

# ethical consumer

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## Big business goes vegan **GOOD or BAD?**



### SHOPPING GUIDES TO

- Meat alternatives
- Plant milk
- Vegan cheese

Universities spend millions with Amazon

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**Minor Figures**, a certified B-Corp, started as a coffee company but branched into oat milk partly for its own milky coffee products. It describes itself as “an independently owned startup” with investors. It was recently announced that the company has received investment from Danone (which also owns Alpro), a major processor of dairy products. It is currently unclear what percentage the investment equates to. This means that the activities of Danone are not currently affecting Minor Figures’ Ethiscore, but if more information becomes publicly available this may change.

**Plenish** started in 2012 as a cold-pressed organic juice company in London and, in 2021, was bought by the drinks company Britvic, owner of Drench, J20, Tango, R Whites, Robinsons, Purdey’s and more. Britvic also struck a 20-year deal in 2020 to produce and distribute Pepsi brands in the UK, including Pepsi, 7-Up and Mountain Dew.

**Rude Health** started as a husband-and-wife team in 2005, but its growth attracted attention and, in 2020, it became 10% owned by Pepsi.

**Califia Farms LLC** has a number of big name investors including the Qatar Investment Authority, Temasek, Claridge, Sun Pacific, Stripes, and Ambrosia that all hold a minority stake in the company and also all have executives sitting on the Califia Farm board.

**Nestlé** is one of the biggest food processors on the planet, and one of its 2000+ brands, Wunda, is a plant milk. Overall, dairy milk is Nestlé’s biggest raw material by volume, and almost of quarter of the eggs it uses worldwide are still not cage-free. Nestlé is also the target of the world’s longest running boycott for its irresponsible marketing of breast milk substitutes, which have been classed by the Access to Nutrition Index as “a threat on global health”.

Nestle has also been found to make use of ‘captive audience’ meetings to dissuade workers at its operations in the US from forming unions. It claims it has operated in line with US law, but while these practices are legal nationally, in April 2022, Connecticut followed Oregon in banning them, as they go against freedom of association, a fundamental workers’ right.



Climate protesters at the Arla dairy factory also demanded the government helps fund a just transition for workers in meat and dairy industries to move to sustainable alternatives.

© Animal Rebellion

**Arla Foods**, another major dairy company, has also decided to claim a stake in the plant milk market with the introduction of its new oat milk brand JÖRD in 2020. However, while it might be looking to cash in on the growing interest in plant-based diets, it does not appear to be making any significant moves away from dairy, which has not escaped the notice of climate activists. In 2021, Animal Rebellion occupied an Arla factory, the largest dairy factory in the UK, in protest of the catastrophic climate impact of the dairy industry. The activists were demanding Arla go dairy-free by 2025, stating that “Arla supplies 10% of UK milk and 2.7 million litres a day”. For all its sins, it did gain half a positive mark under Company Ethos because it is structured as a co-operative, owned by the dairy farmers.

Perhaps the most well-known and widely available plant milk brand is Alpro, owned by **Danone**. However, Danone’s main focus is dairy products. Like Nestlé, Danone has received criticism for its marketing practices in relation to baby formula.

Another of Danone’s major ventures is bottled water, also fraught with ethical issues. In 2021, people from the Nahua Indigenous communities occupied the bottling plant of Bonafont water, a Danone subsidiary, in the Puebla region of Mexico. They were protesting the exploitation and depletion of water resources in the area by Bonafont and other private companies.

After months of occupation to stop production and allow the water table to rise again, residents were evicted in February 2022. Solidarity actions are encouraged around the world. ■



Danone is the main company selling bottled water in Mexico.

# Vegan cheese

# Is the time ripe for vegan cheese?

**JASMINE OWENS** looks into which vegan cheeses are grate and which are goudawful.

In comedian Simon Amstell's vegan mockumentary 'Carnage', a support group of people name cheeses they once ate in an effort to let go of shame they feel about having done so. "Brie!" one confesses. "Edam!" another collapses into tears.

