

THE CIA-FSR

# Plant Forward Full-Service

WATCH LIST

AT TUSK,  
VEGETABLES  
ARE ELEVATED  
WITH WHIPPED  
FETA, HERB  
TEHINA, EGG,  
SEEDS, AND  
ALMONDS.

BY RACHEL  
PITTMAN



The plant-forward movement is showing up in kitchens across the country. Here are the concepts taking veggie-rich dining to the next level.

## What do we talk about when we talk about plant-forward?

The term doesn't necessarily mean vegan, or even vegetarian. In fact, plant-forward dishes can include animal proteins. Those who eat a plant-forward diet—many of whom self-identify as flexitarians—generally consume large amounts of fresh produce, whole grains, pulses, beans, and nuts but are not locked into an exclusively plant-based regimen.

Per the Culinary Institute of America (CIA), plant-forward connotes “dietary and food system transformation that includes a whole range of healthier, more sustainable approaches—from those that contain poultry, fish, dairy, and/or small amounts of meat to vegetarian and vegan offerings.”

In reality, when we talk about plant-forward, we talk about a massive variety of diets, recipes, chefs, and restaurants. Vegan and vegetarian fare are part of it, but so too are dishes that creatively marry plants with smaller servings of animal protein. Through programs like Plant-Forward Kitchen (an education and digital initiative that presents strategies for reimagining menus and flavors) and events including the annual Global Plant-Forward Culinary Summit, the CIA is helping chefs and restaurants integrate plant-rich dishes into their menus.

Putting plant-forward into practice can look very different, depending on the restaurant. No Bones Beach Club offers parsnip-and-veggie “crab cakes,” Gjelina dresses up spigarello (an heirloom broccoli) with a crispy guanciale garnish, and Jajaja Mexicana serves vegan version of cantina fare, with several dishes doused in coconut queso. For all the variety of dishes, these restaurants are connected by a commitment to give plants as much—if not more—attention than other ingredients.

As plant-forward cuisine reaches new heights, we sought to highlight restaurants at the fore-front of the movement through this inaugural

**CIA-FSR PLANT FORWARD WATCH LIST.** Due to the sheer number of innovative concepts celebrating the ver-satility of plants, we limited the list to restaurants and restaurant groups with at least two locations. It is our hope that this report not only spotlights the operators doing it best but also inspires others to follow in their footsteps.

# Veg in Vogue

As plant-forward dining grows in popularity across the U.S., it's no longer just one-offs or independents crafting creative produce-heavy dishes. Bigger chains have also jumped on the trend, and below are some of these brands' most inventive plant-forward applications.

## Veggie Satay Lettuce Wraps

NOT YOUR AVERAGE JOE'S

- Thai peanut noodles
- Roasted peppers
- Asian slaw
- Onions
- Marinated cucumbers
- Sweet chili dipping sauce

## Cauliflower Nachos

PUNCH BOWL SOCIAL

- Corn tortilla chips
- Cauliflower
- Creamy jack queso
- Pickled onions
- Jalapeños
- Jalapeño lime crema



## Hummus Beets Bowl

OREN'S HUMMUS

- Hummus
- Orange zest
- Marinated beets
- Cilantro
- Feta cheese
- Balsamic reduction
- Chopped walnuts



## Veggie Vegan Burger

RED ROBIN

- Veggie burger patty
- Avocado
- Shredded romaine lettuce
- Bruschetta salsa

## The Berk

BAREBURGER

- Organic tempeh bacon
- Red onions
- Parmesan cheese
- Tomatoes
- Avocado
- Mayo
- Baby kale
- Eight-grain toast



## TRUE FOOD KITCHEN

HQ: PHOENIX, ARIZONA

True Food Kitchen was built on the anti-inflammatory pyramid, which posits that a select variety of foods can counteract inflammation and improve overall health. The growing chain's resulting menu spins animal proteins and seasonal power plants, like beets and butternut squash, into fresh, indulgent fare (e.g. squash pie with coconut whipped cream).

