

Q&A

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THE QSR-CIA
**PLANT-
FORWARD
FAST
CASUAL**
WATCH LIST

As the plant-forward food movement flourishes, these are the fast-casual concepts taking it mainstream.

BY NICOLE DUNCAN



Mulberry & Vine

HQ: New York UNITS: 5

The plant-forward scene is alive and well in the Big Apple thanks to innovative concepts like Mulberry & Vine, which welcomes consumers of all diet stripes. The veg-heavy plates and bowls are packed with veggies dressed in global flavors, from lemony Shaved Brussels with fennel and dates to Sesame Scallion Tofu and Miso-Maple Acorn Squash.

Little Beet HQ: New York UNITS: 10

This New York City-based concept used recipes from chef and cofounder Franklin Becker as a jumping-off point for its menu of gluten- (and “guiltin”-) free fare. The vegetarian and vegan options are a step above the competition; think BBQ Jackfruit, Sesame Avocado with yuzu vinaigrette, spirulina-studded rice, and turmeric almonds.

Salata HQ: Houston UNITS: 86

While Salata’s build-your-own menu includes chicken, seafood, and cheese, the vast majority is plant-based, with a wide variety of veggies, lettuces, fruits, nuts, and alternative proteins. Already this year the brand has debuted a new store prototype and hired its first-ever development officer, signaling more growth ahead.

Flower Child

HQ: Phoenix UNITS: 19

Flower Child entered the dining scene in 2014 with some serious firepower. Not only is it under the auspices of acclaimed restaurateur Sam Fox, but it also benefited from the culinary blueprint of former sister brand, True Food Kitchen. In that same spirit, the fast casual’s menu follows the anti-inflammatory food pyramid, which emphasizes vegetables, legumes, and whole grains over animal products. For more on Flower Child, turn to **Page 39**.



MARK AND MARY ANN BEAUCHAMP WERE WELL AHEAD OF THE PLANT-FORWARD EATING CURVE, HAVING OPENED CAFE YUMM! IN THE 1990S.

CAFÉ YUMM!

HQ: Eugene, Oregon UNITS: 23

If a customer asks whether Café Yumm! serves animal proteins, the answer may very well be, “No, ma’am.” Or at least that’s the pun cofounder Mark Beauchamp will answer with, “ma’am” in this case being short for “mammals.” The Pacific Northwest chain does have poultry on the menu, but it’s hardly the focus. Instead, Café Yumm! puts veggies front and center, starting with its signature bowls. A hearty base of rice and beans is bolstered by global flavors—mostly of the pan-Asian persuasion—and guests have the option to build their own from the ground up. Wraps, sandwiches, bento boxes, soups, and salads round out the menu. As Beauchamp points out, dishes like the Turkey Reuben and Cheese Quesadilla serve as reassuring touch points for those less familiar with plant-forward dining or the bowl format.

“Some first-time guests are relieved to see a sandwich on our menu. By the second or third visit, they’ll try a Yumm! Bowl

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[or] something more uniquely Café Yumm!," Beauchamp says.

For him and wife/cofounder Mary Ann, the menu harkens back to ancient culinary traditions found the world over.

"Tofu and tempeh are nourishing, traditional staples in many cultures, even if they sound like they came from 1960s Berkeley," Beauchamp says, adding that rice is a staple in nearly every culture. "Plant-based [eating] has been around for a while, but it wasn't called that. You were vegetarian or you weren't."

Even in bringing back a very old style of eating, the Beauchamps were well ahead of the plant-forward craze. Prior to Café Yumm!, the pair had opened another restaurant, Wild Rose, where Mary Ann regularly changed the menu, experimenting with different dishes and flavors from her eclectic culinary roots (she was born in Japan, grew up partially in Italy, and worked under chefs of various nationalities).

In 1997, the Beauchamps transitioned the business to Café Yumm to infuse it with a bit more consistency. Since then, it's grown to 20-plus locations between Oregon and Washington. Last fall, Boise, Idaho, welcomed its first Café Yumm! store, with more to follow as part of a multi-unit deal.

Broadening consumer tastes could certainly bolster future growth, plus the Beauchamps have another ace up their sleeve. The company's signature Yumm! Sauce is available in 160 grocery stores across the West Coast, and the company also fulfills mail orders for fans in all 50 states. The insights gleaned from the CPG side of the business may prove invaluable in deciding where to next plant a flag.

This cluster strategy, Beauchamp points out, is also how Howard Schultz jumpstarted Starbucks' path to omnipresence back when it was a petite company shipping small-batch coffee across the country.



FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS, CAFE YUMM! HAS EXPANDED WITHIN OREGON AND WASHINGTON, BUT NOW THE CHAIN IS LOOKING FARTHER AFIELD WITH A MULTIUNIT DEAL ALREADY UNDERWAY IN IDAHO.



Next Level Burger

HQ: Bend, Oregon UNITS: 8



The husband-and-wife duo behind "America's first 100 percent plant-based burger joint" has designs to take it to the, um, next level with 1,000 locations nationwide. Even more impressive than the brand's vegan take on burger classics is the range of options: a dozen different burgers and milkshakes; seven styles of fries; four hot dogs; and three salads.

Panera Bread

HQ: St. Louis UNITS: 2,000-plus

This founding member of the fast-casual movement may have built its reputation on traditional bakery and café fare, but in recent years Panera has demonstrated that even a wide-scale chain can pivot further toward plants. Its selection of broth bowls includes three vegan varieties utilizing proteins like edamame, quinoa, and soba noodles, as well as greens and vegetables.

Amy's Drive Thru

HQ: Santa Rosa, California

UNITS: 1

Nearly 30 years after Amy's Kitchen debuted its microwavable meals, the company spun out a proprietary drive-thru concept. Amy's slings vegetarian versions of drive-thru staples like burgers, pizza, and burritos, as well as mac 'n' cheese, salads, and soups. Its second location is expected to open in July.

Copper Branch

HQ: Montréal, Québec UNITS: 56

This growing franchise hails from our neighbor to the north but has ambitious plans for U.S. expansion, beginning with New York City. The versatile menu most closely resembles a classic fast casual like Panera Bread, with a selection of sandwiches, soups, bowls, breakfast fare, coffee, smoothies, and more—but all of it is plant-based.