



minutes with  
**JAMES CROW**

CO-FOUNDER TOMMY  
& JAMES LTD

*When Tommy Holden and James Crow, a couple of young fathers from Auckland, got together to make a better-for-you treat range, they never could have imagined that their ideals of ethical, plant-based desserts and daily staples would become a mainstream norm in the years that followed.*

In 2010 the duo created the Fairtrade certified Nice Blocks range, with freezers now spread the length of the country. In the coming years, demand for their coconut-based products grew too, including Little Island ice cream and more recently a range of chilled dairy alternative milks under the Little Island brand.

“At the beginning we were just a couple of guys avoiding dairy and offering that as a point of difference from the big guys, but over the years more of our fans have been coming from a broader range of backgrounds looking for dairy-free, vegan and now plant-based foods to suit their ethics and health concerns,” said co-founder James Crow.

Crow, 38, is an entrepreneur at heart. He began his foray into the food and beverage as a grocery department underling at Devonport New World while in high school. “My main job was to load the box crusher, which didn’t have as many safety precautions back then, so the job was always peppered with a little danger.”

From there he moved into sports retail before spending his early twenties travelling back and forth to California, snowboarding and working nights repairing skis. It was there in a snow-surrounded hot tub that he realised a life of self-employment was the future for him. “I was sitting in this tub, beer in hand at 5 pm, about to head off to a few hours’ work for a high pay rate and watching my flatmates who were coming home from a 10 day slog on minimum wage at the ski resort and I just thought ‘that’s not how I’ll be working from here on out.’”

From there Crow launched a small family skincare brand called Pot of Gold and eventually teamed up with his co-founder, Tommy Holden, to work on a “better-for-you” beverage concept, which in turn became Nice Blocks, followed closely by Little Island.

When asked what he wants to achieve over his career, Crow’s answer is not surprising for an ethically focused entrepreneur. “I have an amazing wife and two

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TOMMY HOLDEN (LEFT) AND JAMES CROW (RIGHT)

young children, so they are my centre, my professional future will grow with them. Certainly, I would like to continue bringing new and alternative ideas to the industry, as my school report cards regularly highlighted – ‘James is a disruptor’.”

As for where he sees consumers heading in regards to vegan products: “I have seen consumers increase their speed for adopting international norms and as the vegan or plant-based space is one of the fastest growing at present, I only hope companies keep up and don’t hold on so tightly to the norms of previous decades.” ■

## MEAT-FREE OPTIONS GROWING IN POPULARITY

*There is a growing trend towards reducing meat intake or abstaining completely. This is due to a number of moral reasons such as animal welfare, health, nutrition and dietary benefits, the environment and social influence.*

### MEAT STILL IMPORTANT

Closer to home, two-thirds of us still have meat, fish or poultry as part of all our meals. These numbers unsurprisingly increase among males (73 percent) and over 55-year-olds (74 percent) but drop among 18-34-year-olds (55 percent) and females (58 percent).

### MOMENTUM BEHIND MEAT-FREE

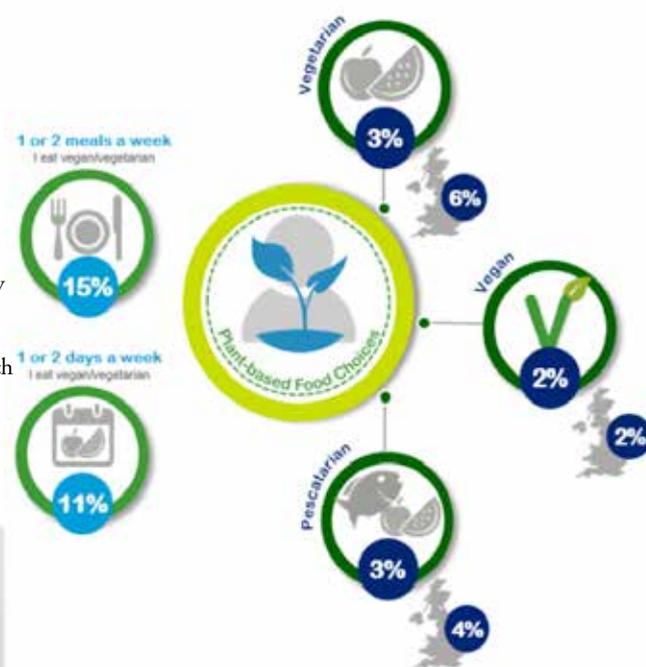
Only eight percent of New Zealander’s identify as pescatarian, vegetarian or vegan, but the younger generations coming through (millennials and generation Z’s) are much more likely to adopt this lifestyle (18 percent).

These new generations are one of the driving forces behind this meat-free movement. Another key driver is that over one-in-four New Zealanders actively follow a ‘flexitarian’ approach to meat reduction by having vegan or vegetarian meals throughout the week<sup>1</sup>.

## PLANT-BASED DRIVES GROWTH

The increased demand for plant-based diets has resulted in a diverse range of product innovation which targets vegan, vegetarian and flexitarian consumers now available in the supermarket environment. The trend represents a growing opportunity for high-quality meat alternatives. The rise of meat-free options is reflected by sharply growing sales in the vegan/vegetarian space<sup>2</sup>:

In fact, Pinterest in their latest Top 100 Report, called out the emergence of the ‘going vegan’ search (part paleo, part vegan), while last year, vegan desserts (+329 percent) and plant proteins (+417 percent) were also high growth searches for Pinterest.<sup>3</sup>



1 IRI 2018 State of The Industry Report - Grocery  
2 IRI Market Edge (Grocery) New Zealand MAT Value 22/07/18  
3 Pinterest Top 100 report 2018 and 2019



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