## AVANT GARDEN, HONEYBEE'S, LADYBIRD, MOTHER OF PEARL, AND NIGHT MUSIC

NEW YORK

DEROSSİ GLOBAL's nine concepts center on libations, but several prioritize produce-heavy plates as a core focus, too. Take Ladybird, a plant-based tapas wine bar, or Mother of Pearl, a bar specializing in tiki cocktails and plant-based, Polynesian-inspired bites. Along with Avant Garden, Honeybee's, and Night Music, Derossi has built a solid pack of guilt-free, health-forward venues for the perfect night out.

## MODERN LOVE

OMAHA, NEBRASKA & BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Author and television personality Isa Chandra Moskowitz is famous for her veganism, and her passion comes to life with "swanky vegan comfort food," served in intimate surroundings in two Modern Love locations that are worlds apart—both figuratively and literally. Whether at the Omaha, Nebraska shop or the original in Brooklyn, New York, Moskowitz's offerings are straightforward yet inventive, ranging from Swiss Fondue to Chik'n Pot Pie to Chocolate Dipped Cannoli.

ISTOCK (3) / TRUE FOOD KITCHEN

## THE BUTCHER'S DAUGHTER

HQ: NEW YORK

Back in 2012, before plant-forward became a hot industry term or photos of avocado toast were popping up on Instagram, The Butcher's Daughter was serving veg-based cuisine. The "vegetable slaughterhouse" hasn't strayed from its early dedication to creatively prepared produce, though it has developed four additional locations, a celebrity fan base, and a major cool-girl reputation.



## LITTLE BEET TABLE

NEW YORK

With the vibrancy of the myriad veggies it serves reflected in the airy interiors of its four locations, Little Beet Table is nothing if not welcoming. The micro-chain opened in New York in 2015 (one year after its sister fast casual, Little Beet) with a familiar-yet-fresh menu, think: crustless quiche with kale, caramelized shallot, comté, and watercress, as well as hearty cavatelli with mushroom Bolognese, lacinato kale, and parmesan.



## Wagamama

HQ: LONDON

At the heart of Wagamama's philosophy is the word "kaizen," which means good change, or continuous improvement, in Japanese. Since its early days in London in 1992 and throughout its expansion into Boston and New York (there are three Wagamamas in each city), the ramen chain has been practicing kaizen through recipe innovation, like putting more plants on the menu.

"I think the plant movement, or the vegan movement, is coming on really fast in the U.S. We've had it in the U.K. for quite some time," says Steve Mangleshot, Wagamama's global executive chef. "This is about having fresh Asian food that can excite people's taste buds. I want people smiling about the fact that we've got great food, not necessarily vegan food. A lot of the ingredients we use every day are vegetables, so plant-based was a natural step for us."

While taste ultimately takes priority over plants for the sake of plants, that doesn't mean that Wagamama doesn't have some mean vegan options in its roster of kokoro bowls, ramen, teppanyaki, donburi, curries, and salads. The brand goes beyond veggie incorpora-

tions, often coming up with creative replacements for animal products.

In 2019, the chain debuted the world's first vegan soft-boiled egg in a new kokoro bowl. The Summer in a Bowl was added to the menu in 2019 and includes barbecue-glazed seitan, a coconut and sriracha vegan egg, grilled shiitake mushrooms, and asparagus over brown rice with edamame beans, carrots, scallions, sweet amai sauce, sesame seeds, and lime.

This year, Wagamama followed its innovative egg with Asian Sticky Vegan Ribs made from barbecue seitan glazed in a spicy cherry sauce. A slew of other tofu and veggie mains, sides, and desserts are also available, including the crispy, wok-fried Bang Bang Cauliflower—a favorite of Mangleshot.

"This cauliflower is absolutely superb, because we make the vegetable the hero of the dish," he says. "People who aren't vegan come in for this because it just tastes so good. If a diner who isn't vegan is trying our veggie dishes, that's when I know I'm winning because that's when I know we've succeeded in making great food."



## PLANT FORWARD

### VEDGE, V STREET, AND FANCY RADISH

PHILADELPHIA &  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

For chefs Rich Landau and Kate Jacoby, every vegetable is deserving of a spotlight. At their first restaurant, Vedge, farm-to-table fare takes on new meaning with dishes like the Wood-Roasted Carrot (pumpernickel, crushed garbanzos, carrot mustard, and carrot kraut) while V Street proves that global small plates can be rooted in veggies as with the Ethiopian-inspired Charred Berbere Broccoli (with harissa hummus, chermoula, and nigella). The couple's D.C. outpost, Fancy Radish, brings classics from the original two, plus new dishes.

