

MENU MUST-HAVES
THE X FACTOR

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A NEW KIND OF 1%

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USA 2021

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Watermelon says hello summer like no other ingredient, making it a go-to for celebrating the return to full-service dining. See recipe on page 9.

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AND... WE'RE BACK!

Welcome to the summer edition of Food Fanatics® Magazine! We hope this issue finds your business improving and spirits lifted as diners return to restaurants.

For the first time in over a year, the food stories are front and center in this issue. As dine in surges, it's time to move away from the delivery-friendly comfort food we've relied on, and focus on competitive, on-trend menus for a successful operation. All our *Menu Must-Haves* stories and recipes are centered around on-premise options that work for both dine-in and outdoor settings. We don't want you to forget about to-go, as it will continue to be a lucrative option, but it's time to give your dine-in menu a refresh built for larger groups and summer gatherings.

In our operations section, *Money Moves*, we get real about menu pricing and why it may be time to revisit it to ensure profitability. Diners know more than ever about what it really takes to run a restaurant and foodservice operation, and they are willing to pay for quality, safety, and service. Learn if it's the right time to revisit menu prices and, if so, use our six steps to raise them the right way.

While we've got you thinking about revenue, *Balancing Act* outlines five steps to balance increases in dine-in, with now essential take-out and delivery business.

We close with a *By The Numbers* trend that could bring in big bucks as America goes back to a lifestyle of on-the-go snacks. Get trending grab-and-go items to add to your menu for easy upselling.

We hope your business is bouncing back and that you're seeing light at the end of the tunnel.

Thanks for reading,

Andrew Iacobucci
Chief Commercial Officer, US Foods

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Intro to India

Ingredients that can add excitement to your menu right now

By Jacqueline Raposo
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Stephanie Hanes

Indian cheese can take on many seasonings, including ones for paneer tikka.



When a potential

voter asked Kamala Harris to name her favorite Indian dish last November, the then-vice presidential candidate couldn't give a straight answer. It's not because Harris—whose mother immigrated from India's southeastern state of Tamil Nadu in the 1970s—doesn't have one. It's because she had to clarify that there's no singular "Indian cuisine."

"So, South Indian it would be idli with, like, a really good sambar," Harris specified. "And then North Indian, probably any kind of tikka."

India is a massive country with over 20 official languages, a history of colonization, and religions specifying dietary customs. These result in a national cuisine of daunting variety. But a rise in chefs and receptive diners interested in increasing their understanding of Indian dishes beyond tikka and naan—and heightened attention of the first woman vice president of Southeast Indian descent—means that regional Indian dishes and the ingredients fundamental to them are about to hit a brighter spotlight.

Chefs long showcasing them stand ready. "Try to picture it," urges chef Heena Patel as she begins to describe her cuisine at Besharam in San Francisco. "I grew up in the state of Gujarat, the land of farmers."

Rather than dive into the massive Indian pantry, four chefs offered irreplicable ingredients in their region's cuisine. Here's how to understand them within the Indian landscape and to incorporate them into dishes you're most likely already cooking.

1 METHI LEAVES (FENUGREEK)

In the rural northwest state of Gujarat, Patel grew up with the fresh produce that made the cornerstone of her family's vegetarian cuisine. Harvested during India's cooler months, the delicate methi leaves her mother stir-fried were a coveted reward for the labor of separating them from their stems. "As far as I am concerned, there is no substitute," she says.

Nutty, slightly bitter methi leaves cook like leafy greens or herbs, opening to a woodsy, caramelized sweetness that balances spicy, rich and fresh flavors. They soften into stir-fries, potato dishes, fritters and curries. They're a beloved addition to flatbreads like *theplas* and *paratha* (see sidebar). The dried leaves, kasoori methi, and methi seeds, which contain even more of the nutty and woody notes, are a must-have for tadka: spices tempered in ghee added to sauces or to finish dishes. "It is like 'bringing the sauce alive,'" Patel says of tadka's sensorial addition to dishes and experiences. "The lingering aroma is from the fenugreek. I'm in love with it."

In the summer, she sets methi against the sweetness of juicy heirloom tomatoes, wilting the tomatoes with black garlic and cilantro and then stir-frying with the fresh leaves. Topping garlic naan, the mixture is a "celebration of summer in a bite," she says.

Try a pickling spice of methi seeds crushed with red chilies, turmeric and salt, sprinkled over a bagel with cream cheese. It enhances that morning go-to in a way nothing else will, Patel says. "Me and my children never have bagels without it."

2 ROASTED CUMIN

For chef Shachi Mehra, Rajasthan cuisine of the northwestern region of India, would be incomplete without cumin. "Cumin generally plays the bass note," she explains of the spice's woodsy, musty undertones. When the seeds are tempered in oil or ghee, their overall aromas soften for egg and rice dishes. Cumin powder added to the later stage of curries provides concentrated warmth to balance the acidity of tomato or cut through the richness of lamb. And when roasted, cumin's earthy undertone becomes even more pronounced, taking on a hint of smoke. "It can be loud, or it can be a bit quieter. But it's that very stable sort of warm, deep flavor," Mehra says.

Until specifically exploring her northern state's dishes and comparing them with others, Mehra didn't realize how regularly Rajasthan cuisine incorporates cumin.



Wilted Methi with Juicy Tomatoes

Chef Heena Patel
Besharam, San Francisco

- 1 pound rainbow cherry or plum tomatoes, sliced
- 1 purple tomato, sliced
- 1 red beef tomato, sliced
- 1 orange tomato, sliced
- 1 tablespoon black garlic, sliced
- 2 teaspoons sea salt, plus extra for seasoning
- 1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons canola oil
- 1 teaspoon whole cumin seeds
- ½ teaspoon whole dried methi seeds
- 1 cup fresh methi leaves
- 1 teaspoon Aleppo chili
- Zest of 1 lime
- 2 teaspoons lime juice
- ½ pound fresh paneer cheese, diced or julienned

On a sheet tray, place tomatoes sliced in uniform thickness, garlic and 2 teaspoons salt. Drizzle with olive oil and bake in a heated 300 F oven for 35 to 45 minutes until tomatoes loosen up and release their juice. Set aside.

In a saute pan, heat canola oil to the smoking point and add cumin and methi seeds. Very quickly add methi leaves, salt, chili and zest. Remove methi spice mixture from heat and sprinkle with lime juice and toss with cheese. To serve, plate with tomatoes and top with spice mixture. Serve with breads such as paratha or thepla. Makes 4 to 6 servings.





Roasted cumin gives seasonal watermelon another dimension of flavor.

Watermelon Chaat

*Chef/owner Shachi Mehra
Adya, Anaheim and Irvine, California*

- 4 tablespoons olive oil**
- 1 lime, zested and juiced**
- 1 teaspoon honey**
- ½ teaspoon chaat masala**
- ½ teaspoon cumin powder, roasted**
- ½ serrano chili, seeded and minced**
- ½ medium red onion, thinly sliced**
- 18 to 20 small fresh mint leaves, chopped**
- 2 tablespoons cilantro, leaves only, chopped**
- 1 small bulb fennel, shaved and fronds chopped**
- 1 small ripe watermelon, diced into medium cubes, about 5 cups**

In a large bowl, whisk together olive oil, lime juice, zest, honey, chaat masala, cumin and serrano.

Gently stir in red onion, mint, cilantro and fronds. Fold in fennel and then watermelon to coat. Serve chilled. Makes 4 servings.





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Breads with Purpose

The variety of Indian bread “all have their identity and purpose,” says chef Shachi Mehra of Adya in Irvine and Anaheim, California.

“There is something to be said about bread in its billions of forms, especially in Indian food,” she says, naming chickpea flour, millet and other grains Todd Duplechan of Vixen’s Wedding in Austin, Texas, agrees. “That’s the wonderful thing about naans, roti, chapatti—once it hits the table, you grab it and tear it apart,” he says. “You can dip it into something, scoop something up with it and eat it all together.”

Here are but five of many Indian breads served alongside Indian dishes.



NAAN
This pillowy, tandoor-baked flatbread is the best-known Indian bread in the U.S., and chefs have no problem playing with flavors. Duplechan adds chilies and onion to his. Pandya, who has restaurants in New York, adds chilies and Amul cheese while Mehra stuffs hers with goat cheese because “everybody loves cheese, and everybody loves naan.” Naan pairs perfectly alongside saucy curries, dhal, masalas, paneer and anywhere else you want to rip, dip and scoop.



PAO
“Pao is a generalist term for bread in India,” says Pandya of the soft rolls that originate from the western state of Goa, once colonized by the Portuguese (pao means bread in Portuguese). Dishes including *keema pao* (minced meat curry dish) and *pav bhaji* (vegetable curry) are always served with buttery pao to soak up the sauce. Duplechan notes that pao plays a vital role in the snacking culture around Mumbai and Goa, too. Ingredients like fried potatoes or chilies are sandwiched on pao with sweet and sour chutneys.



PARATHAS
Parathas are savory thin flatbreads made with wheat flour, oil and salt kneaded several times and baked on a hot griddle for a texture that’s altogether flaky, chewy and crispy. Eaten at breakfast through dinner, they’re ideal for ripping and wrapping other ingredients. But Mehra notes adding methi leaves, cumin, chili powder and adajwain straight to the dough is “very comfort-foodie—like something your mom or your grandmother would make you.”



THEPLA
Millet flour makes thepla an easily digestible, gluten-free flatbread that’s still incredibly chewy, perfect for serving flat or curling into rolls. Made with yogurt or oil and a variety of spices, herbs and green veggies, Patel adds fresh methi leaves, jaggery sugar, lemon juice and asafetida to her dough before grilling. “If you have that with a hot chai, you will never miss a slice of toast in your life,” she says.



CHILLA
Made with besan (chickpea) flour, Mehra describes this Rajasthani specialty as a cross between a crepe and a pancake. “It’s super easy,” she says. “It’s chickpea flour, water, cumin, chili powder and salt. Then put in whatever you want: chopped onions, tomatoes, cilantro.” Cooked over low heat on a nonstick pan (like a dosa), they make for a quick and satisfying savory snack or breakfast dish.



Curry Leaf

Paneer



She doubles down at the two locations of her Southern California restaurant, Adya, too. Year-round, roasted cumin powder folds into dressings with chaat masala—the robust spice blend regularly sprinkled on fruit in India that includes tart dried mango and sulfuric black salt. In winter, Mehra uses the cumin-forward dressing to balance the bitter, sweet and sour notes of citrus and fennel. In summer, it highlights watermelon’s sweetness and freshness with red onions and chilies.

Roasted cumin also steps up simple dishes like scrambled eggs and guacamole. “It has its own independent flavor without overwhelming avocado or egg,” Mehra says. “It mingles in this warming way, where it feels like it just belonged there the whole time.”

5 PANEER

India boasts the largest population of vegetarians, between 23% and 37%, worldwide. “For them, paneer becomes a premium source of protein and a luxury product,” says Mumbai-born chef Chintan Pandya of the Indian cheese.

With a neutral flavor and a firm texture that absorbs robust seasonings, Pandya credits paneer as a go-to main ingredient for traditional tandoor and curry dishes. At his New York restaurants Rahi, Adda and Dhamaka, he offers variations of paneer tikka, marinating his house-made cheese in yogurt and spices before cooking them in a tandoor and serving as an appetizer. He says the technique works for any kind of grill or roast recipe and can hold up to traditional American barbecue methods, too.

Because paneer doesn’t melt like most other cheeses, it’s a prime addition to

stews and curries. “One of the best is tomato-based with fenugreek,” Pandya says. “It’s like how burrata goes with pesto and a little bit of drizzle of balsamic. It’s just phenomenal.” The same goes for traditional spaghetti and tomato sauce dishes—add small-diced paneer for a luxurious upgrade.

4 CURRY LEAF

Don’t be put off by the burnt, petrol-like smell of raw curry leaf. “You cook with it, it transforms, and it gives you a flavor unlike anything else and completely delicious,” promises chef Todd Duplechan, who views curry leaves as ubiquitous to Southern Indian dishes as bay leaves are to Southern Italian.

Duplechan worked at chef Floyd Cardoz’s Tabla in New York and studied in Cardoz’s Mumbai restaurants before opening his Goan-inspired Vixen’s Wedding in Austin, Texas. “It’s a chameleon,” he explains of curry leaf’s overall presence on his menu. As the leaves cook, the petrol flavor broadens in complexity as we might taste in a good Riesling. The floral aromas open. And the umami flavors deepen. Braised with buttermilk and rabbit, the leaves set the undertone for a richly aromatic broth. Fried with chilies, a sharply infused oil finishes dishes with a punch. And in summer, his umami-packed curry leaf aioli plays against the herbaceous, sweet and fatty flavors of his extremely satisfying fried okra chaat.

