the acceptability of specific products or market implications, but on how the information on the label influences the product descriptions and product choice information by consumers with different diets.

3.1. Perception and categorisation of plant-based products via Projective

Mapping: omnivores vs other diets

3.1.1. Omnivores

Consumer categorisation showed a clear distinction into three groups of products, which were set apart from each other in the first two dimensions of the MFA (Fig. 2a). The first group located in the upper left quadrant contains the four labels of the two plant-based products which are breaded (croquettes and meatballs), without differentiating if they were original or clean label (CL). In the lower left quadrant, the second group was located, comprising both options of pizza and quinoa with vegetables, again without separating the original from the clean label. Finally, the third group located in the upper and lower right quadrant

contained the meat analogues like burgers, steaks and cold cuts, and the guinoa spreads, without separation of original and clean labels. The Fig. 2b shows the representation of the terms obtained in the descriptive by omnivore group. Sixteen terms were obtained in three categories, their distribution was as follows: use and type of products (7 different terms: "ready-to-eat", "necessary to heat", "cold cut", "spreadable", "breaded", "fried", and "meat analogue"), nutrition and health characteristics (5 different terms: "simple/additive free", "with additives", "natural", "artificial/processed food", and "healthy"), and composition/ingredients (4 different terms: "allergen", "gluten", "vegetable (plant-based)", and "carbohydrates"). Croquettes and meatballs products were described as breaded, fried and with gluten; the pizza and quinoa with vegetables were described as healthy, ready-to-eat, vegetable and rich in carbohydrates. On the other hand, the third, larger and more heterogeneous group, consisting of burger, sausages, salami, vegetable steak, sobrassada and quinoa spread, was described as meat analogue, natural, simple/additive free, necessary to heat, cold cut, spreadable and allergen. Thus, the third group of products was more positively perceived by omnivores although the products of the second group were classified as healthy. The attributes "artificial/processed food" and "with additives", and "allergens" were located in the middle of the map, not well correlated to the perceptual space, and describing all the items in all the groups (regardless of CL or not). Omnivore consumers did not use these attributes as main drivers for product categorization, but rather classified products by their type and utilization, as highlighted also by the fact that clean label and original ones were mapped together within each category.

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3.1.2. Other diets (vegans, vegetarians and flexitarians)

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The categorisation of the "other diets" group (vegan, vegetarian and flexitarian consumers) resulted in four groups (Fig. 3a). The map was divided into two large groups. In the upper left part of the map was located the first group which contained the clean-label products and the second group formed by originals products was located in the bottom right part of the map. This shows that for consumers reducing or avoiding meat and other animal products ("other diets"), the status of clean label is an important characteristic for their perception of plantbased foods, quite different to the map obtained for omnivorous consumers. The descriptors obtained by "other diets" group are shown in Fig. 3b. In this case, seventeen terms were collected, and separated in a similar way as for the omnivore group. Four categories were obtained and their distribution was as follows: use and type of products (4 different terms: "ready-to-eat/fast food", "spreadable", "fried", and "meat analogue/replacer"), nutrition and health characteristics (6 different terms: "simple/additive free", "with additives", "natural", "artificial/processed food", "non-healthy" and "healthy"), composition/ingredients (3 different terms: "allergen", "animal", and "vegetable (plant-based)" and, preference and consumption (4 different terms: "frequently", "occasionally", "would buy it/look nice" and "wouldn't buy it/don't like it"). Clean label products were characterised as additive-free and natural (top left) while the original products were described as with additives (bottom right quadrant). In both groups of products (CL and original), the products on the left (quinoa spread, sobrassada and quinoa with vegetables) were perceived as more natural, since descriptors such as simple/additive-free, natural, healthy, would buy it/look nice, and frequently consumption were used. However, products which

simulate meat (burger, salami, vegetable steak and sausages) were located on the right and they were more negatively described with terms as with additives, wouldn't buy it/don't like it, artificial/processed foods, non-healthy and with animal ingredients, what supposes a rejection towards these types of products by vegan consumers. Products located in the middle of the map were classified by their type and consumption. "Other diet" consumers evaluated the products for their nutritional and health aspects, also highlighted by the fact that the clean label and the originals were mapped separately.

3.2. Perception and categorisation of plant-based products via Projective

Mapping: flexitarians vs vegans/vegetarians

Fig. 4a shows the categorisation of the flexitarian group and Fig. 4b the descriptors obtained by this group. Flexitarians categorized the products in two large groups, divided according to F1, on the right the clean label products, and on the left the original label products (Fig. 4a). The clean label products were associated to positive descriptors as healthy, would buy it/look nice and simple/additive-free; however, the products with original labels were linked to negative descriptors as artificial/processed food, with additives and wouldn't buy it/don't like it (Fig. 4b).

The map of vegans and vegetarians also presented two different groups (Fig. 4c), the first one was located in the top of the map and consisted of clean label products. On the left were the clean-label products considered more artificial, processed and meat analogues/replacers, and the products perceived as natural, simple/additive-free and healthy were on the right of the map (Fig. 4d). The second group was formed by original products and was in the bottom of the map.

