

Wholesome eating

Restaurants are now adopting the vegan and organic trend by offering not just a section of the menu but a whole menu of food that is good for you

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

Diets once considered alternative are now the norm, so expect to see more of gluten-free, dairy-free, vegetarian, vegan and keto options that have become menu mainstays. Movements like 'going back to your roots' and 'place of origin' are ensuring that the food we consume is seeing a traditional revival and conscientious restaurants are at the forefront of these changes.

The ethos

Today there is a lot of awareness around health and nutrition and how it is affecting the body. People are learning about the harmful effects of chemicals and how they are used in Indian agriculture. Awareness is growing and hence many people are buying organic groceries and wanting to eat organic food in restaurants as well. Sagar Neve, owner, Health by Mondo, says, "People have started to accept change in food preferences by adopting vegan and organic food. There has been a considerable growth in the subscribers for vegan and organic food as they are concerned about health and taste." With the increasing awareness of health and the ideal diet, these two trends have fueled the interest, predominantly in youngsters and millennials. In simple words, vegan refers to a diet that is free from cruelty to animals in every form and therefore free from milk, fat or its meat. Whereas organic means naturally grown produce in a healthy eco-system without any of the chemicals in it. Both the trends are helpful in maintaining a healthy lifestyle which is something everyone wants today.







Vegan wave

Vegan food is a lifestyle and not really a fad; the best part is that it is here to stay. There is an enormous shift in the food and beverage space currently. Dairy-free food is not only healthier in many ways but also supports sustainability. This has been proven by multiple people and studies. It also has enormous benefits to health and medical conditions. People are definitely more mindful about what they consume. "They also prefer to know the details of what they are consuming. Where we come into the picture is to ensure we give them what they demand and ensure it's an experience they enjoy when they choose to dine out. There are some guests who really believe in cruelty free living and there is another set that truly questions the sustainability aspect. We have tried to deliver to those expectations where ever

possible. It might be something as simple as not using paper or plastic straws but banana leaf straws that we make in-house. There is a lot of tiny details involved in giving our diners a flawless experience," says Pallavii Gupta, partner, Santé Spa Cuisine, Bengaluru. Veganism is a trend that is also growing due to information that is coming out about plant-based diets being good for the environment and healthier for people. You also have a growing number of people becoming vegans as they are concerned about animal rights.

Organic optimism

Customers are now starting to be aware of their surroundings, climate change and its impact. A change in diet is a small yet impactful long-term solution to create a more sustainable future. Mohit Bulchandani, founder,

Seeds of Life, says, "Apart from sustainability, it is also a choice for a healthier lifestyle. Customers are making vegan choices which help them combat various health issues like cancer or even cardiac issues. Besides, vegan food tastes great as well. One does not have to compromise on taste or nutrition. Some of our top sellers are vegan dishes like the classic melt or the green goddess pizza." Chef Nishant Chaubey, Street Storyss, says, "Going organic is the way forward. It will not only be professionals who will be looking at making the restaurant organic. It will also go to households. Organic development will relate to sustainable dining and the users will be finding it exciting and organic supplies will directly contribute to positive health. I have vegan and organic dishes that the guests come back to. Earlier customers

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following veganism found very few options for proteins but now cashew cheese, soya cheese and almond milk cheese are available to combat that.”

Food sustainability

Plant-based food has been enjoying a good amount of attention in recent times. Rebekah Blank, founder and brand head, Fabcafe by Fabindia says, “Sustainability in food is incredibly important if we are thinking about sustaining the planet. To still be able to eat

the way we are eating now we are going to have to think about sustainability.” Sustainability, incidentally, is the most important aspect for a circular economy of food in which all aspects have to be considered carefully to make it the most effective supply chain. “In my opinion, it is not only about how the food is grown but about the whole system from distribution to packaging to consumption. For instance, while the food is produced in a sustainable way but many a times, other critical

factors like food loss and food waste are not considered. Sustainability for me is about educating people about good health and of course respecting the planet we live in,” says chef Amit Wadhera, executive chef, The Park New Delhi. Oat and hemp milks will continue to dominate menus in 2020, alongside nut-based, dairy-free cheeses. We will also see more gluten-free options in traditionally carb-centric dishes like pasta and breads, using almond flour, rice flour, guar gum, millet, sorghum or tapioca.

Choosing right

These are many ways of using organic produce. Restaurants typically have a certified group of farmers and vendors who grow particular seasonal ingredients for them for every crop season. Organic certification which is been issued by FSSAI or APEDA are also a guideline when choosing organic raw materials. Raw materials are usually sourced from reliable local vendors and there is no compromise on quality of ingredients that are ethically produced. Jose T. Ramapuram, marketing director, Evolve Back, says, “Meat production places an enormous strain on the environment, everything from the grain the animals eat to the water they consume. If everyone in the world switched to a plant-based diet right now, by 2050 we would reduce the greenhouse gases emitted from food production by a staggering 70 per cent. While the regulations vary from country to country, the Government of India has implemented the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP). India has a certification available for organic food called ‘India Organic’ as per the standards established in 2000 but that is not a mandate.”

Substitution cues

Interestingly, it is not very hard to find vegan substitutes that do not compromise on taste as restaurants rethink certain ingredients. Fabcafe for instance make creams out of nuts and even make a vegan cheesecake



that people love. "Almost all vegan substitutes are available very easily in the market. Some of the healthiest vegan meat substitutes are nuts, seeds, jackfruit, natto, lentils, mushrooms, beans and legumes. These are all part of our well-balanced diet which may not compromise on taste but it depends on one's liking. Vegans report a noticeable difference in their taste buds by the evolving taste and cravings. A lot of tasty dishes can be made with these ingredients," says Ramapuram. According to a recently published research report—*Global Organic Food Market Forecast and Opportunities, 2020*—the Global Organic Food and Beverages Market will reach USD 323.56 billion by 2024 and is likely to register a compound annual growth rate of over 16 per cent of the global organic food markets between 2015 and 2020. The way forward is all about clean eating and being organic; the choice is yours to make. □

Ownership details