“The curry leaf holds the dish,” Duplechan says. It’s the ingredient American diners usually can’t identify that gets them wanting more. “It’s the palate that you eat things against. It’s why you taste things.” ■

Paneer Tikka

*Chef Chintan Pandya
Rahi, Adda Indian Canteen and Dhamaka,
New York City*

- ½ kg paneer**
- Kosher salt, as needed**
- 45 grams Kashmiri red chili or deghi mirch**
- 60 grams besan**
- 650 grams yogurt**
- 350 ml heavy cream**
- 15 grams ajwain**

Cut paneer into squares. Sprinkle with salt and red chili powder.

Mix besan with yogurt and cream until smooth. Add ajwain and salt. Dip the paneer in the marinade and refrigerate for a few hours or overnight. Grill the paneer tikka in the tandoor until well cooked and crisp. Makes 10 servings.



JUTE STRAIGHT

What you
need to know
about the next
nutritional
powerhouse

Get the recipe for Cold
Jute Leaves with Dashi
Shooter on page 19.

By Amber Gibson
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Stephanie Hanes

▼

An unfamiliar or at least underutilized ingredient doesn't surface often but sometimes perfect timing is all it needs.

That's the case with jute, a leafy green nutritional powerhouse.

Best known in home cooking, from the Philippines and Nigeria to the Middle East and Vietnam, jute is packed with fiber, iron, beta carotene, calcium and vitamins A, C and E. At a time when Americans want to eat healthier and plant-based foods are on the rise, jute is poised to break out as the next kale.

Jute leaves are also known as Egyptian spinach, West African sorrel, saluyot in the Philippines, ewedu in Nigeria or lalo in the Caribbean, and they have been a food staple since ancient times among Jews and Egyptians. While jute leaves can be brewed as a tea, eaten with a starch or cooked in a stew, they also can simply be added to a smoothie or tossed in a salad to provide a nutritional boost (think upsell). Jute wilts like spinach but produces a similar mucilage to okra when it's frozen or cooked. A quick saute with ginger and garlic or seasoned with soy sauce and a dash of citrus juice makes for a solid side or component for another dish.

Chef Tezeta Alemayehu of T&T Lifestyle restaurant in Los Angeles says jute leaves are a more nutritious, albeit higher-priced, alternative to spinach. She uses it in several dishes, including *enkulal firfir*, a vegan breakfast scramble with extra firm tofu and fresh vegetables.

"Jute is earthier than spinach, and it's bitter, so it relies on spices, sauces and aromatics to add flavor," she explains. "Texture-wise, jute is closer to basil, whereas spinach is softer and more delicate." Alemayehu also blends jute with basil and garbanzo beans to make a forest green hummus that she serves with

housemade pita chips, and even makes savory power green pancakes with jute leaves, oat flour and bananas that she serves with breakfast scrambles.

For his pop up restaurants in Seattle, chef Shota Nakajima blanches and marinates jute leaves with Japanese okra to make aomi-dashi and pairs the refreshing chilled broth with grated mountain yams.

"I love serving this to begin a meal in the summertime," he says. "It instantly cools you down as a starter." Nakajima will prep a batch of dashi to use for a few days. The first day, it works as a clear soup, but by day three he'll use it for braising or to make a miso soup.

"I love the slime, so I embrace it," Nakajima says. Marinating jute leaves overnight brings out the mucilage for a richer, more viscous soup.

"The mucilage acts as a great canvas for flavors to adhere to," says chef Carlo Lamagna of Magna in Portland, Oregon. "The longer you cook them, the more the cellular structure breaks down and the more it releases its mucilage. Definitely experiment until the desired texture is achieved."

At Magna, he uses fresh or frozen saluyot leaves in *dinengdeng*, a Filipino soup made with vegetables and fried or cured fish.

"Enjoying saluyot is a textural experience," says chef Aimee Arcilla, co-founder of Hunnybee, a weekly Filipino pop-up restaurant in San Francisco. "If you're not familiar with it, it can be an acquired taste." Arcilla uses frozen jute leaves, which she says are easier to find than fresh ones in Bay Area Asian grocery stores, to make *dinengdeng*. ■

Basil and Jute Hummus

Chef/owner Tezeta Alemayehu
T&T Lifestyle, Santa Monica, California

2 cups garbanzo beans, rinsed, skins removed
5 to 6 cloves garlic
2 to 2½ cups jute leaves
½ cup basil
1 tablespoon tahini
1 teaspoon ground cumin
½ teaspoon berbere or cayenne
Juice from 1 lime
Kosher salt, to taste
½ cup olive oil, plus more to drizzle
Toasted pita chips, as needed

In a food processor or blender, pulse the garbanzo beans, reserving a handful for garnishing, and garlic cloves.

Add in the remaining ingredients and spices, except the olive oil and chips, and blend together. Scrape down the sides as needed.

Slowly stream in the olive oil while pulsing the ingredients for a smooth and even texture.

Drizzle with a little more olive oil, sprinkle with remaining garbanzo beans and serve with pita chips. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

"JUTE IS EARTHIER THAN SPINACH ... SO IT RELIES ON SPICES, SAUCES AND AROMATICS TO ADD FLAVOR."

—Chef Tezeta Alemayehu of T&T Lifestyle



Fascinating Fact

During ancient times, jute leaves, also known as molokhia, were considered a food of the gods.



Toss jute leaves at the end of cooking to avoid mucilage.



Enkulal Firfir (Vegan Egg Scramble)

*Chef/owner Tezeta Alemayehu
T&T Lifestyle, Santa Monica, California*

- 16 ounces extra firm tofu
 - 1 teaspoon turmeric powder
 - 2 to 3 cloves garlic, finely grated
 - 1-inch piece ginger, finely grated
 - Kosher salt, to taste
 - Extra-virgin olive oil, as needed
 - 1 small tomato, diced
 - 1 cup red onion, diced
 - 2 cups fresh jute leaves
 - 2 tablespoons nutritional yeast
 - 1 to 2 jalapenos, deseeded, sliced or chopped
- Injera, or other flatbread**

Rinse tofu in cold water to remove residual liquid from the container, then dry gently with a paper towel. Using your hands, gently break and crumble the tofu into smaller, bite-sized pieces, adding the crumbled pieces into a bowl. Add turmeric, garlic, ginger and salt to taste and mix to coat the tofu evenly.

In a nonstick skillet with oil over medium-high heat, saute tofu for about 5 minutes until golden and crispy. Add tomatoes and onion, and cook 2 to 3 minutes longer.

Add the jute leaves; remove from the heat. Sprinkle with nutritional yeast and jalapenos. Drizzle over a little oil. Serve with injera or other flatbread, such as pita. Makes 2 to 3 servings.

Cold Jute Leaves with Dashi Shooter

*Chef Shota Nakajima
Seattle pop-up restaurants*

- Aomi dashi, recipe follows
- 150 grams jute leaves, blanched, shocked and drained
- 4 okra
- 100 ml dashi
- 20 ml soy
- 20 ml mirin
- 80 grams mountain yam, peeled

Combine aomi dashi and use half of it to marinate the jute leaves; set aside and chill.

Slice okra against the grain at 2 mm; blanch and shock in an ice water bath. Marinate in remaining aomi-dashi, set aside and chill.

Combine dashi, soy and mirin, bring to a boil and chill.

Grate mountain yam on a microplane to get the slime out.

To serve as a shot, pour mountain yam into a narrow but small glass container. Top with jute leaves and then okra and top with dashi.

To make aomi dashi: bring 100ml dashi, 10ml soy and 10 ml mirin to boil. Cool.

Jute by Any Other Name Would Be As Powerful

Ask a vendor about jute and you may get a quizzical look. Try a different name and the response will likely be different. The green with the wide, slightly jagged edges is also known as:

Egyptian spinach or melokhia in Africa and the Middle East

Ewedu in Nigeria

Jute mallow in Japan and Korea

Lalo in the Caribbean

Rau day in Vietnam

Saluyot in the Philippines

West African sorrel



Injera or other flatbread can be used to scoop up the egg scramble.

AND... WE'RE BACK!

By Andrea Strong
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Stephanie Hanes

Favorites,
tighter menus
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of indoor dining
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Over the past year

of the pandemic, restaurants have been pivoting at whirlspeed, stitching together a patchwork of revenue-generating ways to survive COVID-19's restrictions, from revised menus for off-premise dining and dinner kits to online booze sales and pantry items.

With the country all but vaccinated, the pall is lifting, and chefs are eagerly returning to normalcy—serving a la minute dishes without concern for travel time, cooking shareable meals, bringing back signatures that didn't fare well reheated, and recommitting to local farmers who have supported them during the public health crisis. For their part, customers are desperate for that cocoon of hospitality after months of cooking, serving and cleaning up after their families at home, industry experts say. The relationship couldn't be more symbiotic, mutually beneficial.

"Consumers crave contact and that sense of being taken care of and the simple pleasure of going into a place to sit down and stay a while, not rush to eat outside or at home," says Nick Mautone, a Seattle-based restaurant consultant and a former managing partner at Gramerey Tavern in New York City.

For Akhtar Nawab, the chef/owner of Alta Calidad, a modern Mexican cantina in Brooklyn, New York, the promise of waning case numbers and higher occupancy restaurants means shelving the mountains of takeout containers that have been lining every available space of his restaurant's small subterranean basement. Takeout and delivery have secured their importance but now must share the attention.

"We had to reconstruct our menu for food to-go that could be taken home and reheated, so I am excited to get back to dishes that taste best when served right away," Nawab says. He's thinking of comforting dishes that speaks summer, such as queso fresco gnudi with peak-of-the-season grilled corn esquites, calamari a la plancha in Mojo de Ajo with wilted

Family-style menus meet blistered corn for comforting gnudi esquites, a celebratory return to on-premise dining. Get the recipe on page 28.



"... EATING, DRINKING AND SOCIALIZING IS IN OUR DNA SO I'M HOPING FOR A RESTAURANT RENAISSANCE ..."

— Andrew Ridge of the NYC Hospitality Alliance



Summer Vegetable Panzanella Salad

*Chef de cuisine Ashley Goddard
Geordie's Restaurant at the Wrigley Mansion, Phoenix*

- ½ cup Banyuls vinegar**
- ⅓ cup honey**
- ⅓ cup whole grain mustard**
- 2 cups roasted vegetables (cherry tomatoes, cauliflower, striped beets, Brussels sprouts)**
- Kosher salt and black pepper, to taste**
- ½ shallot, thinly shaved**
- ½ peach, thinly shaved**
- ½ cup croutons**

Blend together vinegar, honey and mustard. Slowly add in olive oil to emulsify. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Toss with remaining ingredients. Makes 1 serving.



The bright colors of Summer Vegetable Panzanella reflects the joy of returning to on-premise dining.

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greens and blistered tomatoes, and shareable items that had to be removed from his menu, like his housemade 48-hour fermented roti topped with heirloom tomatoes and serrano crema.

Serving wow at the table

A return to festive shareable feasts is on the mind of Ari Bokovza, executive chef at the Middle Eastern restaurant Dagon on New York City's Upper West Side. "I am looking forward to getting back to full table participation and presenting food tableside," he said. "Dishes like whole fish, whole roasted chicken and a leg of lamb."

Bokovza says the pandemic has been particularly challenging for Dagon, a Middle Eastern restaurant built on a menu made for communal eating that adjusted to single servings and less contact among customers dining together (pita was served with a knife vs passing and tearing with one's hands). "I can't wait to get back to the energy of a dining experience that is inclusive and where everyone can be invited to participate," he says.

Consultants watching the industry say they expect to see a strong consumer demand for shareable, communal food once the pandemic is in the rear view mirror. "What people really miss are shared appetizers, passing platters from one to another, and large format dishes like pans of paella," Mautone says. "There is a real need for that imbibing and sharing mentality that you (couldn't) do with all the menu modifications and health mitigations and sanitary conditions. Communal sharing of foods will be one of the first things that comes back."

Break out the favorites

For a restaurant like Animal in Los Angeles, which has been operating as a grocery store since the pandemic hit, getting back to a "real" restaurant setting serving a roster of signature dishes is very appealing. "I want to do the OG Animal dishes that I hold close to my heart and

that are the foundation of my relationship to cooking," said Animal's partner and co-chef Jon Shook.

"Dishes like foie gras biscuits and gravy, hamachi tostada, chicken liver toast, balsamic barbecue ribs and rabbit larb. For those of us that have had to convert our restaurants to survive the pandemic on a drop of a hat, it will be rewarding to get back to the nostalgia of those classic dishes. It's like putting on an old album that just brings you back."

In regards to cocktails, Shook says he expects to see higher beverage bills in a post-pandemic summer. "On the drinking side, people want to be out visiting with friends and more of a Christmas-in-July kind of vibe. What people are missing is that festive interaction."

Smaller menus, bigger payout

But Shook says the Animal menu, which was topping out at 35 to 40 dishes, will be edited down. "We could never do full menu range," he says. "It's just too expensive with labor."

