

What narrative drives my future as a plant-based eater

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Introduction

The information presented is a synthesis of my observations, experiences and discussions over ten years of observing people's reactions to Vegan and plant-based affirmations. The autoethnographic data is supported by an interdisciplinary literature review of Canadian sources, media, and academic documents (Cochlar et al., 2026; Heroux et al., 2025; Oliver, 2021).

I started eating plant-based foods while studying in the United Kingdom. This has been an intriguing journey into exploring how food culture impacts our place in society. Choosing not to eat meat and dairy has decoupled me from the foodie world I had inhabited up to that point and from the social acceptance that supports it. Opting to eat differently challenges the binary mindset that shapes Canadians' self-image. The act of changing my diet has categorized me as "other" and altered the social acceptance and trust assigned to me.

This awareness has brought into focus that while "Futures" are enactments of the social collective, the future we live is personal. In this case, it is an act of reclaiming my sovereignty over my dinner plate. The Six Pillars framework (Inayatullah, 2013) disrupts the traditional binary way of thinking, challenging us to categorize our trajectories into three distinct layers: the baggage we carry, the goals we socialize with, and the futures we might actually create.

The Used Futures represent the habits and narratives we've inherited that no longer serve our current reality. They are the "business as usual" ghosts that linger in our

decision-making, even when the world needs us to change. The most widely adopted are the Preferred Futures, which align with the visions we strive for, the result of the collective social "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1996). Representing the readily accepted, consensus-driven goals of a movement or organization, the safety of what we believe we should want because it feels comfortable or is culturally validated. Possible Futures are thin places (Béres, 2012) where paths merge into something genuinely new. Disrupting the normative practices, these futures are forged through constant, entangled negotiations among personal aspirations, emerging technologies, and a shifting environment. It is the complex, messy boundary where true innovation happens.

The futures are a living system in which technology and narratives reveal how our individual actions aggregate into collective outcomes or radical needs (Mercer, 2023). The information for this essay is synthesized from Canadian media, official documents, and lived experiences.

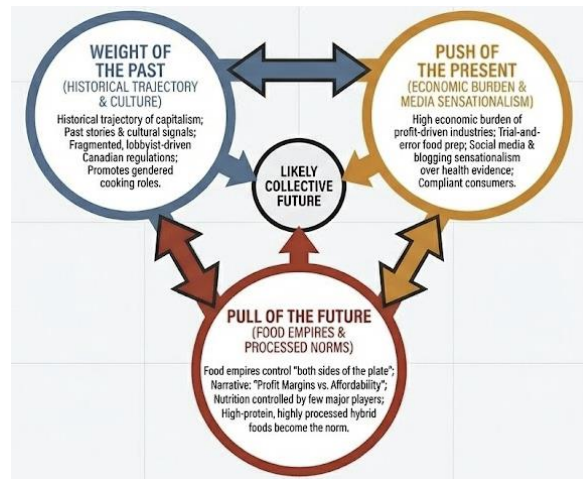
Mapping

The Canadian meat and dairy industry has historically exerted pressure to reinforce a food culture that promotes meat-based consumption over plant-based options. It has gendered meat-eating as masculine and plant-based eating as feminine (Hart, 2018).

Intense lobbying of the food industry has linked beef, poultry and dairy production to Canadian values and rural livelihoods. The only reversal of this narrative was during the world wars, when sacrificing 'the steak' to feed the troops was considered patriotic (Djebabla, 2014). Mapping these threads points to the current high health-care burden of profit-driven food industries.

Exploring and finding information on vegan food preparation is largely trial-and-error, driven by social media and blogging sites that prioritize sensationalism over kitchen recipe testing. The passage of evidence on the health benefits of plant-based diets, while policy and health-driven, does not impact the social levels that matter.

Table 1 Futures Triangle Mapping



Anticipating and Timing

The past stories and cultural signals weigh down the reality on the ground. The collective futures seem likely to continue the historical linear trajectory of capitalism and corporate acquisitions. Food empires aided by compliant consumers take control of both sides of the plate. The narrative shifts from "Meat vs. Plant" to "Profit vs. Affordability," while nutrition remains in the hands of a few major food industry players. High-protein, highly processed hybrid foods become the norm, with cost savings (for industry), rapid market growth of meat analogues and measurable emission cuts.

