



BILLA

Verena Wiederkehr, Head of Plant-Based Business Development at Billa, speaks about their current plant-based reformulation project and the advantage of a dedicated role to align and drive all initiatives within their plant-based strategy.”

“The consumption of purely plant-based foods is not a trend, but rather a sustainable development in society, and it is our job as food retailer to meet current and prospective customer needs.”

Q: How many and which type of private label products did you adjust as part of the current reformulation project **“[One Ingredient](#)”**?

A: At the beginning of 2025, we screened the entire private label assortment together with the Albert Schweitzer Foundation. They evaluated each product in terms of how easily it could be converted to a fully plant-based recipe.

Based on this pre-selection, we internally assessed all products together with our dedicated product managers and created a **shortlist of 80 products. These products shall be reformulated within two years in the regular product revisions** when every private label product is reviewed in terms of taste and quality. The plant-based recipe must offer a fully convincing taste experience while ensuring commercial viability. The project is embedded in the regular revision cycle as we aim to avoid disposing of packaging materials for sustainability reasons.

In addition, we have introduced a new internal workflow for all new product developments, requiring a fully plant-based version to be included in the tender process from the very beginning wherever possible.

Q: What were the main challenges in the reformulation and how did you address them??

A: Our primary goal is to address a larger customer group. **Ideally, existing customers do not even notice that a product has become fully plant-based – it should still taste excellent.**

The biggest challenges are product dependent. In general, taste and texture are the most important criteria. **The product needs to have a great taste, still with a good texture and a convincing price–performance ratio.** Price is critical. We know that our customers are becoming increasingly price sensitive.

Another challenge is that some manufacturers still lack sufficient know-how in plant-based reformulation, for example when it comes to replacing eggs. Many are still at the beginning of their journey and need support, including collaboration with ingredient suppliers to integrate suitable plant-based raw materials. We encourage all manufacturers to further strengthen their expertise in plant-based product development so they can deliver high quality recipes that convince in taste, texture and price.

Q: How important is it for such initiatives to have a dedicated plant-based business developer or category manager who is a proactive innovator?

A: It definitely requires someone who holds all the threads together, motivates people, brings everyone on board, and clearly outlines the parameters of the project. In our organization, we have many different product managers who are responsible for their own categories. In addition, a central project lead coordinates all efforts.

From a broader perspective, my current role strengthens the organization by ensuring that **plant-based topics are addressed strategically and guided by someone with deep market expertise.** We continuously analyse market dynamics, including active manufacturers, current and emerging trends, areas that demand attention, upcoming challenges, and potential gaps in our assortment.

This encompasses a holistic communication and marketing strategy targeting a wider consumer base and supported by dedicated PR and outreach activities. Using the right language and messaging has enabled us to shape public discourse in a positive way and has been an important driver of our growth in Austria.

A recent example of strong media coverage was the announcement of a major milestone for our private label brand “Vegavita”: the entire product range is now 100% free from preservatives, added artificial aromas, flavour enhancers, hydrogenated fats, and palm oil. Especially the elimination of preservatives and artificial aromas is noteworthy, as it is still quite rare for a private-label plant-based brand to take such a clear and comprehensive stance.”

Another strategic priority is that plant-based products should be priced on par with equivalent animal-based options to strengthen affordability.

Having someone who can inspire colleagues and build a shared understanding of the strategic goals is essential. At BILLA, teamwork truly makes the difference, with a large cross-functional team working

together not only to develop a more diverse and improved plant-based assortment, but also to advance all other key areas that drive the growth of the segment.

Q: What was the initiator or the most important argument for starting the reformulation initiative?

A: The basic idea was that even small adjustments can already make a meaningful difference. In many cases, it is just a single ingredient that prevents a product from being fully plant-based – creating numerous quick wins.

We are also aware that shelf space is limited. We cannot simply place a second plant-based variant next to every animal-based product. **If we want to increase the share of plant-based products, we need to evaluate what can be achieved within the existing assortment.**

There are several reasons why we aim to expand our plant-based offering: climate considerations, overall sustainability goals, and the growing demand from our customers.

Q: How much impact did this initiative have so far?

A: The initiative is still very recent, and its effects are difficult to isolate, as factors such as promotions, price changes, or timing/season can influence sales far more than a recipe adjustment. For now, our primary focus is on increasing the number of plant-based products in our assortment.

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

A: We will continue to work on this topic consistently. New products are developed on an ongoing basis, and plant-based options should always be considered. Our key objective is to anchor this mindset across the organization so that it no longer needs to be managed as a separate project but becomes part of our everyday business.

In the ideal scenario, when all criteria are met, plant-based formulations will become the standard option across many product categories.

Manufacturers need to invest more in product development expertise to deliver the best possible taste at competitive prices. Without significant improvements in quality, pricing, and economies of scale, many products will not yet be ready for full replacement.

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

A: The consumption of purely plant-based foods is not a passing trend but a lasting societal development, and as food retailers, it is our responsibility to meet evolving customer needs. In Austria, according to a survey 29% of people under the age of 25 no longer eat meat – a shift that cannot be ignored. From an economic perspective, it would be unwise not to respond to this growing demand.

It needs proactive work to build up the market and there is also a transition phase until **younger generations eventually become the majority of our customer base. Therefore, we have to invest resources early to gain a foothold in the market.**

In addition, plant-based products have a much better environmental footprint. For reducing Scope 3 CO₂ emissions, protein diversification is one of the biggest levers we have.

Finally, there is also the health aspect. We are far from meeting dietary recommendations – national ones or the Planetary Health Diet – particularly regarding legumes and plant-based intake.

There are many drivers that make protein diversification valuable – particularly in meeting evolving consumer expectations, addressing environmental and climate challenges, and improving health.



Figure 1: BILLA immer gut Riesengermknödel (large, sweet dumplings) at BILLA Austria are fully plant-based as a result of the One Ingredient reformulation project