That said, the restaurant's five top-selling dishes usually represent 80% of overall gross sales. "So you can pull the top five and run those and add a few others that will keep the diner excited."

Mautone agrees that menus will need to be more streamlined post-pandemic—edited to offer fewer options with more ingredient cross-utilization to reduce cost, waste, and to turn over inventory quicker. "Now is the time to focus on what you do really well and what you can make money on and keep inventory tight and sales moving in the right direction," he advises. "Keep it brief, and maybe you change the menu more frequently than you used to."

Eating out is an occasion

At Geordie's Restaurant at the Wrigley Mansion in Phoenix, chef de cuisine Ashley Goddard has also noticed that her guests seem primed to celebrate, if only because

Simply eating mussels on-premise at Geordie's in Phoenix feels like an event after the pandemic, diners say.



10 Second Synopsis

What Your Summer Should Look Like

- Dishes that couldn't sustain travel
- Items best a la minute
- Foods that say celebration
- Smaller menus, streamlined for more cross-utilization
- Diner interest in luxe ingredients
- Bigger bar and wine tabs, especially for larger parties
- Christmas-in-July vibe

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they are out to dinner. Goddard says diners are yearning for celebratory foods and meals. “I honestly feel it’s such a big thing for people to be able to go out to eat now, and they want those big celebratory ingredients like truffles and caviar,” she said. “We sell quite a bit of it.”

But it’s not all about the Champagne and caviar for Goddard. She says the pandemic has strengthened her commitment to buying from local farmers. “This pandemic has changed my mindset,” she said. “Supporting local farmers used to be important, but now I see it as critical because so many small businesses have closed.”

A summer vegetable panzanella salad checks the local farm box while the salad says communal. Goddard is also playing with a lighter white vermouth-based sauce for a sous vide rabbit saddle also from a nearby farmer.

That sense of celebration will certainly be a welcome antidote to the fear and grief of the past year, one that promises not only to buoy a battered restaurant economy, but

also connections between friends, families and strangers neglected and frayed over the past year of social isolation.

“At the end of the day, eating and drinking and socializing is in our human DNA,” said Andrew Rigie, executive director of the NYC Hospitality Alliance, who has been advocating for the restaurant industry ever since the pandemic hit. “So I’m hoping for a restaurant renaissance— a new Roaring ‘20s.” ■

Roasted Lamb with Schug

*Executive chef Ari Bokovza
Dagon, New York City*

1 cup of schug, recipe follows
4 to 5 pound boneless leg of lamb
Kosher salt, as needed
Butcher’s twine, as needed
½ cup coriander, coarsely crushed
½ cup black pepper, coarsely crushed
½ cup brown sugar
Olive oil, as needed

Rub the schug all over the surface of the lamb, and season with salt. Tie up the leg with butcher’s twine to form a cylinder shape.

Combine the pepper, sugar and coriander. Brush the “roulade” of lamb with olive oil and season the lamb with the dried mixture. Season aggressively. Season the outside with kosher salt.

Roast lamb in a heated 325 F oven to 125 F. Remove, tent and rest for 30 minutes. Remove twine and slice to desired thickness. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

To make schug: In a food processor, combine 4 ounces jalapeno, seeded; 3 large garlic cloves; 1 fresh squeezed lemon; 40 grams parsley, blanched and shocked; 40 grams cilantro, leaves only; 1 tablespoon cumin, toasted and ground; and 1 tablespoon coriander, toasted and ground. Pulse and slowly add 400 grams extra-virgin olive oil and pinch of citric acid. Pulse until combined.

Gnudi with Sweet Corn Esquites

*Chef Akhtar Nawab
Alta Calidad, Brooklyn, New York*

454 grams sheep’s milk ricotta
50 grams queso fresco, plus more to garnish
15 grams kosher salt
10 grams aji amarillo chili paste
1000 grams semolina flour
6 ears of corn, peeled, silk removed
1 tablespoon oil
1 tablespoon chipotle butter
Cilantro sprigs, to garnish
Small cherry tomatoes, to garnish
Dehydrated corn powder, as needed

In a large bowl, combine ricotta, 50 grams queso fresco, salt and chili paste. Chill the mixture and shape into small ball-shaped dumplings.

Pour the semolina into a tall sided container. Add the dumplings and bury in the semolina and leave to refrigerate for 3 days. After the curing process the dumplings should be firm.

Bring a pot of water to a boil and season generously. Poach dumplings until they float and cool in an ice bath.

Shave the kernels off of 3 ears of corn and run through a juicer. Save the pulp and add to a dehydrator to create a powder from the corn peels.

Add the corn juice to a pot and cook whisking constantly until thickened, about 180 F. Remove kernels from remaining corn, heat oil and blister the kernels. Pour the blistered corn into the corn juice.

Add chipotle butter and over low heat, cook until the corn is tender. Add the dumplings and heat through.

Serve with cilantro, cherry tomatoes, a sprinkling of queso fresco and a generous dusting of the corn powder. Makes 5 to 6 servings.

Two restaurateurs, same excitement

“You build a restaurant and create an environment for guests to come and be taken care of. I can’t wait until we can get people inside our dining room again and we can hear that noise of the restaurant and feel that buzz.”

—Jon Shook, chef/owner of Animal and other Los Angeles restaurants

“It used to be that we’d get a call from a regular when we were booked up and we’d be able to fit them in, but with the indoor dining caps it would be illegal to do so. We are excited to be able to welcome our regulars (especially for birthdays and celebrations) and give them their usual table where they are used to celebrating with us.”

—Trey Smith, chef/owner of Saint Germaine in New Orleans



BETTER
BY THE
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Reap the
benefits of
premixed
cocktails

By Dave Cathey
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Stephanie Hanes

▼
With a summer expected to blow out booze sales like no other, batching cocktails and spirits could be a way to expedite with speed and precision to ensure the most profitable tabs.

“It’s just such a win-win solution,” says Alex Larrea, food and beverage director for Ponyboy and The Tower Theatre in Oklahoma City. “You think about that in terms of labor, guest experience, wait times, and if you do it right, you don’t end up wasting anything.” Larrea isn’t alone.

“Traditional craft cocktails can be a struggle to get out quickly, but batching simplifies our lives during a rush,” says Ryan Goodman, bar manager for Rococo Bar and Grill in Oklahoma City. “On-tap cocktails completely batched can be a lifesaver on a busy shift without harming quality.”



Get the recipe
for the Contessa
on page 32.

NEW BATCH OF INFORMATION

Larrea, who serves on national and local boards for the United States Bartenders Guild, is responsible for service at Ponyboy and the adjacent Tower Theatre, a concert venue and cinema. That requires a blend of large-format services with an intimate daily craft cocktail program.

Batching concepts allow Larrea and bar manager Josiah Reeder to approach both with the same philosophy.

“Batching has evolved from the days of shaking strawberry vodka, lemon juice and sugar in a bucket to get 8 bucks a shot from college kids,” Larrea says. He and Goodman agree bar programs need a better understanding of how batch-and-bottle, batch-and-keg, and spirit-blending can help.

“Combining spirits for a cocktail saves bottle touches, reduces complexity for the bartender, saves space, and improves speed,” Goodman says. “Essentially, any shelf-stable spirit can be combined with another shelf-stable spirit.”

It may not sound like a lot, but blended shelf-stable spirits eliminate a few seconds off every craft cocktail, Larrea says. “If you’re serving cocktails with three to four components and two of them are shelf-stable spirits, then go ahead and combine them. Those seconds you saved will show up in your bottom line.”

At Goodman’s neighborhood setting, the practice is entrenched. “We do this on every drink we can at Rococo, and I have no concern about quality decreasing,” Goodman says.

SOLVE THE CITRUS ISSUE

Complications arise when fresh ingredients arrive, citrus in particular. “Doing batched cocktails with citrus is, in general, not a good idea,” Goodman says. “The alcohol denatures the citrus, causing rapid decomposition.”

Goodman uses powdered acid lime substitute for his kegged Rococo Water, a



See recipe below for the Contessa cocktail.

play on classic Branch Water. “Organics in kegs and keg lines can decompose in pretty disgusting ways, and quickly degrade.” The rule, however, has exceptions.

“If you’re doing a cocktail same-day, go ahead and add your citrus,” Larrea says. “If it’s overnight, do a spirit-bottle blend, for keg cocktails.” Goodman recommends brushing up on citric acids for more details.

It’s a matter of cost thanks to unpasteurized juice’s short shelf-life. “The last thing you want to do is to pull someone from the kitchen to produce three days’ worth of juice that’s only going to be good for a few hours,” Larrea says.

PARTY TIME

Larrea spent a year working for Vault Ice, which included setting up bars at galas and events.

“I did the batches for Willie Nelson’s Luck Reunion (Luck, Texas), and I remember being in a UHaul with like 300 18-gallon painters buckets full of cocktails,” he says. “Jigger-pouring is a lot less important in those instances.”

Usually a cost control, Larrea says when the product is already purchased “just as a batching concept, you stop using the jigger and you just free pour and smile and get those great photos with the guests because the mix is already there.”

Larrea warns batching cocktails for large events doesn’t allow one-to-one scale-up.

“It’s a little more like building a stock in a stock pot,” he says. “For those, I always

Better Batching 10 Second Synopsis

- » Cuts prep time
- » Any shelf-stable spirit can be combined with another shelf-stable spirit
- » Helps with consistency
- » Avoid citrus unless using a substitute or planning on serving the same day
- » Watches waste; cost like single-serve cocktails
- » Easily capitalizes on fresh, seasonal fruit

Contessa

Food and beverage director Alex Larrea and Bar Manager Josiah Reed
Ponyboy, Oklahoma City

- 8 ounces Aperol
- 8 ounces dry vermouth
- 8 ounces London Dry Gin
- 5 drops orange blossom water
- 12 ounces water
- 1 orange

Add all ingredients into a large pitcher. Serve 4.5 ounces over a half rocks glass of ice. Use a wide peeler and garnish with an orange tongue. Makes 8 servings in a batch.



Coffee Cocktail

Bar manager Ryan Goodman
Rococo Bar and Grill, Oklahoma City

- 8 ounces cold brew
- 4 ounces blackheart rum
- 4 ounces brandy
- 2 ounces cioco carciofaro
(can substitute Cynar)
- 2 ounces Demerara sugar
- 8 ounces soda water

Combine all ingredients and store in bottle. Add ice to a Collins glass, add 4 ounces batch and top with 2 ounces soda water. Makes 5 servings.

like to start with a sweetener base, work in the spirit and finish with any citrus juice in the recipe.”

Stirred, boozy builds sans citrus work a little better one-to-one. “You even need to curtail the spirit a little bit because it can stick through a little too strong,” Larrea says.

KEEP COSTING SIMPLE

Bookkeeping software and a simple approach is all that’s needed for batching. “I cost batches literally the same way I cost my single-serve cocktails. Because yes, I can do it faster, but those savings don’t necessarily get passed off to the guest. It’s for their benefit that they’ve been batched, but I’m taking the risk of maybe I’m not going to be able to sell off that last six or seven of them.”

Larrea does scale one-to-one for costing his batched cocktails.

“It’s just really simple math working up individual costs. It doesn’t really change from what you’re trying to earn off at individual cocktails, and that’s why avoiding waste is so important,” he says. ■

Ponyboy White Sangria

*Food and beverage director Alex Larrea and Bar Manager Josiah Reed
Ponyboy, Oklahoma City*

- 1 750 ml Sauvignon Blanc
- 12 mint leaves
- 6 ounces peach brandy
- 6 ounces honey
- 4 ounces cucumber vodka
- 2 peaches, sliced into wedges
- 1 cucumber, thinly sliced
- 1 lemon, sliced into wheels
- 12 ounces sparkling water, such as Topo Chico

Add all ingredients except the sparkling water into a large pitcher. Stir well and refrigerate for 1 to 3 hours.

If serving by the pitcher, add sparkling water and stir gently, making 8 servings. For an individual serving, pour 6 ounces over ice in a medium to large wine glass and garnish with mint, peach slice and cucumber.



More is Better

Additional tips for batching cocktails

With no crystal ball and COVID-19 ready to rear its ugly head at any time with variant strains, it pays to have “just in case” measures ready, such as starting or continuing bottled cocktails to-go.

Be sure to either label the bottle or mention a drink-by date on the menu.

If the cocktail calls for citrus, offer it on the side with instructions. Because citrus degrades batched cocktails, Josiah Reeder, bar manager at Ponyboy and The Tower Theatre, replaces citrus juice with garnishes and oil from fresh fruits.

To make the most of batched cocktails to-go and for on-premise, consider making one that speaks of the vibe, concept and food of the restaurant. It all helps with marketing on your website and social platforms.



Riffing on sangria is only limited by imagination.

