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**Report Highlights:**

Hong Kong not only offers a great potential market for plant-based meat substitutes but also an effective springboard for the lucrative market in the region. The city is an effective place to showcase novice products. The emergence of plant-based meats in the market and quick adoption in local cuisine attest to Hong Kong being a cosmopolitan city and its openness to innovative food products. Hong Kong is the first place outside the United States that Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods became available. Also available in the market is a plant-based pork alternative called Omnipork. It was developed in Vancouver, Canada and introduced to Hong Kong especially for Chinese cuisine.

## Plant-based Meats Available in Hong Kong

Hong Kong has seen the emergence of plant-based meats in recent years. Some Hong Kong consumers first heard of plant-based meats via financial news that Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka Shing invested in Impossible Foods. The photo of Li Ka Shing trying the meatless burger easily caught the eyeball of Hong Kong readers. The surge of Beyond Meats' stock price after its initial public offering (IPO) further drew Hong Kong consumers' attention to the potential of plant-based meats. The three major plant-based meats currently available in Hong Kong are Impossible Foods, Beyond Meat, and Omnipork. They are found in food shows, restaurants, and retail shelves. Though they have not yet been able to have a substantial impact on overall meat consumption, they have successfully raised awareness for their product among consumers and are growing in popularity.



The co-existence of Impossible and Beyond Meats in fact enlarges the plant-based meat market rather than creates vicious competition. The fact that they are accepted for use by top chefs in five-star hotels assuages the public's concern for the safety of the ingredients. Diners who have tried one of them always want to try another so as to draw some comparison. Omnipork catalyzes product awareness of plant-based pork alternative because of its wide application in Chinese cuisine and its introduction to well-established fast food chains.

The developer of Omnipork, David Yeung, is a pioneer encouraging "green eating" in Hong Kong. In an interview, Mr. Yeung relayed some promising figures relating to people adopting various degrees of veganism in Hong Kong based on a research study commissioned by his company. The study revealed that Hong Kong people being flexitarian, full-vegetarian, half-

vegetarian, and occasional vegetarian are 34, 3, 10, and 21 percent, respectively. These figures are in stark contrast to the five percent of Hong Kong flex-vegetarian population in 2012.

There are many favorable aspects supporting the growth of plant-based meat substitutes. Hong Kong is receptive to novice foods. This is the key to the successful initial launch of these meatless products. Hong Kong's foodservice is characterized by the prevalence of trendy, international cuisines, which allows the meatless burgers to have room to be introduced to the market.

Secondly, Hong Kong has a good-sized population who do not eat meat at all for religious reasons. Even more are people who do not eat beef. Also, some Buddhists, while not being strictly vegetarian, do not eat meat for two specific days in a month. There are Chinese restaurants which offer vegetarian

dishes catering for these consumers. The introduction of plant-based meats offers them more food choices rather than a new eating concept.

Thirdly, there is growing number of Hong Kong people who opt for meatless products due to alleged health or environmental reasons. Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan city with a lifestyle very similar to the international landscape. The growth of vegan and vegetarian eating prevalent in western countries is also happening in the city as Hong Kong has a fluid expat community and many local Hong Kong Chinese have spent years studying or residing in other countries. However, industry representatives indicate that compared to environmental and health causes, the latter is the primary driving force for plant-based meat in Hong Kong, whereas the former is in the case in the United States.

Fourthly, there are environmental groups promoting healthy eating and care for environmental footprint. They are active in social media by listing healthy eating tips and providing recipes. For example, [Green Monday](#) advocates for a sustainable food system by having a once-a-week plant-based meal. [Queen Green](#) supports the reduction of the carbon footprint. Their efforts are complementing each other nurturing and are indicative of a growing movement for plant-based food products.

Last but not the least, Hong Kong's simple and transparent food regulations have not impeded the introduction of plant-based products. So far, there are no voices raising product description concerns for plant-based meat alternatives and food safety concern of their ingredients.

## Impossible Foods



Hong Kong was the first overseas market where Impossible Foods launched its plant-based beef alternative in April 2018. Among the first few partners was a burger chain. The marketing director of the chain said the Impossible Burger jumped into its top-three bestselling burgers. The chain quickly offered to switch any of its beef burgers with an Impossible Burger. The response indicated that Hong Kong consumers cannot wait to try something new. Another Michelin guide recommended burger chain recently commented that they introduced both plant-based meat alternatives to their menu in 2019 and the meatless patties are now requested for more than 25 percent of their burgers.

