

Food Fanatics

NOW WITH MORE FLAVOR



TODAY'S SPECIAL:

PROTEIN IS BIG.

AND CHEFS ARE BULKING UP THEIR MENUS WITH INNOVATIVE, PROTEIN-RICH OPTIONS



GET ON YOUR BOWL GAME

PLUS: Road Trip: Washington, D.C., Smash Burgers!, + Fibermaxxing 101

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WHAT'S A FAMILY MEAL YOU'LL NEVER FORGET?

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FOOD FANATICS® is the go-to source for the foodservice industry and anyone truly passionate about food, the people behind it and improving the bottom line. Founded in 2012 and redesigned in 2025, the print publication and online magazine is a US Foods publication produced by The Specialists.

ABOUT US FOODS With a promise to help its customers Make It, US Foods is one of America's great food companies and a leading foodservice distributor, partnering with approximately 250,000 restaurants and foodservice operators to help their businesses succeed. With more than 70 headline locations and approximately 90 cash-and-carry stores, US Foods and its 30,000 associates provides its customers with a broad and innovative food offering and a comprehensive suite of e-commerce, technology and business solutions. US Foods is headquartered in Rosemont, Ill. Visit usfoods.com to learn more.

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FOODS



CHEF JOHN SCARANGELLA OF ENCORE RISTORANTE COOKIN' UP SOMETHING GOOD. READ MORE ON PAGE 27

EDITOR'S RANT

NO ONE SAID IT WOULD BE EASY, RIGHT?

IN FACT, YOU'RE LUCKY IF SOMEONE TOLD YOU MUCH AT ALL. NOW YOU'RE RUNNING THE SHOW TRYING TO STAY ON TOP OF TRENDS, CONSTANTLY INNOVATE (WHILE NAILING THE STAPLES, OF COURSE), FIGURE OUT PORTION SIZES, DIAL IN THAT DELIVERY SERVICE AND A ZILLION OTHER THINGS.

LOOK, FOOD FANATICS ISN'T GOING TO SOLVE IT ALL, BUT IT CAN BE AN ALLY. PROVEN MENU BOOSTERS, TREND WATCHING, THE INFLUENCE OF GLP-1S, NEW TIPS ON PROTEINS – IT'S ALL IN HERE. AND IT'S DESIGNED FOR SHORT ATTENTION SPANS BECAUSE, YEAH, KITCHENS. SO, TAKE A LOOK. LOCK YOURSELF IN THE OFFICE IF YOU HAVE TO.

IT MIGHT BE THE ONE THING YOU DO THE ENTIRE DAY THAT IS DESIGNED JUST FOR YOU.

–FOODFANATICS@USFOODS.COM

EVERY ISSUE WE HIT YOU WITH A #CHALLENGE.

LAST TIME, WE ASKED: WHAT'S A FAMILY MEAL YOU'LL NEVER FORGET?



1. BRETT NOVICK

CHEF/OWNER | BOXCAR BURGERS & CELESTE TAVERN AND VINE; BRUNSWICK, MARYLAND @boxcarburgers

"When I was 14 and checking coats at a FINE-DINING FRENCH RESTAURANT, the chef invited me to family meal which was rabbit Provençale. I ate it sitting on a milk crate in the back office with the dishwasher. It got me hooked on the industry, the rush, the people, the food...all of it. I haven't looked back."



2. SAM ZEITLIN

CHEF/OWNER | ZEITLIN'S DELICATESSEN; CHICAGO @zeitlinsdelicatessen

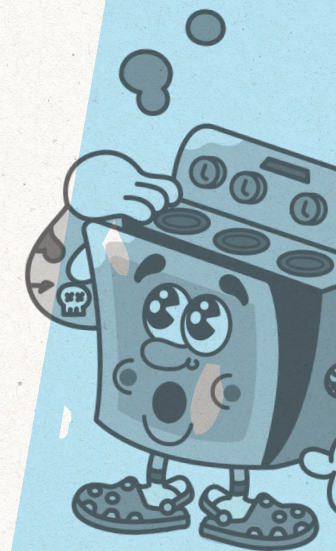
"My most memorable family meals were when I was a cook at MASSERIA IN WASHINGTON, D.C. We take trim from our steaks, fish collars, confit scraps—you name it—and cook it all outside on a make-shift grill. Then, we would kick back in the restaurant pergola with the food and some seasonal agua frescas. The days were long but the memories we shared at those family meals were ones I will never forget."



3. ART JACKSON

CHEF/OWNER | PLEASANT HOUSE PUB; CHICAGO @pleasanthousepub

"There's a special place in my heart for Pleasant House family meals because they are all labors of love that come from the hearts and hands of a diverse team eager to share their comfort foods with each other and they often revolve around special moments in a team-member's life, a holiday or special occasion. My most memorable family meal was in SAN FRANCISCO when the restaurant I was working at was closing for an extended holiday and we had to clear all the amazing ingredients that we were working with out of the fridge—locally-foraged foraged black trumpet, morel and lobster mushrooms, sweetbreads, Sonoma lamb and duck, foie gras and halibut! We feasted like royals that day!"



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NEXT ISSUE'S
CHALLENGE?

**WHAT'S YOUR
FAVORITE
ITALIAN DISH
TO MAKE?**

ANSWER ON SOCIAL AND TAG
#USFOODSCHALLENGE

CUBE THEIR ENTHUSIASM

Glenview Farms® Cheese Cubes are built for charcuterie boards, catering events and more.

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HOT PLATES

FF0726

HOT PLATES

BUZZWORTHY BITES BLOWING UP MENUS



THIS SUMMER,
SMASH BURGERS
ARE ALL THE
RAGE RIGHT NOW
AND THEY'RE
EASY TO EXECUTE

YUMMMM.