Products on the left were perceive as non-healthy, with additives and with animal ingredients. However, products on the right were perceived as healthy (Fig. 4d). Even if the two groups of consumers represented here were not extremely different in perception, it is interesting to highlight that flexitarian consumers seemed to have given more importance to the category/product usage, further dividing the CL group in two subgroups of meat-analogues (burger, sausages, steak, salami) from the rest.

3.3. Attitude questionnaires

3.3.1. Nutritional knowledge

In order to assess the general nutrition knowledge of the two consumer groups, the correct answers for each section of this questionnaire were collected for each; the results from GNKQ for each section are depicted in Fig. 5. It can be observed that both groups presented, in general, similar knowledge about nutrition, since there were no significant differences between them in any section of the questionnaire (p > 0.05) (Fig. 5a). However, when the meat reducers group was further divided into vegans/vegetarians and flexitarians, it can be observed that vegans and vegetarians had a greater significant knowledge about dietary recommendations than flexitarians (p < 0.05) (Fig. 5b).

3.3.2. Food choice and environmental attitudes

Table 2 shows the mean scores for each item of the FCQ and the factor analysis results performed to detect the load of each item and the relationship with the factor. When assessors were divided into omnivores and other diets group, the item "keeps me healthy" was the most important for both groups. On the other

hand, the item "has been produced in a way that animals have not experienced pain" was the least important for omnivores, while and for consumers following other diets was the least important item was "takes me no time to prepare". Moreover, the statistical analysis highlighted significant differences between the food choice motives (p < 0.05). People who follow an omnivorous diet indicated a pleasant texture as significantly more important when choosing food than for vegan, vegetarian or flexitarian consumers. In the case of naturalness, vegans, vegetarians and flexitarians thought it was significantly more important than omnivores ("Contains no artificial ingredients"). Moreover, it should be noted that all the items of "Ethical concern/Environmental protection" and "Animal welfare" factors were significantly more important for meat reducer/meat avoiding followers than for omnivores. Further comparing the subgroups within "other diets", depending if they are a meat reducer (flexitarians) or meat/animal products avoiders, in the second part of the Table 3 it can be observed that for vegan/vegetarian consumers the "Animal welfare" factor and the items "has been prepared in an environmentally friendly way", and "has been produced in a way which has not shaken the balance of nature" were significantly more important than for flexitarians. The survey results about health concern and environmentalism are depicted in Table 4. These results showed that other diets consumer group have a higher concern in the natural product interest, since the "I try to eat foods that do not contain additives", "I do not eat processed foods, because I do not what they contain" and "I would like to eat only organically grown vegetables" items were significantly more important to them than to omnivores group (p < 0.05). Additionally, they also presented a higher ecological interest in the abuse of the

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environment, the plants and animals rights, and the possible ecological catastrophe (p < 0.05). However, when this group is divided into vegans/vegetarians and flexitarians it was only observed that all of them think similarly about natural products, but vegan and vegetarian consumers have a higher concern about plants and animals' rights and the earth's limited resources (p < 0.05).

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4. DISCUSSION

The popularity of plant-based products has been increasing considerably in recent years. However, the results of this study show differences in attitudes, perception and product categorisation depending on the consumer diet (omnivore, flexitarian, vegetarian, vegan). This is in line with recent findings showing that consumers may have different attitudes and motivations depending on the stage of behavioural change towards meat reduction or avoidance (thinking of reducing meat, actually reducing and maintaining that reduction) (Hielkema et al., 2021). More concretely, omnivores in our study separated three groups of plant-based products, based on the category and usage, fried products, products enriched in carbohydrates and the last one as meat analogue products, but clean label and original products were mapped together. However, the meat reducers and avoiders ("other diets") group, perceived plant-based products in a different way, focusing on the clean label status for their categorization. In this case, they perceived the group which contains CL spread food and quinoa with vegetables as healthy, and they use frequency of consumption descriptors to classify them (i.e., frequently for the CL, would not buy for the original products, and occasionally in the middle). It is a well-known fact that meat reducers or

avoiders are more concerned about health and sustainability, as can also be observed in the main motivations displayed by this consumer group when answering to the attitude questions. Omnivores did not use any frequency of consumption descriptors, may be because they thought that these kinds of products, in general, were not directed at them, and perhaps they may not like the texture or flavour and they may prefer to consume meat products instead (Lea, Crawford & Worsley, 2006; Fiestas-Flores & Pyhälä, 2018). Additionally, meat-eaters are more resistant to going vegetarian because they perceive vegetarian diets as less tasty, more expensive, less familiar, less convenient, and less healthful (Fiestas-Flores & Pyhälä, 2018; Rosenfeld & Tomiyama, 2020). The meat reducers and avoiders in this study differentiated clean label from original products, perceiving clean label products as more natural and simpler. It can be pointed out that most of "other diets" consumers described products which simulate meat products as "replacer" not as "analogue", this is an important nuance since they perceived these products like an alternative and, with their consumption, they can supply meat products. However, omnivores perceived these products as products that simulate meat or as a "copy-cat" of meat products. Fiestas-Flores & Pyhälä (2018) pointed out that the taste of animal products is the main challenge for Spanish omnivores to choose to reduce or avoid meat from their diet and in that sense, it can be highlighted that Spain has become the country with the largest meat consumption in Europe (Faber et al., 2020). This different categorisation might be explained by the larger importance that meat-reducers give to health and sustainability, and the different degrees of familiarity towards meat analogues. This is interesting, as familiarity (or rather the lack thereof) is one of the big barriers towards meat reduction. Hielkema et al.

