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Choice environment pilot

Making alternative proteins easier to notice and choose



What is the choice environment pilot?

The choice environment pilot tested whether restaurant menu design could make alternative protein (AP) dishes easier to notice and choose without restricting conventional options.

The pilot took place at LABe in Spain and Bar Amelia in Belgium. AP dishes were tested across three phases: control, integrated into the regular menu alongside conventional dishes, and placed in a separate vegetarian/vegan section. Sensory descriptions, visual cues and staff or menu-board recommendations were also used.

How did consumers react to the pilot?

1

Integrated placement performed better

In both restaurants, AP dish uptake was higher when dishes were integrated into the regular menu than when placed in a separate section.

2

Other vegetarian choices also benefited

Introducing the AP dish appeared to increase attention to the vegetarian category more broadly.

3

Sensory descriptions appealed

Sensory and emotionally engaging descriptions were more compelling than label-heavy messaging, although their impact depended on diners noticing them.

4

Those who tried the dishes liked them

Once trial occurred, acceptance was high, with satisfaction ratings above 4/5. The main challenge was getting diners to try the dish.

What concerns emerged?

Visibility does not guarantee trial

Habitual ordering can limit the shift from noticing a dish to ordering it.

Recommendations depend on the setting

Staff recommendations need to fit naturally with the restaurant's service style.

Labels can discourage some diners

Explicit "vegan" or "alternative" labelling may deter some mainstream consumers.

Stable demand matters

Uncertain demand, low turnover and food-waste risk remain barriers to scaling AP dishes.

Photo: by makafood on Pexel



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What did food restaurant staff observe?

Restaurant teams found AP dishes feasible to prepare and integrate once recipes were established, with no major workflow disruptions. Smaller packaging, portion flexibility and consistent supply could further support implementation.

The main challenge was building stable demand. Staff saw greater potential when AP dishes were presented as attractive culinary options in their own right rather than as substitutes for conventional dishes.

What should practitioners consider?

1 Integrate AP dishes

Place them within the regular menu so they feel like part of the normal offer.

2 Focus on sensory appeal

Use appetising descriptions emphasising flavour, texture and experience.

3 Keep visual cues simple

Help customers identify dishes without overwhelming them.

4 Use recommendations where appropriate

Adapt staff or menu-board endorsements to the service setting.

5 Avoid niche framing

Present AP dishes as appealing culinary options rather than relying on “alternative” or “vegan” positioning.

6 Support the business case

Monitor demand, waste and repeat ordering over time.

Key Takeaway

Choice environment interventions can support AP visibility and trial when dishes are integrated into regular menus and presented as appealing culinary options. Long-term success depends on stable demand, culinary quality and a viable food service business case.

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Xhelili, A., Schüürmann, J., Strube, R., Ziavras, S., Perrea, T., Chrysochou, P., Nystrand, B., Bye, I., Nystad, R., Vázquez-Araújo, L., Romeo-Arroyo, E., Vertriest, L., Willems, M., van der Waard, S. (2026). Driving Change with LIKE-A-PRO: Results and Lessons from Behavioural Intervention Pilots. LIKE-A-PRO project. Wuppertal, 2026; or simply click the Download full report button.

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