Consumer reluctance flies in the face of Health Canada data that conservatively attributes 35,000 diet-related deaths and another 90,000 deaths that are associated with poor diet per year in Canada (Kwok et al., 2026). A minor shift in eating habits could save billions in health care costs and demonstrate the power of altering the food culture narrative to shape future behaviours (Suri & Ray, 2023).

Impressive as this sounds, the real-world outcome would be constrained by economic and access factors. Those who adopt the diet would likely be the highest earners, able to afford fresh produce and a variety of plant-based proteins. The remaining lower-income Canadians may be "left behind" as the industry struggles to maintain its market share, potentially widening the health inequality gap between the wealthy and the

working class (*Reducing the Price of Alternative Proteins*, 2022). There is another path in which the binary is flipped, with what could be identified as the preferred futures, and the masculine/feminine divide is replaced by a "Resilient/Self-Sufficient" identity focused on local food security.

The preferred future is one in which dietary choices are no longer identity markers. The food industry is shifting toward integrating local and global food sources, with livestock and plant-based crops working in a symbiotic cycle. Eating becomes personal and local when examined through the layers of CLA (Inayatullah, 2022).

Deepening the Future

Table 2: CLA of relevant reference material

CLA Layer	What the documents say (evidence)
Litany	The surface picture is contrasting economic and health stakes, growing scientific consensus on plant-forward diets, fragmented policies, and social media-driven learning that is not kitchen-tested. Women are shown as the primary cooks/experimenters, while men appear as performative chefs.
Systemic	At this level, food costs, social policy, and the media industry collaborate to create the structures that make unhealthy eating advantageous, even though it is costly in health care terms. Leaving plant-based alternatives unevenly regulated and poorly marketed
Worldview	Today's worldview, while emphasizing health, sustainability, and authenticity, in a manner that presents options as in conflict with cultural food practices. The debate between "real meat" and "plant-based" foods reflects a clash between cultural meanings of tradition vs. disruption.
Myth/Metaphor	Deep narratives shape how people feel about food: experimentation is suspicious and gendered; plant-based eating is a cultural rebellion. Meat consumption is tied to identity and tradition that underpins the litany of statistics and systemic policies.

Table :3 Media representation and Gender roles

Layer	Media portrayal
Litany	Headlines about "plant-based diets reduce cancer risk" or "Canada loses billions to bad diet" dominate narratives, while positioning women as the knowledge bearers of healthy eating.

Systemic	Platform algorithms prioritize visually striking dishes and capitalize on "meat-vs-plant" debates; promotional media enforce gendered imagery (women embracing plant-based, men brandishing steaks).
Worldview	The discourse of "healthy eating is caring" aligns with traditional gender expectations; "real meat is natural and manly" masculine branding is sustained through advertising. Women are socially expected to manage health; men are positioned as consumers of status foods.
Myth/Metaphor	These myths embed influencing both personal and cultural food practices and policy support.

Alternatives and Forecasts

The personal memories of plant-based eating highlight experiences of social exclusion (Krukowska & Rancew-Sikora, 2018; Salmivaara et al., 2022; Wendler, 2023) and challenge the binary nature of Canadian food culture. It emphasizes the need for personal sovereignty in food choices and positions the "Used Future" as one in which the Canadian identity is deeply tethered to industrial animal agriculture and colonial myths of "pioneer strength," and increasingly at odds with the "Possible Future" of ecological intra-action.

The Canadian meat and dairy industries have promoted meat consumption as masculine and plant-based eating as feminine, linking these choices to national identity and rural economies, with support from lobbying and media. Possible Futures emerge from liminal spaces to transform food culture. Not just disrupting normative practices, these Futures are recipes for negotiations among people, technology, and climate realities. Social media trends drive *clicks* over health evidence, while fragmented, lobby-driven regulations reinforce gendered cooking roles.

The prevailing trend points to ongoing corporate-control of futures, increased production of processed meat alternatives, modest emission reductions, and persistent health inequalities that favour higher-income groups. Proposed solutions include unified labelling, community kitchens, gender-balanced food media incentives, and cross-sector collaboration to address health, economic, regulatory, and gender equity challenges in the food system.

It is where the "submerged" narrative of the plant-based eater rises to the surface, not as political disruption but as a quiet, sovereign reclamation of the food on my plate. In this space, the "othered" becomes a "steward," and the simple act of choosing what we eat becomes the most profound daily foresight practice of all.

