

Redesigning Meat: Meat-Like Veggie Burger – A Cost Comparison with Animal Products

By Reed Mangels, PhD, RD

Consumers choose vegan burgers and vegan ground “meat” for lots of reasons. They may want to try something different. They may perceive vegan products as healthier or more environmentally friendly. They may be vegan and be looking for a quick meal or for a product that can easily replace ground beef in a recipe. In 2021, approximately 18 percent of U.S. households purchased plant-based meat products (1). Retail sales of plant-based meat and seafood in the United States in 2021 totaled \$1.4 billion (1).

Several years ago, we examined the nutritional quality of meat-like veggie burgers ([VJ, issue 3, 2020](#)). We recently conducted a study to compare prices of meat-like veggie burgers and vegan ground meat to animal meat. In late January and early February 2023, we obtained price information from Instacart that allowed us to determine the least and most expensive veggie meat and veggie burgers in seven different U.S. cities (Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, New York City, Seattle, and St. Louis). In each city, we selected a store in a regional supermarket chain and identified the lowest and highest priced veggie meat and veggie burger and the lowest and highest priced animal ground beef and burger from that store. All prices were converted to the cost per pound of product, were non-sale prices, and did not include a shopper discount. We used a similar procedure on the Target website using the same cities that were used for Instacart. We also compared the nutrient content of selected products.

In general, in supermarkets, veggie meats and burgers were more expensive than animal meats and animal burgers. There were exceptions, however. For the most expensive ground products, in 3 cities there was no difference between the price per pound of veggie meats and animal meats; in 2 cities veggie meats were less expensive than animal meats, and in 2 cities veggie meats were more expensive (Table 1). The veggie forms of the most expensive and least expensive burgers and the least expensive meats were all more costly than the meat forms (Tables 2-4). At Target, all forms of veggie meat in all cities were more expensive than animal meat (Tables 5-8).

Table 1. The Most Expensive Veggie and Animal Ground Meat in Supermarkets in Various U.S. Cities

Veggie Meat, package size	Veggie Meat Price (\$ per pound)	Animal Meat Price (\$ per pound)	Difference between Veggie and Animal Meat Price (\$ per pound)	Store, City
Impossible Beef, 12 oz	13.32	9.59	3.73	Schnucks, St. Louis, MO
Impossible Beef, 12 oz	12.79	12.79	0.00	King Soopers, Denver, CO
Impossible Beef, 12 oz	12.79	12.79	0.00	Ralphs, Los Angeles, CA
Impossible Beef, 12 oz	12.79	13.69	-0.90	Kroger, Atlanta, GA
Impossible Beef, 12 oz	12.79	12.79	0.00	QFC, Seattle, WA
Beyond Beef Plant-Based Ground 16 oz	11.09	10.53	0.56	ShopRite, Brooklyn, NY

Beyond Beef Plant-Based Ground 16 oz	10.69	11.19	-0.50	Mariano's, Chicago, IL
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Table 2. The Least Expensive Veggie and Animal Meat Ground Meat in Supermarkets in Various U.S. Cities

Veggie Meat, package size	Veggie Meat Price (\$ per pound)	Animal Meat Price (\$ per pound)	Difference between Veggie and Animal Meat Price (\$ per pound)	Store, City
Lightlife Smart Ground Plant-Based Crumbles Original 12 oz	6.39	3.20	3.19	Kroger, Atlanta, GA
Lightlife Smart Ground Plant-Based Crumbles Original 12 oz	6.52	3.79	2.73	Schnucks, St. Louis, MO
Simple Truth Meatless Crumbles 16 oz	6.79	5.19	1.60	Mariano's, Chicago, IL
Gardein Plant-Based Ground Be'f, 13.7 oz	6.88	3.64	3.24	King Soopers, Denver, CO
Lightlife Smart Ground Plant-Based Crumbles Original 12 oz	7.39	4.76	2.63	ShopRite, Brooklyn, NY
Gardein Plant-Based Ground Be'f, 13.7 oz	7.46	7.19	0.27	QFC, Seattle, WA
Lightlife Smart Ground Plant-Based Crumbles Original 12 oz	8.52	4.26	4.26	Ralphs, Los Angeles, CA

