



Messaging Matters

Key tactics for promoting plant forward dining in Stanford row houses



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Defining Plant Forward	3
Setting Expectations	4
Food Choice Architecture	5
Plating and Serving	5
Enticing Labeling	6
Telling Stories Through Food	7

Defining Plant Forward



As defined by the Menus of Change initiative, plant forward dining is “A style of cooking and eating that emphasizes and celebrates, but is not limited to, plant-based foods - including fruits and vegetables (produce); whole grains; beans, other legumes (pulses) and soy foods; nuts and seeds; plant oils; and herbs and spices - and that



Plant forward is more plant-based than the average diet, but isn't vegetarian - more accurately defined as flexitarian or plant-rich diet, that contains a range of culinary approaches: from those containing poultry, fish, dairy, and/or small amounts of meat to vegetarian and vegan offerings.



Plant forward is a vision, rather than a label for menu items: Describe dishes through descriptors that convey flavor, quality, seasonality, culinary adventure, cultural context, and/or innovation and invention.





Setting Expectations

Set expectations with the chef early on: set the tone for your engagement and support of making menus more plant-forward, remembering you have a say

Set expectations for house residents early on to make your life easier later. Lay particularly clear guidelines around cleaning, snack suggestion purchasing and snack availability, and start messaging plant forward foods to the house in effective ways to get resident support (more on that later).

(On cleaning/hauling by residents) "So I think it has to almost be like a rule like as you come in like here's the expectation like this is what you have to do. Like here's a sign up sheet for it. Otherwise people get used to like not having to clean on Sundays at 10:00a.m. that they're like I don't have to do that. Like we haven't done that and we still get food. But like we've that's like I'm very very strict thing."

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(On snacks) "Like our snacks never run out, which I think I'm surprised at because like at other houses where my friends live my friends are like oh my god we literally don't have any snacks. They just run out and people hoard them and everything. I think what I did at the beginning I told everyone you need to respect the kitchen, you need to respect the food, the hashers, the chef, like if anyone disrespects it then like I'm closing the door of the snacks. So it's always been super super well. It's gone great."

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Food Choice Architecture

On open kitchen shelving, place foods you want eaten more at eye level, and things you want eaten less on lower shelves or in boxes or jars.

Lay healthy foods (like apples, bananas, oranges) out in trays for ease of access — place shelf-stable produce on display for ready-to-go healthy snacking

Positioning on the snack shelf affects what people eat. So I've put healthier snacks in a really really easy to reach locations at like at eye level so the first thing you see is oh the Nutrigrain bar or something like that. I'll just grab that and get a class instead of just being like Oh I'll grab those Doritos. And so I tried to put like the ramen and the Doritos and the like cheese puffs and just like the slightly less healthy stuff on lower rocks and people actually don't eat them. And then if you switch it people start eating them again. So it's like it's largely based on access like everything in the kitchen is based on access. - Sarah, Tri-Delt KM



Serving and Plating

Centering plant-based foods means incorporating bits of meat into a dish instead of the meat being separate or the focal point.

Place plant-based dishes first on the serving line, encouraging people to take larger portions of these and less of meat-heavy dishes

Re-use and Re-present to avoid waste:

Salad Bar Fridays

Soups using older vegetables

Juices/Smoothies from fruits



Enticing Labeling

Use decadent and indulgent taste-focused adjectives to label vegetable dishes.

Taste is the primary factor people think about when choosing what we eat. Unfortunately, healthier foods - like vegetable dishes - are not generally associated with better taste, and this sub-conscious perception influences what we put on our plates when an array of options is in front of us. However, we can push back against this bias with simple messaging that targets what we want to see (and taste) in food.

Here's where labeling comes in:

From a recently published study in Stanford's dining halls, vegetables labeled with **flavorful, decadent and indulgent** adjectives were consumed more often and in greater quantities.

This type of messaging can increase both the number of people who choose to take some of the vegetable dish and the amount they take.

sweet sizzlin' green beans

crispy shallots

dynamite beets

caramelized carrots

juicy bbq jackfruit

glazed butternut squash

Ever had people respond to "Meatless Mondays" or "Veggie Day" by boycotting the meal?

Messaging Matters!

Try labeling that emphasizes the unique flavors and colors of plant-forward meals before accentuating what they lack.

Great Label

=

Tasty Adjective

+

Dish Name

How to Implement:

On your menu board, in your weekly menu email, or on the sneeze guards of the buffet line, write the creative titles of your dishes.

Share the Origin Story

People find it hard to resist a good story, especially one with interesting, empathetic characters. Remember that there are people and stories behind the food we purchase and serve. When you're serving food from a local, identifiable source, consider how you might incorporate or display the farm or farmer's story as part of the meal. This may take the form of including photos and/or a short profile or quotes from the source in your message to the house group chat, in your weekly menu email, or wherever you display the produce.

Example profile:

Will Chen, farmer at the O'Donohue Family Stanford Educational Farm

Will co-manages day-to-day operations and site maintenance for the 6-acre farm on Stanford's campus. He comes to the farm from Veggielution, a 5-acre urban farm and food justice nonprofit in San Jose, California. A San Jose native, Will has a BS degree from San Jose State University in environmental studies. Will's sense of humor and experiments in growing taro and bananas on the farm are well known amongst students who've taken a sustainable agriculture class or two.



Created by Meghan Wilson

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