THE X FACTOR

The one thing that keeps a particular burger a must-have



By Amber Gibson / Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson / Prop styling by Stephanie Hanes

▼ In a trend-driven dining landscape with fickle customers, burgers are bulletproof.

Its portability, comfort food standing and innumerable ways to riff on the classic patty and bun made it a menu must-have during the pandemic. But even as indoor dining resumes, one truth remains: The wow factor sets it apart.

From Canlis in Seattle to Noma in Copenhagen, the burger's unlikely presence on a fine dining menu was the extra pow to draw crowds last year for an already expected stellar burger based on reputation alone. Even in a sea of fast-food options under \$10, the standout element could be a point of differentiation, such as a sprinkle of salt on the patties and grilled medium instead of well-done like at Tasty Burger, the Boston-based regional chain.

In today's competitive market, regardless of pent-up demand from a pandemic, quality is a given. So whether a menu offers a solo star burger or many, including the ever-growing plant-based option, the X factor makes it an enduring bestseller. Here, chefs identify the ingredient that puts an already sensational burger over the top.

BERRY CHEESY BUTCHER BURGER

Chef William Lara, Chop Shop, Chicago

» **Components:** 8-ounce Mishima Reserve American Wagyu patty, blueberry cheddar, tomato onion jam, sliced pickled strawberries, brioche bun

» **Standout element:** Housemade tomato onion jam on the bottom bun is sweet and spicy but doesn't overwhelm the wagyu.

» **Price:** \$16

Fans have their favorites at Roam, right, but the Tejano burger stands out with the crunch of tortilla chips. See page 41.

THE BBQ BURGER

Chef Sue Bette, Bluebird Barbecue, Burlington, Vermont

» **Components:** 4-ounce Pineland Farms beef patty, Vermont-made Cabot American cheese, slow-smoked chopped brisket, housemade bread and butter pickles, and housemade Mountain Maple barbecue sauce

» **Standout element:** The brisket is slowly smoked for 15 hours, then lightly tossed in a maple BBQ sauce made with local Runamok maple syrup for classic burger meets BBQ in the same bite.

» **Price:** \$15

KALI BURGER

Chef Kevin Meehan, Kali, Los Angeles

» **Components:** 8-ounce dry-aged Flannery beef, black garlic ketchup, Fiscalini cheddar, arugula, caramelized onions and a housemade bun

» **Standout element:** Burger blend by Flannery using 25% prime filet, 50% prime dry-aged New York strip and 25% hanger steak. It's juicy, funky and not too tough.

» **Price:** \$18.50

MIYAZAKI A5 STEAK BURGER

Chef Hiroki Odo, HALL by ODO, New York

» **Components:** 4-ounce A5 Miyazaki wagyu beef patty, 3-ounces of sliced A5 Miyazaki wagyu rib-eye, real wasabi, housemade sansho pepper sauce, Boston lettuce, beefsteak tomato, American cheese, onion bun

» **Standout element:** A5 Miyazaki wagyu rib-eye is sliced and served rare. Servers suggest eating a few pieces of steak on its own first, then enjoying as a burger. Half of all orders include this burger, making it a bestseller.

» **Price:** \$20.21



Grind On

Restaurant burger blends typically range between an 85/15 to 80/20 ratio of lean to fat. **Roam Artisan Burgers favors an 80/20 ratio** because they source 100% grass-fed and finished beef from 4K Farms in Stillwater, Montana, so the animal is leaner. **"Fat is flavor,"** says owner Joshua Spiegelman. **"And just like wild salmon, this fat is high in Omega 3s, so actually, from a health and taste perspective, more fat is better."** Grinding their own burgers would be too labor intensive, so they rely on Golden Gate Meats to grind fresh meat and deliver daily.

Long-time purveyor Pat LaFrieda sells 50 burger blends using various whole muscles to create distinct flavor profiles for clients including Minetta Tavern, Shake Shack and The Beatrice Inn. Like Roam, LaFrieda aims for an 80/20 ratio and has a step-by-step guide to grinding your own burgers in his book, "Meat: Everything You Need to Know."

Flannery Beef specializes in dry-aged burger blends, using higher-end cuts like rib-eye and New York strip. Black Tap Craft Burgers & Beer goes as high as 73/27 ratio with their burgers, using a blend of ground brisket and chuck and Fleming's takes it to 70/30 for their prime burger.

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THE CHEESY TODD

Chef Suzanne Perry, Datz, Tampa Bay

» **Components:** 8-ounce Angus beef patty made of ground beef and short rib, topped with American cheese, lettuce, tomato, red onion and pickles.

» **Standout element:** Two deep-fried slabs of bacon jalapeño mac-n-cheese replace the bun. It's been the top-selling item since its 2014 debut. "The deep-fried panko coating still offers a base to soak up all the juicy deliciousness from the burger for extra flavor," Perry says.

» **Price:** \$15

TEJANO BURGER

Executive chef and co-owner Lynn Gorfinkle, Roam Artisan Burgers, San Francisco

» **Components:** A 5-ounce grass-fed beef, free-range turkey, all-natural bison or housemade veggie patty with jalapeño relish, herb ranch, housemade corn strips, avocado, pepper jack cheese, sesame seed bun

» **Standout element:** White corn strips for a hearty, unexpected crunch

» **Price:** \$11.99 (\$2.99 upcharge for bison)

UMAMI DOUBLE TRUFFLE BURGER

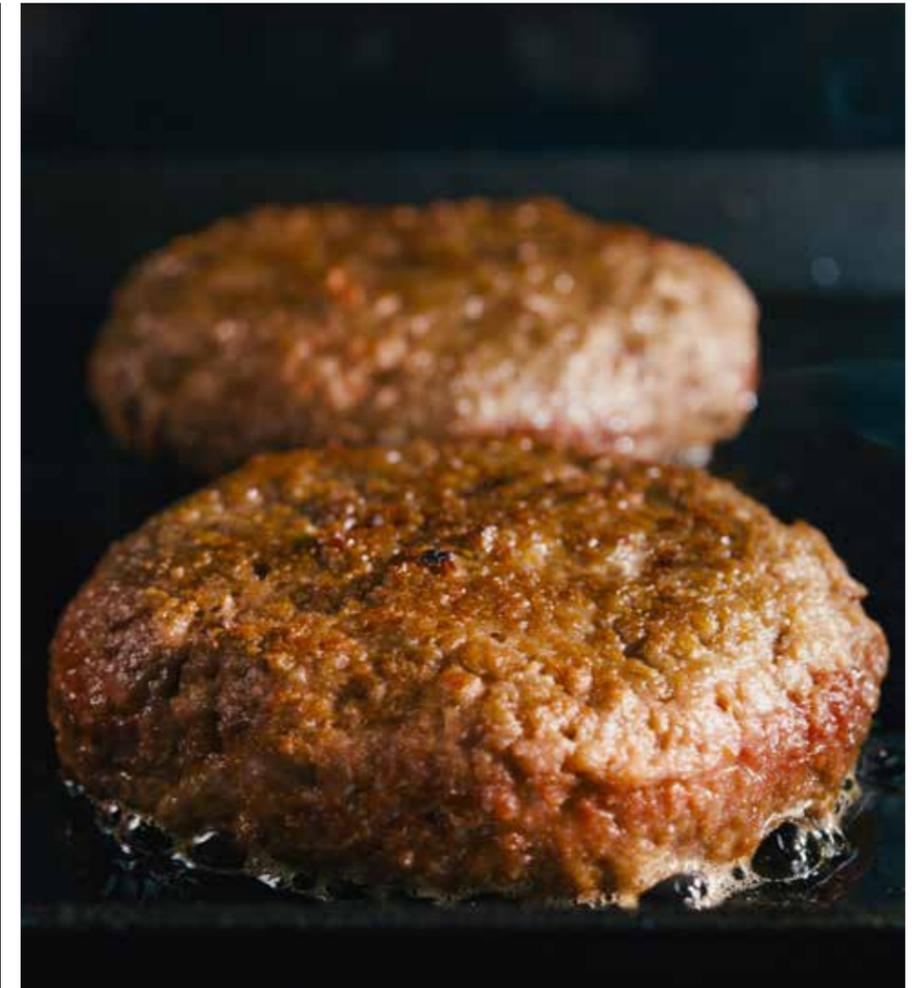
Chef Adam Fleischman, Umami Burger, Los Angeles

» **Components:** Two 4-ounce beef patties, truffle cheese fondue, truffle aioli, truffle glaze

» **Standout element:** Truffle fondue, made in-house with tartufo scorzones or black summer truffles from Tuscany, adds a delicate and luscious layered burger

» **Price:** \$9.99

PHOTOGRAPHY © IMPOSSIBLE BURGER



Ground Up: Plant-Based Patties

Just being a plant-based patty can be the draw whether it's made **in-house** or by **Impossible Burger** or **Beyond Burger**. But to be a bestseller, it first has to be treated right.

Impossible burgers are sold pre-seasoned, so there's no need for additional seasoning. Don't bother smashing these patties on a flat top or char grill—they don't produce the same Maillard reaction as beef.

"The patties are just as sensitive to over cooking as beef is and will become dry and hard if overcooked," says Umami Burger's senior director of openings Vincenzo Rossy. He recommends cooking Impossible Burgers to medium well so there is a faint light pink line in the very center. "Because of the delicate nature of the patties, they will lose structural integrity, so are best cooked on a flat top grill or nonstick fry pan."



House-cured bacon is the Vig burger's stand out ingredient.

Tejano Burger

Executive chef and co-owner Lynn Gorfinkle
Roam Artisan Burgers, San Francisco

- Extra-virgin olive oil, as needed
- 1 sesame seed bun
- 5-ounce grass-fed beef patty
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper, freshly ground
- 1 slice pepper jack cheese
- 1 ounce thick ranch dressing, your recipe
- ½ teaspoon chives, minced
- 6 white corn strips, ¼-inch thick
- 1 ounce jalapeño relish, recipe follows
- 2 slices red ripe tomato
- ¼ avocado, fanned

In a medium saute pan over medium-high heat, add 1 tablespoon of oil to toast the bun perfectly brown; set aside.

Season both sides of the patty with salt and pepper. Add more oil to the hot pan and cook one side for a few minutes, until caramelized. Flip the patty, cook another minute, add cheese. Cook until the cheese is melted and the patty reaches the desired temperature.

Combine ranch with chives and spread a thick layer on both buns. Place the cooked patty with cheese on the bottom bun. Add the white corn strips on top of the melted cheese, which will help hold them on the burger.

On the top bun, add the jalapeño relish on top of the herb ranch. Add the tomato and fanned avocado.

Carefully flip the top bun with all of the toppings onto the white corn strips, bottom bun. Half wrap the burger with parchment paper.

To make pickled relish: Combine 6 ounces pickles, 6 ounces sliced pickled jalapenos, 2 ounces pickled onions, 2 ounces pickled garlic and 2 ounces pickled fennel in a food processor. Chop and stir in 2 tablespoons of chipotle hot sauce or to taste.

The Cheesy Todd below; Umami options, including the Truffle Double, right, at clockwise.



Vig Burger

Chef Jeremy Pacheco
The Vig, Phoenix

- 1 challah burger bun, buttered
- 7 ounce burger patty
- 1 thick slice cheddar cheese
- 2 ounces Vig sauce, recipe follows
- 5 pickled jalapeño slices
- 2 ounces balsamic onions, recipe follows
- 2 thick-slices house-cured bacon, cooked
- Leaf lettuce

Toast bun on flat top until golden brown; set aside. Grill burger to desired temperature and melt cheddar on burger.

Top bottom of bun with Vig sauce and 4 slices of pickled jalapenos. Top with burger patty, balsamic onions, bacon, leaf lettuce and top of bun and a pick with a pickled jalapeno slice. Makes 1 serving.

To make Vig sauce: Combine 2 cups mayonnaise with ½ cup ketchup, ¼ cup chopped pickles, ¼ cup Sriracha sauce, 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce, ¾ teaspoon kosher salt and ¾ teaspoon black pepper.

To make balsamic onions: Sweat 6 julienned red onions in 1 tablespoon olive oil over medium-low heat until they start to caramelize. Add ¼ cup brown sugar to help the process and then add 1 cup balsamic vinegar. Reduce until jammy.



VIG BURGER

Chef Jeremy Pacheco, The Vig, Phoenix

- » **Components:** 7-ounce Rovey Dairy Wagyu beef, cheddar cheese, smashed avocado, balsamic onions, pickled jalapeño, grilled house bacon, Vig sauce
- » **Standout element:** Made from 100% Iowa Duroc pork, the belly is cured for five days with celery juice, no nitrates, then dried for two days and smoked for three hours over hardwood.
- » **Price:** \$17

WILD BOAR BURGER

Chef Linda Hampsten Fox, The Bindery, Denver

- » **Components:** 8-ounce patty (75% wild boar and 25% top sirloin), bourbon brown sugar caramelized onions, black garlic aioli, aged sharp cheddar, pickled escabeche, seeded brioche bun
- » **Standout element:** Wild boar, lean but uniquely flavorful, is ground weekly in-house. Burger starts on the grill for a smoky start but finished in the oven so it stays juicy inside and out.
- » **Price:** \$19

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Dos and Don'ts for the Ultimate Burger

DO...

