

# HOLD THE MEAT



Contract Testing Inc.





# INTRODUCTION

As we solemnly say goodbye to another Canadian summer, we offer one last nod to one of our favourite summer food traditions...the barbeque. Hamburgers and hotdogs continue to be the standard go-to 'meats' of many backyard barbequing occasions, but there are a growing number of options that are making their way into popular barbeque food culture. Burgers, for instance, are no longer synonymous with beef – as turkey, chicken, and meat-free burgers are making big headway and becoming a popular choice on the grill.

Years ago, the concept of meat-free burgers was about as foreign and far-fetched as the idea of water sold in a bottle. While recipes for meat-free burgers have been in print since the 60s, the first commercially sold veggie burger came much later in the early '80s, and is said to be the brainchild of a natural food restaurateur in London.

Since then, many companies have embraced the trend, offering their own spin on plant-based protein options as increasingly more consumers have reduced their meat intake. But as more competitors have invaded the ever-growing vegetarian section, it can be overwhelming to pick out a meat-free bun-filler that can live up to our 'beefy' expectations of a burger.

With that in mind, we recently put four veggie burgers on the grill and to the test in order to see whether they all equally cut the mustard.



## MATERIALS AND METHODS

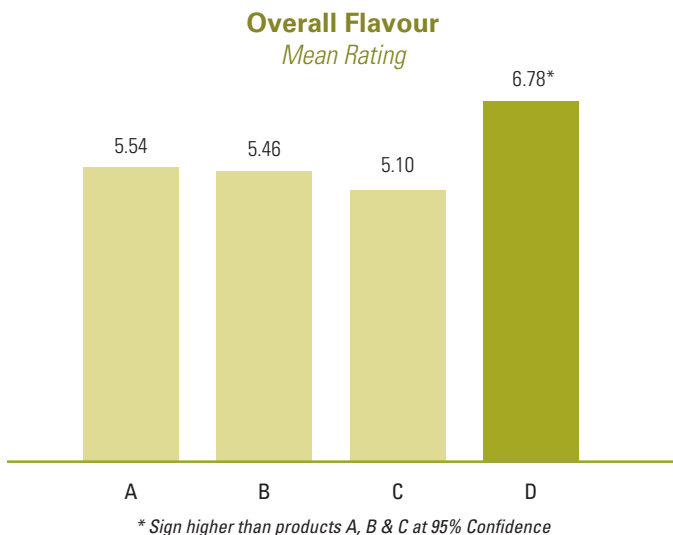
We recruited 50 females between the ages of 25 and 54 from the Greater Toronto Area, to taste and evaluate four brands of frozen meatless burgers procured at local grocery stores. Our testers received one half of each burger served on a bun, with the samples presented in varied order. They were first asked to evaluate the appearance and aroma, followed by a series of liking and 'just about right' questions on specific aspects of the taste and texture.



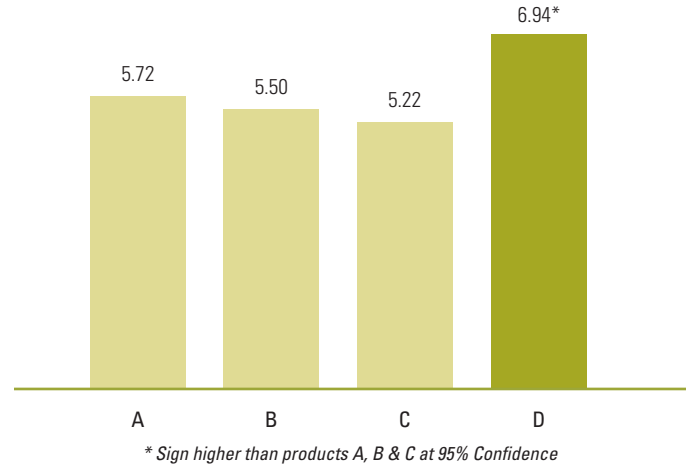
## VEGE-TERRIFIC

One of our four brands (Product D) emerged as the undeniable king of the veggie burgers, scoring significantly higher than the other three burgers on Overall Flavour, Quality, and Definite (Top Box) purchase intent (Figs. 1-3).

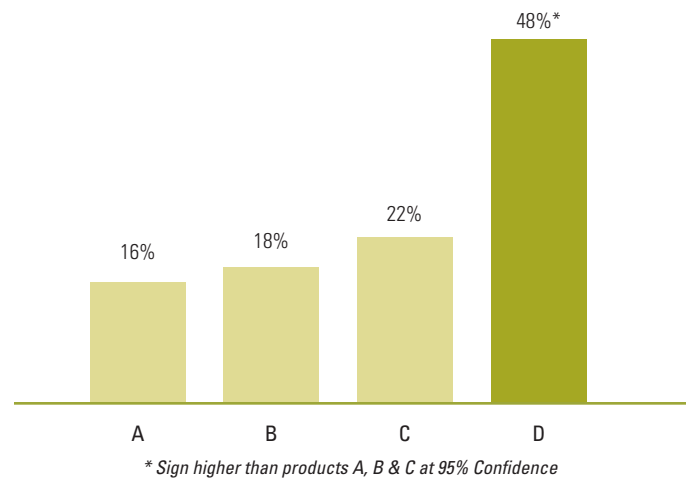
Figure 1-3 – Flavour, Quality, and Top Box Purchase Intent