Final Thoughts

The Six Pillars framework (Inayatullah, 2013), when applied to the future of plant-based eating in Canada, identifies the strategic pressure points for systemic change. The framework suggests that true transformation occurs when we move beyond inherited food habits and socialized expectations toward personal sovereignty over our eating choices.

This exploration of possible futures must consider the prevailing populist narrative in North America, which often links food consumption to so-called common-sense traditions, masculinity, and national identity. These associations create significant resistance to the envisioned future of plant-based sovereignty.

Mentorship becomes the vehicle that traces backward from the preferred future, transforming a private dietary choice into a public "foresight practice". It shifts the needle away from the corporate-led "pull of the future" (highly processed hybrid foods) toward a future in which fresh produce and plant proteins are a shared community norm. My vision of this becomes clearer when I examine my inner narrative using CLA of the Self (Inayatullah, 2022).

Table 4 CLA of the Self

Layer	The Narrative Journey	
Litany	Being categorized as "other" and experiencing a shift in social trust and acceptance	The daily practice of choosing becomes an assertion of personal sovereignty by reclaiming the dinner plate. Replacing "othered" status with "stewardship."
Systemic	Food empires control "both sides of the plate" and prioritize "Profit Margins vs. Affordability". Platform algorithms prioritize meat vs. plant" debates to drive clicks. Decoupling	Shifting away from "Used Food Future, transforming a private dietary choice into a public "foresight practice". Choosing to eat differently is not a rejection of

	from the "foodie world" and rejecting the binary of "Meat vs. Plant" promoted by industry lobbying.	cultural identity but an assertion of autonomy from industry narratives. Food shifts from commodity to public resource
Worldview	A clash between the worldview of traditional masculine branding ("real men") vs. the disruption of "plant-based eating".	Rejecting the binary culture practiced by Canadians' self-image. Transforming the plant-based eater image into a "steward" within an ecological system.
Myth/Metaphor	Colonial myths of "pioneer strength" and the idea that "real meat is natural and manly". Plant-based is aligned with wokeism and anti-livestock farming.	Futures march on their stomachs. Kitchen become thin places that merges food futures with "home-cooked comfort" and "stewardship of planet."

One of the most common reactions I get when people discover I am plant-based is confusion, anxiety, and distrust. Few understand what the term plant-based means. They do not associate plant-based eating with choice but with advocacy and non-traditional values. Acting as a mentor helps dispel these myths. I explain that I do not dislike meat or dairy; it is a choice, not a rejection, and that home-cooked comfort meals are still possible.

I'm not fighting the old system, meat versus plant. I accept that it is a "weight of the past" (Inayatullah, 2023), a gendered and cultural myth reinforced by corporate narratives that drive this used future. Instead, by living the principles of "home-cooked comfort" and "stewardship of planet," you send a signal that shifts the narrative from "radical" to "normal." The essay argues that possible futures ultimately result from the layers of intra-actions surrounding personal choices. When individuals who identify as plant-based eaters serve as mentors, they send a powerful signal that shifts the narrative from "radical rebellion" to "normal activity".

What scenarios do I see (Milojević, 2023)? The most prominent is one of marginal change, dominated by traditionalists, conservatives, and moderates who wear self-interest as an armour against change. Industries and global forces dominate the food space, crowding out local and healthy eating habits. Convenience and ease of preparation overshadow choice, marginalizing national health, animal rights, and

climate change. However, there is a new generational path towards an adaptive approach that uses technology and data (apps and health trends) to frame unhealthy eating as a health concern, like tobacco and alcohol. The technology solutionists, progressives, and reformists dominate this thin space between no change and real change. These binary scenarios give rise to the vision this essay advocates. Traditionally radical scenarios are occupied by radicals, visionaries, and utopians. Instead, this version is filled with stewards, mentors, shepherds, and guides who present plant-based eating as an option rather than a rejection. Decoupling food from identity markers through mentorship, the "othered" status often assigned to plant-based eaters is replaced with one of living example, demonstrating that choosing to eat differently is not a rejection of cultural identity but rather an assertion of personal agency (Oliver, 2021).

Choosing what we eat is a profound daily foresight practice, a simple way to shift the narrative away from a "used food future." The kitchen becomes a thin space that nudges the curious towards possible futures in which plant-based eating in Canada becomes a normal part of the future of food.

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