Table 3. The Most Expensive Veggie and Animal Ground Meat Patties in Supermarkets in Various U.S. Cities

Veggie Meat Patties, package size	Veggie Meat Patties Price (\$ per pound)	Animal Meat Patties Price (\$ per pound)	Difference between Veggie and Animal Meat Patties Price (\$ per pound)	Store, City
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Everything Legendary, Plant- Based Burgers 8 oz	17.18	9.59	7.59	Schnucks, St. Louis, MO
Everything Legendary, Plant- Based Burgers 8 oz	17.18	10.69	6.49	Ralph's, Los Angeles, CA
Gardein Ultimate Plant Based Burgers 8 oz	15.98	10.69	5.29	Mariano's, Chicago, IL
Tie: Gardein Ultimate Plant Based Burgers 8 oz Dr. Praeger's Perfect Burger 8 oz	15.32	10.88	4.44	ShopRite, Brooklyn, NY
Impossible Burger Patties, 8 oz	14.98	10.69	4.29	Kroger, Atlanta, GA
Impossible Burger Patties, 8 oz	14.98	10.69	4.29	King Soopers, Denver, Co
Tie: Impossible Burger Patties, 8 oz Dr. Praeger's Perfect Burger 8 oz	14.98	10.69	4.29	QFC, Seattle, WA

Table 4. The Least Expensive Veggie and Animal Meat Ground Meat Patties in Supermarkets in Various U.S. Cities

Veggie Meat Patties, package size	Veggie Meat Patties Price (\$ per pound)	Animal Meat Patties Price (\$ per pound)	Difference between Veggie and Animal Meat Patties Price (\$ per pound)	Store, City
Beyond Meat Cookout Classic Plant-Based Burger Patties 32 oz	8.32	2.44	5.88	ShopRite, Brooklyn, NY
Beyond Meat Cookout Classic Plant-Based Burger Patties 32 oz	8.55	3.15	5.40	Kroger, Atlanta, GA
Beyond Meat Cookout Classic Plant-Based Burger Patties 32 oz	8.55	3.20	5.35	Ralph's, Los Angeles, CA
Beyond Meat Cookout Classic	8.55	3.15	5.40	King Soopers, Denver, CO

Plant-Based Burger Patties 32 oz				
Beyond Meat Cookout Classic Plant-Based Burger Patties 32 oz	9.10	4.86	4.24	Mariano's, Chicago, IL
Beyond Meat Cookout Classic Plant-Based Burger Patties 32 oz	9.60	4.00	5.60	QFC, Seattle, WA
Gardein Ultimate Plant Based Burgers, 24 oz	11.33	3.12	8.21	Schnucks, St. Louis, MO

Table 5. The Most Expensive Veggie and Animal Ground Meat in Target in Various U.S. Cities

Veggie Meat, package size	Veggie Meat Price (\$ per pound)	Animal Meat Price (\$ per pound)	Difference between Veggie and Animal Meat Price (\$ per pound)	City
Everything Legendary Lightly Seasoned Plant-Based Ground 12 oz	10.65	8.29	2.36	Los Angeles, CA
Everything Legendary Lightly Seasoned Plant-Based Ground 12 oz	10.65	8.49	2.16	Brooklyn, NY
Everything Legendary Lightly Seasoned Plant-Based Ground 12 oz	10.65	7.99	2.66	Chicago, IL
Everything Legendary Lightly Seasoned Plant-Based Ground 12 oz	10.65	7.89	2.76	Denver, CO
Beyond Beef Plant-Based Ground 16 oz	8.99	7.79	1.20	Atlanta, GA
Beyond Beef Plant-Based Ground 16 oz	8.99	8.19	0.80	St. Louis, MO
Beyond Beef Plant-Based Ground 16 oz	8.99	8.79	0.20	Seattle, WA

