



PLANTING FOR THE *future*

WHY PLANT-FORWARD MENUS ARE IDEAL FOR FOODSERVICE OPERATIONS

BY SONJA KEHR, CEC, CDM, CFPP

IF YOU'VE NOTICED THE TREND

sprouting, you are not mistaken. Plant-based food sales grew almost 2.5 times faster than total food sales from 2018 to 2020, and today represent a \$7 billion (and growing) market, according to the Good Food Institute.

As more and more consumers recognize the benefits of eating plants, there is a plethora of new meatless and dairy-free options emerging to meet demand in the grocery aisles and in away-from-home settings.

It's not just vegetarians or vegans who enjoy plant-based foods or recognize that they can be better for both individual and environmental health. A typical plant-based diet will, naturally, incorporate lots of fruits and vegetables as well as legumes and beans, nuts, seeds, whole grains, and oils. This type of diet does *not* have to be vegetarian or vegan—while focusing on plant food sources, it still

makes room for meat and dairy on the plate.

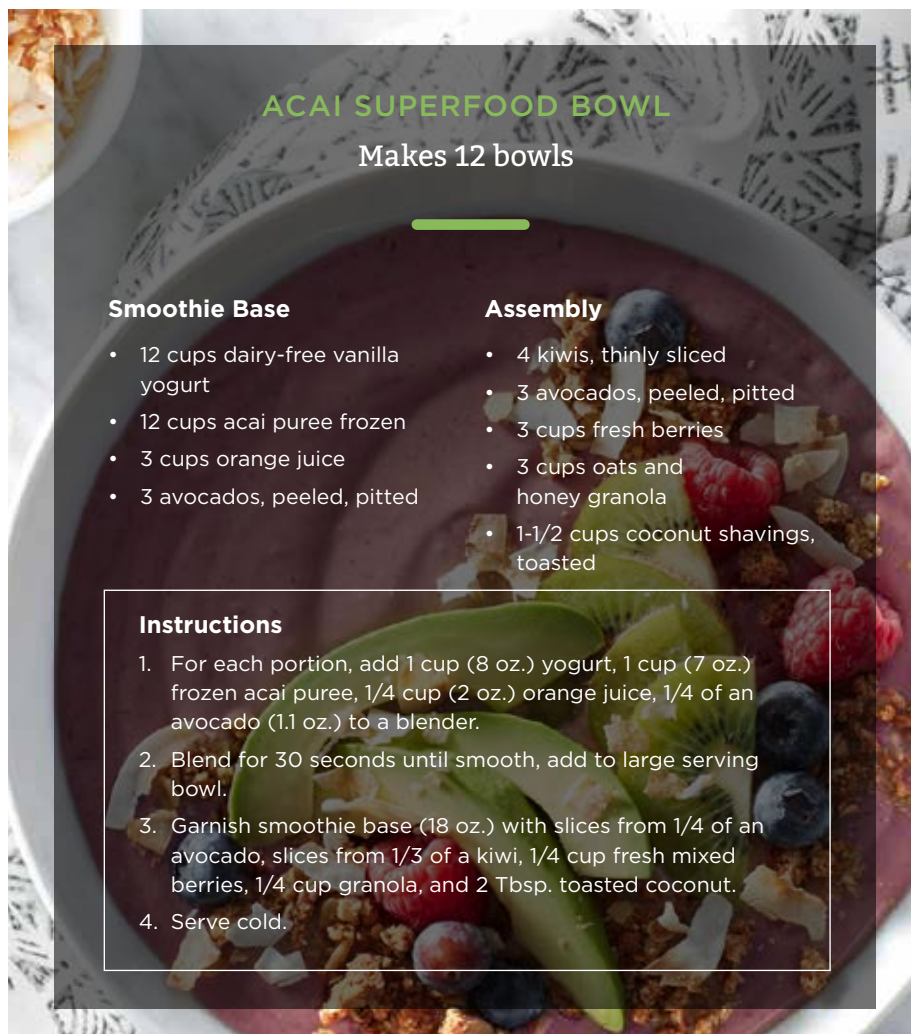
Fortunately for plant-based fans and plant-curious consumers, the options are exploding. Grocery store aisles are now packed with everything from Impossible™ burgers to almond milk and nut butters. Eating out is also easier than ever, with restaurants such as KFC, Panera, Carl's Jr., and many more serving up plant-based fare from morning till night to meet the expanding interest from diners.

But how does this shift in eating impact your menu planning? General Mills shared a webinar, "Plant-Forward Eating—Translating Trends into Menu Solutions," that broke down consumers' appetite for more plant-based foods, discussed the impact on foodservice menu planning, and shared some ideas and inspiration to incorporate more plant-based foods on your menu. Following is a summary of what was presented.

BETTER FOR YOU

For starters, more consumers are interested in the fiber, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants offered by a plant-forward diet, which can help reduce the risk of heart disease, certain cancers, high blood pressure, diabetes and other chronic health conditions, according to the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. Plants offer a wealth of key nutrients that can support long-term health and wellness without the cholesterol and saturated fat that are often linked to meat and dairy.

In fact, more than 60 percent of consumers say the most important factor for plant-forward foods is that they are healthy. The rest, on the other hand, are focused on the environment and animal welfare.



