

Alt Meat®

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Better TOGETHER

Long-time meat industry leader **Nicole Johnson-Hoffman** pivots to a future in cultivated meat as CEO of Future Meat Technologies.

Tasters were surprised by the price of the pork strips.

OmniFoods



Not great, but not bad

OUR TASTE TESTERS WERE SPLIT ON OMNIPORK STRIPS, NOTING THAT, WHEN PREPARED, THE FLAVOR IS GOOD. BUT THE PORK STRIPS ARE TOO PACKED WITH SODIUM TO BECOME A REGULAR STAPLE FOR MOST. AND THE PRICE ... YIKES!

The world of alt-meats tends to focus heavily on ground meat and nuggets, so when we heard about OmniFoods' OmniPork Strips' debut in the US, we thought it would be ideal for Taste Test. We hadn't seen a "pork-strip-type" product before, and when we realized that this is simply a protein base that can be used to create a variety of dishes, we were sold.

The product was purchased online and comes frozen, requiring thawing in the refrigerator prior to use. Once defrosted, it's ready to eat in 2-3 minutes. We wanted to see how and what our tasters cooked with the Pork-Style Strips and hear about their experiences.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Tasters included a vegetarian, several flexitarians, some of whom are trying to eat less meat for various reasons and some of whom are plant-curious folks. One flexitarian backed out due to a soy allergy once she found out that OmniPork is made from soy protein concentrate.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

"I was hesitant about these, especially after I opened the package," shared an open-minded taster. "The strips looked and felt different — firmer than real pork. I had to think about what I was going to make with them."

"The sandwich on the package looked really good and made me excited to try the pork strips," said our vegetarian. "I liked that the package gave examples of cuisines you could use the pork strips with (noodles, tacos, stir fry, fried rice) and that it said OmniPork was ready in only 2-3 minutes. I also liked that it had 16g of protein per serving and was a good source of fiber. I was excited to give it a try."

An Asian woman noted, "I can't see the content through the bag, which would discourage me from buying it since I don't know what plant-based pork-style strips look like. The cuisine suggestions on the bag might help. But holy moley, a little 6-oz. package has 240 calories and 900mg sodium! That almost made me back out

Taste Test



PRODUCT:

OmniPork Strips Plant-based Pork-Style Strips

PRICE:

\$6.49/6-oz. package
online (2 servings)

NUTRITION PER SERVING:

Calories 120, Total Fat 3.5g, Saturated Fat 0g, Cholesterol 0mg, Sodium 450mg, Total Carbohydrate 6g, Protein 16g.

of trying this product, but I soldiered on in the interest of science.”

An adventurous foodie told us, “My concern is that it says to ‘season to taste’ before cooking. If you just blindly add salt, you will be sorry since it already has 20% of your daily intake in the ‘raw’ product. Also, if you’re not supposed to eat it before cooking, how do you season to taste? And, having to remember to thaw it out the day before is a pain. I would just put it on the counter or submerge in water.”

A 30-something male tester noted, “The packaging seemed a bit cheap. I’m not a fan of vacuum-sealed bags that you need to cut open. The directions weren’t the easiest to find and they were small. I expected multiple ways to prepare these, but they only offer stir frying on the stove.” (Note: This tester didn’t realize that he had to incorporate the strips into a recipe and season them.)

“This has a short shelf life for a frozen product — just about two months,” noted the male in our couple. “Why only prep from the thawed state ... an extra step? Why no directions from frozen?”

APPEARANCE, FEEL, TASTE AND TEXTURE

“I made an Asian stir-fry with soy sauce, oyster sauce and veggies. When all the flavors fraternized, I ate the whole thing! I was shocked,” noted an adventurous taster. She continued, “I felt ‘good’ after, because I had just eaten a plant-based dinner. But, when I looked at the package, I realized there was no comparison to ‘real’ pork — so why did I eat this?” The OmniPork website does explain that, “this healthy, vegan alternative

contains 0mg cholesterol, 48% less calories and 76% less fat when compared to pork shoulder,” but that information is not on the package.

“I tried the ‘pork’ strips and they were a huge hit! They looked similar to what I remember ‘real pork’ looking like,” our vegetarian taster excitedly shared. “I made them in an air-fryer fried rice recipe, and they were a huge hit with both me and my dad, who doesn’t eat pork. They had a good texture and a nice flavor and added protein to the dish. I would use them again and maybe try a stir fry next time. I could also see making a sandwich like the one pictured on the package. I like that there are a lot of different ways the strips can be used.”

An adventurous foodie told us, “I added BBQ sauce. It’s a little chewier than pulled pork would be — maybe ‘bouncier’ is a better word. The pieces weren’t random enough in width to really get the idea of pulled pork, but once all was added to the bun with raw onion, it could pass. I could have eaten the whole package, but I was afraid of how I would feel after.”

Our Asian taster said, “They look nothing like pork; more like strips of cut-up uncooked hot dogs. I made a Sha Cha stir fry, but didn’t want to add too much soy sauce because at 900mg of sodium there really isn’t much wiggle room. It was decent. The strips have a slight soy protein taste, which wasn’t too bad. Texture-wise, they reminded me of very dry tempeh.”

A 30-something male taster who cooked the strips plain, commented, “They weren’t great, but they weren’t bad. I do like the amount of food it provides for such a low number of calories, but that is about the only pro I can find.”



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Texture-wise, they reminded me of very dry tempeh.



Our couple told us, “We prepped in a frying pan with BBQ and teriyaki sauce and it became too salty and chewy. It’s great that it’s very low in fat. But the price equates to close to \$16 a pound, which is absurd!”

CONCLUSION

Our adventurous taster said, “I liked it, and if I knew it was better for me than ‘real’ pork, I would eat it again — especially since it was easy. But it does require forethought to defrost. If I could only purchase this online, I wouldn’t go through the trouble. I want to pick this up in the store.”

Our Asian taster concluded: “900mg of sodium in a little 6-oz. pouch? This is a nope for me!”



Pork and pineapple tacos, made with OmniPork Strips.

Omnifoods



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Taste Test

"These were a big hit," said our vegetarian. "I was never a huge pork fan, and I didn't really know what to expect from these, but I was pleasantly surprised. They were easy to cook and versatile. I could definitely see myself buying them again!"

Our male taster concluded, "I was intrigued by the idea of plant-based pork since I enjoy plant-based chicken and beef. But this was bland. Maybe if you marinate them in BBQ sauce [they'd be tastier]."

Our couple fixated on the price: "We could serve this to guests and they probably wouldn't know it was plant-based. But we would not buy this at \$16 per pound!"

Overall, OmniPork Strips garnered mixed reviews from our tasters for a few key reasons: Many are choosing to eat plant-based foods because they believe

they provide a better-for-you option versus conventional meat. But having a product labeled "plant-based" doesn't automatically make it healthier, as is the case with OmniPork Strips. The conundrum is that the strips are a great source of protein, but the sodium, for quite a few, was an issue.

Some of our tasters also struggled with what to do with the strips because they are not a familiar format, as plant-based burgers and nuggets are. Perhaps more blatant ideas and visual cues on the package would help since these strips are truly versatile and open to a variety of flavors and seasonings.

OmniPork was a perfect find for our vegan, providing she can easily buy it – which should happen as supermarket distribution for OmniPork Strips continues to expand.

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.