People rarely switch to vegan cheese because it tastes better. It's an ethical decision, asking dairy cheese to moo-ve aside for the benefit of other species and the planet.

Fortunately, plant-based alternatives, from humble cheddar to crumbly feta, even creamy mozzarella, have stepped up to make this transition easier – they're gonna Roquefort your world!

## Three reasons to cut out (or cut down on) dairy cheese

### 1. To help out the planet

Due to a lack of good studies and variations in production methods, it is difficult to give exact figures, but saying plant-based cheese is ten times better for the climate than dairy cheese probably isn't a wild exaggeration. While the production of one kilogram of dairy cheese creates 18 kg CO<sub>2</sub>e, the ingredients commonly used in plant-based cheeses are way less carbon intensive to produce (coconut 2.1 kg CO<sub>2</sub>e, tree nuts like almond and cashew 2, soya beans 2, potato 0.4).

### 2. To protect rainforests

Valuable habitats like forests, grasslands and savannahs are being converted into land for soy production. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) says almost 80% of the world's soybean crop is fed to livestock. It says that 24 g of soya is used to produce 100 g of dairy cheese. So, perhaps surprisingly, if everyone stopped eating dairy cheese and switched to plant-based alternatives then overall soya production would likely plummet. Cathedral City (owned by Saputo) is one example of a dairy cheese company that's been linked to deforestation in Brazil.

### 3. To stop funding animal suffering

All dairy products come from mothers that either just had a baby or are milked while pregnant. Animals can't give consent to the cycle of forced impregnation, separation from their offspring, and endless milking that are integral to dairy production. Dairy animals are virtually always killed when their milk production slows down even though they are still young.



A fully referenced version of this Product Guide is on our website

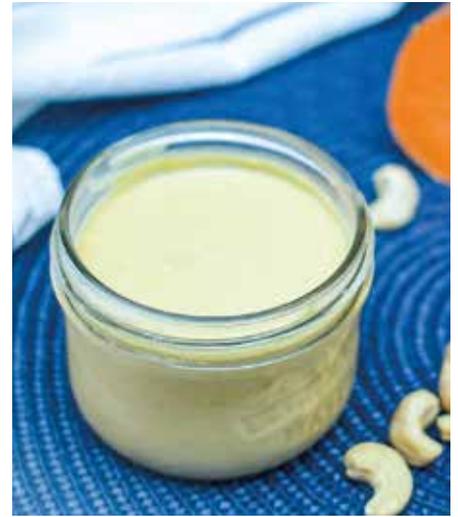
## ANIMAL SENTIENCE RECOGNISED IN UK LAW

One positive thing we lost to Brexit was the EU law which recognised that animals are sentient – meaning capable of experiencing feelings and sensations, like joy and pain. Fortunately, a new UK Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act was announced in 2021. This has brought animal sentience to the discussion table in UK government which is significant in itself. In concrete terms, this legislation aims to ensure that policymakers take into account the fact that animals are sentient when introducing policy changes that relate to animal welfare.

## EASY VEGAN CHEESE RECIPE

- 250 g cashews
- 2 tbsp nutritional yeast
- Juice 1 lemon
- A few chopped chives

1. Soak cashews in a large bowl of water overnight (or for at least 4 hours).
2. Drain and rinse cashews, blend in a food processor with nutritional yeast, lemon juice, ½ tsp salt and 1 tbsp water. Whizz until smooth, scraping down sides as needed.
3. Place in a bowl, stir chives through, then cover and place in fridge for one hour to firm up a little.



© Marco Verch

# THREE EASY STEPS FOR REDUCING OR GIVING UP DAIRY CHEESE

### 1. Put a picture of the reason why you're doing it on your fridge

This could be for example a photo of a lovely goat's face or a drawing of the earth not descending into climate doom.



Happy

### 2. Throw a vegan cheese party (perhaps call it a rendez-fondue)

This is an affordable way to try a broad range of cheeses and find which one tastes best to you. Plus, you'll have people there to support you after sampling any unpleasant ones.