- » Butter and toast the bun
- » Season liberally with salt and pepper only
- » Press down a little on the patty to fully caramelize on the flat top griddle
- » Let burgers rest briefly after cooking to avoid making the bun soggy

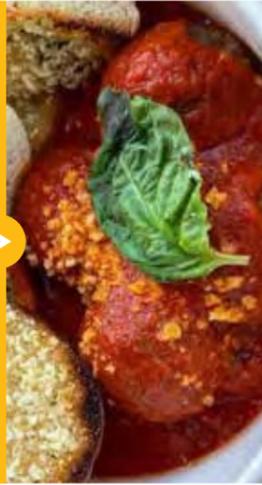
DON'T...

- » Bother with tasteless tomatoes
- » Overdo seasoning—quality meat should stand on its own
- » Let the juices escape
- » Press down on your burgers too much while cooking; moisture is lost each time
- » Overwork your meat when preparing patties by squeezing or kneading ■



The Tejano burger cinches the top spot with crunch from tortilla chips.

ON THE RADAR



Ballin.

Can a meatless meatball concept draw enough customers? Brothers Meatballs that opened earlier this year in Los Angeles is proving yes right now. The plant-based meatballs appear in sandwiches and plates, both with a variety of sauces including truffle Alfredo and green tomato arugula pesto.



When you cross a website builder with a reservation and online ordering system.

Squarespace's recent \$400 million acquisition of Tock will allow diners to transact and interact more directly and more seamlessly with restaurants through smarter prefab websites. Watch your back, third party apps.



THE NEW "OTHER" WHITE MEAT.

Yuba, meet your lower food cost, plant-based counterpart: dried bean curd. Rehydrate, season liberally and add it to soup, stir-fry or protein bowls.

► **LAST SEEN:** Kimchi fried rice a la plancha at San Francisco's State Bird Provisions include strips of bean curd, adding another flavor-carrying texture to nubs of crispy medium grain rice.



Juicy fruit.

Strawberries may always say spring but customers want them juicy and sweet year-round. Using technology that measures sugar content, Driscoll Strawberries is incentivizing its 1,000 growers to produce sweeter berries.

HIGH ALERT



Testing...1-2-3 testing.

An eager audience makes for excellent test subjects for new or updated menu ideas.

► **LAST SEEN:** Instead of a takeout rendition of his 3-star Michelin menu, Benu chef/owner Corey Lee debuted dishes for his new Korean concept, San Ho Won, slated to open this fall. The meticulously prepped, multicourse \$49 prix-fixe, takeout-only menu crushed it.

BEAUTY AND BRAINS.

Watermelon radishes are this year's nasturtiums. No one's knocking edible flowers, but this heirloom daikon rocks beauty, flavor, crunch, color and high nutritional value, as in calcium, potassium and folate.



The next ramen?

Hinoya Curry has opened its first U.S. location in San Francisco, hoping that the sweet and salty flavors of Japanese curry will be as industry-changing as ramen.



In a pickle.

Seasonal fruit's got game but it can be so much more by using various methods to draw out different attributes. The arugula salad at Chicago's Coda di Volpe includes two types of grapes—pickled and roasted—tossed with fried almonds, pecorino and lemon citronette.

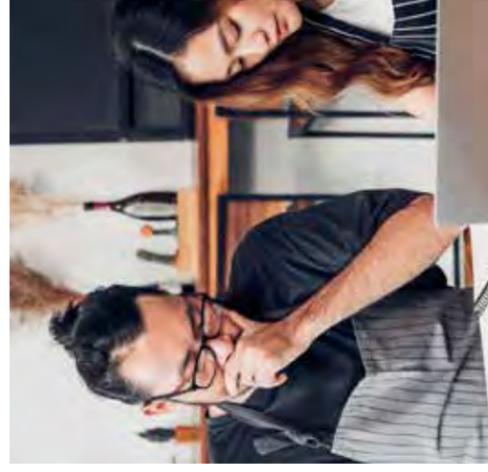
FADING OUT



Leave the big top with the circus.

Throwing up a tent in the parking lot and dragging indoor furniture outside may have cut it a year ago but now, not so much.

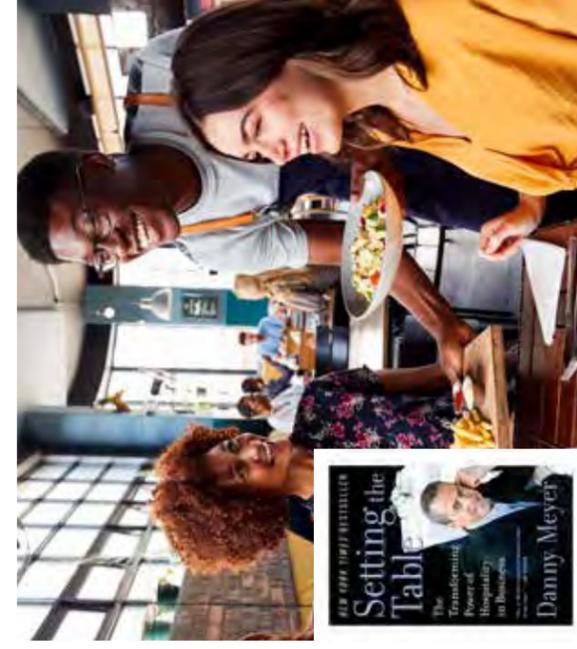
► **TRY THIS INSTEAD:** Up your outdoor dining game by creating an atmosphere that works with your concept through plants, drapery, lighting and tabletops. The competition won't allow for afterthoughts.



Fee for all.

It's a good time for adjusting prices (see story on page 46) but that doesn't mean piling it on. The Vault in San Francisco charges a \$3.32 fee for propane that's in addition to the city's mandated 5% fee for worker health insurance. The mandate, sure, but it's on the diner to be comfortable?

► **TRY THIS INSTEAD:** Add a service fee and briefly explain what it's for, including the added cost of operating outdoors. It's easier for diners to swallow one additional cost versus three.



The kindness of strangers.

People's memories are short; the good will of diners who have been forgiving of missteps during the pandemic won't last forever.

► **TRY THIS INSTEAD:** Meet and exceed expectations. Read/reread Danny Meyer's 2008 "Setting the Table: The Transforming Power of Hospitality in Business."



hit
refresh

The time is now for adjusting prices and policies

By Novid Parsi

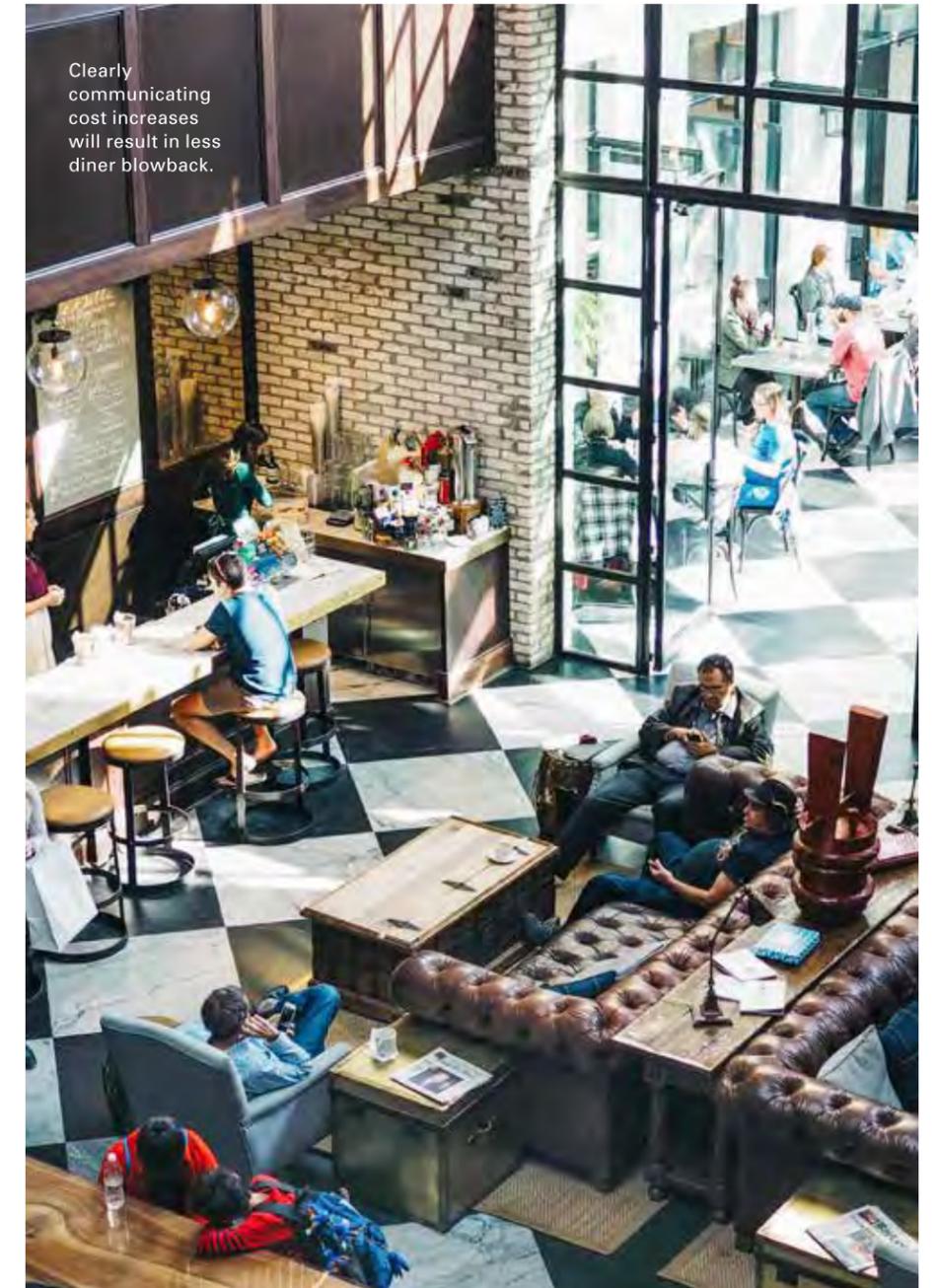
After a year unlike any other, restaurant owners are finding that the pandemic may have an unexpected upside: There's no better time to hit the reset button.

The “dirty little secret,” as Michael Roper calls it, is now out: “Restaurant food is vastly underpriced,” says Roper, who has owned Chicago gastropub Hopleaf since it opened in 1992. “We’re at a unique moment where customers understand more about the restaurant business than ever before.”

Roper and other operators hope to take advantage of this moment by raising prices and introducing charges to improve historically razor-thin margins and low workers’ wages.

Still, in today’s uncertain climate, such moves cannot be made capriciously. “When restaurants are on life support ... and when we have a consumer that is fearful and challenged, it’s hard to build in higher charges,” cautions Stephen Zagor, a New York-based restaurant consultant and educator.

Yet that’s precisely the route operators are taking—with notable success—by following a strategic and methodical plan.



Clearly communicating cost increases will result in less diner blowback.

“WE’RE AT A UNIQUE MOMENT WHERE CUSTOMERS UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT THE RESTAURANT BUSINESS THAN EVER BEFORE.”

—Michael Roper of Hopleaf on why now is the time to implement change

▶ 1 TAKE AN ITEM-BY-ITEM APPROACH TO RAISING PRICES

Hopleaf, a beloved neighborhood restaurant, serves elevated pub cuisine that's costly to source and labor intensive. Roper felt he always had to compete on price with national chains. "Now we charge what we need to charge," he says.

To prepare for resuming on-premise dining this year, Roper looked at the expense and profit margin of every menu item. Overall, the prices of about half the menu increased—but not significantly. Sandwiches cost \$1 or \$2 more, and draft beers are an additional 25 to 50 cents. Some of the onetime loss leaders, like the steak, will increase by \$5 to \$7; others, like a duck Reuben sandwich, will become occasional specials.

Such per-item changes can make a big difference to the bottom line, proving that a little can go a long way.



Hopleaf reduced its offerings, top, to control costs while Zazie uses an all-inclusive model.

▶ 2 GO ALL INCLUSIVE

Zazie, a bistro and brunch hotspot in San Francisco, takes a "whole picture" method as a way to more equitable pay through an all-inclusive model. Six years ago, it eliminated tipping and raised menu prices around 20%. Now, Zazie's servers get 12% of their sales, while the back of the house and support staff split 12% of the restaurant's sales during their shifts.

"It evened out the playing field for the back and front of the house," says Zazie co-owner Megan Cornelius. "This model is not only possible but profitable."