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(2021) confirmed that identity-incongruence (eating foods not familiar or part of their habitual behaviour) inhibits consumers to progress towards meat reduction, and they highlighted that for consumers that were already reducing meat, climate concerns were important drivers, but not for those consumers with no intention to reduce meat. For most consumers, naturalness is crucial to which food industry's answer has been the "clean label" trend (Roman et al, 2017), defined by Ingredion (2014) as "a 'clean label' positioned on the pack means the product can be positioned as 'natural', 'organic' and/or 'free from additives/preservatives'." Our study has shown that consumers may react differently and have a different degree of interest/focus in this trend when categorizing plant-based products. We can confirm that meat-reducers and meat avoiders are more related to this trend, since they pointed out as main reasons for choosing foods that did not contain additives, that were not processed food and that they preferred organically grown vegetables, also, we saw that those consumers categorized clean label products in a different group than the original counterparts. This stronger focus on clean label vs additive added products in the meat reducers and avoider groups, goes in line to what Cliceri et al. (2018) found in their study on attitudes, vegetarian and meat reducers' attitudes towards healthy and natural food products were more positive than omnivores' attitudes. Furthermore, when it comes to veganism, it has been described as "a way of life rather than a simple dietary choice" (North et al., 2021), many times overlaying with other ideology groups (animal activists, environmentalists, focus on social justice), which is also the case for many vegetarians (Rosenfeld & Barrow, 2017) and these groups can be somehow more absolutists in their dietary and lifestyle choices.

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In general, consumers presented a similar knowledge about nutrition; however, the reasons for choosing food vary according to the diet that each consumer follows. The perception of clean label plant-based products vegans/vegetarians and flexitarians were quite similar, although flexitarian consumers gave a further division between the CL group separating meatanalogues from the rest. Furthermore, vegans and vegetarians showed a higher concern about dietary recommendations; it could be because vegan/vegetarian consumers need to obtain key nutrients such as zinc, vitamin B12 and protein from alternative sources (Sneijder & te Molder, 2009), so that, they are likely to follow the nutritional recommendations more closer than meat eaters. Thus, the different perception of clean label plant-based products could be related to the attitudes of each consumer diet; commonly, the vegetable and fruit consumption is associated with a healthy dietary pattern and more concern about sustainability. An association between dietary patterns and environmental concern was observed in this study, as results indicated by Asvatourian et al. (2018). Furthermore, our study confirms that reduced-meat diets, vegans and vegetarians, are more motivated by the environmental issues and animal rights than omnivores, in line with that reported by Hopwood, Rosenfeld, Chen and Bleidorn (2021) for vegetarians. Spanish vegan and vegetarians showed having the highest levels of affection towards animals and environmental awareness, while omnivores were least likely to draw similarities between human and nonhuman animal emotions (Díaz, 2016; Fiestas-Flores & Pyhälä, 2018). Moreover, the ecological drive for vegetarianism has been documented as the most often listed reason. This is based on the fact that meat consumption strongly increases the greenhouse gas emissions, which increase the ecological footprint, as well

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as the water footprint (De Backer & Hudders, 2014). However, considering the existing literature showing that concerns about animal welfare and environmental impact are the most common reasons for avoiding meat (De Backer & Hudders, 2014; Malek, Umberger & Goddard, 2019; Malek & Umberger, 2021), we observed that what distinguished meat reducers from meat avoiders was the importance that they gave to animal welfare factors. Similarly, Fiestas-Flores & Pyhälä (2018) pointed out that human-like animal attributes directly affected Spanish students' intentions to become vegetarian and vegan. Attitudes towards a vegetarian lifestyle have been shown to be significantly correlated with nutritional knowledge (Pribis, Pencak, & Grajales, 2010; Corrin & Papadopoulos, 2017). However, in this study no differences were found between omnivores and other diets group related to healthy patterns, it could be because vegans and vegetarians are more likely to cite ethical motivations over health ones (Rosenfeld, 2018). Thus, the increase of plant-based products in markets (Lantern Study, 2019) may promote the benefits of these ones on sustainability, environment, and animal rights, in addition to health. Both omnivores and meatreducers and avoiders seem to know well that a meat-reduced diet is positive, since they presented similar nutritional knowledge in our study, as results reported by Asher and Peters (2020). So that, Lea, Crawford and Worsley (2006, p. 835) report that "the primary barrier to eating a vegetarian diet related to taste, whereas taste barriers ranked relatively low in the plant-based diet survey," which is also in line with the results obtained in our study, since omnivores showed that one of the motives for choosing foods is "have a pleasant texture", unlike meatreplacers.