Ask guests to bring one or two cheeses each (being careful not to get duplicates).

If you can't throw a party, another way to sample a range of vegan cheeses is to head to a vegan festival. Vegans Events UK is running the following, but there are often smaller local ones happening too:

- Nottingham – 6th August 2022
- Bournemouth – 3rd September 2022
- Glasgow – 8th October 2022
- Leeds – 6th November 2022
- Manchester – 20th November 2022
- Bath – 26th November 2022

### 3. Find out what else satisfies your cravings

Some people find that other foods satisfy them enough for dairy cheese cravings to pass.

We asked subscribers what other alternatives they turned to when the cravings for dairy cheese struck. Here are some of the responses:

- Hummus
- Tahini
- Nutritional yeast
- Pesto
- Creamed cashews
- Pistachios
- White miso
- Tofu
- Nut butter
- Soya yoghurt ●

## SHOPPING GUIDE

# Vegan cheese

### USING THE TABLES

**Ethicscore:** the higher the score, the better the company. Scored out of 14. Plus up to 1 extra point for Company Ethos and up to 5 extra points for Product Sustainability.

**Green (good)** = 12+  
**Amber (average)** = 11.5-5  
**Red (poor)** = 4.5-0

● = worst rating  
 ○ = middle rating  
 = best rating/no criticisms found

BRAND	Ethicscore (out of 14 + 6 extras)	Environment					Animals			People				Politics				+ve		
		Environmental Reporting	Climate Change	Pollution & Toxics	Habitats & Resources	Palm Oil	Animal Testing	Factory Farming	Animal Rights	Human Rights	Workers' Rights	Supply Chain Management	Irresponsible Marketing	Arms & Military Supply	Controversial Technologies	Boycott Call	Political Activity	Anti-Social Finance	Tax Conduct	Company Ethos
New Roots [O]	16																		★	1
Mouse's Favourite [O]	15.5	○																	★	1
La Fauxmagerie [O]	14.5	○								●									★	1
Tyne Chease	14.5	○																	★	
Cheezly	13.5	○								●									★	
Green Vie	13.5	○								●									★	
La Fauxmagerie	13.5	○								●									★	
Nush spread	12	○							○	●										
Koko	11	●	○		●				○	●									★	
Mozzarisella	8.5	●	●					●	●		●		○							
Applewood	8	●	●					●	●		●		○	○	○			☆		
Ilchester	8	●	●					●	●		●		○	○	○			☆		
Mexicana	8	●	●					●	●		●		○	○	○			☆		
nurishh	7.5	○	●					●	●	○	●		○	○	○					
Sheese	4.5	○	●	○	○	●		●	●		●		○	○	●	●				
Vitalite	4.5	○	●	○	○	●		●	●		●		○	○	●	●				
Violife	3		●	●	○	○	●	●	●		●	○	○	●	●	●				
Follow Your Heart	2.5	○		○	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	○	●	●	●				

### Positive ratings (+ve)

#### Company Ethos:

★ = full mark ☆ = half mark

#### Product Sustainability:

Various positive marks available depending on sector.

Best Buys are highlighted in blue

Recommended Brands to avoid

### COMPANY GROUP

New Roots AG

Mouses Favourite

La Fauxmagerie Ltd

Tyne Chease Limited

VBites Foods Ltd

VP Elmarso Ltd

La Fauxmagerie Ltd

Prebe Limited

First Grade International Ltd

Frescolat SRL

TINE SA

TINE SA

TINE SA

Unibel

Saputo Inc

Saputo Inc

KKR & Co.

Groupe Danone

All the research behind these ratings is available for subscribers to see on the score tables on [www.ethicalconsumer.org](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org)

Definitions of all the categories are at [www.ethicalconsumer.org/our-ethical-ratings](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/our-ethical-ratings) **Product Sustainability plus points:** [O] = organic



Best Buys are decided by the editorial team based on the research we have undertaken, the scoring system and the unique insight into the issues that our editorial team has. 9 times out of 10 this will be the brand (or brands) that are top of the table but sometimes an ethical company which is truly innovative scores less well on our rigid scoring system and we use the Best Buy and Recommended section to acknowledge this. A company cannot be a Best Buy if it scores worst for Supply Chain Management but it can be a Recommended brand.