Table 6: The Least Expensive Veggie and Animal Meat Ground Meat in Target in Various U.S. Cities

Veggie Meat, package size	Veggie Meat Price (\$ per pound)	Animal Meat Price (\$ per pound)	Difference between Veggie and Animal Meat Price (\$ per pound)	City
Gardein Plant-Based Ground Beef 13.7 oz	5.36	5.16	0.20	St. Louis, MO
Gardein Plant-Based Ground Beef 13.7 oz	5.83	5.59	0.24	Los Angeles, CA
Gardein Plant-Based Ground Beef 13.7 oz	5.83	5.16	0.67	Atlanta, GA
Gardein Plant-Based Ground Beef 13.7 oz	5.83	3.60	2.23	Denver, CO
Gardein Plant-Based Ground Beef 13.7 oz	5.83	5.13	0.70	Seattle, WA
Gardein Plant-Based Ground Beef 13.7 oz	6.29	5.16	1.13	Chicago, IL
Gardein Plant-Based Ground Beef 13.7 oz	6.41	5.23	1.18	Brooklyn, NY

Table 7: The Most Expensive Veggie and Animal Ground Meat Patties in Target in Various U.S. Cities

Veggie Meat Patties, package size	Veggie Meat Patties Price (\$ per pound)	Animal Meat Patties Price (\$ per pound)	Difference between Veggie and Animal Meat Patties Price (\$ per pound)	City
Everything Legendary Plant-Based Burgers 8 oz	10.98	7.65	3.33	Los Angeles, CA
Everything Legendary Plant-Based Burgers 8 oz	10.98	7.65	3.33	Brooklyn, NY
Everything Legendary Plant-Based Burgers 8 oz	10.98	7.65	3.33	Chicago, IL

Everything Legendary Plant- Based Burgers 8 oz	10.98	9.15	1.83	Denver, CO
Tie: Impossible Burger Patties 8 oz Beyond Burger Plant- Based Patties 8 oz	10.58	7.70	2.88	Atlanta, GA
Tie: Impossible Burger Patties 8 oz Beyond Burger Plant- Based Patties 8 oz	10.58	7.65	2.93	St. Louis, MO
Tie: Impossible Burger Patties 8 oz Beyond Burger Plant- Based Patties 8 oz	10.58	7.65	2.93	Seattle, WA

Table 8: The Least Expensive Veggie and Animal Meat Ground Meat Patties in Target in Various U.S. Cities

Veggie Meat Patties, package size	Veggie Meat Patties Price (\$ per pound)	Animal Meat Patties Price (\$ per pound)	Difference between Veggie and Animal Meat Patties Price (\$ per pound)	City
Beyond Meat Cookout Classic Plant-Based Burger Patties 32 oz	7.80	4.50	3.30	Los Angeles, CA
Beyond Meat Cookout Classic Plant-Based Burger Patties 32 oz	8.00	4.90	3.10	Atlanta, GA
Beyond Meat Cookout Classic Plant-Based Burger Patties 32 oz	8.00	4.50	3.50	St. Louis, MO
Beyond Meat Cookout Classic Plant-Based Burger Patties 32 oz	8.00	4.90	3.10	Brooklyn, NY
Beyond Meat Cookout Classic Plant-Based Burger Patties 32 oz	8.00	4.50	3.50	Chicago, IL

Impossible Burger Patties Made From Plants 24 oz	8.99	5.50	3.49	Denver, CO
Beyond Meat Cookout Classic Plant-Based Burger Patties 32 oz	9.25	4.90	4.35	Seattle, WA

Table 9 provides a summary of the price differences between veggie and animal meats. Generally, the price of veggie patties averaged \$5 or more per pound compared to animal-based patties in supermarkets. The difference was somewhat less at Target. Veggie ground, on average, cost between 40 cents and \$2.50 a pound more than ground beef, depending on where it was purchased.

