

Dutch vegetarian butcher takes on the 'Frankenburger'

THE HAGUE, THE NETHERLANDS: Never mind last month's revolutionary test-tube beef burger grown from meat stem cells. The Dutch are way ahead with a "vegetarian butcher" who transforms plants into "meat".



VEGETARIAN
BUTCHER

Dubbed the "Frankenburger", the lab-grown beef -- developed at a cost of more than €250,000 - was unveiled by scientists in London and served to volunteers in what was billed as the start of a food revolution.

But "we are much more advanced, so-much-so that we have built an unassailable lead over meat produced from stem cells," said Jaap Korteweg, founder of the "Vegetarian Butcher".

While the "cultured beef" in London was made using strands of meat grown from muscle cells taken from a living cow, the Dutch butcher needs only plant matter to make his "meat".

Korteweg's shop on a main street in downtown The Hague is packed with a range of products from veggie "hamburger" patties to "meatballs" and even "tuna" salad.

Soy paste is the secret

One of the secret ingredients is a soy paste, which when put through a special pressurisation machine, imitates meat fibres, a technology invented by the University of Wageningen in the central Netherlands.

Ingredients vary. For chicken, he uses more soy, while beef is made from carrots, peas and potatoes. The "meat" taste comes by adding herbs and spices and all the rest.

The vegetarian chicken "tastes just like real chicken", and the tuna salad is also close to the real thing, according to an AFP journalist and several customers, who conceded some products weren't quite realistic but said they tasted good.

The demand for an environmentally friendly and vegetarian alternative to meat is growing, with meat production notoriously inefficient, requiring huge swathes of land to grow the crops to feed the animals.

"Our hamburger's environmental footprint is seven times less than that of a real hamburger," claimed Korteweg.

"Our chicken only requires half to a third of what's needed to produce a real chicken. I'm talking about use of land, water, the grain and feed normally fed to chicken," he said.

Three years after opening, the Vegetarian Butcher sells its products in 500 stores around the Netherlands, mainly supermarkets and specialist food stores.

Korteweg says that sales have doubled each year since the butchery opened and hopes to open his own factory next year to boost his share of the market and drop prices to below meat cuts.

Though now slightly more expensive than real meat, his products cost about the same as organic meat.

The Vegetarian Butcher has struck a chord with Dutch animal welfare organisations and its pro-vegetarian Party for the Animals (PvdA), which has two seats in Parliament. One of those seats is held by Korteweg's wife and PvdA leader Marianne Thieme.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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