## Supermarkets

Since the last guide we removed the brands Happy Cashew and Tofutti because it appears they are no longer easy to find in the UK. We also removed supermarket brands, which tend to score poorly. When we published the guide to supermarkets in December 2021, the following scores were given to supermarkets that sell own-brand vegan cheese: Waitrose (4.5), M&S (3), Asda (2.5), Sainsbury's (0), Morrisons (3), Tesco (0).

### Who makes supermarket own-brand cheese?

Supermarkets aren't that transparent about who makes their own-brand vegan cheeses but, according to the Sheese website, it is manufacturing supermarket own-brand products for Morrisons, Tesco and Asda.

## WHAT TO BUY

- **Is it owned by a vegan company?** Now's the time to support innovative companies that only sell plant-based products.
- **Is it a local, independent company?** Finding your local vegan cheesemaker is the best way to support local businesses and avoid the carbon costs of ordering online.
- **Has it got a transparent ingredients list?** It's easy to avoid palm oil and other contentious ingredients if you pick a product that is well-labelled and has an easy-to-understand ingredients list.

## WHAT NOT TO BUY

- **Is it owned by a meat or dairy company?** If you want to avoid fuelling dairy companies' revenues, make sure you're not accidentally buying from one.
- **Does it use palm oil?** It's uncommon for plant-based cheese brands to use palm oil, but some do. While certifications provide some reassurance that palm is sourced sustainably, avoiding it altogether eliminates the risk.



## Palm-oil free vegan cheese

Most brands scored a best rating for Palm Oil in this guide, meaning the company that owns them either does not use palm oil or derivatives, or is clearly taking steps to ensure the palm oil it uses is traceable.

### Brands that have a policy against using palm oil:

- Green Vie
- Mouse's Favourite
- New Roots

### Brands that do not appear to use any palm oil:

- Applewood
- Ilchester
- La Fauxmagerie
- Mexicana
- MozzaRisella
- Nurishh
- Nush
- Tyne Cheese
- Violife (owner Upfield uses certified palm elsewhere)

### Brands that use 'sustainable' palm:

- VBites
- Follow Your Heart

### Palm-free brands owned by a company that uses unsustainable palm:

- Sheese and Vitalite

### Brands that use palm oil without any sustainability initiatives:

- Koko

## Score table highlights

- Only three companies scored a best rating for Supply Chain Management – New Roots, Mouse's Favourite, and Tyne Cheese. The rest all scored worst ratings. While vegan cheese companies are taking responsibility when it comes to animal rights, we need to see more attention paid to workers' rights! This is especially important as many brands use ingredients such as cashews, which are often produced in countries with poor labour rights.
- New Roots was the only company to receive a best rating for its approach to Climate Change. Even though the production of plant-based cheese produces fewer emissions than dairy, we expect all companies to be taking reasonable steps to minimise their climate impact.
- Only four brands lost a whole mark for Tax Conduct: Sheese, Vitalite, Violife and Follow Your Heart.
- Half of the brands in this guide are owned by companies that scored our worst rating for Animal Rights.



## CASHEWS, COCONUTS AND WORKERS' RIGHTS

Cashew nuts are originally encased in a shell. If the shells are split by hand without protection, the acids that are found in between the shell and the nut can burn the skin, leading to severe pain and even permanent damage.

West Africa is the largest producer of cashew, followed by India. For many workers burns are a part of life. Best Buys in this guide all use organic cashews and scored our best ratings for Supply Chain Management, which is considered to provide some mitigation against this risk.

Coconuts are usually produced on small-scale farms in Indonesia, India and the Philippines. Coconut farmers have historically been paid wages little over a dollar a day, which are said to be getting even lower as palm oil muscles in, reducing demand for coconut oil. ●



Best Buy brands in this guide are **Mouse's Favourite, New Roots, and Tyne Cheese.**

All are independent vegan companies and scored highly across our categories. We also recommend searching for local independent manufacturers in your area.