### AVA GENE'S AND TUSK

PORTLAND, OREGON

Zeroing in on "locally sourced, aggressively seasonal" cuisine, **SUBMARINE HOSPITALITY** houses Ava Gene's, a Roman-inspired eatery underpinned by local ingredients, and Tusk, a Middle Eastern concept that changes menus daily depending on what's in season. Both outposts balance a cornucopia of fruit-and veggie dishes with thoughtfully sourced meats, rather than building their menus the other way around.



### JINYA RAMEN BAR

HQ: LOS ANGELES

While Jinya's 30-plus domestic restaurants do serve animal proteins, herbivores needn't despair;

plant-forward options are far from an afterthought. The authentic ramen bar builds veggie-friendly broths, salads, small plates, mini tacos, and rice bowls, creating scratch-made dishes like the Flying Vegan Harvest (vegan miso broth, soy meat, tofu, bean sprouts, broccolini, green and red onions, corn, crispy garlic, chili seasoning, and thick noodles).



### BAD HUNTER

CHICAGO

You'll find animal proteins at Bad Hunter but as an addition rather than a foundation. As part of Chicago's celebrated Heisler Hospitality group, the New American eatery offers a set of majority-vegetarian small and medium plates, such as Parsnip Pavé with black truffle, carrot miso, and ubriaco cheese. The whole roasted cauliflower with sambal, ginger, and peanuts is one of the larger plates on offer.



## Café Gratitude and Gracias Madre

HQ: LOS ANGELES

Aside from plants, being thankful is at the core of both Café Gratitude and Gracias Madre, the two concepts owned and operated by the plant-based restaurant group Love Serve Remember.

"We're a family business and, as a family, for the majority of our lives, our diet was plant-based, for human health, the health of the planet, and the well-being of animals,"



says cofounder Ryland Engelhart. "The origins of Café Gratitude were in connecting to food as medicine and looking at what we consume as the fuel for our lives. It's about a compassionate lifestyle."

Café Gratitude opened its first location 15 years

**ZAYTINYA, CHINA CHILCANO, AND OYAMEL**

HQ: WASHINGTON, D.C.

As with fast casual Beefsteak, veggies play a major role in most ThinkFoodGroup concepts, thanks to the ingenuity of founder and legendary chef José Andrés. Inspired by the flavors of Greece, Lebanon, and Turkey, Zaytinya lets plants shine in vegetarian, seafood, meat, and poultry small plates. China Chilcano and Oyamel have a variety of veg-centric plates on offer; try trumpet mushroom skewers with peewee potato and aji panca at China Chilcano or protein-laden crispy Brussels sprouts with chile de arbol sauce, pumpkin seeds, peanuts, and lime at Oyamel.

**ABCV**

NEW YORK

Housed inside an ABC Carpet & Home retail store, abcV is a vegetarian café by chef Jean-Georges that serves brunch, lunch, and dinner entirely free of animal proteins. The restaurant’s interior is airy, bright, and modern—like its cuisine. The dinner menu is split into light and fresh (like green chickpea hummus); warm and hot dishes, such as honeynut squash with tahini; noodles and rice options; and legumes.

ago in California’s San Francisco Bay area. Now the eatery has four California locations and has become a health-and-wellness mainstay, even garnering celebrity fans (Jay-Z and Beyonce have been spotted eating at the establishment). Breakfast, lunch, dinner, dessert, and happy hour menus are on offer, with produce-packed dishes featuring affirmation-styled names. For instance, guests can order the Brilliant Creamy Puttanesca Pasta with capers, Kalamata olives, cashew sour cream, tomato confit, roasted red pepper walnut purée, and lacinato kale over pasta.

In 2009 the owners added a second concept, Gracias Madre, to their collection.

“We were inspired to do an organic, plant-based Mexican restaurant by some of the original recipes of families of some of our longstanding employees,” Engelhart says. “Gracias Madre means, ‘thank you, mother.’ Thank you Mother Earth, thank you to the mothers who have been feeding their families, thank you to [Our Lady of] Guadalupe, who is almost a mother figure in Latin culture.”