Smash burgers, like these ones from Halal Smash BRGR, are hot this summer but they're not the only trend heating up menus. From corn-fueled street food and tearable shareables to Indian mashups, read on for the ideas driving demand.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY YASMIN OUF

BEYOND THE BURGERS, WE'VE GOT: FIBERMAXXING 101, SUMMERTIME CORN, INDIAN MASHUPS & MORE

GREAT ARTISTS STEAL

WE'RE NOT SUGGESTING TO COPY THESE IDEAS... BUT C'MON, GET INSPIRED



SMOKY SMASH HALAL SMASH BRGR, SEATTLE

100%-certified halal burger with American cheese, caramelized onion jam, halal beef bacon + smoky sauce



BBQ BACON SMASH HAMMY'S SMASH BURGERS, CALIFORNIA

Double patties with melted cheese, crispy bacon, crunchy onion rings and sweet barbecue sauce



HOT HONEY-TALLOW SMASH PILOT PROJECT BREWING, CHICAGO

Angus beef patties, American cheese, beef tallow aioli, hot honey pickles + caramelized onions

THE SMASH-IT FACTOR

"SMASH BURGERS... SO HOT RIGHT NOW"

'SMASH BURGERS ARE MASSIVELY HUGE RIGHT NOW.'



FOOD FANATICS®
CHEF TYLER
HERALD

SMASH BURGER LORE

INVENTED BY A DAIRY CHEER COOK IN KENTUCKY DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION;
REVIVED BY STEAK 'N SHAKE IN THE 2000S



LIKE IT? LET'S SMASH IT!
SCAN TO BUY ALL THE GOODS

"WE'VE BEEN PREACHING smash burgers in the test kitchens lately," Herald says. "Steak 'n Shake has been making them for years, but now this retro burger's back. They're easy to make, don't have to be cooked to temp, and you can play around with the toppings. We've been testing them with many customers in the test kitchen." Classically served as thin patties—crisped and caramelized around the edges—with American cheese, griddled onions and "special sauce" on a potato bun—there's still plenty of room for creativity.

SMOKY SMASH: YASMIN OUF; BBQ BACON: PROVIDED BY HAMMY'S; HOT HONEY: PROVIDED BY PILOT PROJECT BREWING



SMASH BURGER BY HALAL SMASH BRGR; PHOTOGRAPH BY YASMIN OUF



+862%

PREDICTED 4-YEAR GROWTH FOR SMASH BURGERS

CORN ESQUITES

"CORN IS IN EVERYTHING RIGHT NOW—THESE ARE BASICALLY MEXICAN ELOTES, BUT OFF THE COB IN SALAD OR BOWL FORM"

—CHEF SERA CUNI, CAFÉ ROOT CELLAR, N.C.



WANT THIS IN BITE FORM? SHOP HERE.



FF0726

← SERA STIRRING A CORN DISH; ABOVE: CORN ELOTE



PIZZA BREAD MADE WITH HOUSEMADE BEER BREAD
@ PARLOR PIZZA, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS



READ MORE:



+62%
CONSUMERS SAY THEY'D ORDER A CHEESY GARLIC BREAD—IF IT'S ON THE MENU, THAT IS

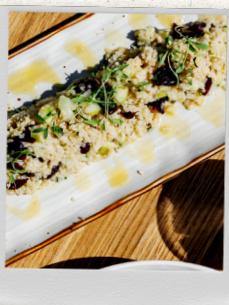
TEAR-ABLE SHARE-ABLES

Korean cream cheese garlic bread may have started the chewy-goey rage on social, but any stuffed, tear-apart dough like garlic knots or monkey bread that can be shared with dipping sauces will please cheese-pull seekers.

FIBERMAXXING

AKA
GETTING
A TON OF
FIBER

MAXXED MENUS



QUINOA SALAD
AZARA, ATLANTA
Dried cranberries,
apples, celery, parsley +
agave vinaigrette



GRAVITAS BOWL
GRAVITAS,
BEVERLY HILLS
Brown rice, tamari-
adzuki beans, griddled
sweet potato, seaweed
salad + housemade kimchi

ILLUSTRATION BY YAO TING WANG FOR FOOD FANATICS®

What is Fibermaxxing, and Why Should Operators Care?

BY AMELIA LEVIN

51%
OF CONSUMERS WANT
TO INCREASE THEIR
FIBER INTAKE

PROTEIN HAS DOMINATED health conversations as of late, but fiber's quickly catching up. Growing interest in gut health and the rise of GLP-1 medications are pushing fiber into the spotlight—both in consumer conversations and on food and beverage packaging.

"As GLP-1 medications become more accessible and affordable, we're seeing a rise in demand for higher-protein and higher-fiber options," says Jillian Marino, RD, LD, corporate chef and dietitian with Morrison Healthcare.

Social media helped accelerate the shift—and gave it a catchy name. "Fibermaxxing," as it first became known on TikTok, encourages consumers to pack as much fiber as possible into meals through ingredients such as beans, whole grains, fruits and vegetables.

"There's also a lot happening on social media around 'fibermaxxing' and high-protein recipes," Marino says. "As dietitians and clinical experts, our role is to make fiber realistic and practical for people."

The term is still emerging—only 12% of consumers overall know what fibermaxxing is, according

"IT IMPROVES
DIGESTION,
HELPS CONTROL
BLOOD SUGAR
AND KEEPS US
FULLER LONGER."

—JILLIAN MARINO, RD, LD

to Datassential, though interest jumps to 21% among Gen Z. Once consumers understand the concept, 52% say they're interested in trying it, revealing broad potential for fiber-focused products and menu items. Datassential research also shows 52% of consumers want to increase protein intake, while 51% say the same about fiber, signaling that fiber could soon rival protein as a major nutrition driver.

SO BUCKLE UP FOLKS, 'CAUSE WE'RE FIBER-MAXXING. FIND RECIPES AND IDEAS HERE:



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J&J SNACK FOODS
CORP.

Goodbye plain, hello pretzel.

The enticing bun customers can't resist.

Go from plain to premium with J&J Snack Foods Pretzel Buns. As #1 in soft pretzels, our buns offer a soft, hearty texture and rich, malty flavor. Perfect for specials and LTOs, they delight guests, boost protein-centric orders, and let you upcharge your signature sandwiches.

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MAINSTAY MASHUPS

Chefs and culinary creators are blending Indian flavors with everyday menu staples like pizza, loaded fries and wings. With 30% of U.S. consumers saying they love or like Indian cuisine, according to Datassential, there's plenty of room for these craveable creations to grow.