16



15.5



14.5

## RECOMMENDED

Our highly recommended buys are **La Fauxmagerie, Green Vie, Cheezly, and Nush.**

The reason they are not Best Buys is because they didn't publish information about how they ensure workers' rights are upheld in their supply chains.

## BRANDS TO AVOID

Buying any plant-based cheese is better for animals and the climate than buying a dairy one, regardless of who owns it. Unless you don't have access to any other vegan cheese brands, we'd suggest avoiding **Follow Your Heart, Violife, Vitalite, and Sheese** which all performed extremely poorly on the Ethiscore table.

# Vegan cheese

## What do they make and how much do they cost?

Type of cheese	Applewood	Cheezly	Follow Your Heart	Green Vie	Iichester	Koko	La Fauxmagerie	Mexicana	Mouse's	Mozzarisella	New Roots	Nurishh	Nush	Sheese	Tyne Cheese	Violife	Vitalite
Artisan							✓		✓						✓		
Block / cheddar	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Blue			✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓				✓			
Camembert							✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	
Spread				✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Feta			✓	✓			✓							✓		✓	
Fondue											✓						
Goat							✓										
Gouda			✓	✓										✓			
Grated	✓			✓			✓					✓		✓		✓	✓
Halloumi				✓												✓	
Mozzarella			✓	✓			✓			✓		✓		✓		✓	
Parmesan			✓				✓					✓				✓	
Provolone			✓									✓					
Ricotta							✓				✓						
Slices	✓		✓	✓						✓		✓		✓		✓	✓
<b>Cost by brand</b>																	
Least expensive	£2.25 (slices)	£2.19 (block)	£3.29 (slices)	£2.49 (mozzarella slices)	£2.30 (block)	£2.30 (block)	£4.50 (block)	£2.30 (block)	£8.25 (artisan)	£2.35 (slices)	£2.99 (spread)	£2.50 (slices)	£2.75 (spread)	£2.25 (block)	£7.95 (artisan)	£2.30 (block)	£2.30 (block)
Most expensive	£2.75 (grated)	£2.25 (block)	£4.69 (parmesan)	£4.49 (parmesan)	£3 (blue)	£2.30 (block)	£6 (camembert)	£2.30 (block)	£9.99 (blue)	£4.50 (mozzarella)	£6.49 (ricotta)	£3.50 (camembert)	£2.75 (spread)	£2.50 (mozzarella)	£10 (artisan)	£2.75 (feta)	£2.99 (block)

## Where can I buy vegan cheese?

All of the brands in this guide are available online and with some local stockists. The following brands are commonly available at supermarkets, or places like Holland & Barrett and local retailers: Applewood, Cheezly, Follow Your Heart, Mexicana, Nurishh, Sheese, Violife, Vitalite.



## How much does vegan cheese cost?

Vegan cheese does tend to be a bit more expensive than dairy. However, dairy cheese produced by more ethical companies is the most expensive of all cheeses on the market.

### Cost of dairy cheddar vs vegan block/cheddar

We searched the websites of major supermarkets, ethical online retailers, and independent cheese shops to get an indication of how much different brands of cheddar sell for. Calon Wen and Daylesford were the highest scoring brands in our guide to cow's milk that sell cheddar.

	£ per kg
● Asda own-brand dairy	4.67
● Pilgrim's Choice	7.14
● Cathedral City	7.27
● <b>Violife</b>	10.50
● <b>Asda own-brand vegan</b>	11.00
● <b>Cheezly</b>	11.50
● <b>Koko</b>	11.50
● Calon Wen organic dairy	11.50
● <b>Green Vie</b>	13.00
● Daylesford Organic Cheddar	30.00
● The Ethical Dairy	30.00

● = Vegan

## What is vegan cheese made of?

Common ingredients in vegan cheese are almonds, cashew, coconut, macadamias and soy, but many mass-produced vegan cheeses contain added ingredients.

