



# Why center plant-based foods and drinks on your menu? So everyone can eat!

Even small changes like defaulting to oat milk in your coffee or egg-free mayo in your sandwiches can make your offerings more inclusive.

## Allergies & Racial Justice

Approximately 50 million US adults experience some degree of lactose intolerance.<sup>1</sup> The condition is inherently racialized, as specific populations are genetically predisposed to it.<sup>2</sup> Approximately 95% of Asian Americans, 60-80% of Black Americans and Ashkenazi Jews, 80-100% of American Indians, and 50-80% of Latine Americans exhibit lactose sensitivity.<sup>3</sup>

Lactose aside, Black children are more likely to have food allergies than children of other races. A study published in *Pediatrics* found that “...self-identified black ethnicity was associated with a more than two-fold increased likelihood of sensitization to foods,” even after controlling for socioeconomic status.<sup>4</sup> Dairy is the most common major allergen, followed by eggs.<sup>5</sup>

Serving dairy and eggs by default contributes to inequity. Lower-income families pay up to 2.5 times more in hospitalization costs than higher-income families for food allergy-related visits.<sup>6</sup>

## Religious & Cultural Dietary Needs

Some religious traditions (e.g., Jainism) strictly mandate vegetarianism. Others such as Hinduism, Taoism, and Seventh-Day Adventism have a long history of encouraging plant-forward diets.<sup>7</sup> Judaism and Islam also leave room for vegetarianism in their practices, owing in part to the restrictions around kosher and halal foods.

Defaulting to animal-based food discriminates against adherents of traditions such as these, when instead, serving food that's DefaultVeg would allow everyone to eat regardless of religious affiliation.

## Consumers of Tomorrow

Gen Z makes up an estimated one-fourth of the world's population.<sup>8</sup> Eco-anxious and more racially diverse than ever before, Gen Z is the future of consumerism—and they're eschewing traditional products in favor of climate-friendly alternatives. Sixty percent of them want to eat more plant-based foods, and 80% already eat plant-based a few times a week.<sup>9</sup>

Gen Z is especially keen on plant-based milks, consuming 550% more than prior generations.<sup>10</sup> Many young people feel ashamed to consume dairy products.<sup>11</sup> Almost half of U.S. households already purchase plant-based milk—and as Gen Z continues to age into adulthood, that figure will grow.<sup>12</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 Mihesuah, D. n.d. “Health Problems: Lactose Intolerance.” American Indian Health and Diet Project. University of Kansas. Accessed via [https://aihd.ku.edu/health/lactose\\_intolerant.html](https://aihd.ku.edu/health/lactose_intolerant.html)
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- 3 Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. n.d. “Lactose Intolerance: Information for Health Care Providers.”
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- 5 “Prevalence of Food Allergy and Access to Epinephrine for Children in the US.” 2018. Snack Safely. Accessed via <https://snacksafely.com/2018/12/prevalence-of-food-allergy-and-access-to-epinephrine-for-children-in-the-us/>
- 6 Bilaver, L.A., Kester, K.M., Smith, B.M., and R. S. Gupta. 2016. Socioeconomic Disparities in the Economic Impact of Childhood Food Allergy.” *Pediatrics* 137(5). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2015-3678>
- 7 Krishnaveni, G. V., Kehoe, S.H., and K. Kumaran. 2017. “Religious Variations in Vegetarian Diets and Impact on Health Status of Children: Perspectives From Traditional Vegetarian Societies.” *Vegetarian and Plant-Based Diets in Health and Disease Prevention*. Academic Press. 107-116.
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- 9 “Consumer Insights.” n.d. Plant Based Foods Association. Accessed via <https://plantbasedfoods.org/marketplace/consumer-insights>
- 10 Edy, Nina. 2017. “Thought Millennials went crazy for avocados? Meet Generation Z.” *City A.M.* Accessed via <https://www.cityam.com/thought-millennials-went-crazy-avocados-meet-generation-z/>
- 11 Rabb, Maxwell. 2022. “Is it embarrassing to order dairy milk at a coffee shop? Gen Z thinks so.” *The Beet*. Accessed via <https://thebeet.com/is-it-embarrassing-to-order-dairy-milk-at-a-coffee-shop-gen-z-thinks-so/>
- 12 “Plant-Based Market Overview.” n.d. The Good Food Institute. Accessed via <https://www.gfi.org/marketresearch>