Table 9. Comparative Cost of Veggie vs Animal Meat, overall

Type of product	Mean price difference veggie vs. animal product (\$ per pound)*	Range of price differences (\$ per pound) veggie vs. animal product
Least expensive patty, supermarket	5.73	4.24-8.21
Most expensive patty, supermarket	5.24	4.99-7.59
Least expensive patty, Target	3.48	3.10-4.35
Most expensive patty, Target	2.94	1.83-3.33
Least expensive ground meat/veggie meat, supermarket	2.56	0.27-4.26
Most expensive ground meat/veggie meat, Target	1.73	0.20-2.76
Least expensive ground meat/veggie meat, Target	0.91	0.20-2.23
Most expensive ground meat/veggie meat, supermarket	0.41	-0.90 – 3.73

*Average price difference over 7 U.S. cities. Positive mean price differences mean that the veggie products are more expensive than the animal product.

Table 10 compares the nutrients in some popular veggie meats and similar animal products. The calories, protein, and saturated fat are similar. Veggie products were higher in sodium, unless they were compared to a seasoned beef patty which had salt as an ingredient. Veggie products tended to be higher in iron.

Table 10. Comparison of Nutrients in Some Popular Veggie Meats and Similar Animal Meats

Product	Serving Size	Calories	Protein (g)	Saturated Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Iron (mg)
Ground Veggie/Animal Meat						
Beyond Beef Plant-Based Ground	4 oz	230	20	5	390	4
Everything Legendary Lightly Seasoned Plant-Based Ground	4 oz	200	21	4	450	6
Gardein Plant-Based Ground Be'f	¾ c	120	18	0	360	2
Impossible Beef	4 oz	230	19	6	370	4.2
Lightlife Smart Ground Plant-Based Crumbles Original	1/3 c	70	10	0	170	1.9

Simple Truth Meatless Crumbles	1 c	140	23	0	410	3
<i>Ground beef, raw 75% lean</i>	4 oz	331	18	11	75	2
<i>Ground beef, raw 95% lean</i>	4 oz	155	24	2.5	75	2.7
Veggie/Animal Patties						
Beyond Burger Plant-Based Patty	4 oz patty	230	20	5	390	4
Beyond Meat Cookout Classic Plant-Based Burger Patty	4 oz patty	290	18	7	340	3.7
Dr. Praeger's Perfect Burger	4 oz patty	230	20	2	380	5.2
Everything Legendary, Plant-Based Burger	4 oz patty	200	21	4	470	6
Gardein Ultimate Plant Based Burger	4 oz patty	210	20	9	450	3.2
Impossible Burger Patty	4 oz patty	230	19	6	370	4.2
<i>Kroger seasoned ground beef patty, raw</i>	4 oz patty	250	16	7	430	1.8

Source: Manufacturers' information for veggie meats and ground beef patty; USDA Food Data Central (<https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/>) for animal-based ground meat

We noted that at Target, plant-based and animal-based ground meats were relatively close in price; perhaps this will spread to other stores in the future. The lower cost of many of the animal products is due, at least in part, to government subsidies including payments to farmers who grow animal feed like corn and soybeans. As consumers become more aware of the environmental and health costs of animal products, there may be a move towards reducing or eliminating government subsidies which could make veggie and animal products have similar prices. We are hopeful that in the future veggie meats will be more affordable. We plan to repeat our study to determine if the market is changing.

If you're looking for less expensive alternatives to meat-like veggie burgers, try making your own burgers at home using tofu, seitan, or a variety of beans. For vegan burger recipes see:

[Veggie Burgers Rock!](#)

[Lentil Burgers](#)

[Jay's Black Bean Burgers](#)

[Cajun-Spiced Tofu Burgers](#)

[Portobello Burgers](#)

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Reference

1. Good Food Institute. Plant-based meat sales. <https://gfi.org/blog/a-deeper-dive-into-plant-based-meat-sales-in-2021/>, 2021.