



A Case Study

 **proveg** _____
NEW FOOD HUB

INTRODUCING:

Katja is a Dutch candy brand that offers a range of products, including animal-shaped gummies and licorice laces. In 2012, the company began the process of becoming plant-based by removing gelatine from its product recipes.

Since then, Katja has been working on making all of its products fully plant-based. The only products in Katja's range which are not yet fully plant-based are their yoghurt gums, which still contain milk, but the brand is committed to finding a suitable replacement.



INTRODUCING:

In conversation with ProVeg International, Katja's Brand Manager **Floortje Sjoer** discussed the process of becoming a majority plant-based company and the consumer response to this shift.

According to Floortje, "Katja's mission was to make candy that was available to everyone. We didn't want to exclude anyone. We can prove with Katja that **our newly plant-based products are as good as they always were.**"

FLOORTJE SJOER

*Brand Manager,
Katja Fassin B.V.*



Read on to find out more about the growth in the plant-based confectionery sector and the steps taken by Katja to grow their plant-based range.

THE CASE FOR PLANT-BASED CONFECTIONERY

Many companies have attempted to drastically cut the sugar content of their products to maximise appeal.¹ After experimenting with reduced-sugar candy products, Katja decided this was not the way to go for their company.

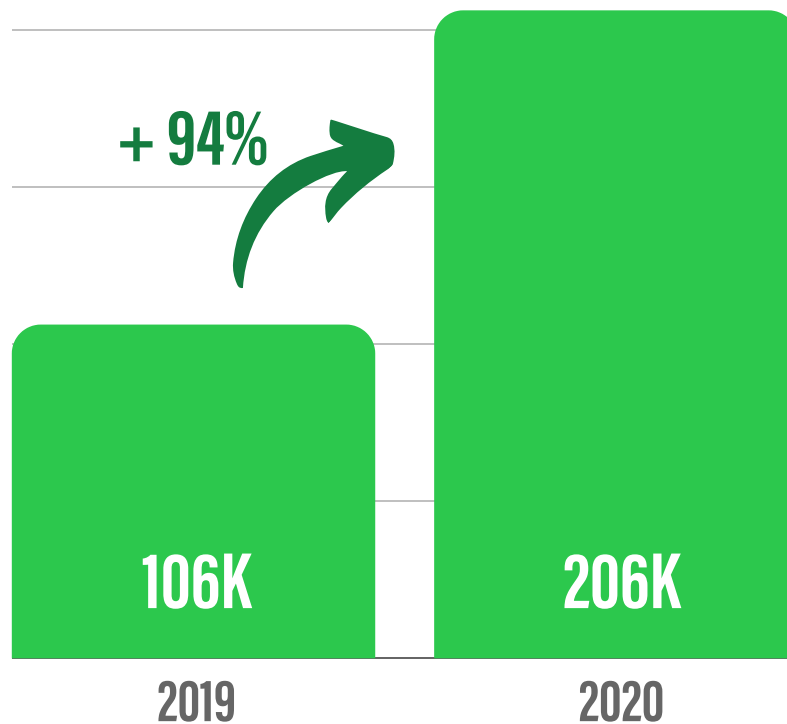
Floortje explains that going plant-based aligned more naturally with their brand ethos of inclusivity and indulgence.

“Candy is indulgent and it should stay that way,” she says. “Katja is about fun and treating yourself, but it can also do something good for the world. It’s an ideal combination and I’m sure more brands will follow.”

The market has seen a **46% increase** in food and beverage launches that have a plant-based and indulgence claim, indicating that **it’s an accelerating segment.**²

Market research furthermore shows strong growth in plant-based baked goods and a 94% increase in plant-based confectionery on the UK market between 2019 and 2020.³ This is likely the case across Europe, including the Netherlands.

SALES VALUE GROWTH OF PLANT-BASED SUGAR CONFECTIONERY (UK)



THE FIRST STEP: KATJA GOES VEGETARIAN

Motivated by the desire to expand their consumer base and improve their environmental credentials, Katja began the process of making its products vegetarian in 2012. The main obstacle was replacing gelatine with a plant-based alternative.