PILOT PROJECT BREWING, CHICAGO ILLINOIS

CURRY WINGS

Executive Chef **JAVI AYALA** draws inspiration from Japanese curries for a mashup version that's still heavy on the turmeric for a bright golden color. Japanese curry is similar to Indian versions, but uses a roux for the base, plus garlic, ginger and some apple or honey for more sweetness.

+1,750%

THE AMOUNT THAT PANEER TIKKA MASALA HAS GROWN ON MENUS
SOURCE: TECHNOMIC, 2025

CURRY WINGS: PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY THE SPECIALISTS;
SOURCE: PILOT LIGHT BREWING

THE MASHUP ERA IS IN FULL SWING

CHECK THESE OUT:



MASALA FRIES
@MAZALA PIZZA,
ILLINOIS + CALIFORNIA

MADE WITH: TIKKA MASALA, CRUSHED SAMOSA, ONIONS, CHEESE, SEV, MINT + TAMARIND CHUTNEY



BUTTER CHICKEN PIZZA
@CURRY PIZZA CO.,
CALIFORNIA

BUTTER CHICKEN PIZZA WITH CHEESE, DICED TOMATOES, RED ONIONS AND FRESH CILANTRO



LIKE 'EM?
MAKE 'EM!

SCAN TO SHOP INGREDIENTS:



59%
OF CONSUMERS ARE
INTERESTED IN TRYING
BUTTER CHICKEN

SOURCE: DATASSENTIAL TRENDS, 2026

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SAVE \$2.50 /CASE ON TOP BRANDED INGREDIENTS!

Nearly 30% of consumers are looking for a new twist on classic menu items, and leading brands including OREO® and RITZ® can help elevate your menu to help attract new guests and incremental sales.

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OREO® COOKIE PIECES



FISH TACOS COATED WITH
RITZ® CRACKERS



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DATASSENTIAL KEYNOTE REPORT, LIMITED TIME OFFERS

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CHERRIES + 27%¹⁰

"Cherries are exploding on the West Coast right now—and they're working their way through the rest of the country. I just made an entire cherry menu for a Gilroy Gardens festival, including a homemade Cherry Bomb BBQ sauce, which is also huge right now."

—FOOD FANATICS® CHEF JEANETTE MONEY

THE AMOUNT THAT TART + DARK CHERRIES HAVE GROWN ON FOOD AND DRINK MENUS NATIONWIDE

Our
Voices



JEANETTE MONEY
US FOODS
FOOD FANATICS®
CHEF



MAURIZIO BUSSOLINO
US FOODS
FOOD FANATICS®
CHEF

WHAT?

Cherries, the tart and dark kind, have grown +27% on food and drink menus nationwide in recent years, with another +6% expected growth in the next four years, according to Datassential research.

HOW?

Cherries are even bursting on boards and at the bar—"they're being used for cherry chutney for charcuterie and on crostini like a bruschetta; customers are also asking for the higher quality maraschino cherries for cocktails and mocktails," Bussolino says.

WHO?

Operators are using cherries in place of tomatoes for pico de gallo, pairing them with goat cheese for bruschetta, adding them to sauces for barbecue, wings and smashburgers, and topping tabouleh and grain bowls with the dried version, our chefs say.



COOL, LET'S TRY IT!



SCAN FOR CHEF MONEY'S
CHERRY BOMB BBQ SAUCE RECIPE

BREADY FOR
ANYTHING



Smash burgers. Stacked classics. Saucy signatures. However you build it, guests want a burger that holds together. Hilltop Hearth® buns and rolls are engineered to perform under pressure – ready for whatever hits the grill and whatever goes on top.



US FOODS® EXCLUSIVE BRAND



Scan to shop these buns on MOXē®

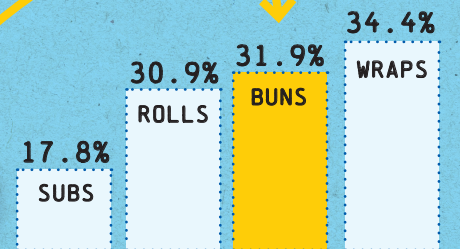
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FOOD FANATICS® PRESENTS:

TOP BUNS

BUNS are the most popular carrier for sandwiches second to wraps

31.9%
POPULARITY RATING



SO WHAT'S TRENDING BETWEEN THESE BUNS?

SMASH BURGERS!

Crispy-edged, nostalgic and easy to execute, smash burgers are surging on menus.



+862%
predicted 4-year growth for smash burgers

TRY IT WITH:
SESAME SEED BUNS
+26%
GROWTH ON MENUS NATIONWIDE ^

TRENDING BETWEEN BUNS:
HOT CHICKEN!



+464%
PREDICTED 4-YEAR GROWTH ON MENUS NATIONWIDE FOR NASHVILLE HOT CHICKEN

ALSO TRENDING:
BRIOCHE BUNS



+28%
GROWTH ON MENUS NATIONWIDE ^

TRENDING BETWEEN BUNS:
GLOBAL BBQ!

+21.7%
4-YEAR GROWTH FOR KOREAN BBQ

HONORABLE MENTION: ROLLS
THE THIRD TOP CARRIER FOR SANDWICHES

+30.9%
POPULARITY RATING

SOURCES: TECHNOMIC, FLAVOR CATEGORY MENU INSIGHTS (Q 1 2025); DATASSENTIAL IGNITE, SEPTEMBER 2025; DATASSENTIAL SANDWICH TRENDS (DECEMBER 2025)

WHO'S DOING IT GREAT AND WHERE.

ROAD TRIP!

"D.C. IS VERY **DIVERSE**, WITH PEOPLE FROM AROUND THE WORLD, SO WE'RE USED TO SEEING A LOT OF DIFFERENT FLAVORS WORKING TOGETHER." —FOOD FANATICS® CHEF JOHN LEAVITT



AS A COSMOPOLITAN CITY with about 2,500 restaurants surrounded by more metro areas in other states, **WASHINGTON, D.C.**, has a restaurant scene that's as diverse geographically as it is culturally. As far as the food scene, "I'm seeing a lot of mashups of cuisines right now—modern Caribbean, Levantine, new Mexican," says Food Fanatics® Chef John Leavitt, based just outside the city.