Research suggests that strikingly long ingredients lists, and high oil content, of some vegan cheeses could be putting people off buying it.

### Ingredients in artisan and small companies' vegan cheese

Many smaller brands use very few ingredients.

New Roots' ricotta and camembert alternatives, for example, contain only organic cashew nuts, water, Himalayan salt, and cultures. A machine is used to make the cashew milk, and all remaining steps needed to make the cheese are done by hand. The company's camembert is fermented and ripened for 3 to 4 weeks following traditional camembert-making methods.

Mouse's Favourite Camembert contains only organic cashews, water, salt, and cultures. La Fauxmagerie's blue cheese contains coconut oil, almonds, tapioca flour, nutritional yeast, salt, and cultures.

### Ingredients in mass-produced vegan cheese

The general rule seems to be the bigger the brand, the longer the ingredients list.

Violife's mature cheddar contains 11 ingredients, most of which are recognisable, but it also contains 'Mature Cheddar Flavour' (not sure what that is!)

Sheese contained 14 ingredients such as coconut oil and oat fibre, as well as tricalcium citrate and colouring.

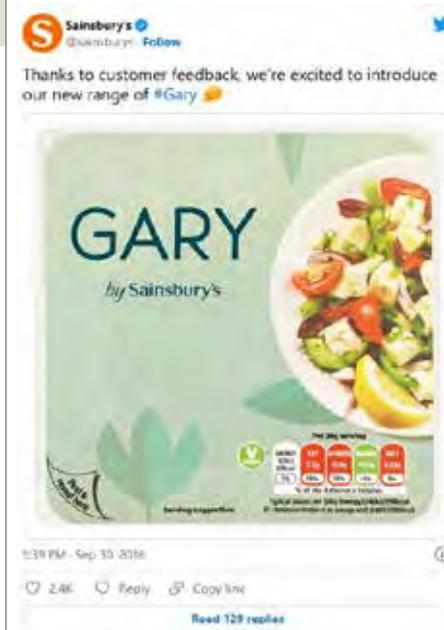
Koko's vegan cheese contained 15 ingredients, including stabilisers, humectant, calcium phosphates, maltodextrin, preservatives, dextrose ... and other things difficult to identify in a line-up.

None of the big brands published detailed information about the manufacturing process of their vegan cheeses.

### What are vegan cheese cultures?

Just as some dairy cheese is fermented, so are some vegan cheeses. Cultures, which are different strains of bacteria combined together, are used to enable the fermentation process. This ripens the cheese, which can help preserve, texture, or impart flavour. Some websites (such as satsumapips.co.uk) retail vegan culture starter kits. One example is a vegan strain of penicillium camemberti – the bacteria used to make the characteristic white mould you find on cheeses like camembert and brie.

## "CALL IT GARY!"



Sainsbury's joined in on the joke on Twitter.

Legally, we're not supposed to call vegan cheese, 'cheese' – UK regulations say the term can only be used to describe products derived from animals.

Sainsbury's decision to break the mould in 2016 by becoming the first major supermarket to offer own-brand vegan cheese prompted a Facebook rant which is now a potent piece of vegan cheese's cultural history.

In a post that's too long for us to fit on this page, a fuming defender of dairy cheese argued: "If you're going to be a vegan don't call your vegan cheese BECAUSE IT'S NOT CHEESE!!!! ...CHEESE IS NOT MADE WITH COCONUTS. Call it Gary or something don't call it Cheese because IT'S NOT CHEESE!!!!!"

Needless to say, many vegans found great satisfaction in adopting the name Gary.

Hopefully, the subtle title of this guide will prevent us from getting in trouble with both law enforcement and also the anti-vegan cheese police.

## Nut-free vegan cheese

Most vegan cheese contains nuts, with some made primarily from coconut (which can be classed as nut, fruit or drupe). In this guide Cheezly, Green Vie, Koko, and MozzaRisella are the highest-scoring brands that sell nut-free cheese. ●

**Legally, we're not supposed to call vegan cheese, 'cheese'.**



# Vegan cheese



## All vegan cheeses are vegan, but some are more vegan than others...

Every brand in this guide is vegan. But some are owned by fully vegan companies, while others are owned by companies involved in factory farming, animal slaughter, and animal testing.