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On the other hand, most consumers of this study were young people (<44 years), some of them students with low incomes (Table 1). Fuller, Brown, Rowley and Elliott-Archer (2021) indicated that people who follow a vegan diet are particularly young, females and those living in urban areas. University-educated and younger people may be more receptive to information on changing to a plant-based diet and they appeared to be more willing to alter their diet than the non-university educated and oldest groups (Lea, Crawford & Worsley ,2006). Furthermore, although they present low incomes while they are studying, it is to be expected that they would have high socio-economic status and would take up this form of eating first (Lea, Crawford & Worsley ,2006).

It has been suggested that there is not "one size fits all" with regards to plant-based foods and consumers (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2020); our study further contributes to the understanding that these two big consumer trends growing in the last years, of plant-based foods and clean-label may interact in different ways with regards to consumer perception and attitudes, which would ultimately affect

4.1. Limitations and future research

their choices towards healthier and more sustainable foods.

This study is a first visualization of the interaction of the clean label with the perception of plant-based products by consumers in different stages of meat reduction, avoidance and omnivores, but future research might be performed by focusing on other factors such as gender, age, income and/or diet familiarity, among others, as well as focusing on how taste might influence the effects seen in this work, by including product tasting.

It should be noted that this study was performed before the COVID-19 crisis, which has impacted consumer's attitudes and habits in many ways. If this survey were carried out today, the results could be different, since Spanish population during the COVID-19 health crisis has increased its concern for a healthy lifestyle, with an increase of physical activity and fruit and vegetable consumption (Academia Española de Nutrición y Dietética, 2020; López-Bueno et al., 2020). It could be related to the families had more time to cook and improve eating habits, even though this did not increase the overall diet quality of Spanish population (Ruiz-Roso et al., 2020).

This study represents a sample of Spanish consumers; so these results may be different in other cultural contexts and environments settings (Ares, 2018).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Consumer categorisation and perception of clean label plant-based products was different depending on the type of diet. The present results show that flexitarian, vegetarian and vegan consumers pay more attention to food naturalness quality and health, following the clean label trend, as compared to omnivorous consumers. At the same time, this group also presents a greater concern for animal welfare and sustainability. Clean label plant-based products were perceived as healthy, simple/additive-free, natural, and would buy it/look nice by meat reducers and avoiders, while omnivores did not focus on the clean label status when categorizing plant-based products.

We hereby present a first exploration of consumers' categorisation and perception of clean label plant-based products, and its relation to consumer attitudes, depending on their diet, and it can help to the understanding of how

565	different consumers perceive them, at the light of supporting consumers in a
566	transition to healthier, more sustainable diets.
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577	6. REFERENCES
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Figure captions

- Fig. 1. Example of experimental card, (a) original label and (b) clean label (CL).
- **Fig. 2.** Perceptual space determined by the first two factors of the MFA in the projective mapping task by **omnivores**. (a) Representation of the samples and (b) representation of the terms obtained in the descriptive step. Note: CL before the food product name means "clean-label".
- **Fig. 3.** Perceptual space determined by the first two factors of the MFA in the projective mapping task by consumers of "**other diets**" (vegetarian, vegan and flexitarian). (a) Representation of the samples and (b) representation of the terms obtained in the descriptive step. Note: CL before the food product name means "clean-label".
- **Fig. 4.** Perceptual space determined by the first two factors of the MFA in the projective mapping task by flexitarians and vegans/vegetarians. (a) Samples' representation by flexitarians; (b) representation of terms obtained by flexitarians; (c) samples' representation by vegans/vegetarians; (d) representation of terms obtained by vegans/vegetarians.
- **Fig. 5.** GNQK correct answers for each section: (a) differences between omnivores and "other diets" group and (b) differences between flexitarians and vegans/vegetarians.

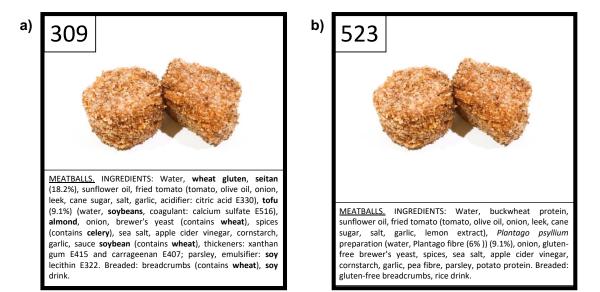
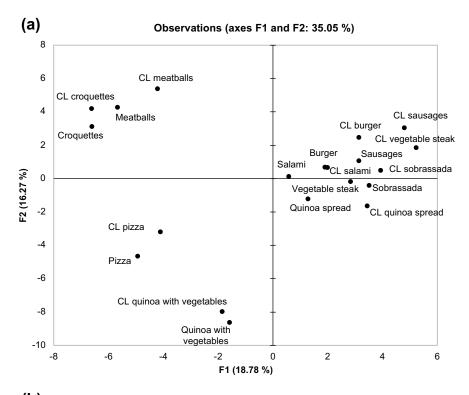


Fig. 1.



