

# Alt-Meat®

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## Alt- ASIA

Singapore's Keri Matwick knows where alt-meats intersect with Asian culture and the meaning of food for its denizens.





Urban Accents

# ‘Turned to mush’

**T**raditional ethnic flavors found on food trucks and street foods have been showing up in a variety of retail food categories ranging from snacks to desserts. We recently spotted Urban Accents Plant Based Smokin’ Chipotle Street Taco at a local supermarket and were intrigued with this Mexican-inspired shelf-stable meatless mix.

Distributed by Stonewall Kitchen, The Urban Accents line features five globally inspired flavors, including Sweet Black Garlic Korean BBQ and Classic Mesquite Hearty Chili. According to the website, “Meatless Mondays, meet Taco Tuesdays. Your next dinner will be smokin’ with these plant-based tacos featuring classic Southwest flavors like fire-roasted chipotle peppers, garlic and cumin.” Let’s see what our crew of tasters had to say about this Street Taco.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Our panel included several folks who are consciously interested in reducing their consump-

tion of conventional meat, along with a vegetarian, vegan and pescatarian who prepared and taste-tested Urban Accents Plant Based Smokin’ Chipotle Street Taco.

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

“Although textured soy flour is the first ingredient, it has a relatively clean ingredient list overall,” noted a female taster.

“The packaging looked sleek and cool, plus it’s low in calories and seemed quick and easy to make. It had the makings of a great product,” said a 30-year-old health-conscious male.

A female vegetarian told us, “I was intrigued to try something shelf-stable, and the taco on the package looked really good. I liked the packaging. It clearly said it is vegan and gluten free, and the protein content per serving is right on the front. It was also cool to see that the pouch could replace 1 lb. of ground beef.”

Our vegan shared, “I appreciate that it has a long shelf life and doesn’t have to be stored in

## OUR TASTE TESTERS OFFERED MIXED REVIEWS

OF URBAN ACCENTS PLANT BASED SMOKIN’ CHIPOTLE STREET TACO. IT LOOKED APPETIZING ON THE BOX AND WAS EASY TO PREPARE, BUT THE TASTERS WERE SPLIT ON THE FLAVOR AND TEXTURE.

## Taste Test

the refrigerator or freezer. Before today, I had never cooked with this type of dried textured vegetable protein, but I know it is popular with vegans and vegetarians alike, and I can see why. From a health standpoint, the ingredients have sugar listed in addition to the spices, but it is nice to see a short list of ingredients.”

### APPEARANCE, FEEL, TASTE, TEXTURE

“I liked the packaging, but once cooked, the product didn’t look appetizing at all,” noted a mom in her mid-50s. “And the texture was weird in my mouth. It’s not similar to ground beef but almost like a hard barley.”

“My husband prepared this, making

it in a skillet and serving with corn, salsa, cheese and onion,” explained a mom who has been trying to get her family to eat more plant-based foods. “He said he couldn’t tell the difference and enjoyed it. I think a big factor was the strong chipotle flavor. I felt the crumbles were really small, but once everything is in a taco, you don’t notice how crumbly it is.”

An adventurous male explained, “When I opened the package, it had a nice chipotle smell, so I was excited to give it a try. My excitement dropped as I let it soak in water. Every minute that passed, it seemed less appetizing. After the soak, as I heated it in the microwave, the smell changed. Instead



of that chipotle smell, it smelled like burning plastic. And once it was done, the taste was bland.”

A pescatarian shared, “After the



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## PRODUCT:

Urban Accents Plant Based Street Taco

## PRICE:

\$3.98 - \$5.79/3.4-oz. Package (equivalent to 1 lb. of ground meat)

## NUTRITION PER SERVING:

Calories 50, Total Fat 0g, Saturated Fat 0g, Cholesterol 0mg, Sodium 380mg, Total Carbohydrate 7g, Protein 8g.

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.

five-minute soak in water, I tasted it, and it had too much spice. Not ‘hot spicy,’ but like eating a teaspoon of chipotle powder. After sauteing, I didn’t like the texture, and it still tasted too strongly of spices. The convenience of storage and availability sounded nice, but ultimately I couldn’t eat it.”

“It’s a little spicy,” agreed another taster. “Also, the texture was more comparable to ground turkey than to ground beef. It’s soft like ground turkey and moist. On the positive side, it made more than I thought it would based on the size of the package.”

Our strict vegan told us, “I preferred the texture after rehydrating it in water. But once I cooked it with the green pepper and onion, it turned to mush. Visually, this product looked good and imitated meat, but the texture was less than appealing. The flavor was wonderful, but I added some nutritional yeast for a ‘cheese-like’ note. Although this was tasty, I would not choose to eat textured vegetable protein regularly because it is processed, and I avoid processed foods for health reasons. I would much rather have a similar product made from mushrooms, quinoa, grains, lentils, organic tofu or beans.”

“The taco meat had a nice combo of spices,” noted a vegetarian. “I tried it without any toppings before putting it into my taco shell, and the texture was a little softer than other plant-based meatless crumbles I’ve tried, but I didn’t mind. I followed the directions on the package, and it was easy to make. It was nice to have just a small pouch to keep in my cabinet rather than a big frozen bag. It was also nice that it was pre-seasoned.”

## CONCLUSION

Our vegetarian concluded, “I would buy this again based on the price and how much taco meat you get for it. It will probably be enough for me to have three meals. It was tasty, so definitely something good to keep in the cabinet for a quick meal.”

One couple shared, “It’s better than textured vegetable protein products of many years ago, but it’s too dry, with no fatty notes.”

“I put it in a tortilla and threw in some taco seasoning which helped, but overall, this isn’t something I’d want to have again,” an adventurous 30-something male said.

“I would buy this again to get more plants into my taco-loving husband,” said a mom.

Our vegan concluded, “Overall, this product tasted good with the medley of spices, but I am too wary about eating non-organic textured vegetable protein products. I would make this as a treat for myself occasionally, but I would pay more to have a higher quality product with the same flavors.”

The packaging and concept of the plant-based Street Taco was well received by our team of tasters. Some appreciated its relatively “clean” ingredient list while our vegan commented negatively on the use of textured soy flour. Ultimately, most of our tasters found that the texture and aroma of this plant-based meat left a lot to be desired.

Many plant-based companies are focusing on clean ingredients, but soy still comes with some baggage. The industry is in a state of flux and needs real innovative breakthroughs to create the next generation of plant-based products. But will consumers still be willing to try them?