## Quality

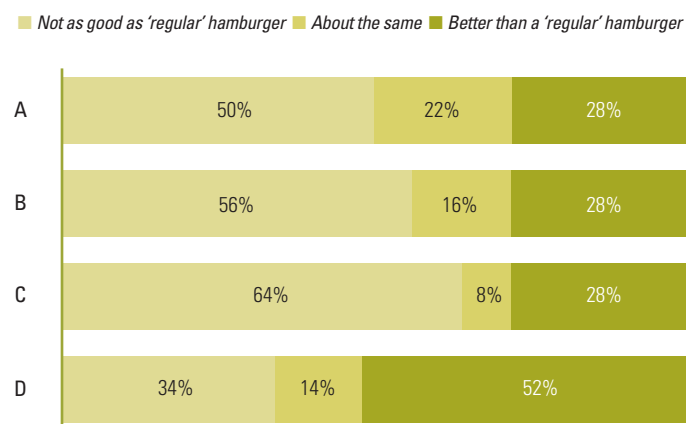


## Definite Purchase Intent



In fact, over half of our taste-testers agreed that this veggie burger was even better than the traditional beef burger! (Fig 4). Now we must have full disclosure here, because this winning brand also stood apart for its unique ingredient list which included cheese and rice, where the others used soy protein as the main ingredient. So the win for this brand came at the expense of both higher sodium and carbs.

Figure 4 – Comparison to a 'Regular' hamburger



VEGE-TERRIBLE

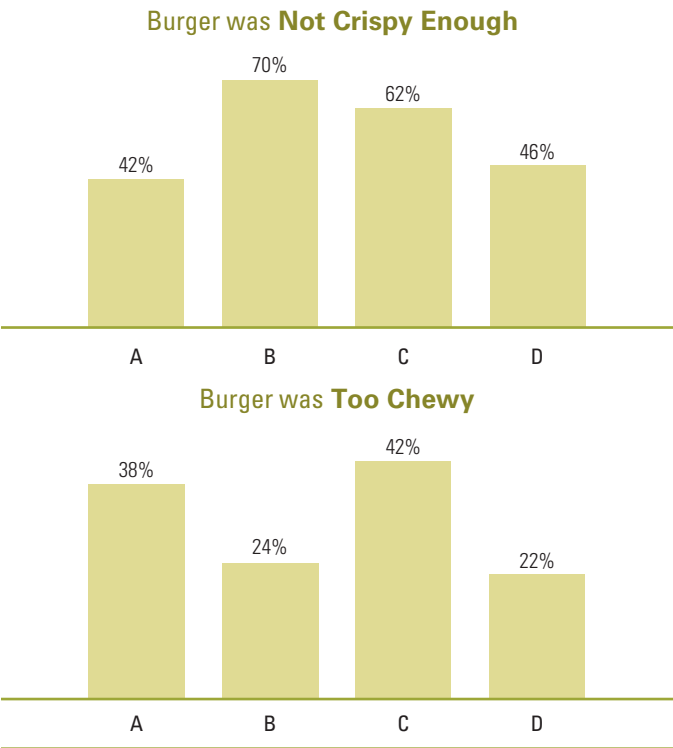
Unfortunately, the other three veggie burgers in our test did not fare nearly as well - each scoring below all of our benchmark norms for this category. There were no significant differences between them on key indicators of Quality, Overall liking, or Overall Flavour. They all equally ‘under-achieved’ and ‘under-impressed’, with most people in agreement that they did not stack up against traditional beef burgers. This was partly driven by taste; two of them were too strong in smoky flavour while the other lacked any flavour at all; and, all three had a noticeable and unpleasant aftertaste (Table 1).

Table 1 – Strength of the Smoky Flavour, Overall Flavour, and Aftertaste

Product	Percent who said the Smoky Flavour was too strong	Percent who said the Overall Flavour was too weak	Percent who said the Aftertaste was too strong
A	42%	8%	65%
B	12%	38%	45%
C	32%	22%	68%
D	0%	26%	27%

Lack of crispness was a problem for all four of the burgers - perhaps a by-product of the comparatively low fat content of anything ‘meatless’. Two of our underachievers also had another big textural problem - they were much too chewy (Fig 5 & 6).

Figures 5 & 6 - Textural Attributes



BEEFING UP MEATLESS ALTERNATIVES

With an aging consumer population and a growing demand for plant-based processed food options, the future looks bright for the ‘meatless’ market. In fact, among our testers over 50% expect to eat more veggie burgers and less beef burgers in the future.

And as free-market forces would dictate, we should definitely expect increased competition for this growing food segment – putting more pressure on food manufacturers to ‘up the ante’ in the quality of meatless alternatives such as veggie burgers.

Three of the four burgers in our test did not come close to meeting the taste expectations of a Veggie Burger – and they were light years away from the taste delivery of a traditional hamburger. As we forge ahead with new innovations in meatless alternatives, the keys to success will lie in providing quality flavour and textural delivery that reduces the trade-offs of the move from meat to veg, and not leaving your consumers asking “Where’s the Beef?”



Contract Testing Inc.

**CONTACT:**  
119 West Drive  
Brampton, ON L6T 2J6  
2776 Birchcrest Dr. SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49506  
Phone: 905 456 0783  
Fax: 905 456 1172  
Email: [info@contracttesting.com](mailto:info@contracttesting.com)  
[www.contracttesting.com](http://www.contracttesting.com)

**TEST SITE LOCATIONS:**  
Grand Rapids, Michigan  
Detroit, Michigan  
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