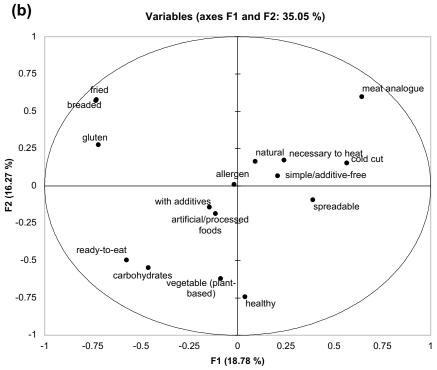
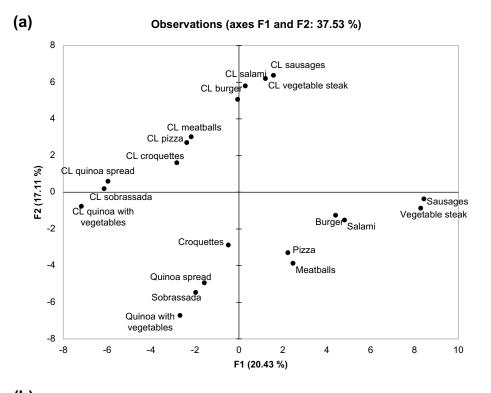


Fig. 2.



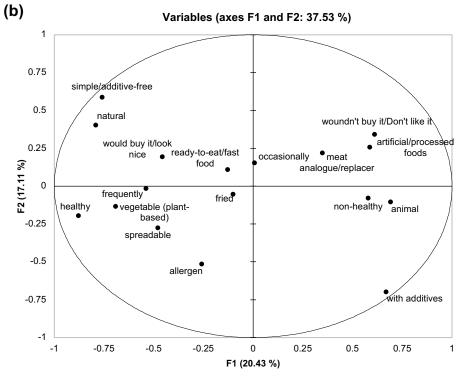


Fig. 3.

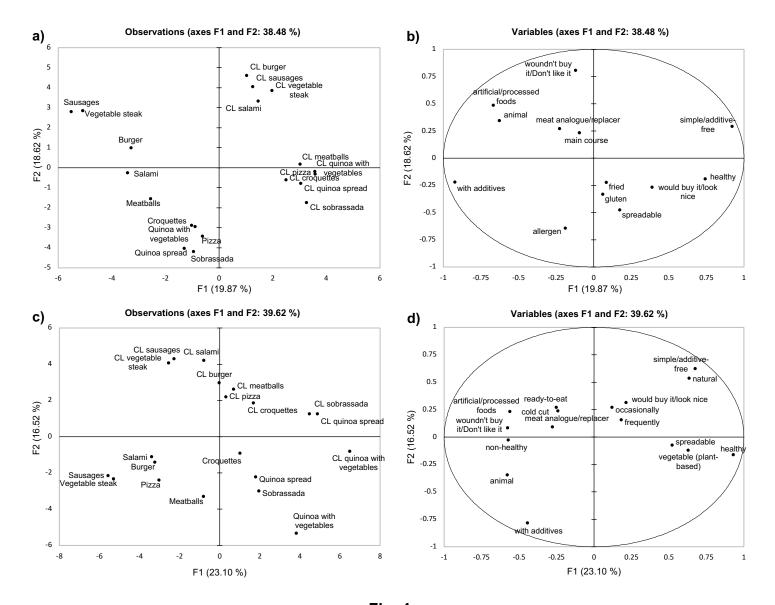


Fig. 4.

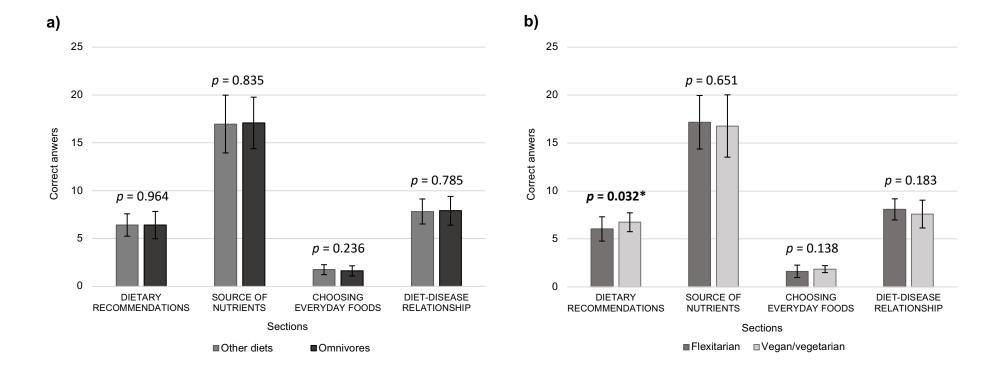


Fig. 5.

Table 1. Socio-demographic information of 101 respondents.