THE VETERANS:

1 Founding Farmers

1924 PENNSYLVANIA AVE.

Located just blocks from the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue, Founding Farmers is one of the city's OG farm-to-table restaurants, created in 2008 by restaurateurs Dan Simons and Mike Vucurevich in partnership with the North Dakota Farmers Union.

2 Unconventional Diner

1207 9TH ST. NW

Chef David Deshaies opened Unconventional Diner in May 2017, bringing a chef-driven approach to classic American diner fare in Washington, D.C.'s Shaw neighborhood. The restaurant reimagines familiar comfort foods with refined techniques.

3 Andy's Pizza

2000 PENNSYLVANIA AVE.

Founded by pizzaiolo Andy Brown in 2018, Andy's Pizza has become a well-known neighborhood slice shop known for its New York-style pies and wins at the International Pizza Challenge in Las Vegas.

THE NEWBIES:

4 Ingle Korean Steakhouse

1926 14TH ST. NW

An upscale take on Korean barbecue featuring premium beef, house-made banchan and modern tabletop grilling in a sleek dining room.

5 Onggi

2100 P ST. NW

Onggi takes its name from the traditional Korean earthenware vessels used for fermentation—the foundation of many of its menu items like housemade kimchi and other fermented veggie dishes alongside modern Korean barbecue and seafood pancakes.

6 The Occidental

1475 PENNSYLVANIA AVE. NW

One of Washington, D.C.'s most historic restaurants from 1906. The Occidental's remake features an updated menu blending classic American steakhouse and seafood traditions like crab cakes, oysters Rockefeller, prime steaks and roast chicken.

YOU'RE GONNA WANT TO TRY THESE:

CORDERO HOSPITALITY GROUP

Led by 40-year restaurateur Mike Cordero, Cordero Hospitality Group operates several restaurant concepts across the Washington, D.C.–Northern Virginia region.

7 DON TITO

8 CARBONARA OLD SCHOOL ITALIAN & WINE BAR

9 BIG TONY'S PIZZA

10 TACO ROCK

11 COWBELL SEAFOOD & OYSTER

A casual, coastal-inspired seafood concept in the Union Market neighborhood.

FISH + FIRE GROUP

Led by seasoned restaurateur Greg Caston, Fish & Fire Food Group is a family-run seafood operation.

12 THE TAVERN AT IVY CITY SMOKEHOUSE

13 THE STRAND

14 THE POINT

SCAN TO LEARN MORE AND HEAR THEIR STORIES FROM THE RESTAURANT UNSTOPPABLE PODCAST WITH ERIC CACCIATORE

VISIT US AT USFOODS.COM



THE BIG STORY MENU

PROTEIN IS BIG!

**Today's
Special:**

PROTEIN'S POPULARITY IS
EXPLODING AND RESTAURANTS
ARE MEETING DEMAND—HERE'S
HOW PROTEIN IS SHOWING UP
ACROSS THE COUNTRY

BY AMELIA LEVIN



INTRO

CRAVEABLE
PROTEINS

FLAVOR FIRST!

PORTION SIZE
INNOVATION

BOWLS BOWLS
BOWLS

PORK POWER

MEXICAN
MEATS

BETTER
BAR BITES



PHOTOGRAPH BY JONATHAN BORBA



INTRO

WHEN CHAINS CHANGE
their menus, everyone notices.

Snack wraps are back at McDonald's. Chipotle's got high-protein bowls. Subway rolled out Protein Pockets. Even Farmer's Fridge vends fire-roasted steak bites for snacks and light lunches.

Protein is everywhere. And it's all about the meat.

While the easy explanation could be a rebellion against the plant-based craze and fatigue over fake meats, another factor is at play.

"Specifically calling out protein is becoming a big deal on menus these days," says Darren Tristano, an industry data analyst and founder of Foodservice Results. "With more people concerned about losing weight while also building and preserving muscle mass, we're seeing a shift to higher protein items, but in smaller portions." Protein's also getting more traction among people taking GLP-1 medications, Tristano notes. "There will definitely be a continuation of more protein-focused menu items, not just for people on these

DARREN
TRISTANO,
FOUNDER OF
FOODSERVICE
RESULTS



**"CALLING OUT PROTEIN
IS BECOMING A
BIG DEAL ON MENUS
THESE DAYS"**

medications, but for all consumers concerned about their health, especially as they age."

PHOTOGRAPH BY MAURY PAGE

Research backs this up. According to Datassential, 38% of consumers in 2023 said protein intake was important—that jumped to 52%

34%
**GEN Z + MILLENNIAL DINERS
INTENTIONALLY CONSUME
MORE PROTEIN**

in 2025. Meanwhile, consuming more plant-based foods ranks lower in importance.

Younger diners care even more. More than two-thirds of Gen Z and millennials say they want more protein for health goals, and to stabilize energy throughout the day.

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**STOCK YARDS
COLLECTIVE**
A US FOODS COMPANY

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CHANGES
EVERYTHING.**

**A PROTEIN PARTNER THAT UNDERSTANDS
WHAT OPERATORS ARE UP AGAINST.**

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usfoods.com/syc



40% GEN Z DINERS
say they prefer spicy flavors

ONE

CRAVEABLE PROTEINS

THERE'S A REASON HEALTH-CONSCIOUS CONSUMERS CRAVE PROTEIN.

"Protein helps preserve muscle mass and maintain metabolic health, especially when appetite is reduced or there is a dramatic weight loss," says Jillian Marino, RD, LN, corporate chef and dietitian with Morrison Healthcare. Her team is developing protein- and portion-conscious menus across its facilities.

Animal protein is nutrient-dense, helping diners feel full faster. Even dairy is gaining ground. "Cottage cheese is trending right now because it's neutral in flavor, relatively inexpensive and accessible and very high in protein," says Marino.

Fiber also plays a role in the high-protein menu makeover. "Fiber helps with satiety and digestion, and helps round out a protein-rich diet," Marino says.



