

Alt Meat®

August 2022 | www.alt-meat.net

NO ACCIDENT

Upton's Naturals' **Nicole Sopko** is 'eternally optimistic'

Breakfast casserole made with jack and annie's maple breakfast jack sausage

Not all right, Jack

Photo courtesy of jack & annie's

OUR TASTE TESTERS WERE DISAPPOINTED WITH JACK & ANNIE'S MAPLE BREAKFAST JACK SAUSAGE, NOTING THAT THE LINKS ARE EASY TO PREPARE BUT THE FLAVOR AND TEXTURE FALL SHORT

Breakfast for dinner? Why not?! With so many enjoying breakfast foods throughout the day, when we spotted jack & annie's maple breakfast jack sausage in our local freezer case, we thought it would be a great plant-based product to share with our tasters. These 'sausage' links are made from jackfruit, which has a stringy flesh and a relatively neutral flavor. Many vegans seek it as a meat substitute for its ability to imitate pulled pork. Touting 45% less fat than traditional sausage links, jack & annie's jack sausage claims it is "made without gluten," "non-GMO" and "from real, whole plants." Each box contains 12 links. Let's see what our medley of tasters had to say.

DEMOGRAPHICS

We have quite a few adventurous tasters on our team, including a vegetarian. Many of them are trying to eat less meat for a variety of reasons or are simply curious to taste the plethora of plant-forward products on the market.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

"I have heard nothing but good things about plant-based sausages, so I was excited for this one," a

curious taste-tester in his mid-30s told us. He continued, "They're supposed to be the closest-tasting to the real thing, and when I opened these up, they smelled and looked like the real deal."

A vegetarian in her late 30s said, "I haven't had anything by this brand yet, so I'm excited to try them! I'm intrigued because they're made from jackfruit. The package made the sausages look similar to real-meat breakfast sausage, and I liked that the ingredients were pretty simple without a lot of chemical-sounding things."

"I like pouring maple syrup on sausage so this seems intriguing since it says Maple Breakfast Sausage. And I'm open to plant-based offerings," an adventurous eater explained. She continued, "The frozen links look like pork breakfast sausage, but I'd like the inside plastic package to be resealable."

A newly married couple observed, "We wouldn't know this was plant-based in a store because it's written quite small on the bottom of the package."

Our vegetarian noted, "The sausage was appealing and looked similar to true pork sausage. The box was cute with the little story on the back about Annie eating plant-based products, as well jackfruit and why it is good for us and the planet."



PRODUCT:

jack & annie's maple breakfast jack sausage

PRICE:

\$5.99 SRP/7.8 oz. (12 links); \$4.89 sale

NUTRITION PER SERVING (3 LINKS):

Calories 130, total fat 9g, saturated fat 3g, cholesterol 0mg, sodium 220mg, total carbohydrate 9g, protein 5g.

"The package is bright and colorful," pointed out a taster. He continued, "I know (packaging) symbols, but have no idea what the 'V' inside the circle stands for ... Vegan? Kosher?"

A retired male taster said, "I didn't know what a jackfruit was but there was a picture on the back of the box of what it looks like, so now I know."

A young male observed, "The packaging was nice and clean, and I like that it gave multiple options to cook it."

"Honestly as I try to eat more plant-based, I find myself eating more vegetables," explained a 50-year-old meat-eating female foodie. "Good meat has gotten so expensive, eating fatty or rich meat doesn't make me feel good, and I realize the impact the entire industry has on the environment."

APPEARANCE, FEEL, TASTE AND TEXTURE

Our curious male noted, "I opted for the oven instructions. As they cooked, it created a very maple-y smell that again seemed consistent with breakfast sausages. The only annoying part about cooking in the oven is that you have to roll them every 2 minutes, and I noted they were extremely greasy. I'm always curious how plant-based products get so greasy since there's no animal fat in them."

Our husband-and-wife team commented, "There was a good maple aroma upon prepping (we made in both the microwave and a skillet), and we ate this for dinner with waffles. There was good maple flavor and aroma, but a lingering, nasty aftertaste that wasn't covered by the maple. This made the product inedible, making for a disgusting eating experience. And despite chewing the sausage, it formed a glob that didn't disintegrate

despite lengthy chewing. Compared to (regular) sausage this is not very good."

