

Chapter 10

Consumption of Cheese by Vegetarians and Vegans: Production, Ethics, and Market Trends

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines vegan and vegetarian cheeses' development, production processes and market dynamics. With the growing demand from vegan and vegetarian communities, the variety and quality of plant-based cheeses has increased significantly. The study examines the consumption of plant-based cheeses from the perspectives of vegetarianism and veganism, exploring the issue comprehensively from ethical, environmental, health, religious and cultural aspects. Then, how plant-based cheeses are produced from various raw materials is presented. Compared to conventional cheeses, the similarities and differences of plant-based cheeses in terms of organoleptic properties and health values were examined. Considering the changes in consumer preferences and the rapidly growing market share of plant-based cheeses, it is revealed how the food industry responds to these changing demands. As a result, it has become clear that vegan and vegetarian cheeses can play an important role not only as an alternative food product but also in the transition to a more ethical and sustainable food system.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the popularity of plant-based diets such as vegetarianism and veganism mark a significant change and transformation in dietary preferences. Health, environmental awareness, and ethical concerns are at the heart of this transformation process. Vegetarianism and veganism are not only personal preferences of individuals but also have cultural, social, and economic impacts. In this context, cheese production and consumption is an important issue at the centre of dietary patterns.

Cheese is one of the building blocks of diets and menus and has played an important role in human nutrition for centuries. Cheese has been an indispensable component of traditional dishes in many cultures due to its delicious taste and rich nutritional value. However, in plant-based diets such as vegetarianism and veganism, there is increasing awareness and criticism of the ethical and environmental dimensions of cheese consumption. Those who prefer vegan and vegetarian diets argue that cheese is of animal origin

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and that there are environmental harms as well as ethical concerns for animals during the production process of these products.

Gastronomy tourism has been at the centre of academic studies with increasing interest in recent years. In some of these studies, the cultural and gastronomic values of foods are examined within the framework of sustainability principles and are considered an integral part of tourism experiences. In studies focusing on specific products such as cheese, the gastronomic value of these products is emphasised and specific issues such as cheese varieties and cheese routes are addressed in the context of tourism (García-Hernández et al., 2022; Ermolaev, 2019; Fusté-Forné, 2015; Fusté-Forné, 2020a; Fusté-Forné, 2020b; Fusté-Forné, 2020c). In this context, cheeses as a gastronomic product have an important role in promoting local culture, highlighting the cuisine of that culture and encouraging gastronomic tourism.

On the other hand, vegan and vegetarian dietary habits have received increasing attention in tourism studies in recent years. Vegan and vegetarian tourism is seen as a growing niche area in the tourism sector, and research is generally shaped around the themes of sustainability, ethics, and healthy living (Kim et al., 2023). The general scope of literature studies can be categorised under headings such as market potential and consumer profile analysis, the capacity of tourism destinations to offer vegan and vegetarian-friendly services, sustainability and environmental impacts of vegan tourism, interactions with local culture and gastronomy, and marketing strategies. Studies on vegan and vegetarian tourism primarily reveal the growth potential of the market in this field (Zouni and Klouvidaki, 2022) and the demographic characteristics, food consumption experiences and motivations of consumers (Badu-Baiden et al., 2024; Li et al., 2021; Molina-Gomez et al., 2018; Ottenbacher et al., 2023). In this context, the difficulties faced by vegan and vegetarian tourists, the service deficiencies in this area, and the development potential are also evaluated (Huang et al., 2020; Zouni and Klouvidaki, 2022). In addition, the image (Guachalla, 2022) and capacity (Başol and Alvarez, 2023) of destinations to offer vegan and vegetarian-friendly services is also an important research topic. Vegan and vegetarian hotels (Dilek and Fennell, 2018), restaurants (Lochman, 2023; Riverola et al., 2022) and events (Cohen, 2012; Li et al., 2021) in destinations come to the fore critical elements that affect tourists' preferences and are the focus of studies. Another research topic is the relationship between vegan and vegetarian lifestyles and environmental sustainability and the role of tourism in this context. In this context, studies are carried out on environmental impacts such as carbon footprint (Araç et al., 2024; Üçtuğ et al., 2022), water use (Hadjikakou et al., 2013), and animal welfare (Duffy and Moore, 2011; Von Essen et al., 2020). At the same time, the development of vegan and vegetarian cuisine and its relationship with gastronomy are also among the focal points of research (Doğan and Yalçın, 2023; Tekiner, 2021). A significant portion of the research in the literature is on marketing strategies. The focus of the research is on how vegetarianism and veganism are presented in the tourism sector, and the marketing strategies developed by hotels and restaurants (Iacovou and Charalambous, 2022; Yu et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2024). Although there are studies on vegan and vegetarian products in the literature, there is no study on vegan and vegetarian cheeses from a tourism perspective. Filling this gap can make significant contributions to both gastronomy tourism literature and sustainable tourism practices. In this context, studies on the role of vegan and vegetarian cheeses in tourism can diversify tourism experiences and provide a new perspective to gastronomy tourism approaches.

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive review of the complex issues surrounding cheese consumption from the perspectives of vegetarianism and veganism, covering ethical, environmental, health and culinary aspects. For this purpose, the production processes, components and nutritional values of vegetarian and vegan cheese alternatives will be detailed. At the same time, the environmental impacts,

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