



Martijn Versteegh, Program Director Sustainability at Albert Heijn, explains their private-label assortment strategies to increase protein diversification.

“Changing the food system is a shared responsibility, and protein diversification is one of the most important steps to make diets healthier and more sustainable.”

Q: How many plant-based private label products do you have under the new plant-based brand?

A: We currently have ca. 350 plant-based private label products under our AH Terra brand.

Q: On which categories are you focusing and why? How important are traditional plant-based products compared to alternatives or blended products?

A: We are focusing on all of them. That includes traditional plant-based products like beans, grains and legumes, but also animal protein alternatives and hybrid or blended products. **We believe it is important to offer plant-based options across all categories**, because different consumers have different entry points into eating more plant-based.

Q: How was the consumer reaction to the new brand and how did you promote it? Which changes could you see in purchasing behaviour?

A: When we launched AH Terra, we supported it with a large campaign to really put plant-based food in the spotlight. **One of the main barriers for consumers is still taste, so our first goal was to get people to try the products.** We did this through tastings in stores and strong promotion at launch.

We have also been running campaigns such as the “Enjoy the Good Food” initiative together with Unilever and the Dutch Lottery, which helps bring more attention to plant-based categories and attracts consumers into our stores.

In general, **we do see that many customers say they want to eat more plant-based, but there is still a gap between intention and action.** People often fall back into previous shopping routines, or they feel plant-based is less convenient, less tasty or more expensive.

Q: What was the most important argument for starting this initiative?

A: For us, the most important driver is our purpose: **“Together we make better eating the easy choice for everyone”.** We want to contribute to a meaningful, social and sustainable society.

We also know that the current food system is not sustainable. Around one third of carbon emissions are related to food, and animal products, have the highest impact. That is why we have set clear ambitions to shift towards a more plant-based diet.

Our target is to reach a 60:40 plant-based to animal-based protein split by 2030.

Q: How much impact did the creation of the AH Terra brand have so far?

A: In terms of the protein split, we have made progress but achieving targets remains challenging. **We see an uplift in the sales of plant-based products.** On the other hand, we also see customers eating more animal-based proteins based on the “enriched protein trend”.

Q: Which further developments and effects of the initiative do you expect in the future?

A: We will continue to expand the AH Terra assortment further. We are also working on the way we present plant-based products. In the Netherlands, very green packaging can sometimes create the impression that products are only for a specific group of consumers, so **we want to move towards branding that feels more fun, fancy and focused on taste.**

Going forward, we will place **more emphasis on plant-based protein sources such as bread, legumes and beans,** and we will continue to **grow our hybrid and blended product range.**

We also need continuous innovation to improve taste and consumer acceptance, because taste remains one of the most important factors for customers.

Q: Which additional benefits do you see in similar measures to increase the protein diversification in your company?

A: Advancing the protein transition directly contributes to achieving our climate ambitions. Shifting sales towards proteins with a lower carbon footprint can significantly reduce scope 3 emissions, thereby supporting our CO₂ reduction targets.

We believe the transition to more plant-based diets is essential, but it is not something retailers can achieve alone. **We can contribute through assortment, affordability, promotions and inspiration, but we also need consumers, stakeholders and governments to work together.**

Changing the food system is a shared responsibility, and protein diversification is one of the most important steps to make diets healthier and more sustainable.



Figure 1: Albert Heijn currently has ca. 350 “AH Terra” products on their shelves, which is marketed as the “largest selection” of plant-based options in the Netherlands