

NECTAR, a nonprofit initiative working to accelerate the sustainable protein transition, conducts an annual *Taste of the Industry* sensory analysis. **Taste of the Industry 2026**, the third report in this annual series, provides objective sensory data about dairy-free products collected through blind taste tests in American restaurant settings. By having consumers blindly taste dairy-free products alongside conventional dairy benchmarks, we reveal competitive positioning and specific R&D opportunities for manufacturers in this increasingly important category.

1 Products across multiple categories are nearing, or have already achieved, taste parity

AT TASTE PARITY

Qualification criterion: 50-90% likelihood of outperforming the dairy benchmark in future tests.



NEARING TASTE PARITY

Qualification criterion: 10-50% likelihood of outperforming the dairy benchmark in future tests.

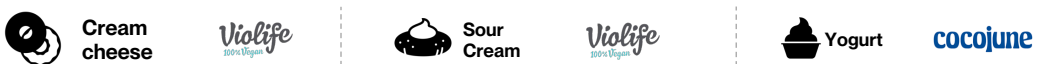
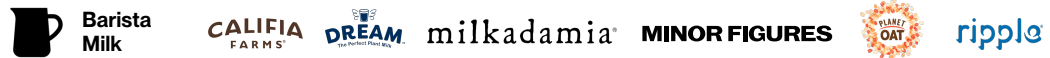


2 Leading products have emerged in most categories and are worth celebrating

TASTY AWARD

Qualification criterion:

At least 50% of tasters must rate the product the "same or better" than the dairy benchmark on overall liking.



1. Product marketed as "non-dairy" according to FDA regulation. Contains less than 2% micellar casein (a milk derivative).

3 Leading dairy-free products far outperform the average dairy-free product

1.5× more promoters

51% rated dairy-free leaders 'like very much' or 'like' vs. 35% for dairy-free average

50% fewer detractors

Only 17% rated dairy-free leaders 'dislike somewhat', 'dislike', or 'dislike very much' vs. 34% for dairy-free average

3× closer to dairy

Just 0.4 pts below dairy on overall liking vs. 1.2 pts for dairy-free average

Explore the full dataset with our dashboard [here](#)

The full scoop

Methodology: Full details on study design and analytical approach are [here](#).

Demographics: 2,183 American consumers aged 18 and up who regularly consume the category tested. The sample leaned female, younger, and higher educated.

Dairy-Free Average: Calculated by averaging the scores of every dairy-free product tested in that category.

Dairy-Free Leader: The dairy-free product in each category that performed the highest on overall liking (independently and against the dairy-based benchmark).

Dairy Benchmark: The 'typical' dairy product in each category with the highest retail sales volume.