

## Vegan capitalism: food multinationals and BlackRock

*After seducing the population with the supposed wonders of the vegan diet, transnational meat producers and big investment funds have landed in the food industry, presenting themselves as substitutes for the vegan diet.*

Gustavo Duch

Until not so long ago, six or seven decades ago, the majority of the rural population's diet was austere, balanced and subject to the possibilities of their territories. In parallel to developmentalism and the concentration of the people in the cities, study centres, universities and prestigious magazines - in coordination with the food industry - spread the message of the need to improve eating patterns, increasing protein consumption, especially animal protein. Through the power of much advertising and propaganda, as in the case of fast food, the message permeated the culture and was installed in the imaginary as the pattern to be followed. To satisfy this "created" demand, the food industry, capable of producing much milk, meat and its derivatives at low prices without contemplating or worrying about its excessive externalities, was justified, thanked and exalted. Traditional food and agriculture were scorned and ridiculed, affecting bodies and territories. From buying and cooking fresh food, we moved on to ultra-processed food reheated in the microwave, and the industry was the clear winner. Something as intimate as our food has ended up being delegated to a few mega-corporations controlled by investment funds.



Photo by Juan Soto

Knowing what has happened, and now that vegan food trends are reaching significant proportions, could it be that history is repeating itself? Is it a culturally induced success? And, if so, are they new players or the same old ones?

Although it may seem contradictory, it is the large transnational industrial meat companies that are behind foods based on plant-based or lab-grown proteins, which are presented as substitutes for meat, fish, eggs and milk. Much information on this reality can be found in the report [Proteins and Policies](#) by [Ipes-Food](#) or on the pages of the [ALEPH2020](#) scientific platform. For example, the company Vivera, well known in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK for its more than 100 vegan salmon and chicken kebab products, belongs to the Brazilian company JBS, the world's largest producer of poultry and beef and the second largest producer of pork. We also found that JBS is the

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majority shareholder in the Spanish company BioTech Foods, which is active in the cultured meat sector. In the United States, two of the country's leading meat companies, Tyson Foods and Smithfield, have created their divisions to produce their vegetable-based nuggets and sausages to compete with

the two leaders in the sector, Impossible Foods (associated with Burger King) and Beyond Meat. In Spain, we find the same phenomenon. The largest integrator in the country, the leader in chicken and pork macro farms, Vall Companys, launched the Zyrular Foods business project in 2019 to produce meat substitutes from peas, wheat or soya from far away, whose products we can already find in different supermarkets under their white brand. And its expansion will continue if it wins the 134 million euros allocated to the Next Generation Recovery Fund to tackle new challenges in this field.

If we continue to break down the vegan market, we will find more multinationals controlling the world's food supply for decades, such as Cargill, Nestlé, Danone, and so on. We also find investment funds such as BlackRock, the largest in the world (supporting Tyson or JBS, among others), or Breakthrough Energy Ventures, chaired by Bill Gates (actively involved in Impossible Foods and Beyond Meat).

The landing of the food multinationals in this "segment" could not have happened without the certainty of having seduced the population beforehand. As has always been the case with such competitive companies, they have no problem finding common ground, such as the EAT platform, thanks to which they, with the help of "science" and

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the investors mentioned above, are in charge of transmitting and lobbying in favour of these new dietary patterns. By repeating as mantras the wonders of this vegan diet to curb the climate crisis and guarantee eternal health, they have imposed a narrative that has taken root in the population and

the administrations. And the truth is that reducing the solution to all our ills by removing animal protein from our diets is not only a reductionist narrative but also wrong. Why not look at the differences in animal protein production models, knowing as we do the importance of herbivores in the nutrient cycle, their use of food that does not compete with the human population, their role as fertilisers for the earth, etc.? Are they unaware that a diet based on proteins from peas, soya, maize or wheat replicates the same monoculture model responsible for the problems they claim to want to solve? Why is there no recognition of the dependence on oil for so much processing, travel and the plastics that clothe these pseudo-foods?

Did we think that veganism succeeded in the awareness-raising work of certain NGOs? Whether meat or vegan, the usual food capitalism distances us from the sovereignty that we urgently need to recover and that can only be

established by adapting our diet to the cycles of the earth's abundance that peasants, shepherds and pastoralists of our corresponding territories know how to manage: in their gardens and on their farms. Simplicity is beautiful.

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❖ **Tags:** capitalism, food multinationals, corporate social responsibility, ecology, food sovereignty, veganism, sustainability.

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