

Alt-Meat®

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BREAKING *the mold*

New School Foods
CEO Chris Bryson
embarked on a
three-year R&D
process to reimagine
how plant-based
meats are created





Hit & miss

OUR TASTE TESTERS WERE SPLIT ON DARING ORIGINAL PLANT CHICKEN PIECES, BUT MOST AGREED THE TEXTURE IS AN EXCELLENT MIMIC FOR THE 'REAL THING' AND THE NUTRITION LABEL IS SUPERIOR TO OTHER PLANT-BASED PRODUCTS.

Many of us are familiar with breaded plant-based chicken, but what about *unbreaded*? Daring has a line of unbreaded Plant Chicken Pieces available in Original, Cajun, Lemon & Herb and Teriyaki. Since the Original is as plain as one can get, we opted to taste-test this variety in the hopes of getting a good read on the flavor, appearance and texture, with what Daring calls “a simple swap you can feel good about.”

DEMOGRAPHICS

Daring Plant Chicken Pieces were taste-tested by several vegetarians, a vegan, a pescatarian and others who are proactively interested in eating more plant-based foods. Ages ranged from 17 up.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

A vegan taster said, “I had tried the spicy and lemon flavor pieces, but never tried the plain. So I was looking forward to this taste-test. “The ingredients are disappointing,” she continued. “I’m used to seeing soy protein isolate in alt-meats, but it’s usually mixed with another plant-based food such as a bean or pea protein. The fact that this is made from just soy protein

concentrate, oil and spices is bizarre to me.”

One of our vegetarians commented, “I was pleasantly surprised and impressed by the nutrition facts. A quick comparison to a few other plant-based chicken products I had on hand showed that this has less calories, fat and sodium, while having an equal amount of protein. However, I didn’t see any directions for cooking in an air fryer, which is usually my preferred method.”

Another vegetarian told us, “I liked that the ingredients were all things I knew and could pronounce. I was excited to give this a try just based on what I read on the package.”

APPEARANCE, FEEL, TASTE AND TEXTURE

“The first time I bit into it I couldn’t believe it wasn’t chicken. That unnerved me, and I had to re-read the ingredients to make sure,” said a vegetarian. “I was impressed at how the outside became crispy and it was still juicy inside.”

“After being cooked, the pieces looked like they were going to be delicious and were comparable to ‘real’ chicken pieces,” noted our vegan. “I had to cover the pan to keep oil from splattering, but once cooked, the external texture truly imitated that of cooked chicken. The crazy

Taste Test



PRODUCT:

Daring Original Plant Chicken Pieces

PRICE:

\$5.94–6.99/8-oz. package (3 servings)

NUTRITION PER SERVING:

Calories 90, Total Fat 2g, Saturated Fat 0g, Cholesterol 0mg, Sodium 400mg, Total Carbohydrate 5g, Protein 14g.

part is that the item tastes like an odd chemical concoction! It needed to be served with a truly delicious, overpowering sauce. I was really disappointed with the odd taste and weird smooshy interior texture.”

A plant-based-only eater said, “I tried a version of this before and wasn’t thrilled with the texture. But I air-fried them this time to a really crispy texture, which I enjoyed more.”

A traditional chicken eater who’s open to eating plant-based foods told us, “The ingredient list contains oil and soy — not good for you. And this is stringy. So, I’ll just do (‘real’) chicken.”

Several tasters commented on the amount of oil (up to 2 Tbsp.) required to cook this, even in a nonstick pan. “It takes away from the lower fat nature of chicken,” noted one.

A taster who served the chicken in tortillas said, “With all my toppings it might as well have been chicken. I can imagine if I used it in a recipe that called for cooked chicken, like a casserole or mixed skillet dish, it would be even more like ‘real’ chicken.”

Another ‘real’ chicken-eating taster told us, “Best fake chicken I’ve ever had.” And still another said, “The texture is as close to ‘real’ chicken as I’ve ever had. The flavor is good too.”

One of our vegetarians observed, “Some of the pieces were as big as the images on the bag, but a lot were smaller. I did like how the shapes were irregular and not all identical since it made it seem more realistic.”

Another taster said, “It did not look like chicken in the bag. It looked fibrous, but then as it cooked it looked real! I loved the crunchy outside — similar to really well-cooked chicken wings, which I love. But, there really wasn’t a ‘meaty’ inside.”

A curiosity-seeking, health-oriented 17-year-old told us, “These are not chicken-y at all.”

Many tasters noted that “the price point was very reasonable.”

A taster who eats plant-based when she can, said, “I wasn’t thrilled that it was tiny little pieces of chicken. I thought they would be more full pieces rather than crumbles, so I guess I could only use this for a salad. I saved some for the next day on salad, but they didn’t reheat well.”

“I ate it by itself, and also added it to a creamy pasta and veggie dish, and loved it,” said another vegetarian. “The taste was flavorful. My husband, who eats ‘real’ poultry, said the taste is pretty identical to crispy turkey skin.”

“I couldn’t believe how much this looked like ‘real’ chicken,” another vegetarian shared. “If I didn’t prepare it myself, I don’t know that I would believe someone telling me that this was not ‘real’ chicken.”

She continued, “I found a recipe on the website for chicken fajitas and used that. It cooked up really nicely in the electric skillet with some onion, garlic and a little olive oil. I shredded the pieces of ‘chicken’ in the fajitas and it really was crazy how similar they were to ‘real’ chicken.”

CONCLUSION

“As a vegetarian with a family of non-vegetarians, I love finding plant-based alternatives that work the same as the meat that I’m cooking for my family. This Daring Chicken is what I have been waiting for! It’s going to be a permanent addition to my weekly shopping list,” enthused one taster.

On the other hand, our vegan concluded, “I would not buy this item because it does not taste good and I would not consider it healthy in any way. It does get points for looking like

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Taste Test

cooked chicken and having the exterior consistency of cooked poultry.”

“As a pescatarian, I like having plant-based alternatives to extend recipe options and, in the case of the breaded chick’n and fish sticks, to have a familiar eating experience. But I could not get past the texture and would not buy this,” said another.

One vegetarian summed it up, “I will continue to use this as an additive to a dish, rather than eating it on its own, mostly due to the smaller size of the pieces. I like that the website has a ton of recipes. It’s a quick and easy way to add more protein to a dish and make it more filling. I would definitely buy this again. The development of new and different plant-based products is great for veggie-eaters and meat-eaters alike.”

A vegetarian remarked, “I was a big chicken lover before going plant-based and this really was a delight for me getting to eat ‘chicken’ guilt-free. These are a new favorite for me.”

Daring Plant Chicken Pieces really hit the mark for some of our vegetarians who were excited about adding this new find to their repertoire. For others, it did not deliver the right sensory aspects.

We are intrigued by our learnings as we increasingly hear some say they want a plant-based product to mimic its ‘real’ counterpart, while just as many don’t. As with many other alternative meats, Daring Original Chicken Pieces seems to appeal to a narrow, but quite enthusiastic, market.

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.

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Toll Free:
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3224 Butler Avenue
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