Socio-demographic information	Number of respondents	Percentage		
Gender				
Male	32	31.68%		
Female	68	67.33%		
I prefer not to say	1	0.99%		
Age				
18-24	27	26.73%		
25-34	58	57.43%		
35-44	10	9.90%		
45-54	3	2.97%		
55-64	3	2.97%		
Education level				
Secondary school	9	8.91%		
Professional training	9	8.91%		
Degree	42	41.58%		
Master	26	25.74%		
Doctorate	14	13.86%		
I prefer not to say	1	0.99%		
Country				
Spain	82	81.19%		
Europe	10	9.90%		
Latin America	9	8.91%		
Diet				
Vegetarian	13	12.87%		
Vegan	14	13.86%		
Omnivorous	50	49.50%		
Flexitarian	24	23.76%		
Employment status		20070		
Student	47	46.53%		
Unemployed	3	2.97%		
Employed Part-time	9	8.91%		
Employed Full-time	29	28.71%		
Public worker	12	11.88%		
Retired	1	0.99%		
Salary	1	0.9970		
< 500	26	25.74%		
	23	22.77%		
500-1000		22.77%		
1000-1500	22 21	21.78%		
1500-2000				
2000-2500	5 4	4.95%		
I prefer not to say	4	3.96%		
Live status	4.4	40.000/		
Alone	14	13.86%		
In couple	29	28.71%		
With family	36	35.64%		
Sharing floor	22	21.78%		

Table 2. FCQ-items means, standard deviations (SD), factor loading and *p-value* for answer to: "It is important to me that the food I eat on a typical day" for each experimental group.

Factors and items	Omnivores	Factor loading	Other diets	Factor loading	p-value	Vegans/Vegetarians	Factor loading	Flexitarians	Factor loading	p-value
	Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)			Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)		
Factor 1. Health										
Keeps me healthy	6.38 (0.78)	0.442	6.47 (0.73)	0.616	0.548	6.59 (0.69)	0.589	6.33 (0.76)	0.578	0.209
Is high in protein	4.80 (1.41)	0.415	4.84 (1.27)	0.268	0.872	5.11 (0.89)	0.270	4.54 (1.56)	0.312	0.124
Is high in fibre and roughage	4.66 (1.29)	0.505	5.02 (1.27)	0.435	0.161	5.04 (1.02)	0.623	5.00 (1.53)	0.474	0.921
Factor 2. Mood										
Helps me to cope with life	5.52 (1.39)	0.330	5.90 (1.30)	0.388	0.157	5.93 (1.44)	0.189	5.88 (1.15)	0.573	0.891
Makes me feel good	6.22 (1.27)	0.391	6.33 (0.93)	0.496	0.609	6.33 (1.00)	0.364	6.33 (0.87)	0.574	1.000
Factor 3. Convenience										
Is easy to prepare	4.88 (1.76)	0.707	4.76 (1.56)	0.661	0.728	5.19 (1.39)	0.566	4.29 (1.63)	0.733	0.039*
Is easily available in shops and supermarkets	5.70 (1.27)	0.605	5.55 (1.32)	0.426	0.558	5.82 (1.15)	0.686	5.25 (1.45)	0.416	0.127
Takes me no time to prepare	4.72 (1.62)	0.633	4.65 (1.65)	0.693	0.823	4.89 (1.53)	0.546	4.38 (1.77)	0.764	0.270
Factor 4. Sensory appeal										
Has a pleasant texture	6.06 (1.08)	-0.038	5.35 (1.43)	0.654	0.006*	5.22 (1.70)	0.621	5.50 (1.06)	0.577	0.482
Looks nice	5.44 (1.25)	0.222	5.00 (1.39)	0.740	0.097	4.96 (1.45)	0.600	5.04 (1.33)	0.675	0.842
Factor 5. Natural content										
Contains no additives	4.32 (1.76)	0.511	4.90 (1.63)	0.377	0.087	4.89 (1.78)	0.441	4.92 (1.47)	0.625	0.952
Contains natural ingredients	5.60 (1.21)	0.560	5.98 (1.10)	0.399	0.102	6.00 (1.24)	0.597	5.96 (0.96)	0.637	0.895
Contains no artificial ingredients	4.64 (1.71)	0.573	5.51 (1.29)	0.416	0.005*	5.52 (1.28)	0.761	5.50 (1.32)	0.692	0.960
Factor 6. Price										
Is not expensive	4.76 (1.60)	0.649	5.25 (1.34)	0.617	0.095	5.41 (1.42)	0.541	5.08 (1.25)	0.598	0.394
Is good value for money	5.84 (1.22)	0.722	5.92 (0.98)	0.279	0.711	5.85 (1.03)	0.513	6.00 (0.93)	0.268	0.594
Factor 7. Ethical concern/Environmental protection										
Is packaged in an environmentally friendly way	5.14 (1.47)	0.710	6.00 (1.15)	0.752	0.001*	6.26 (1.06)	0.744	5.71 (1.20)	0.665	0.087
Has been prepared in an environmentally friendly way ^a	5.16 (1.49)	0.815	6.10 (1.22)	0.840	0.001*	6.56 (0.85)	0.786	5.58 (1.38)	0.856	0.005*
Has been produced in a way which has not shaken the balance of nature ^a	4.98 (1.45)	0.905	5.86 (1.22)	0.874	0.001*	6.33 (0.92)	0.796	5.33 (1.31)	0.864	0.003*
Factor 8. Animal welfare										
Has been produced in a way that animals have not experienced pain ^a	4.51 (1.92)	0.636	6.02 (1.53)	0.569	<0.0001*	6.85 (0.46)	0.483	5.08 (1.77)	0.478	<0.0001*
Has been produced in a way that animals' rights have been respected a	4.84 (1.49)	0.780	6.24 (1.09)	0.751	<0.0001*	6.74 (0.66)	0.576	5.67 (1.20)	0.793	0.000*

Mean values in bold type correspond to the highest mean for each factor. * indicates significant differences at p-value < 0.05 a Items from Lindeman and Väänänen (2000).