The prix-fixe menu should allow for a mix of lower and higher food costs items, but instead of a loss leader, add a supplemental price. At The Vault in San Francisco, for example, the lamb loin tartine entree choice had a \$10 supplement price for the \$49 prix-fixe brunch that included four starters and two desserts to share.

▼ 3 REPLACE TIPPING WITH A SERVICE CHARGE

Operators can point to a variety of reasons why eliminating tipping failed to achieve mass adoption several years ago. But that was before the pandemic that has permanently or temporarily closed more than 110,000 restaurants nationwide and

service charges became commonplace as way to offset charges from third-party apps and pay furloughed workers.

"Tipping creates massive wage disparity and is certainly discriminatory," says Nick Kokonas, CEO of reservations system Tock and co-owner of the Alinea Group, which includes world-renowned Alinea and several other Chicago establishments. When The Alinea Group eliminated tipping and replaced it with a flat 20% service charge a decade ago, the company was able to provide higher, more stable wages to all staff as well as health care and other benefits, Kokonas says.

While it helps to be Michelin-starred like Alinea to succeed, Thamee, a Burmese restaurant in Washington, D.C., is proving that such an approach can work for casual restaurants. Thamee cut tipping and implemented a flat 30% service charge last July. "It goes to our employees directly and also indirectly through their benefits," says Eric Wang, co-founder and partner. Half of the charge goes toward workers' pay, the other half toward their health insurance and other benefits.

Thamee's customers, Wang says, did not complain and most asked to leave a tip in addition to the service charge.

Wang says he's looking into a hybrid approach that can allow the front of house to accept tips while a service charge supplements back of house wages.

When the pandemic forced Elmwood in St. Louis to switch from fine dining to takeout pizza, it bolstered its workers' wages by introducing a 19% service charge—a much easier sell than increased menu prices, according to owner-operator Chris Kelling. That service charge got the front and back of house within "reasonable proximity" of their pre-pandemic pay, he says. When it reopens its in-person dining, Elmwood will keep a similar service charge.

"We want our people to make a living wage," Kelling says.

Want to increase prices and/or introduce new charges?

CONSIDER THIS CHECKLIST

- ▶ Instead of raising all prices, consider a more surgical approach. Evaluate each menu item and determine exactly the amount needed to make the dish more profitable.
- ▶ Don't hide any pricing changes. Communicate them—and the reasons for them—on your menu, website and social media channels.
- ▶ Be prepared to discuss changes with customers to avoid or temper backlash.
- ▶ Get the team's buy-in. Servers are on the front lines selling it.
- ▶ Be prepared to pivot. Sometimes the initial changes may not work so be flexible and listen to your staff.
- ▶ Consider what works best for you and your people. **"You have to look at your unique circumstances and see what is the math that will make sense," says Eric Wang, co-founder and partner of Thamee. That starts with paying yourself an equitable wage as the owner. "If the business isn't supporting you, how can you take care of other people?"**



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Thamee, a casual restaurant, right, proved a flat 30% service charge isn't reserved only for fining dining.



6 COMMUNICATE CHANGES

The lack of blowback from customers on policy changes might be the result of pandemic goodwill and the public's better understanding of restaurant operations. But restaurateurs like Wang, Roper and Zazie say success on hitting reset also hinges on transparency and clear communication about the charges and the reasons for them.

Thamee announced its service-charge policy as “Our Flat30 Manifesto” on its website, subscriber emails and social media platforms—explaining that it provides a livable wage, health benefits and profit sharing.

Instead of shying away from its higher prices, Zazie proudly touts it at the top of its menu and on its website, explaining that all menu prices include a living wage, revenue share and other benefits, and that no tips are expected. “I can't tell you how many times people take photos of that and post it on Instagram,” Cornelius says. ■

“MULTIPLE RESERVATION TYPES—FREE, DEPOSIT AND PREPAID—NEED TO BE UTILIZED TO CUT NO-SHOW RATES.”

—Nick Kokonas, CEO of reservations system Tock and co-owner of The Alinea Group



4 PRICE LIKE THE AIRLINES

Travelers expect to pay more to fly at peak times while lower fares are offered on traditionally slower days or less preferred times. Why can't operators follow a similar approach?

Since 2011, The Alinea Group practiced variable pricing, charging more at busier times, less at slower times but starting at a base with a solid profit margin. Pre-pandemic, dining at Alinea cost \$70 less per person on a Tuesday than on a Saturday night. “This ensured we were full every night of the week,” Kokonas says.

“This is economics 101,” he says. “Pricing should move in two directions to either take advantage of excess demand during busy times or increase demand during slow times.”



5 REQUIRE DEPOSITS FOR RESERVATIONS

“Multiple reservation types—free, deposit and prepaid—need to be utilized to cut no-show rates,” Kokonas says. His reservations platform, Tock, allows customers to make all three types of reservations. Used by over 7,000 restaurants, Tock says deposits, along with automated text and email reminders, reduce no-shows to under 3%. Prepaid reduces it to under 1%.

After Elmwood reopens its fine dining space, Kelling expects to require a nonrefundable deposit, likely about \$50, for parties of six or more. In addition, he thinks his reservation times will come with a two-hour maximum table time.

Balancing



Act



Toss or juggle the lifesaving revenue streams from the pandemic?



By Andrea Strong





STEP 1 Know your Budget and Break Even

▼ Pivoting on a dime— cutting staff, shifting operations, and adding revenue streams

from groceries, meal kits, takeout, delivery, virtual cook-along classes and even toilet paper—has kept restaurants afloat during the pandemic.

But changes that once helped could now hinder as restaurants return to full-capacity indoor dining. Which additional revenue streams should remain? Which pivots should be abandoned? And how can restaurants staff appropriately and scale operations without breaking the bank and sliding backwards?

The answers, experts say, are not one-size-fits-all. Success in the next phase of pandemic recovery will depend on an operator's ability to stick to a budget and at least break even, stay on brand, streamline operations, communicate well, and above all else, remain nimble in the face of an ever-evolving public health landscape.

Before any decisions about pivoting back can be made, certain financial benchmarks must be put in place.

"The first thing you need to have, and this is not optional, is a budget and a break-even," says Matt Vannini, a fourth generation restaurateur and the CEO of Restaurant Accounting Solutions Inc., which provides financial operational management services to restaurants.

"Without a budget to show you what you

want to achieve for revenue and cost targets, and a break-even to show you what the floor is, you cannot know what decision to make in terms of labor and operations."

Once you have your budget and break-even, Vannini says it's time to examine the pivots you've made to stay solvent and to determine which make sense to your brand and business.



STEP 2 Find the Sweet Spot

If your pivot is making money, experts say to keep it up, but monitor its impact. For instance, attitudes about dining may not shift back overnight, so the demand delivery and takeout may continue to evolve.

"If you were doing 15% to 20% delivery with 50% dining room, if you think that with 100% occupancy, that delivery will go down to zero, you are wrong," says Vannini. "Your business has shown the dining public that it can achieve the same quality product in the comfort of their homes. You don't know what folks will be comfortable with when dining gets up to 100%."

He adds that delivery and takeout offer lower margin meals and should not be quickly abandoned—especially for restaurants with fewer than 100 seats. It's not worth the loss of delivery to go to full capacity indoors, Vannini says. **"Keep the pedal to the metal on that delivery to make a lower-cost meal,"** he says. "You have to continue to invest in your takeout and

delivery. If there's one thing I have learned (it's that) your digital brand is just as important now if not more than your physical structure."

Other consultants are not as sure. Beatrice Stein, an NYC-based restaurant consultant imagines that post-COVID dining will be like the Roaring '20s. **"Many of the things we have been doing this year will fall by the wayside because I think people want to be out and sociable,"** she says. "I think we will see a drop in things like meal kits and delivery. Eating out will become more desirable."

Dan Kluger, the chef and owner of Loring Place in Manhattan's Greenwich Village, says he will continue offering takeout and delivery even when he reaches full capacity indoors and outdoors. "We will keep it up as long as possible," he said. "We invested a ton of money in building it out. I certainly feel like I am taxing the team with all these different things, but everyone is on board to survive. We will move forward and

try to find the sweet spot and fine tune the recipe for success, not throw everything against the wall to see what sticks."

Kate Edwards, a New York City-based restaurant consultant, advises operators to look at the new offerings and examine which create dissonance for that full-service experience. Delivery folks walking through a restaurant during service is not ideal, nor is taxing a kitchen that slows service or leads to poor prep. "When does the takeaway literally take away from your diner's experience?" she asks.

Her preference leans toward prioritizing in-person dining, because, she says, it is the main reason many people are in this business in the first place. "The point of hospitality is building relationships and interacting and creating a community," she says. **"Restaurants are built on in-person connections. So the idea is to maintain that in-person guest experience while making money for your business."**



"... IF YOU THINK THAT WITH 100% OCCUPANCY, THAT DELIVERY WILL GO DOWN TO ZERO, YOU ARE WRONG."

— Matt Vannini, CEO of Restaurant Accounting Solutions Inc.

“... ORDERING IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ENGAGE WITH YOUR GUESTS EVERY DAY AND THAT GIVES YOU A PLATFORM TO COMMUNICATE.”

— Andrew Jaffe, CMO of Snooze A.M. Eatery



STEP 3 Streamline Menus

Delivery, takeout and on-premise indoor and outdoor dining can tax a staff. One way to lighten the load is to streamline and simplify menus. That can mean carefully curating the list of appetizers and entrees and reducing complexity of the dishes.

For some operators, the chance to rethink their menus has been one of the few silver linings in an otherwise dark cloud. **“This has been a time for reinvention and there is a lot of freedom in that,”** says Barbara Sibley, who runs several concepts in New York City (see sidebar on opposite page). Sibley not only streamlined

her menu, doing more customer-driven specials but also said goodbye to signatures that had previously been untouchable, a process she has thoroughly enjoyed. “It has been liberating to play with new dishes and have this huge surge of creativity,” she says.



STEP 4 Maximize Digital Communication

Nihao used social media to open during the pandemic.

With the daily shifts in operations, many operators emphasize they have learned the critical importance of regular customer communication. “Social media ended up playing a big role for us,” says Pichet Ong, who opened Nihao in Baltimore in the middle of the pandemic. Images of food and prep as well as videos of the patio and outdoor patio on various channels provided a link to guests.

Newsletters and email marketing can also allow operators to dig into real-time customer behaviors and preferences. **“You have to understand your customer—who they are, what they want, what they are buying, what their comfort levels are,”** says Edwards. “And if you don’t know that, find out. Send a survey, write a newsletter and invite a conversation, engage your customers on social media. It is crucial for your business to understand your customers better.”

Robust communications go hand in hand with an operator’s digital ecosystem, says Andrew Jaffe, CMO of Snooze A.M. Eatery, a rapidly

growing breakfast and brunch restaurant concept based in Denver. **“For restaurant companies to thrive in this new world, they must have a vision for their technology stack,”** he says. “It’s the central nervous system of your data collection, and it will allow you to connect and communicate in a more authentic way with guests.”

While restaurants may not have the budget for marketing or advertising, Jaffe says not to underestimate the value of delivery data. “Every time a guest orders, it is a chance to learn more about them,” he says. “Ordering is an opportunity to engage with your guests every day and that gives you a platform to communicate. That has been a positive consequence of COVID.”

Likewise, digital communication through apps and software that allow employees to reach managers and each other is more important than ever for scheduling and trading shifts, especially as staffing expands and constricts in times that remain uncertain.



How One Restaurateur Does It All

Barbara Sibley changed the staffing hierarchy to remain many things to many people

Servers who cook? Waiters who wash dishes? Bussers who check in guests and take temperatures? A need for more flexible and fluid staffing during the pandemic has forced some operators to rethink and eliminate the restaurant hierarchy.

That’s the path Barbara Sibley chose. She runs three concepts in New York City—La Palapa, La Palapa Tacos at the Gotham Market and Vanderbilt Hall, and the Holiday Cocktail Lounge. She pivoted during the shutdown, adding taco kits, takeaway, delivery, and groceries. When the dust settled on her patchwork business model, a new way of staffing emerged, one grounded in equity that effectively abandoned the front and back of house divide.

“I eliminated the labor hierarchy, so there are no managers, no dishwashers, no bussers, no cooks, no servers,” explains Sibley. This means her waiters cook, her cooks serve, and everyone busses tables and does dishes. “We cross-train to promote people to more responsibility and everyone has to do everything,” says Sibley. “It has been liberating.”

The new formula has allowed Sibley to offer more shifts. “With such a small staff I can say, I don’t have a shift for you on the floor, but you can do a kitchen shift,” she says. “So I keep people who need the work and put them wherever there is a need.”