CHEF JILLIAN MARINO, RD, LN

"THE GOAL IS ALWAYS BALANCE—MAKING SURE THE FOOD IS SATISFYING, NUTRITIONALLY SOUND AND PRACTICAL"

—CHEF JILLIAN MARINO, RD, LN

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIP BRECHT

TWO

FLAVOR FIRST

WHILE PROTEIN MATTERS, MENU ITEMS STILL NEED BOLD FLAVOR TO DRIVE VALUE FOR BUDGET-CONSCIOUS DINERS.

"Spiced" was the fastest-growing flavor last year, according to Technomic, followed by chipotle (69%), Korean (60%) and garlic-parmesan (54%). Datassential reports spicy flavors are especially popular with Gen Z, with 40% preferring them.

Marino says her team has been "working on a shaker salad with buffalo chicken and farro—it's high in protein, bolder in flavor and uses a nutrient-rich grain but it comes in a smaller portion size." Bolder bodes well for GLP-1 users too, because the medication can dull tastebuds.

And instead of simple salad-bar vegetables, "we're offering elevated vegetables like marinated mushrooms, roasted broccoli, spiced, toasted chickpeas and composed mini salads offering more nutrition and flavor in the same bite," she adds.



FAST GROWING FLAVORS:

CHANGE INCIDENCE
+100%
"SPICED"
CHANGE INCIDENCE

CHANGE INCIDENCE
+69%
"CHIPOTLE"
CHANGE INCIDENCE

CHANGE INCIDENCE
+60%
"KOREAN"
CHANGE INCIDENCE

CHANGE INCIDENCE
+54%
"GARLIC PARM"
CHANGE INCIDENCE

OPERATOR TAKEAWAY:

HOW TO DESIGN A MODERN MENU

WITH PROTEIN AND PORTION SIZE IN MIND

Catering to changing consumer preferences while cutting costs and food waste can be tough. Here's five tips:

FOCUS ON PROTEIN

Meat's back in a big way, but plant-based proteins still count

VARY PORTION SIZES

Offer a wider variety of smaller bites and snacks, entrees in smaller plate form and bigger portions meant more for sharing, priced fairly

FORGO FRYING

Simply grilled, slow-cooked proteins work better for GLP-1 users than heavily breaded and fried items

REMEMBER FIBER

Learn more about fibermaxxing on page 10

RETHINK BAR SNACKS

Offer smaller, protein-forward bites to pair with low- or no-alcohol drinks

46% DINERS SAY:

"I ORDERED A MEAL AT A RESTAURANT AND WAS SURPRISED BY HOW LARGE THE PORTION WAS."

Significantly more likely among GLP-1 users (63%), Gen Z (56%) and millennials (47%)

35% DINERS SAY:

"I SHARED A REGULAR MENU ITEM WITH SOMEONE ELSE TO AVOID ORDERING TOO MUCH FOOD."

More likely among Gen Z (45%) and millennials (40%)

Source: Datassential, 2026

FOOD FANATICS®
CHEF JEANETTE
MONEY



"I DON'T KNOW ONE CUSTOMER RIGHT NOW WHO DOESN'T WANT TO ADD A BOWL TO THEIR MENU, BUT IT HAS TO BE AN ELEVATED BOWL."

THREE

PORTION SIZE INNOVATION

PROTEIN—IN THE FORM OF MEAT, EGGS AND DAIRY—DELIVERS HIGH-DENSITY NUTRITION IN SMALLER PORTIONS, GIVING DINERS MORE VALUE IN FEWER BITES.

Smaller portions can also boost revenue.

Datassential research shows 59% of consumers are more likely to visit restaurants offering flexible portion sizes—think mix-and-match combos, split plates, snack-size options or small plates. Nearly half of diners say they were surprised by how large a restaurant meal was in the past month.

Matt Peota, chef/owner of Passero in Arlington Heights, Illinois, applied these insights for newly opened Hugh's Chophouse.

One of our main menu items is a steak frites—a 6-ounce bavette with peppercorn sauce and fries for \$25. "There are always going to be the guests who are willing to spend more on a Friday or Saturday night, but what about those who come in on a Tuesday and don't want to drop \$80 on a steak? If they're spending that much less, then you might make it up on a second drink or another small item."

PHOTOGRAPH BY AZZEDINE ROUICHI



FOUR

BOWLS, BOWLS, BOWLS

Jeanette Money has worked on a wide range of bowl concepts packed with everything from cheeseburger ingredients to boneless wings, Korean bulgolgi, shawarma and even mac and cheese and ribs designed for barbecue and bars. Technomic reports that the fastest-growing savory bowl flavors include Korean, honey and pesto.

"Bowls are a great way to cross-utilize items and carry costs across menu items," Money says. "They're inexpensive and easy to execute—you can literally throw everything from your kitchen into them and people are happy."

FIVE

PORK POWER

WITH PORK PRICES DECLINING, OPERATORS ARE BUYING IT UP—AND PRESENTING IT LIKE STEAK TO JUSTIFY HIGHER PRICE POINTS.

Chef John Scarangella of Encore Ristorante adapted a popular pork piccata dish from his original restaurant into a more steakhouse-style pork Diane with mushrooms and brandy cream sauce. "Priced at \$34, it still sells like crazy," he says.

At Hugh's Chophouse, the menu features Kan Kan pork—a pork tomahawk chop with the fat cap still on—that's brined, smoked, lacquered with a Mongolian barbecue-style glaze and finished in an infrared broiler until caramelized. "We want to make that just as big of a standout as our steaks," Peota says.



SIX

MEXICAN MEATS

MEXICAN MEATS—FROM PORK CARNITAS TO CARNE ASADA—ARE ALSO GAINING MOMENTUM ON MENUS.

At Taqueria Chingón in Chicago, carne asada pairs with chorizo and chicharron for tacos campechanos, a popular Mexican street food known for mixing multiple proteins. The dish also features grilled Monterey Jack cheese, avocado salsa, onions and cilantro. Money points to two additional favorites: the El Don Molcate sizzling protein bowl with grilled skirt steak, shrimp, chorizo, chicken and onions with asadero cheese at El Don Cocina & Cantina in Lathrop, California; and a carne asada taco bowl with black beans, pico de gallo, salsa and corn at Inc 82 Brewing in Dublin, California.