### The most vegan of all the vegan cheeses

The following brands have a spotless record under our Animal Rights, Factory Farming and Animal Testing categories: **Cheezly**, **Green Vie**, **Koko**, **La Fauxmagerie**, **Mouse's Favourite**, **New Roots**, **Nush**, and **Tyne Cheese**.

### The least vegan of all the vegan cheeses

**Applewood**, **Ilchester** and **Mexicana** are owned by dairy company Norseland, which is owned by Norway's largest producer of dairy products TINE SA. It appears to have no meaningful welfare policies at all.

**Sheese** and **Vitalite** are owned by dairy giant Saputo (see right).

**Violife's** immediate parent company Upfield is transitioning towards a plant-based product range, but still uses a lot of dairy for its brands like Elmlea cream. Violife lost half a mark under the Animal Testing category because its ultimate parent company (private equity company KKR) has investments in biopharmaceuticals companies, which are required to use animal testing to demonstrate the safety of products.

In February 2021 it was announced that plant-based brand **Follow Your Heart** had been bought by Danone, which tests on animals "to ensure the safety and efficacy of new products". Danone also claims it is "committed to avoid and will be phasing out close confinement and permanent tethering systems for all farm animals, including cages, crates or tie stalls," which appears to mean it is still involved in these cruel practices.

**MozzaRisella** is owned by dairy company Frescolat SRL. It says its cow and goat milk is fully traceable and that it "collaborates exclusively with local stables", but didn't provide any extra information about what actual animal welfare measures are expected.

**Nurishh** is owned by The Bel Group – you guessed it, owner of the Babybel brand. The Group states that, in 2019, it developed an Animal Welfare Charter with Compassion in World Farming, which it wants all of its farmers to be compliant with by 2025. At the time of writing, 90% of the milk used to make its products came from cows with access to pasture, though it's unclear for how many days of the year.

## Case study

### VEGAN CHEESE PIONEER, SHEESE, SOLD TO DAIRY GIANT SAPUTO

This story starts on a remote Scottish island – the Isle of Bute. In 1988, its soy-based cheese alternative (then named 'Scheese') was born. It spread to indie health food shops, before rolling into success across the UK, until it began manufacturing for all the major supermarkets and sitting on top of Papa John's pizza. And in 2020 we recommended it in our guide to vegan cheese.

But all of this wasn't enough. In June 2021, Sheese, which had always been an independent fully vegan company, was sold to dairy giant Saputo for £109 million.

Despite manufacturing dairy butters, spreads, cheeses and whey products Saputo lacks adequate animal welfare policies, so scores Ethical Consumer's worst ratings in our Animal Rights and Factory Farming categories.

### Saputo's approach to pollution, tax, and executive pay

Saputo's UK subsidiary admitted to 21 pollution incidents and permit breaches since 2016 at its creamery in Cornwall. Local residents say they were forced to endure "horrendous smells" which left them with headaches and vision problems. It was also alleged that fish were killed due to the "sludge" pollution, in the River Inny which is home to native wild brown trout among other species.

Saputo also has holding companies in Luxembourg, so was marked down in our Tax Conduct rating. It paid its top executive over \$6 million in 2021.

### Is Sheese veganwashing?

What is veganwashing? Well, despite what you might think, it has nothing to do with washing vegans.

Veganwashing could be defined as a company promoting itself as compassionate towards animals when its actions are actually causing animal suffering.

Does publishing posts on its website about veganism and compassion for animals, while adding to the bottom line of a mega dairy giant, fit this description?

We invited Sheese for an interview, but it declined, stating "Joining Saputo allows us to bring our products to new markets, enabling more people to live dairy-free, should they wish."



Sheese is now owned by dairy giant Saputo.