Since then, over 450 restaurants in Hong Kong have started serving the product, mostly western food restaurants. Prices on the menu range from over US\$32 at high end hotels vs US\$13 at casual dining outlets. In September 2019, the Impossible product was also introduced to a Chinese vegetarian restaurant, blending the plant-based beef alternative into Chinese cuisine.

Impossible burger version two has already been introduced to Hong Kong. According to Impossible Foods, the new version is juicier and tastes more like beef than the first version. The improved recipe has replaced wheat with soybean.

Currently in Hong Kong, Impossible Foods focuses its business on restaurants and food service. A company representative revealed in a media interview that the company is planning on retail sales when supply chains develop and added that it would even consider having a production site in or near Hong Kong. Having the product produced in the region certainly would help lower its cost and benefit sales.

## **Beyond Meats and Omnipork**



Beyond Meat was introduced to Hong Kong in 2015 by David Yeung. He is an investor and official distributor of Beyond Meat. The product is proliferated to retail and food service today. It appears on menus stretching from five-star hotels to casual dining outlets. It costs around US\$31 and US\$12 in an upscale hotel and a deli counter, respectively. David Yeung remarked in a media interview that the product has tripled its revenue in the city every year.

David Yeung is a keen pioneer promoting plant-based products. Apart from Beyond Meat, he also introduced a plant-based pork alternative called Omnipork. It was developed in Vancouver, Canada and introduced to Hong Kong especially for Chinese cuisine. It is made of shiitake mushroom, non-GMO protein, pea protein, and a mixture of rice. This plant-based “pork” is produced in Thailand, thus making it very price competitive. A pack of 230 gram of Omnipork costs HK\$38 (US\$5), currently cheaper than freshly slaughtered pork.

In recent years, Omnipork has been widely adopted in local restaurants, ranging from fast food chains, five-star hotels to vegetarian restaurants. Chinese cuisine offers many pork dishes. Therefore, as a pork alternative, Omnipork has huge potential. A recent milestone was its being used as an ingredient by a leading dumpling brand. The brand has launched two new plant-based dumplings made with Omnipork and the products are on the shelf of some six hundred supermarkets all over Hong Kong. The plant-based dumplings are selling at the same price of conventional ones, rebuking the public’s perception that plant-based novelty products are more expensive. Its marketing impact has increased awareness of plant-based alternatives and has begun to chip away at the idea that plant-based alternatives are not affordable for general consumers. There has also been huge outreach beyond expat and young vegan communities.

As pork is the most popular meat among Chinese, Omnipork has been also been introduced to Taiwan. The company is planning to certify the product in order to label it as “halal” or “kosher” pork for sale in the Middle East.



## The Future

The fact that Hong Kong was selected as the first overseas market to launch new plant-based products speaks to the fact that Hong Kong is a sophisticated market receptive to novice foods and its international food service landscape and open-minded consumers are favorable for new food choices.

Hong Kong is a popular tourist spot in the region. The rich culinary experience is one of the attractions for Hong Kong. Plant-based meat alternatives showcased in Hong Kong offer new experience for many tourists and help raise product awareness. In 2019, Hong Kong received 56 million tourists.

The potential of plant-based meats will grow with its the wide application in Chinese cuisine, given the majority of Chinese population in the city. In particular, a variety of Chinese dishes use minced meats, the texture of which is even closer to meat alternatives, making consumers harder to tell the difference. Minced meat is a key ingredient for Chinese dim sum and dumplings.

Plant-based pork is the area with the biggest potential in Hong Kong because of the Chinese preference for pork over other meat choices. While Impossible Foods' has yet to introduce its products to retail in Hong Kong, the experience of Beyond Meats and Ominpork indicated that their market share between retail and food service are almost the same.

With just a few years of being marketed in Hong Kong, plant-based meats already established a niche market share, having a footprint in retail, food service and food processing. The future is bright while competition is expected to be keen.

**Attachments:**

No Attachments.