What is gelatine?

As an odourless and tasteless gelling agent, gelatine is a staple ingredient in many candy products due to its ability to create the gummy texture that consumers are accustomed to. However, in order to utilise the gelatine protein, it must first be extracted from collagen contained in the hides and bones of animals such as cows and pigs.⁴ Gelatine is a byproduct of the meat industry, and its reliance on this industry means it is inextricably linked to its detrimental environmental impact.⁵

Floortje explains that Katja as a company is “very climate conscious” and is committed to becoming carbon-neutral. “We’re doing all we can to do better in packaging, green energy, and using less materials.”

In 2016, Katja relaunched their products without gelatine.

This was not an easy process. The brand spent years redeveloping their signature Apekoppen product (banana-flavoured licorice candy) in order to ensure that the taste and texture remained the same. Each product necessitated experimentation and a different approach, with some products discontinued as a result.



Consumer Testing

Once Katja was ready to take its newly vegetarian products to market, they tested consumer response by selling their Apekoppen sweets in **two different kinds of packaging**. One highlighted its vegetarian status, while the other did not. They also engaged with consumer research companies and tested their new products face-to-face with consumers on the street. The company found that **consumers either did not notice the difference** between the old gelatine-based product and the new vegetarian one, **or they rated the newer product as tastier.**

Since this transition, the range of consumers able to consume Katja's products now includes vegetarians as well as those with religious dietary restrictions such as Halal or Kosher.

THE NEXT STEP: KATJA GOES VEGAN

Katja recognised there was still a group of people who could not consume their products. Due to the use of beeswax as a glazing agent, their candies were not fully vegan. This was the next challenge.

Beeswax is a common ingredient in candy and is used to provide a glaze and prevent the sweets from congealing once packaged. Having replaced gelatine in their products, Katja sought to replace beeswax and began using an alternative plant-based wax known as carnauba wax, sourced from Brazil.

What is
beeswax?

Replacing beeswax was much easier than finding a suitable replacement for gelatine. However, the difficulty lay in finding an ethical carnauba-wax supplier.

“Many carnauba-wax suppliers have bad labour conditions for their workers,” Floortje says. “We didn’t feel like we should just go with any supplier, because then we’d be **doing good for the animals but not for the people.**”



“We have future-proofed our recipes. I’m curious to see what will happen in five, 10, or 20 years in supermarket trends. We’re watching the trends and innovations closely.”

FLOORTJE SJOER

Brand Manager, Katja Fassin B.V.

In order to further promote their newly plant-based products, Katja launched a TV commercial with the slogan,



“I’M A PLANT-EATER, ARE YOU?”

The advert features a German influencer and aims to promote a **modern, dynamic, and youthful image** of both Katja and plant-based eating as a whole. Since the launch of its new plant-based recipes, Katja has begun to engage more with **influencers**, working with lifestyle, fashion, and food accounts.

“We wanted to show that Katja is not just for vegetarians or vegans,” Floortje comments.

This is an astute choice – the majority of plant-based purchases are not actually made by vegans or vegetarians, but rather by **flexitarians and those trying to reduce their animal product intake.**⁶

KEY TAKEAWAYS

→ **Transitioning to a fully plant-based range is worth it!**
Consumers may even prefer your new recipe to the original

→ **Transforming your recipes takes time and research.**
Ensure that everyone - especially the R&D team - is passionate about the cause



FLOORTJE SJOER

*Brand Manager,
Katja Fassin B.V.*

You shouldn't transition to plant-based just because other brands are doing it.

It will affect every department, and takes a lot of work to replace existing recipes.

If you want to do it, you have to do it well."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

→ **Figure out which trends naturally fit with your brand.**
It's important not to lose touch with your traditional consumer base when embracing contemporary trends

→ **Consider adopting new marketing strategies.**
Engaging with influencers may promote your brand's image and product

If you're interested in learning more about how to align your brand's marketing with key consumer trends, make sure to watch ProVeg International's webinar

"How to position plant-based foods to maximise their appeal"

If you want to know more about how your company can engage with influencers, check out ProVeg International's white paper

"How to work with influencers to reach key consumers"

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