Gracias Madre’s two locations boast a menu of classics minus the animal products, from hearts of palm crab cakes to mushroom fajitas with cashew crema. Extensive mezcal and tequila lists complete the cantina vibe.

ISTOCK

**A World of Green**

In reality, the plant-forward diet is nothing new. Throughout the centuries, the seasonal bounty of vegetables, fruits, grains, nuts, and more have been a cornerstone in all cultures. Oftentimes, plants comprised the majority of ancient diets with animal proteins serving as a garnish or smaller portions. Now renewed interest in produce-heavy diets has restaurants going back to this foundation.

**HAKKASAN**, a global chain based in London, centers its modern Chinese fare with fresh meatless ingredients, resulting in dishes like the Aubergine, Tofu, and Mushroom Claypot, served with chili and black bean sauce.

Several of chain **BAWARCHI** Indian Cuisine’s signature biryanis (basmati rice with spices, veggies, or meats and a thick gravy) are vegetarian, featuring marinated vegetables and sides of mirchi ka salan (curried chili peppers) and raita (a condiment made from salted yogurt, vegetables, fruits, and herbs).

And, while ramen chain **IPPUDO** prides itself on slow-simmered pork broths, Goma Q (cucumbers seasoned with a signature sesame oil sauce) and IPPUDO Buns (steamed buns filled with eggplant and eringi mushrooms and served with a house-made spicy buns sauce) are also available for plant seekers.

Taiwanese chain **DIN TAI FUNG** has won fans the world over (including in the U.S.) with its selection of dumplings, potstickers, noodles, and more. Although the menu has no shortage of vegetarian options, fresh veggies shine throughout all the dishes, as in the Shanghai Rice Cake, which is packed with cabbage, spinach, and rice ovalettes, and topped with a garnish of shredded Kurobuta pork.





## Matthew Kenney Cuisine

(Double Zero, Plant Food + Wine, Bar Verde, and others)

HQ: LOS ANGELES

Helmed by celebrity chef, author, educator, and namesake entrepreneur, Matthew Kenney Cuisine (MKC) isn't your usual restaurant group. In fact, the company isn't a restaurant group at all, but instead a lifestyle company that offers an international network of restaurants, education, products, and wellness opportunities with minimally processed, plant-forward cuisine at its crux.

"I felt intuitively it was the right way to go in my personal life. I hadn't made the connection as to how I could apply that to my profession," Kenney said of his conversion to plant-forward in the MKC film, *Crafting the Future of Food, Part I*. "Then one night a friend invited me to dinner and told me he was taking me to a raw food restaurant. I felt like I could apply my culinary background to that kind of food to really make a difference and do it in a new way."

The French-trained chef now runs more than a dozen concepts across the U.S., offering his veg-heavy spin on a wide variety of cuisines.

Take Double Zero, a six-location pizza eatery serving wood-fired vegan pies topped with a wonderfully colorful array of veggies. Or Plant Food + Wine, which has a store on each coast (one in New York and another in LA) and a menu of bright, plant-powered plates like the Raw Lasagne (tomato, marinara, pistachio pesto, and macadamia ricotta) and abalone mushrooms with kimchi, lentils, and Italian vinaigrette. In a shift from Italian cuisine, there's the two-outpost Bar Verde, which offers zesty, New Mexican brunch, dinner, and drinks—think Spicy Cauliflower Enchiladas and Broccoli Tamales doused with creamy, butternut queso.

No type of cookery is off the table for MKC, as long as it has the freshest ingredients at its core.

"What we do is very simple. We source the best ingredients, which ideally are local and organic and grown without chemicals, in-season, and at their peak," Kenney said in *Crafting the Future of Food, Part I*. "Once you have the ingredients and the tools, and you understand what your weapons are and you understand what you're holding in your hand, then you just dream."

## JAJAJA MEXICANA

NEW YORK

Jajaja Mexicana might have the market cornered when it comes to Mexican street-food concepts that offer wholly vegan menus, extensive tequila and mezcal lists, and a set of cantina-inspired cocktails. Its trio of restaurants render clean versions of favorite cantina fare with produce components like shredded hearts of palm carnitas and coconut queso.