PHOTOGRAPH BY TAYLOR FRIEHL

28



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OPERATOR TAKEAWAY: HOW TO MAKE PROTEINS & SMALLER PORTIONS PROFITABLE

1. SHRINK THE CUT, NOT THE VALUE
Go smaller on portion size, but bigger on protein quality and flavor.

2. MONETIZE SHARING
Guests are splitting anyway—charge for it, build it into the price or offer small, medium and larger size options.

3. SELL THE SMALL PLATES
Size down entrees and turn sides into smaller mains, leaving more room for another drink, side or add-on protein bite.

4. BUILD MORE BOWLS
Cross-utilize proteins, grains and veggies you already have for high-margin, fork-eating formats.

5. MAKE PROTEINS BOLDER
With smaller portions, flavors need to be bolder and more craveable.

Source: Datassential, 2026



THE WINGS (RIGHT) AND LUMPIA (ABOVE) AT DIRTY HABIT

SEVEN

BETTER BAR BITES

PROTEIN-FORWARD MENU INNOVATION IS ALSO SHOWING UP AT THE BAR.

At Dirty Habit in San Francisco, the bar menu features Smoked Bourbon Maple Glazed Chicken Wings and Surf & Turf Lumpia. The wings pair with the bar's collection of more than 640 whiskeys, while the lumpia—crispy rolls filled with wagyu beef and lobster—are served with sweet chili garlic vinegar for dipping.

"We use both dishes to lean into protein in a fun, snackable way while still fitting into the elevated vibe we're trying to create," says Chef Ruby Oliveros.



SCAN TO LEARN MORE ABOUT PROTEIN CUTS AND GAIN ACCESS TO GUIDES TO HELP YOU MAKE MORE INFORMED PROTEIN CHOICES FOR YOUR MENU

The latest stuff. Because we love stuff.

GEAR CHECK!



WITH US FOODS
EQUIPMENT SPECIALIST
**KIMBERLY
MCHARDY**

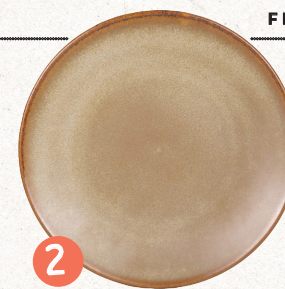
MIX AND MATCH

'Tis the season for summer fun—the perfect time to step up your tabletop with new plateware. “One of the biggest trends we’re seeing is more artisan styles in different shapes and colors to mix and match,” says **US Foods Equipment Specialist Kimberly McHardy**. Here are three popular styles:

1 BRIGHT AND SPECKLED COLORS

KIMBERLY'S PICK:
INTERNATIONAL TABLEWARE'S
ROTANA LINE

“These brightly colored plates with speckling glaze work great for shareable plates and patios, but are also popular among our Mexican restaurant customers.”



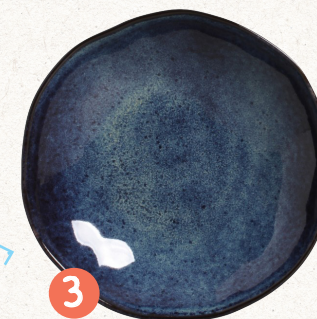
ARTISAN ORGANIC

KIMBERLY'S PICK:
INTERNATIONAL TABLEWARE'S
HEARTH LINE IN ESPRESSO;
STEELITE ORGANICS

“More customers want plateware with that hand-crafted, stone-fired look in earthy colors.”

NOT GOING ANYWHERE...MELAMINE!

“THIS IS A GREAT PRODUCT FOR OUTDOOR DINING, ROOFTOPS, POOLS AND GOLF COURSES, BUT ALSO AT ANY TIME OF YEAR FOR AVOIDING CHIPS AND BREAKAGE.”



REACTIVE GLAZE

KIMBERLY'S PICK:
INTERNATIONAL TABLEWARE'S
ALLOY PLATES IN CARBON BLACK

“These glazes create a metallic effect in the light and look great in dark colors like black and navy, making the food pop. The light crackling adds a nice texture element.”

LIKE 'EM? GET 'EM!

SCAN THE CODE
TO LEARN MORE



KEEP ON EVOLVIN' USE AI THE RIGHT WAY

US FOODS DIRECTOR OF RESTAURANT OPERATIONS CONSULTING LANCE REYNOLDS SPENDS A LOT OF TIME ON LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS (LLMS)—HE KNOWS HOW US FOODS' CUSTOMERS CAN USE AI TOOLS TO IMPROVE THEIR OPERATIONS AND MARKETING EFFORTS.



1) TREAT YOUR GOOGLE LISTING LIKE YOUR FRONT DOOR

"If you're going to get discovered—if somebody's looking for a restaurant—you need to make sure you're going to show up on their phone in that Top 3 list. You get outside that Top 3, nobody's clicking down and doing more research. It's really about using AI to build the entire ecosystem of your digital brand—your Google listing, your Apple Maps listing, social media engagement and more."

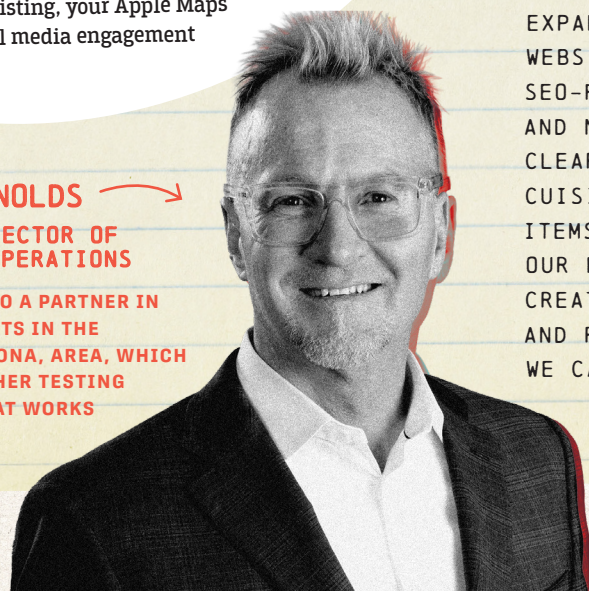
SAMPLE PROMPT:

"HELP ME IMPROVE MY WEBSITE COPY, GOOGLE BUSINESS PRESENCE AND CUSTOMER REVIEW REPLIES SO THEY ATTRACT MORE LOCAL GUESTS AND RANK BETTER IN SEARCH BY REWRITING AND EXPANDING MY RESTAURANT'S WEBSITE CONTENT TO BE MORE SEO-FRIENDLY FOR MY CITY AND NEARBY NEIGHBORHOODS, CLEARLY SHOWCASE OUR CUISINE AND CORE MENU ITEMS AND KEEP OR IMPROVE OUR BRAND VOICE. THEN, CREATE GOOGLE POSTS AND REVIEW REPLY TEMPLATES WE CAN USE GOING FORWARD."

ILLUSTRATION BY MARK HARRIS FOR FOOD FANATICS®

LANCE REYNOLDS
US FOODS DIRECTOR OF RESTAURANT OPERATIONS

REYNOLDS IS ALSO A PARTNER IN FOUR RESTAURANTS IN THE FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA, AREA, WHICH GIVES HIM ANOTHER TESTING GROUND FOR WHAT WORKS



2) AUTOMATE YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY

"People panic post all the time. They don't think everything through, ... what they did last week, what's going on this week or what's happening in town. All you have to do is call a team marketing meeting for a brain dump of ideas, record it on your phone and feed it to AI for further research and a plan. Now you have agency-level marketing."

77%

OF DINERS VISIT A RESTAURANT'S WEBSITE BEFORE DECIDING WHERE TO EAT

SOURCE: MGH CONSUMER DINING INDEX

SAMPLE PROMPT:

"YOU ARE A RESTAURANT MARKETING STRATEGIST AND COPYWRITER FOR A CHEF-DRIVEN, FOODIE-FOCUSED RESTAURANT. CREATE A 7-DAY CONTENT PLAN COVERING EMAIL, SOCIAL MEDIA AND SMS WITH TWO EVENT TIE-INS, PLUS TWO AUTOMATED GUEST MESSAGES, SUCH AS A DAY-AFTER-VISIT AND A 45-DAY-LATER 'WE MISS YOU'".



FOR MORE TIPS + PROMPTS, SCAN HERE

FOODFANATICS.COM 33

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JEREMY + GRACE MCGEE, SALO SALO

TODAY, WE'RE MAKING: EMPANADAS

EMPANADAS topped multiple trend lists for 2026, including our own. “Empanadas are the perfect vehicle for all types of proteins, vegetables and bold flavors,” says Dr. Raj Pandya, owner of Azara in Atlanta. At Salo Salo in Indianapolis, owners Grace and Jeremy McGee make both traditional empanadas and flaky, croissant-like empanadas de kaliskis with laminated dough. Here, Jeremy McGee, co-owner with wife Grace McGee, describes how they make their popular pork belly, chicken and beef empanadas with peas, potatoes and carrots using traditional pie dough and served with Suka Pinakurat, a spicy Filipino vinegar for dipping.

ENDLESS FILLINGS & FLAVORS

Check out these flavor combos from other US Foods customers.



SWEET POTATO-MOJO
AZARA, ATLANTA, GA.
purple sweet potato,
black beans, fontina,
green mojo sauce



CRAB-POBLANO
CAFÉ ROOT CELLAR,
PITTSBORO, N.C.
crab and corn with
creamy poblano sauce



CHICKEN-MOLE
PILOT PROJECT
BREWING, CHICAGO, IL.
chicken thigh, mole
negro, pickled red
onions, cotija cheese

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MADELINE LEBRUN FOR FOOD FANATICS®

INSPIRED??? SHOP INGREDIENTS HERE AND GET ROLLING ->



JEREMY MCGEE
TELLS US HOW

LET'S COOK THIS!!



STEP ONE

MAKE THE DOUGH

Prepare a pie dough using flour, butter, salt and cold water, leaving small chunks of butter for a flaky texture. Mix, then wrap and chill thoroughly before rolling into rounds. “That’s the most important thing—keep everything cold. If it warms up, the dough gets soft and mushy and won’t hold together.”



STEP TWO

PREPARE THE FILLING

Season cooked ground beef, chicken, cheese, potatoes and/or vegetables with plenty of spices and aromatics. “We keep the filling pretty dry—no sauce—otherwise it gets wet when you cook it. And definitely chill the filling completely before assembling.”

MAKE IT FASTER:

FILL WITH PRE-COOKED PROTEINS.



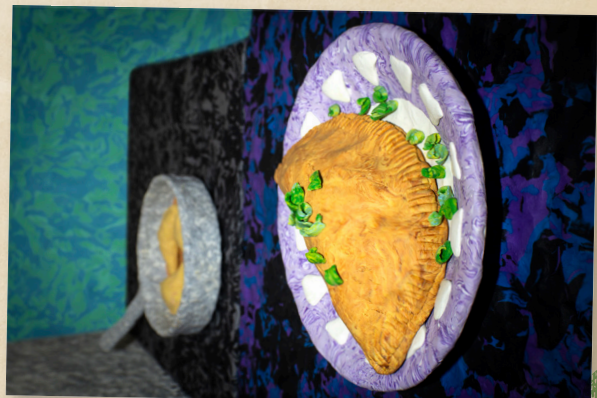
STEP THREE

FILL AND SEAL

Portion dough into rounds, add filling and fold into a half-moon, pressing out any trapped air. Use a crimping tool or fork for a tight, consistent seal. “We poke holes in the empanadas—otherwise they’ll float in the fryer and only cook on one side.”

MAKE IT FASTER:

USE PAR-FRIED EMPANADAS.



STEP FOUR

FRY AND SERVE

Fry at 350°F until golden and crisp, ensuring the empanadas stay fully submerged for even cooking. Work in batches and serve hot with bright, acidic accompaniments to balance richness. “We don’t take them out of the fridge until right before frying.”

