



## MARKETING PLANT-BASED FOODS



RESTAURANT  
TOOL KIT

Plant-based meat alternatives are being eaten by a wide variety of people, many of whom also eat animal proteins. Restaurants can take advantage of this macro-consumer shift by ensuring that they have at least one or two appealing plant-based items on their menu. The best approach is having a variety of protein options available for most dishes.

### HOW YOU ORGANIZE YOUR MENU MATTERS

Most consumers are looking for familiar foods when they dine out, so marketing plant-based menu entrées should focus on ensuring that these items are integrated into the rest of the menu and that they are labeled with appealing and familiar words.

Studies have shown that when plant-based entrées are moved from a “Vegetarian” section of a menu

When plant-based entrées are moved from a “Vegetarian” section of a menu into the general menu, sales more than double.<sup>1</sup>

into the general menu, sales more than double.<sup>1</sup> Given that fewer than five percent of consumers eat a vegan or vegetarian diet, in order to appeal to a wider swath of the population, plant-based entrées should be mixed in with other similar menu items.

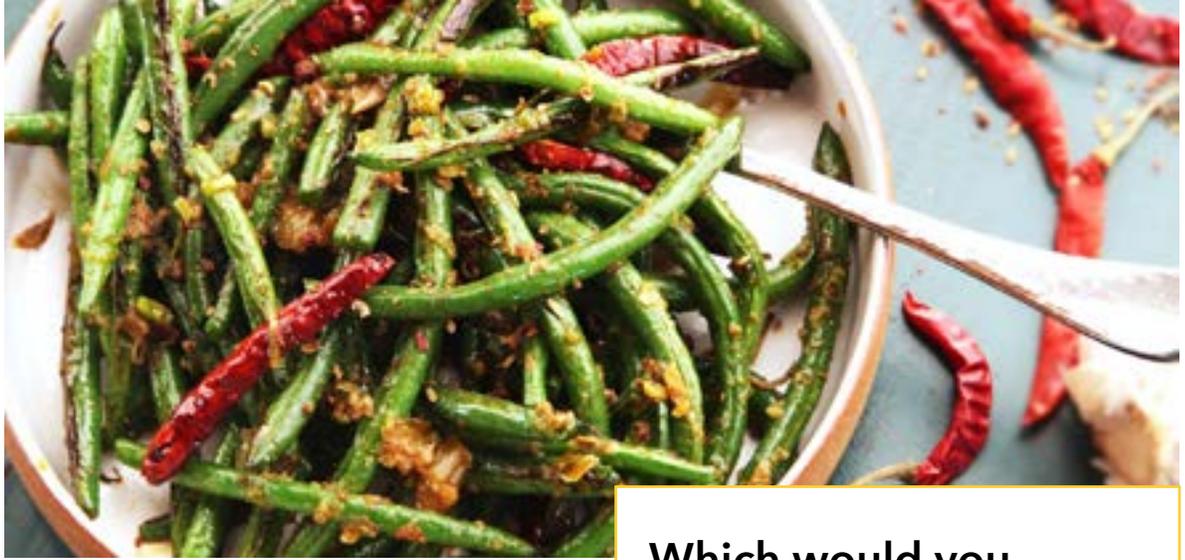
The World Resources Institute’s Better Buying Lab is currently working with Panera, Hilton Hotels, Stanford University, Unilever, Sodexo, and others to identify ways to help consumers shift to more plant-based dishes. Preliminary research conducted by the Better Buying Lab has shown that even terms like meatless and meat-free should be avoided. When consumers are choosing foods in the moment, they don’t want to be reminded of what the food

<sup>1</sup> J. Holzer, *Don’t Put Vegetables in the Corner: Q&A with Behavioral Science Researcher Linda Bacon*, World Resources Institute (2017). See also WRI’s *Better Buying Lab*.

CAPITALIZE ON THE SHIFT TO PLANT-BASED EATING!

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is not; labels should stress the positive aspects of the food – ideally with a focus on flavor.

Restaurants like Chipotle and Panera use a subtle letter “v” next to their vegan or vegetarian items while California Pizza Kitchen denotes plant-based dishes with a small leaf symbol. These are smart ways to let diners who eat a vegan or vegetarian diet know which menu items they can order while at the same time not alienating consumers who eat all kinds of foods.

#### HOW YOU DESCRIBE PLANT-BASED ENTRÉES MATTERS

Plant-based dishes can taste as good as or better than ones that use ingredients from animals, however they aren’t always described in a way that makes them sound appealing or appetizing. A study conducted at Stanford University and released in June 2017 by JAMA Internal Medicine tested the naming of vegetables in a dining hall context and concluded that labeling them in decadent terms (e.g. “Sweet sizzlin’ green beans and crispy shallots”) increased their selection by 41% versus healthy

## Which would you rather eat?

- Sweet Sizzlin’ Green Beans and Crispy Shallots
- Light ‘n’ Low-carb Green Beans and Shallots

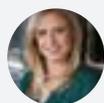
restrictive terms (e.g. “light ‘n’ low-carb green beans and shallots”).<sup>2</sup>

Using positive, indulgent language that emphasizes taste and flavor seems to be much more effective than positioning dishes as the “better” choices. Even though consumers may indicate a desire to eat healthy foods and even though a dish may indeed be quite healthy, indulgent descriptors will increase the likelihood of it being ordered and will actually increase satiety in the consumer as well.

<sup>2</sup> B. Turnwald, D. Boles, A. Crum, *Association Between Indulgent Descriptions and Vegetable Consumption: Twisted Carrots and Dynamite Beets*, JAMA Internal Medicine (2017).



Download all the resources in the Restaurant Toolkit to better understand consumer motivations in shifting toward plant-based eating, the reasons why this represents an opportunity for your restaurant, ideas on adding plant-based entrées to your menu, and best practices in marketing these dishes.



#### FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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