## TERRACYCLE AND CHEESE PACKAGING

The plastic film covering cheese is infamously tricky to recycle. Saputo teamed up with recycling company TerraCycle to make it possible for cheese packaging (from any brand) to be recycled through a free programme.

However, this isn't always easy to do – you have to search the TerraCycle website for your nearest cheese recycling Drop-Off Point, and then might have to drive a significant distance if there's not one nearby.

Buying from local companies that wrap cheeses in more sustainable materials, such as greaseproof paper, is the best option when it comes to cheese packaging.

## HOW ETHICAL ARE MARIGOLD'S ENGEVITA NUTRITIONAL YEAST FLAKES?

It's not a vegan cheese, but countless vegans use Marigold's Engevita nutritional yeast flakes because it tastes a bit cheesy and nutty (and contains B12 which is hard to get in a plant-based diet).

Small UK company Marigold manufactures and sells perhaps the most recognisable yeast flakes on the market today. Marigold is a vegan company and scored our best rating for Environmental Reporting, Palm Oil, and Animal Rights.

Engevita is a specific brand of nutritional yeast. Multinational company Lallemand owns the 'Engevita' trademark, and Marigold has a licensing arrangement with Lallemand which makes it the only company able to manufacture Engevita products in the UK. We therefore consider Marigold's Engevita yeast flakes to be owned 50/50 by Marigold and Lallemand.

Lallemand appeared to actively test on animals, stating that it had a "Strong collaboration network with research partners to conduct efficacy trials in all livestock species" and discussed "ex vivo and in vivo studies". Lallemand also listed one of its research centres as focusing on "Development and testing of new bio-pesticides on live insect models". It is a major supplier of feed to the animal slaughter industry.

Marigold's yeast flakes have an ethiscore of 10.



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## Companies behind the brands

**New Roots** is a fully vegan and organic company which uses hydropower to power its factory. It uses cocoa in some products, all of which was Fairtrade certified. It buys its cashew nuts from small-scale independent farmers in Vietnam who are paid above average wage, plus an organic premium.

**Mouse's Favourite** is a London-based vegan and organic company, certified by The Organic Food Federation, and uses plastic-free packaging. It tries to recreate the "rustic visual beauty of traditional dairy cheese and its aesthetic shapes and forms, but in vegan versions". It tries to keep the processing very simple – leaving it to fermentation cultures to create subtle flavours.

**La Fauxmagerie** was launched in 2019 by two sisters who describe it as "the UK's first vegan cheesemonger". It sells own-brand cheese, plus a range of other brands. It signed a deal with Waitrose in May 2022 and can now be found in several Waitrose stores – check out its website to find out which. Its success

looks set to skyrocket. However, we couldn't find any information about how it manages workers' rights in its supply chain.

**Nush's** parent company, Met Foods Ltd, is plant-based, but as it sold chocolate ice cream and cheesecakes and hadn't published a cocoa sourcing policy it lost half a mark under Workers' Rights.

**Follow Your Heart**, which also owns Vegenaise, was a fully plant-based company that launched in 1970 and lots of its products contain organic ingredients. It's GMO-free and has positive waste-free policies. It was sold to Danone in February 2021. Follow Your Heart's CEO announced the sale, saying the two companies had a "shared vision". As a result of the merger, Follow Your Heart now picks up scores from Danone, meaning it has plummeted to the bottom of the table.

**Violife** is probably the most widely available vegan cheese. While its

**Violife owner KKR's highest paid director received £455 million in 2021.**



immediate parent company Upfield is transitioning towards plant-based products, its ultimate owner is KKR, a huge, US-based private equity firm which has its fingers in all sorts of unsavoury pies. KKR was criticised in 2019 for providing financial services to a "producer of tear gas, anti-riot bullets and other crowd-control gear" which had been used against demonstrators in Puerto Rico, Turkey and the US. KKR has quite literally hundreds of subsidiaries in tax havens, from the Cayman Islands to Bermuda, Singapore and Hong Kong. While it's stingy on paying tax, it's happy to fork out for directors – its highest paid director received £455 million in 2021. ■