Our young newlyweds shared, "As we cooked it on the stovetop with a little oil in the pan, the smell was soooo strong of maple, and the sausages were sticky. They tasted like pre-packaged artificial Thanksgiving stuffing. There's no maple flavor in it, yet it stinks of it! It's almost like it's just coated in maple. The texture is chunky and breaks apart in your mouth, which was really bad."

An open-minded female added, "They looked so 'real' but I wanted it to have more of a 'breakfast sausage' flavor. As they cooled down, they did get more flavor, but I could feel them expanding in my stomach."

"I prepared the links all three ways — the oven, skillet and microwave — and all were overcooked and dry," described a food-loving 60-year-old. "I missed the snap of biting into a pork breakfast sausage and the textural contrast inside," she continued. "There was a strong maple aroma in my microwave oven, but when I bit into the sausage, there was no maple flavor. It was as though the maple flavor was on the outside and the inside was dry, gray and spongy with some odd pieces in it that I couldn't make out."

Our 50-year-old foodie told us, "The oven directions were spot on, and the aroma was appetizing — like maple. I ate these beside scrambled eggs with chives, and they looked just like pork breakfast sausages. I could taste the maple flavor — it was good — and the texture was similar to a meat sausage. As I chewed though, the flavor disappeared. It was like the flavor was sprayed on the outside to hit your taste buds first, but didn't last."

“There was a good maple aroma, but a lingering, nasty aftertaste that wasn't covered by the maple.”

Taste Test

A 30-ish male who is open to trying plant-based products shared, “I let them cool and I was so excited to give them a try. That excitement stopped really quick as I bit through the first one. Not only was it very greasy, but it had an odd texture. It was just awful. The taste was a weird mixture of spices and maple syrup, but in a bad way.”

Our vegetarian indicated, “I didn’t really know what to expect with it being jackfruit, but it was similar to typical sausage, minus the casing some have. I had it as part of a breakfast for dinner. The taste was really good as I was eating it, and I enjoyed the maple flavoring, but there was a bit of an aftertaste that I didn’t really enjoy.”

Our retired female said, “I loved the maple smell as it was cooking, and I loved the look, but then I tasted it and it’s like chewing cardboard. The whole texture was just wrong.” Her husband added, “The flavor is awful, and the texture is very hard and chewy. I cut them up and mixed them with eggs which made them a bit more palatable, but they did not taste all that good.”

CONCLUSION

Our mid-30’s male disappointedly concluded, “I did not enjoy these and will not be purchasing them. I’m shocked because I heard positive things about plant-based breakfast sausages. But these did not taste like breakfast sausage and certainly did not have the same texture.”

Our adventurous retired couple said, “We would not buy this again, and we still haven’t found a good substitute for meat.”

Our vegetarian concluded, “Because of the aftertaste, I’ll probably just stick to my usual plant-based breakfast sausage links.”

“I still prefer ‘meat’, but this is one of the top faux meat products I’ve used,” noted a female partici-

pant. She added, “I cooked them all three ways, and although the box says the skillet is the ‘tastiest,’ the oven prep in a countertop oven was the best for me.”

“Five days later, my microwave oven still smells like maple when I open it,” noted our female food lover. “I enjoy trying new foods, but I’m having a tough time in this category because none have measured up to my real-counterpart expectations.”

“I’m not a big breakfast sausage eater because it often repeats on me, but this did not. If I’m ever in the mood for sausage, I will buy this product. It’s not over-the-moon spectacular, but it is tasty, easy to prepare and a good substitute for the real deal,” concluded our 50-year-old foodie.

Over the past several months, retail sales of plant-based meats have been relatively flat or waning, and IRI found that the total volume of meat substitutes has fallen close to 6% over the past year in this highly competitive space. Many people are exploring the plant-based category, but we’re continually hearing that, for many, the products are, more often than not, disappointing — usually because of the flavor and frequently because of the texture. In the case of jack & annie’s maple breakfast jack sausage, the concept is right on, but, for many, the delivery didn’t cut it as our tasters expected it to eat and taste like its ‘real’ counterpart. If the product falls short, they move on.

This begs the question: Should alternative meat companies continue trying to play the ‘match-the-real-meat’ game or perhaps consider innovating with a totally new offering that we don’t have anything to compare to? This may be the conundrum the industry is now facing: Trying to figure out which way to direct its attention and resources. Until then, we’ll keep taste testing and hoping we, along with our willing tasters, find alternative meat products we really, truly enjoy.

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

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