

Admit It, That Protein Shake Is Basically Soylent **The post-food future is here.**

Rachel Sugar, The Atlantic, 9 May 2026

From the beginning, Soylent was shorthand for a certain kind of guy. A guy who worked in tech and probably wore a hoodie. A guy who, despite his six-figure salary, lived in an unfurnished apartment. Soylent Guy, above all else, did not have time for quotidian tasks such as cooking and chewing. One way you knew this was that he slugged the nutrient-dense slurry known as Soylent.

Remember Soylent? In the mid-2010s, Soylent promised to change the world by solving a timeless problem: Everybody has to eat. Instead of chopping vegetables or defrosting a meal, you could fertilize yourself, like a needy rhododendron, with a blend of oat flour, maltodextrin, brown-rice protein, canola oil, fish oil, and just enough sucralose to mask the flavor. For a brief moment, Soylent was beloved—at least in Silicon Valley, where venture capitalists helped turn it into a \$170 million brand. It was also a dystopian punch line: What if you stripped life of all joy and bottled the result? Ha! In 2023, Soylent was sold off for a fraction of its former valuation. [...]

You can find Soylent-like drinks almost everywhere these days. Fairlife—a line of protein shakes that bills itself as “a satisfying way to get the nutrition you’re looking for”—is so popular that it has become Coca-Cola’s fastest-growing U.S. brand. One of its competitors, Huel, recently sold to Danone for \$1 billion. You can buy nutrition drinks from Rebbl and Orgain and Koia and Oikos, along with many, many other companies whose names have the wrong number of vowels.

If you are one of the many Americans who chugs these shakes on the regular, perhaps you might balk at the comparison to Soylent. (You don’t even wear a hoodie!) The point of nonfood nutrition is no longer to fuel yourself so that you can sit at a computer longer. You are instead becoming healthier, hotter, more beautiful, more jacked. The shakes are engineered for our protein-obsessed times. Fairlife’s Nutrition Plan shake, for example, comes with 30 grams of protein in a mere 150 calories. But many of the shakes do not stop at protein. They want to talk to you about adaptogens and your gut health, your antioxidants and your immune-boosting support. Only some of them explicitly identify as a meal replacement. Instead, they are “next-level nourishment” to “fuel every move.” They go from “gym bags to lunchboxes to morning smoothies” and match pace “with your everyday, get-strong hustle.” [...]

Soylent had a bold, even ridiculous vision for a post-food future. So far, it has not materialized. After several days of searching, I finally got my hands on a bottle of Soylent through the magic of the internet. It tasted strikingly similar to the other shakes on the market—dominated by notes of their low-calorie sweeteners. Coogan, the Soylent co-founder, has given up the stuff. “I have a very regimented schedule now where I have breakfast with my team every morning,” he said. But when you walk into a grocery store and glance at the refrigerated row of shakes, with their minimalist packaging and maximalist promises, the original dream of Soylent can seem comparatively quaint. The goal is no longer to match food. The goal has become to transcend it.