Interview

**David van Dooijeweert, CSR Advisor at JUMBO Supermarkten, explains their use of the Protein Tracker and how it helps them make progress to reduce emissions and offer more sustainable protein products.**

***"Importantly, this transition cannot be achieved by supermarkets alone. It requires collaboration across the entire food environment – including governments, retailers, restaurants, caterers, and consumers."***

Q: **When did you set the first protein split target and started reporting the progress towards it? Which methodology do you use and why?**

A: We published our first protein split in 2023. We use the "Eiweet" methodology (the "Protein Tracker", which we developed together with other supermarkets, the Green Protein Alliance, ProVeg, Questionmark, and other partners. **The goal was to create one shared method so retailers could report their protein split between animal and plant-based protein in a comparable and transparent way.**

The ambition behind this methodology is to measure protein at product level to understand how much animal and plant-based protein is contained in each individual product. Once you combine that with sales volume data, you can calculate your protein split very accurately. However, this is still a relatively new metric, and collecting reliable data takes time. Suppliers need to provide protein composition data, and until that is fully available, we complement it with industry-average data. Each year, we publish the share of products based on actual data versus estimated data, and that share is steadily improving.

**In October 2023, we set our target of reaching 60% plant-based protein sales by 2030.** This is more ambitious than the Dutch government's national goal of achieving a 50:50 protein balance by the same year.

**Q: What insights have you generated through measuring and reporting, and how has this enabled you to act more effectively?**

**A: The measurement work gave us much clearer insights into which categories have the biggest impact.** Milk, cheese, and meat are obviously major contributors, but protein is also present in many other product groups – sometimes even in categories people do not immediately associate with protein, such as bread.

**One of the most important lessons is that companies should not focus solely on meat, cheese, and dairy.** Significant opportunities exist across many product categories, and sometimes the biggest improvements come from areas that are initially overlooked. Plant-based staple foods such as grains, breakfast cereals, and legumes can offer strong potential for improvement and often deliver additional health benefits.

This broader view helped us identify where we can make the biggest difference. It also showed us that focusing exclusively on meat alternatives is not enough. Plant-based meat and dairy alternatives still represent a relatively small share of overall protein consumption. **We therefore need to consider other high-volume product groups such as beans, nuts, cereals, and bread.**

For example, bread – and especially wholegrain bread – contains a significant amount of protein. Changes in bread consumption can sometimes have a larger impact on the overall protein split than promotional campaigns for plant-based meat alternatives.

**Another key insight is that innovative products, including enriched or blended products, can help shift the protein balance without requiring consumers to drastically change their eating habits.** Increasing plant-based protein intake by integrating it into familiar products can be very effective. An important condition here is that the taste of these products should be similar or even better.

At the same time, increasing plant-based protein alone is not sufficient. The impact becomes much stronger when plant-based products replace animal-based proteins. For example, increasing bean consumption instead of meat delivers a double effect on the protein split.

**Q: What was the main motivation for starting the protein split reporting?**

**A:** $CO_2$ emissions were a major driver. **Animal-based products represent one of the largest contributors to food-related emissions, and reducing their impact is therefore crucial for achieving climate targets.**

However, sustainability was not the only original motivation**.** In the early stages, food security was also an important consideration. Europe is currently highly dependent on imports of animal feed and other agricultural inputs from outside the EU. **Diversifying protein sources and strengthening local plant-based production can improve supply security and resilience.**

At the same time, improvements can also be made within animal-based production, for example by reducing emissions related to animal feed. **The transition is about improving balance and sustainability across the entire food system and not about eliminating animal products**.

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

**A: We are already seeing positive developments, particularly with blended or enriched meat products that combine animal and plant-based proteins sourced from European agriculture.** These types of products were not widely available before and are now gaining traction.

Progress overall is gradual. Trends such as the growing popularity of high-protein diets can sometimes slow the transition because they often drive increased consumption of dairy products. At the same time, improved data quality has allowed us to better track developments, and we have seen modest improvements in recent years.

**Importantly, this transition cannot be achieved by supermarkets alone. It requires collaboration across the entire food environment – including governments, retailers, restaurants, caterers, and consumers.** Ultimately, protein diversification is a cultural shift as much as a supply chain transformation.

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

A: We expect blended products to continue playing a significant role, and we are also exploring similar opportunities across other assortments. Taste remains the most important factor for consumer acceptance, so new products must meet consumer expectations first and foremost.

**One barrier we encounter relates to product naming regulations that limit the use of names for plant-based products.** Terms such as “milk” and “yogurt” are legally protected, which can make it difficult to market alternative or enriched products in ways that consumers easily understand. If consumers do not recognise familiar product terminology, adoption can be slower. Similar regulatory challenges may also arise for meat-related product names.

Another challenge is that the transition is sometimes framed as pushing consumers toward vegan diets, but that has never been the objective. **The goal is to create a healthier and more sustainable balance between plant-based and animal-based proteins, while also improving the sustainability of animal products themselves.** It is good to realise that, when explained properly, the general opinion of consumers (at least in The Netherlands) is that a more balanced diet is favourable.

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

A: The primary benefits are environmental and health-related.

Protein diversification also opens opportunities for strengthening European and local agricultural supply chains. Many plant-based protein crops can be grown within Europe, including in the Netherlands. **Increasing local sourcing allows retailers builds stronger connections between farmers and consumers while reducing dependency on imported raw materials**. This creates a compelling sustainability story and supports regional agricultural development.

**Figure 1:** Illustrative image of the new range of plant-based meat alternative products at Jumbo