Why center plant-based foods and drinks on your menu? So everyone can eat!

Even small changes like defaulting to oat milk in your coffee or egg-free mayo in your sandwiches can make your offerings more inclusive.

Allergies & Racial Justice

Approximately 50 million US adults experience some degree of lactose intolerance. The condition is inherently racialized, as specific populations are genetically predisposed to it. Approximately 95% of Asian Americans, 60-80% of Black Americans and Ashkenazi Jews, 80-100% of American Indians, and 50-80% of Latine Americans exhibit lactose sensitivity.

Lactose aside, Black children are more likely to have food allergies than children of other races. A study published in Pediatrics found that “...self-identified black ethnicity was associated with a more than two-fold increased likelihood of sensitization to foods,” even after controlling for socioeconomic status. Dairy is the most common major allergen, followed by eggs.

Serving dairy and eggs by default contributes to inequity. Lower-income families pay up to 2.5 times more in hospitalization costs than higher-income families for food allergy-related visits.

Religious & Cultural Dietary Needs

Some religious traditions (e.g., Jainism) strictly mandate vegetarianism. Others such as Hinduism, Taoism, and Seventh-Day Adventism have a long history of encouraging plant-forward diets. Judaism and Islam also leave room for vegetarianism in their practices, owing in part to the restrictions around kosher and halal foods.

Defaulting to animal-based food discriminates against adherents of traditions such as these, when instead, serving food that’s DefaultVeg would allow everyone to eat regardless of religious affiliation.

Consumers of Tomorrow

Gen Z makes up an estimated one-fourth of the world’s population. Eco-anxious and more racially diverse than ever before, Gen Z is the future of consumerism—and they’re eschewing traditional products in favor of climate-friendly alternatives. Sixty percent of them want to eat more plant-based foods, and 80% already eat plant-based a few times a week.

Gen Z is especially keen on plant-based milks, consuming 550% more than prior generations. Many young people feel ashamed to consume dairy products. Almost half of U.S. households already purchase plant-based milk—and as Gen Z continues to age into adulthood, that figure will grow.
Endnotes


3 Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. n.d. “Lactose Intolerance: Information for Health Care Providers.”