ACAI SUPERFOOD BOWL

Makes 12 bowls

Smoothie Base

- 12 cups dairy-free vanilla yogurt
- 12 cups acai puree frozen
- 3 cups orange juice
- 3 avocados, peeled, pitted

Assembly

- 4 kiwis, thinly sliced
- 3 avocados, peeled, pitted
- 3 cups fresh berries
- 3 cups oats and honey granola
- 1-1/2 cups coconut shavings, toasted

Instructions

1. For each portion, add 1 cup (8 oz.) yogurt, 1 cup (7 oz.) frozen acai puree, 1/4 cup (2 oz.) orange juice, 1/4 of an avocado (1.1 oz.) to a blender.
2. Blend for 30 seconds until smooth, add to large serving bowl.
3. Garnish smoothie base (18 oz.) with slices from 1/4 of an avocado, slices from 1/3 of a kiwi, 1/4 cup fresh mixed berries, 1/4 cup granola, and 2 Tbsp. toasted coconut.
4. Serve cold.

BETTER FOR THE WORLD AROUND US

A full 65 percent of consumers recognize that “we could mitigate climate change by eating differently,” and nearly 90 percent of those who eat plant-based now intend to continue this healthy habit into the future.

The production of meat can be a drain on water supplies while also producing greenhouse gas emissions, so a stronger focus on plants could be an important step in helping mitigate climate change.

PLANTING NEW SEEDS

The plethora of new dairy and meat alternatives make it easier for foodservice operations to create standout menu items that meet a full range of dietary preferences; plant-based items can deliver both mass appeal and support specific dietary needs and allergies. Even better, as these alternatives continue to flourish, so do their flavor profiles.

Nearly one-third of consumers have ordered plant-based items at restaurants¹, enjoying items made

from almonds, oats, coconuts, peas and more, and a similar percentage consider themselves “meat limiters.”

Today’s top plant-based menu trends feature:

- **Both tried-and-true items and new favorites:** Many familiar foods such as salads, soups and sandwiches make the list as well as new options including meatless burgers and bowls. In particular, trendy menu items include buffalo cauliflower, avocado toast, cauliflower wings, spaghetti and plant-based meatballs, plant-based burgers, breakfast sandwiches, and more.
- **Innovative meat alternatives:** Mushrooms, beans and peas have traditionally been the most menued meat alternatives, but plant-based burgers, jackfruit, nut butters and fried cauliflower are all seeing extensive growth in the category. Fortunately for foodservice operations, a variety of options can readily substitute for traditional meat and dairy products.
- **Plants from morning to night:** While interest in meatless meals peaks at lunch, with 53 percent of those dining out at restaurants looking for something plant-based, it also reaches 27 percent at breakfast and 43 percent at dinner. Consumers are seeking simple ways to incorporate healthy, great-tasting food throughout the day and foodservice operations can succeed by making it easy to access nutritious options.

Consumers’ greatest qualms about plant-forward eating lead with “might not taste good,” followed by “being hungry two to three hours later,” and “paying too much for plant-based

1. Cleveland Research Company, Consumer Utilization and Restaurant & Retailer Adoption of Meatless Options, May 2021.

ingredients.” To counteract these concerns, operators can:

- Focus on flavor and satisfaction. Spicy and Southern foods are both trending right now—consider offering dishes with a kick that provide both dynamite flavor and satisfying texture.
- Spotlight what is there, rather than what’s missing. “Made from plants” is more appealing than “meatless.” Let diners know what they are getting—simple ingredients and a wealth of vitamins and minerals. Emphasize quality, nutrition, and protein to encourage interest.
- Integrate plant-based options with other dishes on the menu. You can offer a traditional breakfast sandwich with sausage and cheese and a vegetarian version, for example, pair plant-based meatballs with spaghetti and marinara sauce, or include multiple yogurt alternatives on your parfait station.

NUTS FOR COCONUTS

As a chef at General Mills, I’ve had the opportunity to test out different plant-based ingredients as we aim to bring new menu solutions to foodservice operators. Coconut milk continues to be a top dairy alternative for its great taste, texture and flexibility, and it serves as the base for the new smooth and creamy dairy-free yogurt we are bringing to foodservice menus.

2. Nielsen XAOC Total US 52WE 5/1/21.



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Sonja Kehr is a member of the Chefs of the Mills—specialized culinary professionals at General Mills who immerse themselves in the industries they serve to offer training, ideas, and inspiration. Visit www.generalmillsfoodservice.com to view their Plant-Based Eating webinar and access more plant-forward recipes.

DAIRY-FREE TRIPLE BERRY PARFAIT

Makes 12 parfaits

Ingredients

- 9 cups dairy-free vanilla yogurt
- 3 cups blueberries
- 3/4 cup parfait granola
- 1-1/2 cups blackberries
- 3 cups strawberries, quartered

Instructions

1. Place 1/4 cup yogurt in bottom of parfait cup.
2. Layer in 1/4 cup blueberries and another 1/4 cup yogurt.
3. Add 1/4 cup strawberries and 1/4 cup yogurt.
4. Top with 1 Tbsp. granola and 2 Tbsp. blackberries.

Dairy-free yogurt consumption has experienced double-digit growth, with the category up 14 percent year over year.² And coconut milk is second only to almond milk when it comes to non-dairy milk options.

Plant-based foods have gone from a niche market to mainstream appeal. They offer health benefits, reduced environmental impact, and versatility that can help operators incorporate new favorites in a variety of ways across the day. **E**