## PAULIE GEE'S

HQ: NEW YORK

Paul Giannone opened the first Paulie Gee's in Brooklyn, New York's hipster haven, Greenpoint, in 2010 and quickly earned critical acclaim. The charming, no-reservations concept—with locations in Columbus, Ohio, Baltimore, Chicago, and sibling counter-serve, Greenpoint's Paulie Gee's Slice Shop—sports an extensive list of vegan slices topped with a multitude of veggies and non-dairy cheeses like house-made cashew ricotta in addition to the traditional 'za with cheese aplenty.



**BAR BOMBÓN**

PHILADELPHIA

Delightfully cheery and entirely vegan, Bar Bombón serves made-to-order, authentic Puerto Rican brunch, lunch, dinner, and drinks. The concept’s bright interiors match punchy favorites like the Cubano Club Slider with blackened chik’n, smoked tempeh, avocado, dill pickles, lettuce, tomato, and grain mustard aioli.

**NIX**

NEW YORK

Chef John Fraser’s Nix has made a name for itself with its Mediterranean-inspired vegan and vegetarian fare, becoming one of only three New York City vegetarian restaurants to earn a Michelin star. The menu is divided into two sections: lighter eats, like kabocha squash dumplings, as well as heartier dishes, like mushroom galette with leeks, sheep’s milk cheese, and almond-sorrel cream.

**GJELINA**

LOS ANGELES

At Gjelina, there’s a long list of plant-forward dishes up for grabs, including plates that treat animal proteins as a garnish rather than a main; enter braised spigarello with crispy guanciale and confit tomato. The Gjelina Group’s other restaurants—Gjelina Take Away, fast casual café Gjusta, and Izakaya-inspired eatery MTN—make an impressive group, but none have quite the original rustic-yet-refined vibe of Gjelina.



**NO BONES BEACH CLUB**

HQ: SEATTLE

No Bones Beach Club spices up the plant-forward scene with glam, beach hut-inspired restaurants that are 100 percent vegan, tasty, and approachable. At outposts in Seattle, Portland, Oregon, and Chicago, classics such as crab cakes find a home after receiving a produce-powered makeover. (The crab cake solution was fried, Chesapeake Bay-style parsnip and veggie cakes with garlicky super sauce).

**NEIMAN MARCUS**

HQ: DALLAS

This iconic department store chain has a roster of restaurants to satiate hungry shoppers, and plant-forward is on the menu. The Zodiac opened in the Dallas flagship store in 1953 and the chain’s culinary creativity has been unstoppable ever since. The company refreshed the menu at more than 30 of its U.S. restaurants in 2018, bringing plant-forward into the spotlight, and even opened an almost fully vegetarian/vegan café in Beverly Hills.

**KISMET**

LOS ANGELES

The Kismet family—Kismet and fast casuals Kismet Falafel and Kismet Rotisserie—is a trio of California-cool Mediterranean eateries that take veggies as seriously as animal proteins. Dishes like the harissa cauliflower toast and spiced carrots with chickpeas coax out rich, complex flavors. ■

**MAKING THE LIST**

In any field, identifying innovators and visionaries is far from an exact science. For this Watch List, we used the following questions as criteria: Is this concept significantly elevating fruits, vegetables, and other plant-based foods? Is it creating more choices around vegetable-centric options? At the same time, does it highlight the potential for meat and other animal proteins to be supporting players on the plate rather than always the stars? Does the restaurant leverage healthy, plant-forward traditions of world cuisines? Is the restaurant implementing at least a handful of the Menus of Change Principles of Healthy, Sustainable Menus?

This list marks the second such partnership between The Culinary Institute of America and Food News Media and the first for FSR. Through this, we hope to shine a light on the many talented restaurants and chefs who have taken up the plant-forward cause in new, unexpected, and, most importantly, delicious ways.

For more inspiration on the plant-forward kitchen, please visit [www.plantforwardkitchen.org](http://www.plantforwardkitchen.org), [www.menusofchange.org](http://www.menusofchange.org), and [www.plantforward50.com](http://www.plantforward50.com).

NO BONES BEACH CLUB