Sean Umstead and Michelle Vanderwalker, co-owners behind Kingfisher bar in Durham, North Carolina, have followed a similar model. Their bar was not allowed to open at all during COVID, so they did a full pivot in August, debuting a new outdoor burger concept called Queen Burger by turning their parking lot into an outdoor burger bar serving pre-bottled outdoor cocktails like strawberry margaritas and hibiscus daiquiris.

Rather than hire new staff, they just brought on a head chef and then turned to their roster of craft cocktail makers, who they trained to become burger cooks and servers. “Everyone does everything from prep to cooking to dishes and everyone is an equal player,” he says. “My bartenders are grilling burgers.”

Once bars were allowed to re-open indoor service at 30% in February, they reopened Kingfisher, but continued to run their burger bar, splitting their fully fluid staff between outdoor and indoor service.

The model has done more than make staffing easier. Sibley says the shift has also meant a more equitable restaurant environment. “It is really working well, and I don’t see any reason to go back to the way things were before.”

—Andrea Strong

“IT IS REALLY WORKING WELL, AND I DON’T SEE ANY REASON TO GO BACK TO THE WAY THINGS WERE BEFORE.”

—Barbara Sibley, New York-based restaurateur

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW KIST

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STEP 5

Remain Nimble

Predictions about dining habits are just that, predictions, which is why all experts agree that the only constant is change. "My advice is to learn quickly and fail cheaply," says Snooze's Jaffe, who changed his business, adding takeout, delivery, meal kits and a new ordering app during the pandemic. What comes next, he says, is a commitment to evolution. "We need to continue to be open-minded, nimble and innovative because there is still some change on the horizon."

So that staff doesn't feel yanked around, he suggests making them a part of the process. "As restaurant professionals, we are trained on process and repetition, so change can be difficult," he says. "One of the lessons I learned is to give my staff the

'why' behind what we are doing, and why we think it will impact the business." As a team, he says, they have learned to recognize stumbles are OK. "As long as we can apply them and learn from those mistakes," he says. **"We have learned to embrace innovation. It is critical to surviving especially when every day presents different challenges."**

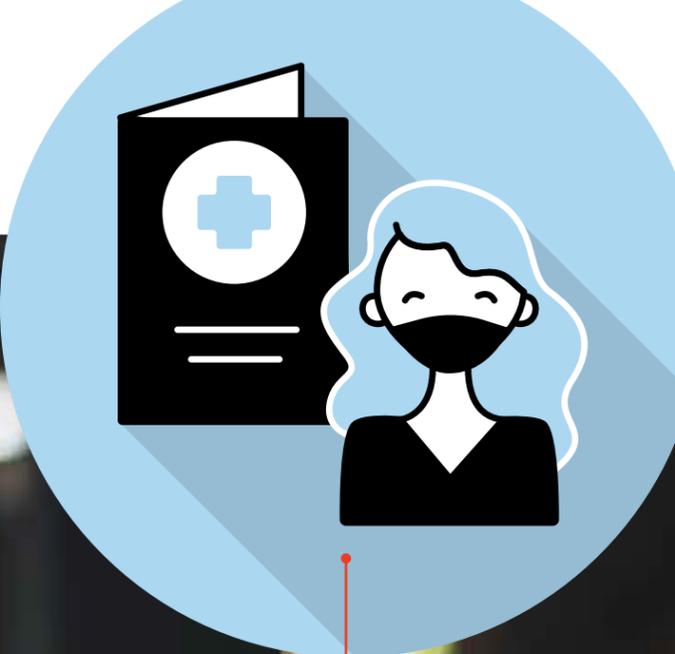
Matan Hammer, CEO of Westville, a multi-unit independent restaurant based in New York City, added DIY cocktails and the expanded delivery and takeout program during the pandemic. Now, he says, is the time to continue to listen and remain innovative. **"Our mission is to make people feel as protected as possible and to know we care,"** he says. "We have learned you have to listen and to be flexible and dynamic. That is the only way forward." ■

Even as restrictions ease, wearing masks during prep tells diners and employees that you care about their safety.



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Can digital health passports make on-premise dining safer for everyone?

By Lisa Arnett

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¹ SUZY, Custom Survey for Kraft Heinz
² Datassential Independent Study, Ketchup Purchasing Report, 2020
³ NPD SupplyTrack, 2020: Manufacturer branded bulk formats vs. PC in restaurants with fewer than 20 outlets

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The concept is simple:

proof of vaccination or a negative Covid-19 test on a mobile app to enter a restaurant, entertainment venue or a flight. The issues surrounding it, however, not so much.

In Israel, residents are using digital health passports to show proof of vaccination so they can get into gyms, restaurants, theaters and other public places.

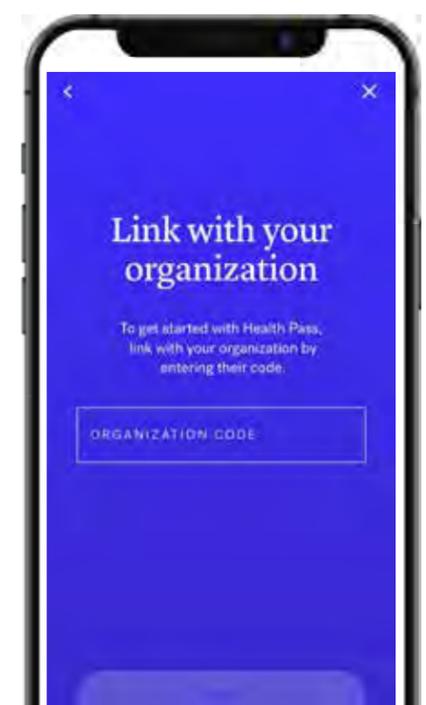
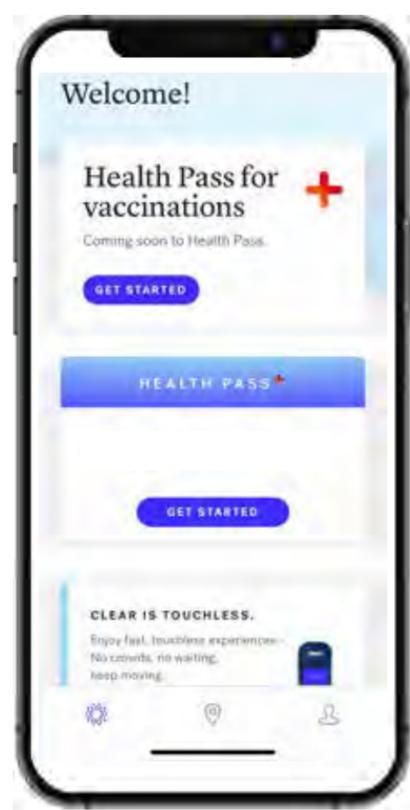
“Necessity is the mother of invention,” says Asher Rubinstein, a partner at New York City law firm Gallet Dreyer & Berkey who represents numerous restaurants. “So the concept of showing proof that you’re not ill or that you’ve been vaccinated, it’s understandable as we come out of this pandemic.”

Numerous digital health pass platforms are in the works or already available. Secure identity company Clear created a mobile app called Health Pass that links verified identity with health records such as Covid-19 test results and symptom screening surveys. Last October, Clear announced a number of partners that would be using it to monitor staff, including Chopt and Dos Toros restaurants and Union Square Hospitality Group. Other key players include IBM’s Digital Health Pass and CommonPass, backed by the World Economic Forum and The Commons Project. Similar to a mobile boarding pass, these apps display a QR code that can be scanned for touchless verification.

“It’s much like showing your driver’s license to get into a 21-and-over bar or a passport to get on an international flight,” says Keith Hontz, CEO and president of Savantis, an Exton, Pennsylvania-based SAP development and IT staffing firm working on integrating digital health passes information systems for entertainment venues, restaurants and retailers.

President Joe Biden has said there won’t be a federal vaccination passport program, leaving the matter to the state level and private businesses. New York recently announced the launch of Excelsior Pass, an app built on IBM’s Digital Health Pass, which attendees to concerts and sporting events can brandish to prove they’ve either tested negative or have been vaccinated to gain admission to venues such as Madison Square Garden. Meanwhile, governors in Texas and Florida have issued executive orders banning mandated Covid-19 vaccine passports. As states and businesses grapple with issues such as privacy, the fate of digital health passes is likely to play out in courts for months to come. “This is going to be subject, I think, to a lot of legal analysis,” Rubinstein says.

Apps such as IBM’s Digital Pass and Clear Mobile can verify health status.



Keeping Tabs on the Team

As for how useful health passports may be for restaurants, it depends on whom you ask. They might help orchestrate health monitoring for large operations if that process has become unwieldy—but may not be as relevant for smaller operations. “We’ve had really good success, all things considered, just with monitoring the health of our staff and promoting the idea to stay home if you don’t feel well,” says David Spatafore, principal of Blue Bridge Hospitality, which operates Stake Chophouse & Bar, Little Frenchie and other restaurants in Coronado, California. “It hasn’t been something we’ve struggled to manage. Maybe that’s because of the individual size of our restaurants; we might have 40 to 50 staff members (at each). If you had 300, it would be easier to use an app.”

Union Square Hospitality Group uses Health Pass to implement daily health checks. “Before each shift, our team members complete a real-time health survey via Clear’s Health Pass app,” USHG’s safety pledge reads. “Upon arrival, their temperature is taken via a touchless Clear pod or a thermometer onsite. With this partnership, we can ensure all employees are fulfilling our daily health checks while protecting team members’ privacy.” Validating a Covid-19 vaccination is upcoming but Clear has not yet announced a date.

Not Worth the Trouble?

Some restaurateurs say they don’t want to risk alienating either staff or diners by requiring proof of vaccination. “I have heard of this technology and, to me, it seems more applicable to the airline industry rather than the restaurant industry, as we want to respect the privacy of both our employees and clients,” says Stephen Stoll, COO of Restaurants for Maverick Hotels & Restaurants in Chicago.

Mark Moeller, a restaurant consultant with Westport, Connecticut-based firm The Recipe of Success, thinks checking



“BEFORE EACH SHIFT, OUR TEAM MEMBERS COMPLETE A REAL-TIME HEALTH SURVEY VIA CLEAR’S HEALTH PASS APP. UPON ARRIVAL, THEIR TEMPERATURE IS TAKEN VIA A TOUCHLESS CLEAR POD OR A THERMOMETER ONSITE.”

—Union Square Hospitality Group, New York City

digital health passes would be too time-consuming for front of the house staff. “To have restaurants go through the process of verifying every guest would be cumbersome, even on the slowest of evenings,” he says. “It would require dedicated staff and could create frustration for customers who had to wait in line.”

Others imagine that health passes could be a source of conflict with customers. “I mean, I’ll tell you, it’s been so hard just to get the mask mandate enforced,” Spatafore says. “The idea of having to check someone’s vaccine record—I can only imagine the fights we would have at the door.”

The Perception of Safety

Requiring diners to show proof of a negative test or vaccination makes sense in some scenarios, operators say. “The only true value-add may be in events where large numbers of people will come together, as they will be interacting with more than just their party,” Moeller says. “If there was the ability to utilize the viewing or logging of the data for contact tracing purposes, that would be very helpful in the current environment.”

Sports arenas are already offering sections for vaccinated spectators. Could designating a space for vaccinated diners help safety-conscious people feel more comfortable dining indoors? “Restaurants could create a private space for these individuals,” says Relu Stan, CEO of Fulton Market Hospitality in Chicago. “Knowing that guests are surrounded by staff that are vaccinated, (they) could feel safer. The ultimate goal would be to give staff and guests peace of mind.”

On one hand, that’s not all that different from offering a VIP lounge or smoking versus non-smoking section; however, it could be viewed as a segregation of sorts. “Can you really have a situation where a restaurateur offers the space on the left to the vaccinated and the space on the right to the unvaccinated?” Rubinstein says. “My fear is this would translate into a two-class system.”

Lou Flores, general manager of IGC Hospitality, which operates The Wilson at INNSiDE New York Nomad, says that the intel collected by digital health passports could be helpful. “It would be beneficial to see the percentage of guests who dine with us that are vaccinated,” Flores says. “We can see if those high or low numbers have any effect on an outbreak within our space.”