Table 3. Natural products interest and NEP-items means, standard deviations (SD), factor loading and *p-value* for each experimental group.

Factors a	and items	Omnivores	Factor loading	Other diets	Factor loading	p-value	Vegans/Vegetarians	Factor loading	Flexitarians	Factor loading	p-value
		Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)			Mean (SD)		Mean (SD)		
Natural p	roduct interest ^a										
	I try to eat foods that do not contain additives	4.14 (1.90)	0.851	5.12 (1.76)	0.848	0.008*	5.33 (1.86)	0.853	4.88 (1.65)	-0.856	0.359
	I do not care about additives in my daily diet	3.28 (1.59)	-0.593	2.92 (1.86)	-0.824	0.302	3.15 (1.96)	-0.687	2.67 (1.76)	0.885	0.362
	I do not eat processed foods, because I do not what they contain	2.80 (1.65)	0.474	3.57 (1.60)	0.411	0.020*	3.59 (1.53)	0.776	3.54 (1.72)	-0.398	0.911
	I would like to eat only organically grown vegetables	3.66 (1.94)	0.536	5.02 (1.88)	0.750	0.001*	5.37 (1.80)	0.848	4.63 (1.93)	-0.697	0.160
	In my opinion, artificially flavoured foods are nor harmful for my health	3.30 (1.91)	-0.738	3.00 (2.05)	-0.635	0.448	3.04 (2.21)	-0.752	2.96 (1.90)	0.471	0.893
	In my opinion, organically grown foods are no better for my health than those grown conventionally	3.96 (1.91)	-0.629	3.26 (2.08)	-0.728	0.079	3.56 (2.34)	-0.791	2.92 (1.72)	0.751	0.277
New Eco	logical Paradigm scale ^b										
	Humans are severely abusing the environment	6.58 (0.86)	0.657	6.88 (0.43)	0.663	0.027*	6.96 (0.19)	0.280	6.79 (0.59)	0.723	0.184
	The earth has plenty of natural resources if we just learn how to develop them	5.98 (1.29)	0.215	5.98 (1.46)	0.549	0.999	5.89 (1.58)	0.538	6.08 (1.35)	0.670	0.640
	Plants and animals have as much right as human to exist	5.64 (1.61)	0.559	6.35 (1.47)	0.502	0.022*	6.78 (0.64)	0.176	5.88 (1.94)	0.346	0.038*
	The so-called "ecological crisis" facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated	2.88 (1.69)	0.222	2.41 (1.97)	-0.308	0.203	2.48 (2.10)	-0.319	2.33 (1.86)	0.346	0.792
	The earth is like a spaceship with very limited rooms and resources	5.76 (1.62)	0.693	5.49 (2.10)	0.507	0.473	6.04 (1.74)	0.619	4.88 (2.33)	0.680	0.048*
	If thing continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe	5.74 (1.60)	0.753	6.41 (0.85)	0.703	0.010*	6.48 (0.75)	0.753	6.33 (0.96)	0.666	0.541

Mean values in bold type correspond to the highest mean for each factor.
* indicates significant differences at *p*-value < 0.05

a Factor and items from Roininen, Lähteenmäki and Tuorila (1999).

b Items from Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig and Jones (2000).

 Table S1. Original and Clean labels of selected products.