MAKE IT FASTER:

USE PRE-MADE DIPPING SAUCES AND PICO DE GALLO

FOOD AS MEDICINE

HOW A DOCTOR OPENED A NUTRITION-LED RESTAURANT IN ATLANTA



WHEN DR. RAJ PANDYA opened Azara in December 2025 along Atlanta's BeltLine, he broke ground as one of the first practicing doctors to open and operate a restaurant—not just invest in one. A longtime orthopedic surgeon and sports medicine physician, Pandya drew on his nutrition science background to shape the concept and menu. Here are his tips for introducing a bold new concept.



OWNER + OPERATOR
DR. RAJ PANDYA

WANT MORE
MENU IDEAS?
CHECK OUT
FIBERMAXXING
PAGE 10

* ONE *

START WITH A CLEAR MISSION

Pandya says Azara's purpose goes well beyond sales or growth. "Our goal is far bigger than making a profitable restaurant. We want to do that so we can exist, but our goal is something much bigger—we want to change the way people rethink their relationship with food and health."

TIP: ENSURE THAT EVERY DECISION, FROM MENU DEVELOPMENT TO DINING ROOM DESIGN, REINFORCES YOUR MISSION.



STILL HUNGRY? SCAN THE CODE TO READ MORE

* TWO *

HIRE PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN YOU

For Pandya, one of the biggest challenges wasn't designing the restaurant—it was finding a strong culinary partner. "The hardest part was trying to find a chef who believed in the concept."

TIP: PRIORITIZE PARTNERS AND TEAM MEMBERS WHO ARE COMMITTED TO YOUR VISION BUT EXCITED ABOUT EXPERIMENTATION.

* THREE *

LEAD WITH FLAVOR

Pandya believes many "healthy" restaurants struggle because they prioritize nutrition over taste, even though nutrition is still important. "Health food too often is binary—you have something healthy and it doesn't taste good. Why can't we have both?"

TIP: MAKE SURE MENU ITEMS ARE CRAVEABLE BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE.

The Mediterranean Veggie Flatbread and Strawberry Spritzer cocktail at Azara



TIP: LEAN ON RECOGNIZABLE INGREDIENTS, BUT BE BOLD—TRY NEW TWISTS.

* FOUR *

CHOOSE FAMILIAR FOODS

Rather than eliminating comfort foods entirely, Azara's menu reimagines them with more nutritious ingredients. Pandya points to empanadas as an example. "The empanada to me is nothing but a vehicle. It's a container for what you put inside of it."

SEE PAGE 34 FOR EMPANADA TIPS

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PHOTOGRAPH BY LYNSEY WEATHERSPOON FOR FOOD FANATICS®
DROP CAP BY NIKKI SCIOSCIA FOR FOOD FANATICS®

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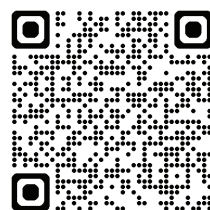


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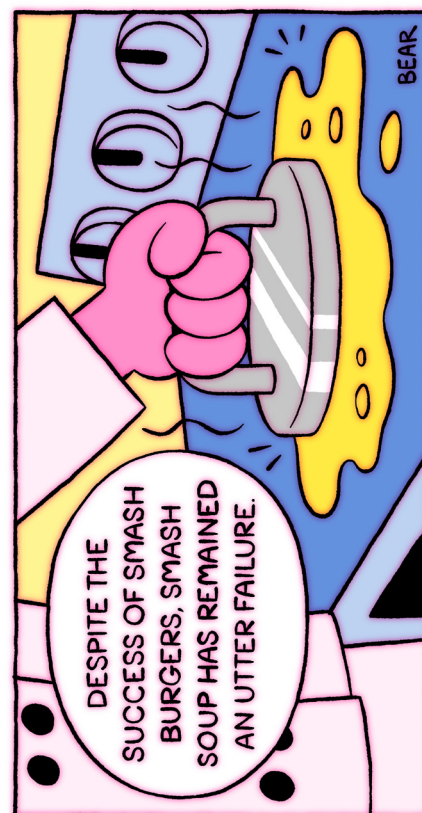
THE FUNNY PAGES

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AND TAG #USFCOMICS

SIMPLY SMASHING. CHECK OUT PAGE 8 FOR MORE.

PROTEIN, PROTEIN, PROTEIN. READ MORE ON PAGE 20

HIGH PROTEIN DREAM



FIBER, TOO? VISIT PAGE 10.



"Maybe we should add more fiber to our diet."

BACKBURNER

FIVE Q'S 'CAUSE NO ONE'S GOT TIME FOR MORE

JULY 2026

SERA CUNI

OWNER ① THE ROOT CELLAR IN CHAPEL HILL + PITTSBORO, N.C.

Since opening her first restaurant in 2013, Chef Sera Cuni has focused on very local and seasonal food served casually where “you don’t need a Ph.D. to read our menu—you can just come get a great meal.”

1. FIRST INDUSTRY JOB?

“My grandfather ran an Italian-American club, and I would spend time with him in the summers. He ran the kitchen, so I would go with him and stir pots of sauce and peel onions.”

2. HOTTEST SEASONAL SUMMER ITEM?

“Strawberries, heirloom tomatoes and peaches from right down the street. Oh, and North Carolina corn—it’s the base of our popular catfish dish with succotash.”

3. WORKING WITH FARMERS?

“The farmers will text me what they have, and I’ll plan my menu around that. At one restaurant we change the menu every week.”

4. GOT FREE TIME?

HOW DO YOU USE IT?

“I run a nonprofit called Feed-Well Fridges. We stock fridges throughout the county and people can take what they need. In six years, we’ve made 85,000 meals and rescued over 100 tons of food—the equivalent of 28 large African male elephants.”



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SERA CUNI

5. LOVE/HATE INGREDIENT?

“**YELLOW SQUASH**
+ **ZUCCHINI.**”

But I’ll work with sweet potato leaves, pickle peanuts and make kimchi out of carrot tops.”

**WANNA
BE NEXT?**

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