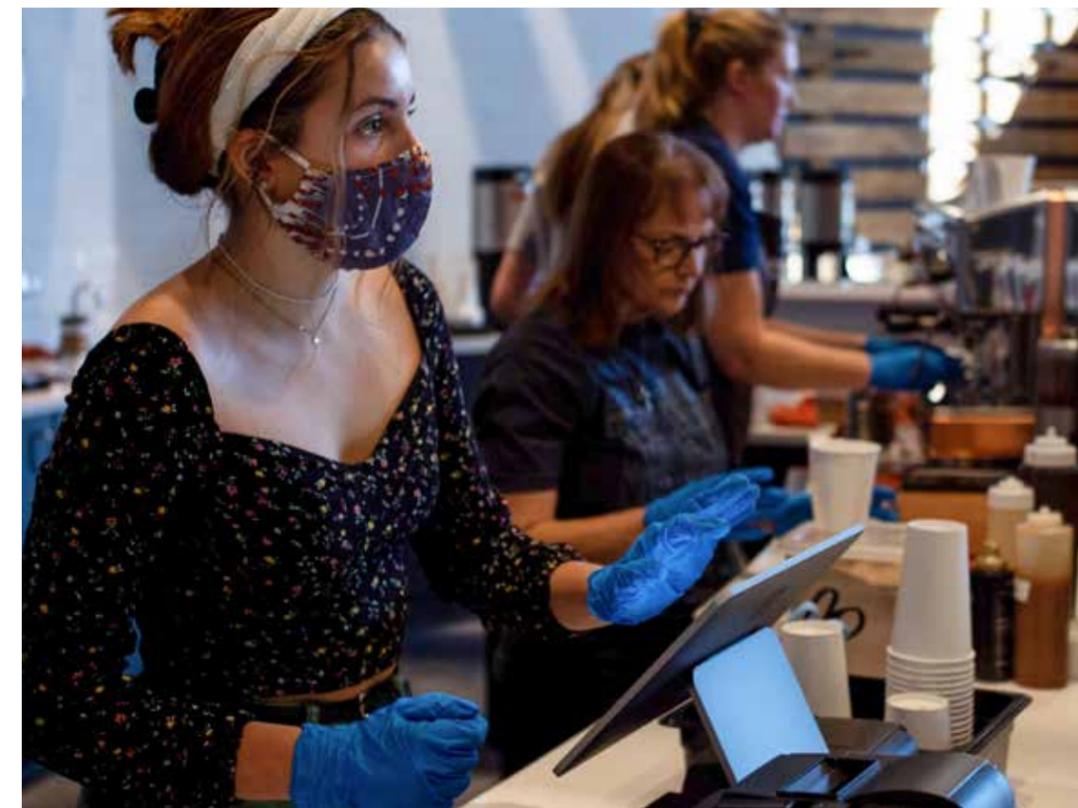
With vaccinations increasing nationwide, operators are wondering how long this kind of identification might be needed. “The unknown here is, now that we have a vaccine, is COVID going to

become more like the common flu where it’s just dealt with that way, or is it going to continue to be this scary monster where you need something more official, like a passport for proof?” Spatafore says.

Though experts anticipate that vaccinated people are less likely to transmit COVID, whether or not that holds true will take some time to bear out in studies. And because vaccines aren’t universally available worldwide—and not everyone chooses to vaccinate—we will likely continue to rely on testing to safely go about public activities. ■

“TO HAVE RESTAURANTS GO THROUGH THE PROCESS OF VERIFYING EVERY GUEST WOULD BE CUMBERSOME, EVEN ON THE SLOWEST OF EVENINGS.”

—Mark Moeller, a restaurant consultant with Westport, Connecticut-based firm The Recipe of Success





State Bird Provisions is among the restaurants that have joined Zero Foodprint.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ED ANDERSON



At a Glance: Karen Leibowitz

Executive director of Zero Foodprint, a nonprofit named Humanitarian of the Year by the James Beard Foundation for empowering the restaurant industry to create solutions to climate change

Co-founder of several award-winning restaurants, including Mission Chinese Food, The Perennial and Commonwealth in San Francisco

A 2019 James Beard Award nominee for Outstanding Restaurateur

Co-author of two cookbooks: "Mission Street Food" (with Anthony Myint) and "Atelier Crenn" (with Dominique Crenn)

Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley



When the entire world

finally reopens, it will be just as fragile as it was pre-pandemic. Coronavirus, unfortunately, didn't shut down climate change. If anything, it made the issue more pressing—especially within the foodservice industry, which relies on a healthy planet to make ends meet.

While adding "fight climate change" to a to-do list might seem like a nightmare to a restaurateur rebuilding the business from the pandemic, Karen Leibowitz, the executive director of the James Beard Award-winning nonprofit Zero Foodprint, says it's worth it. "We all benefit when there are more sustainable options," she explains.

It also doesn't have to be challenging. Zero Foodprint makes it easy, she says, for restaurant operators to fight climate change by adding a 1% surcharge to the check and using that money to fund carbon-reduction farming projects (so far, 48 members/restaurants have signed on). Giving farmers the support to take carbon out of the atmosphere and replant it in the soil is "how we can eat our way out of the climate crisis," says Leibowitz.

To learn more about carbon farming and why it benefits foodservice operators, Leibowitz recently shared some insight from her San Francisco base.

PORTRAIT BY ALANNA HALE

A NEW KIND OF 1 PERCENT

By Abigail Covington

Fighting climate change with the help of a small menu surcharge

Q. Foodservice is hardly the most polluting industry. Why should it take on the challenge of climate change?

Zero Foodprint was founded, in large part, from our questions as restaurateurs about the impact of our work. My husband, Anthony Myint, and I had become parents, and we wanted to know the carbon footprint of our restaurant, Mission Chinese Food, so we worked with experts to do a life cycle assessment. What we learned really surprised us: We'd expected that most of the impact would come from energy use, transportation, maybe food waste or packaging, but actually about three-quarters of our impact came from ingredients. It turns out that about one third of the planet's greenhouse gas emissions come from food and farming.

Over time, we've come to understand that it's not about assigning blame, but rather about seizing an opportunity to invest in the future of sustainable food. Our members are helping diners put micro-donations—just 1% of their check at a restaurant—into farm practices that actually pull carbon back out of the atmosphere and into the soil.

Q. How does Zero Foodprint make it easier for foodservice operators to go carbon neutral?

Zero Foodprint mobilizes the food world around carbon farming, so that we can eat our way out of the climate crisis. When you buy food from a ZFP member, 1% goes to our carbon farming fund. Carbon farming stops climate change by pulling carbon out of the atmosphere (restoring it in the soil), making healthier soil that's more nutritious, more profitable for farmers, and more resilient to extreme weather. Grants funded by the ZFP community have already pulled nearly 7,000 metric tons of CO₂e from the atmosphere.

“OVER TIME, WE’VE COME TO UNDERSTAND THAT IT’S NOT ABOUT ASSIGNING BLAME, BUT RATHER ABOUT SEIZING AN OPPORTUNITY TO INVEST IN THE FUTURE OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD.”

—Karen Leibowitz



Karen Leibowitz collecting compost at Stemple Creek Ranch in California.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DIANA DONLON

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A 1% surcharge on the check that might include grilled Monterey Bay abalone at State Bird Provisions would go towards fighting climate change.

Q. How much does it cost restaurants to join Zero Foodprint?

There is no fee for restaurants to join Zero Foodprint. Rather, restaurants are doing their part by gathering microdonations from the public, by adding 1% for carbon farming to their prices. The restaurant gets staff training, social media assets, publicity and other benefits but does not pay into the fund directly. Restaurants that would like to undertake an assessment of their carbon footprint may do so for a fee that reflects the labor of analyzing their operations.

Q. How could a company like Aramark work with Zero Foodprint?

Zero Foodprint works with all kinds of businesses. We started with restaurants, but we also have members across the food system, from composters and knife shops to corporations and employee cafeterias.

Q. Not all consumers are equally interested in sustainable farming practices. How would you pitch Zero Foodprint to a restaurant operator that relies on big agriculture and is convinced their customers won't go for the 1% charge?

Zero Foodprint empowers each of us to take climate action in our communities. We invest in better food through carbon farming, rather than certifying restaurants as “sustainable” or not. As restaurant owners ourselves, we understand that the food system is not set up for sustainability, and that not every restaurant can source from sustainable farmers, but we all benefit when there are more sustainable options. We have a number of fast-casual members including 20th Century, Creator, Handline, Lunchette and WesBurger in San Francisco. Also, five Subway locations in Boulder, Colorado, just joined, in part because it makes sense (for them) to support local farmers and implement sustainable practices that lower the fire risk in Boulder County.

“IT TURNS OUT THAT ABOUT ONE THIRD OF THE PLANET'S GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS COME FROM FOOD AND FARMING.”

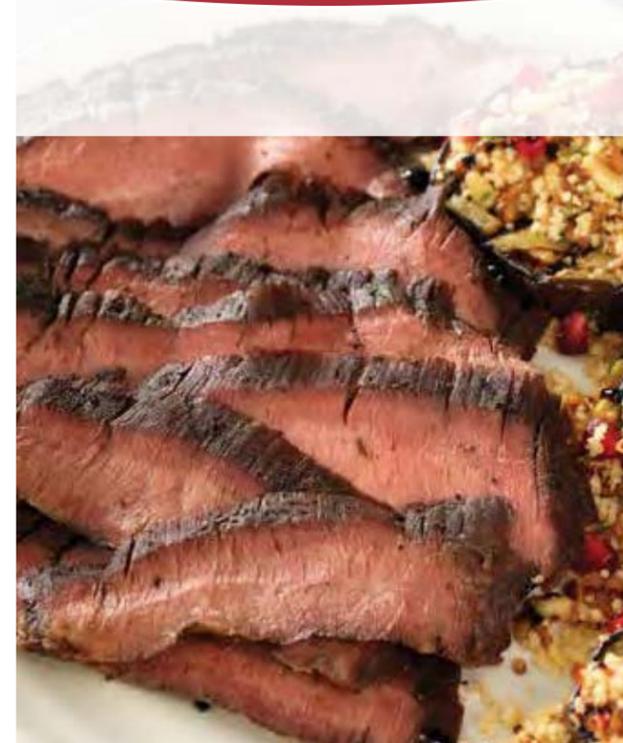
Larger companies often choose to donate directly to (one of) our carbon farming grant funds), and we consider them sponsors. Clover Organic, for example, recently learned that one of the dairies they work with had received a grant from Zero Foodprint, which inspired them to put \$25,000 into our Restore fund to contribute to the larger change of our farmland toward regenerative management. Pre-pandemic, we did life cycle assessments with Square, Salesforce (software marketing), and Stripe (payment processor) and they made contributions to the Restore fund as well.

Q. To what extent should the government be involved in incentivizing carbon farming techniques? Why rely on the foodservice industry and market forces?

We have been very heartened to see the federal government beginning to incentivize regenerative agriculture through the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and through the new Carbon Bank plan. In fact, the Biden administration has called regenerative ag the lynchpin of its climate policy. Meanwhile, at the state level, many programs are helping regenerative ag because of the many co-benefits. Beyond restoring soil carbon, regenerative agriculture practices also reduce drought and fire damage and protect watersheds and increase biodiversity, not to mention the fact that farm profits tend to increase alongside soil health.

Q. What's up next for Zero Foodprint? What are your top priorities for the remainder of 2021?

We're launching farm projects in Colorado, in collaboration with regional government and local nonprofits. ■



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BY THE NUMBERS

▶ PLAY THESE NUMBERS FOR A BIGGER PAYOUT

FIRST UP

Call them appetizers, starters, snacks or even side dishes, the food that first hits the table sets a tone for the meal. That's more prevalent now than ever, giving operators a chance to light up the menu as their restaurants swing into a full-service summer. Here's projected growth from 2020 to 2024.

WHAT MAKES FOR GREATNESS

FINGER FOOD, EASY TO EAT BY HAND...**+51%**
EASILY SHAREABLE...**+42%**
UNIQUE FLAVORS AND TEXTURES...**+41%**

Familiar comfort food...+40%
Healthy...25%
Artfully presented...24%
All-natural ingredients...23%

BANK ON THESE

SAUCE & FAVORS
MANGO HABANERO...**+194%**
Korean barbecue...+108%
Sriracha aioli...+83%
Lemon zest...+82%
Fig jam...+71%

PROTEIN
WAGYU...**+122%**
Poke...+79%
Fried fish...+74%
Chicharron...+55%
Fried pork...+52%

VEGETABLES
ELOTE...**+189%**
Calabrian chili pepper...+156%
Fried Brussels sprouts...+154%
Pickled red onion...+114%
Microgreens...+86%

CHEESE
BEER CHEESE...**+125%**
Cheese curd...+65%
Burrata...+55%
Parmigiano-Reggiano...+53%
Cotija...+52%

WHAT'S AN APPETIZER?

STARTERS CAN BE ANYTHING...**+38%**
ONLY CERTAIN FOODS ARE TRUE APPETIZERS...**+27%**

They can be both...+36%
Indulgent...+45%
Indulgent & healthy...+37%
Healthy...+15%

ILLUSTRATION BY RENEE WOOD

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BAKED SunCHIPS ROLD GOLD Pretzels Smartfood

US FOODS ITEM # 5585476

US FOODS ITEM # 5605472

US FOODS ITEM # 5603857

US FOODS ITEM # 5605332

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Frozen Cinnamon Roll Dough 1.5 oz
APN 3252285

79%

of Americans have eaten breakfast foods for meals other than breakfast in the past year.

75%

look forward to eating breakfast/brunch at their favorite restaurant once the pandemic is over.