Products	Original Label	Clean Label
Sausages	Egg white powder (rehydrated), water, sunflower oil, salt, aromatic plants, spices, flavourings, glucose syrup, dextrose, stabilizers: carrageenan E407, garrofin gum E410, xanthan gum E415, Konjac gum E425; acidity correctors: sodium acetate E262, Lactic acid E270; carrot powder, colours: radish concentrate, carotene E160a.	Potato protein (rehydrated), water, sunflower oil, salt, aromatic plants, spices, aromas, glucose syrup, dextrose, Plantago fibre (<i>Plantago psyllium</i>), lemon juice, alcohol vinegar, carrot powder, radish concentrate.
Burger	Water, pea protein (18%), rapeseed oil , refined coconut oil, aroma, smoke aroma, stabilizers: cellulose E460, methylcellulose E461, gum Arabic E414; potato starch, maltodextrin, yeast extract, salt, sunflower oil, dehydrated yeast, antioxidants: ascorbic acid E300, acetic acid E260; colour: beet juice concentrate E162; modified starch, apple extract, lemon juice concentrate.	Water, pea protein (18%), sunflower oil, refined coconut oil, aroma, smoke aroma, Plantago fibre (<i>Plantago psyllium</i>) and pea fibre, potato starch, maltodextrin, yeast extract, salt, sunflower oil, lemon extract, beetroot juice, modified starch, apple extract, lemon juice concentrate.
Vegetable steak	Rehydrated egg white, water, sunflower vegetable oil, salt, vegetable fibre, aromatic plants (0.6%), spices, spice extracts, flavourings, sugar, dextrose, thickeners: carrageenan E407, garrofin gum E410, xanthan gum E415; acidity correctors: sodium acetate E262, Lactic acid E270, potassium lactate E326, potassium chloride E508; food colour: radish, apple and blackcurrant concentrate; olives.	Rehydrated potato protein, water, sunflower vegetable oil, salt, aromatic plants (0.6%), spices, spice extracts, aromas, sugar, dextrose, Plantago fibre (<i>Plantago psyllium</i>), potato fibre, lemon juice, yeast extract, radish concentrate, apple and blackcurrant; olives.
Salami	Water, canola oil, stabilisers: garrofin gum E410, xanthan gum E415; wheat gluten (4.4%), pea proteins (2.7%), spices, maltodextrin, dextrose, sea salt, vinegar, beet concentrate, colour: paprika extract E160c; tomato concentrate, acidity regulator: calcium citrate E333.	Water, sunflower oil, potato fibre, buckwheat protein (4.4%), pea protein (2.7%), spices, maltodextrin, dextrose, sea salt, vinegar, red beet concentrate, paprika, tomato concentrate, vinegar extract.
Croquettes	Soy drink, spinach (20.1%), breaded (breadcrumbs [contains wheat], water, wheat flour, corn starch), wheat flour, tofu (7%) (water, soybeans, stabilizer: calcium sulphate E516), margarine, pine nuts, raisins, sea salt.	Rice drink, spinach (20.1%), breaded (breadcrumbs [contains wheat], water, wheat flour , corn starch), wheat flour , prepared from <i>Plantago psyllium</i> (water, Plantago fibre (6%)), margarine, pine nuts , raisins, sea salt.
Meatballs	Water, wheat gluten, seitan (18.2%), sunflower oil, fried tomato (tomato, olive oil, onion, leek, cane sugar, salt, garlic, acid: citric acid E330), tofu (9.1%) (water, soybeans, coagulant: calcium sulphate E516), almond, onion, brewer's yeast (contains wheat), spices (contains celery), sea salt, apple vinegar, corn starch, garlic, soy sauce (contains wheat), thickeners: xanthan gum E415 and carrageenan E407; parsley, emulsifier: soy lecithin E322. Breading: breadcrumbs (contains wheat), soy milk.	Water, buckwheat protein, sunflower oil, fried tomato (tomato, olive oil, onion, leek, cane sugar, salt, garlic, lemon extract), prepared <i>Plantago psyllium</i> (water, Plantago fibre (6%)) (9.1%), onion, gluten-free brewer's yeast, spices, sea salt, apple vinegar, corn starch, garlic, pea fibre, parsley, potato protein. Breading: gluten-free breadcrumbs, rice milk.
Quinoa spread	Water, tofu (water, soybeans , gelling agent: E511 magnesium chloride), sunflower oil, kale (10.3%), quinoa (4.3%), potato starch, onion, celery , potato powder, sea salt, agave syrup, lemon juice, garlic, herb mixture (0.67%), thyme (0.18%).	Water, cashews , sunflower oil, kale (10.3%), quinoa (4.3%), potato starch, onion, potato powder, sea salt, agave syrup, lemon juice, garlic, herb mixture (0.67%), thyme (0.18%).

Sobrassada	Cashews (33.7%), sunflower seeds (11.2%), sunflower oil, extra virgin olive	Cashews (33.7%), sunflower seeds (11.2%), sunflower oil, extra virgin olive oil
Sobiassaua	oil (6%), miso (barley and soybean), paprika, salt and xanthan gum E415.	(6%), miso (barley and soybean), paprika, salt and potato fibre.
Pizza	Common wheat flour, prepared natural strips (11%) [water, soy protein concentrate, sunflower oil, salt, aroma, spices (paprika, pepper, ginger, nutmeg, cardamom)], tomato sauce, tomato pulp, vegetable preparation (10%) (water, modified corn and potato starch, coconut oil, vegetable protein, salt, vegetable fibre, flavouring, stabilizer: tara gum E417; colour: calcium carbonate E170, b-carotene E160a; preservative: sorbic acid E200; vitamin B12), water, semi-dehydrated tomato (7.5%), rucola (2.5%), sunflower seed oil, extra virgin olive oil, salt, seasoned breadcrumbs [breadcrumbs (wheat flour, malted wheat flour, rapeseed oil, sunflower seed oil, yeast, dextrose, salt), extra virgin olive oil, onion, garlic, rosemary, parsley, thyme, salt, black olives], yeast, sugar, olive oil, thyme, garlic, onion, parsley, oregano, black pepper and basil.	
Quinoa with vegetables	Cooked red bean, real quinoa (14%), water, tomato, corn, extra virgin olive oil, onion, red pepper, green pepper, lemon juice, vinegar, salt, brown sugar, spices and stabilizer: xanthan gum E415.	Cooked red bean, real quinoa (14%), water, tomato, corn, extra virgin olive oil, onion, red pepper, green pepper, lemon juice, vinegar, salt, brown sugar, spices and citrus fibre.