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# AS PLANT-BASED DEMAND SKYROCKETS, INNOVATORS THINK BEYOND THE BURGER



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There is no doubt that burgers and sandwiches are the most popular items ordered by consumers when dining out. In fact, according to the NPD Group, burgers were included in 13.5% of all restaurant orders in the year ending 2020, which translates into 7 billion servings of burgers. Chicken sandwiches were included in 6.7% of all restaurant orders in the U.S., which amounts to 3.5 billion servings. With that in mind, it comes as no surprise that plant-based innovators are looking to imitate these offerings as demand for alternative proteins skyrockets. The Plant Based Foods Association reported that in the past two years, plant-based food sales have increased 43%, which is nine times faster than total food sales. In 2020, about 57% of all U.S. households purchased plant-based foods. This is up from 53% in 2019, totaling 71 million households. As this market becomes mainstream, foodservice operators are taking notice and getting creative with plant-based offerings that go beyond traditional burger patties.

## TACOS

Taco Bell announced its latest vegetarian and plant-based push earlier this year and is testing a new meatless protein dubbed the “Cravetarian.” Created from chickpeas and peas, this new taco is topped with sour cream and cheese, which can be swapped out for vegan guests. This offering comes after Taco Bell announced a partnership in January with Beyond Meat to add more plant-based options to their menu. These upcoming plant-based meat offerings will add to Taco Bell’s existing vegetarian and vegan range, which includes the option for consumers to swap any meat ingredient for potatoes or black beans.

## HOT DOGS

The plant-based expansion does not end with tacos, as Nathan’s Famous partnered with Meatless Farms to offer consumers a gourmet, plant-based hot dog. Beginning in April, the Nathan’s Famous Plant-Based Hot Dog by Meatless Farms was available exclusively through Nathan’s online retail portal on Shopify and was rolled out in select locations the following month.

“As plant-based menu items continue to grow in popularity, we are excited to launch the first ever gourmet, plant-based hot dog, a product created not just for our flexitarian, vegetarian, and vegan customers, but all who enjoy a healthier diet,” said James Walker, Senior Vice President for Nathan’s Famous.

“We’ve spent a great deal of time perfecting this hot dog and making sure that those who know and love Nathan’s one-of-a-kind flavor, as well as those that might not have tried a Nathan’s hot dog due to diet, can now enjoy an option that fits their lifestyle,” added Walker. “We are looking forward to growing a new customer base through this partnership with Meatless Farms and know their high-quality ingredients are the way to deliver what our customers have come to expect of the original Nathan’s Famous hot dog.”

The plant-based hot dog is made with pea protein, and the kit features six plant-based hot dogs, six buns and a bottle of Nathan’s Famous deli mustard for \$44.99. The restaurant started offering the plant-based hot dog to consumers in the tri-state area and Florida in May, with plans to expand to additional restaurants in the coming year.

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Meanwhile, Greenleaf Foods, SPC, owner of Field Roast, and Chef Roy Choi, co-host of *The Chef Show* and co-founder of the world-famous Kogi BBQ Truck, teamed up to create their own plant-based hot dog for consumers to experience.

Starting in March and available through September, the Kogi Plant-Based Dog can be purchased via Los Angeles and Orange



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County-based Kogi BBQ food trucks. The hot dog, also known as “The Home Run,” features the Field Roast Stadium Dog, which is double smoked using maple hard wood chips, and topped with Choi’s signature Kogi slaw, cilantro-onion lime relish, salsas roja, verde, naranja, and roasted sesame seeds. The hot dog is then smothered with melted Chao Creamery dairy-free cheese and nestled inside a toasted bun.

“The Home Run’ dog is insanely delicious, and the LA community won’t find anything else like it on any other food truck,” said Dan Curtin, President of Greenleaf Foods. “This co-creation is a testament to Field Roast’s and Roy’s commitment to pushing the limits of flavor and giving people indulgent, elevated flavors without sacrificing on chef-inspired quality.”

The Kogi Plant-Based Dog is the first of several initiatives planned between Field Roast and Chef Choi. In November 2020, Field Roast announced the multi-year partnership with Choi as part of a larger brand redesign and its Make Taste Happen campaign launch, which aims to inspire communities of culinary creators with bold flavors that help them craft, discover, and share new taste experiences.

Field Roast and Kogi fans can find the new Kogi Plant-Based Dog the next time they visit the Kogi truck or can order it online. The Field Roast Signature Stadium Dog also rolled out nationally at retail in April.

## TUNA

Seafood has come into the spotlight in the plant-based world as well. In 2020, plant-based seafood brand Good Catch announced a partnership with fast casual restaurant Veggie Grill to bring a plant-based Tuna Melt to the menu.

The sandwich is made with Good Catch’s tuna salad, which consists of legumes including chickpeas, lentils, soy, fava beans, and navy beans, and uses ingredients like diced onion, capers, celery, and fresh dill to mimic the taste. The sandwich is topped with vegan American cheese, pickles, and tomato on griddled

rye bread. This Good Catch tuna sandwich initially started off as a limited time menu option but became a permanent fixture on the Veggie Grill menu due to its popularity.

Good Catch plans to expand further into the restaurant industry this year and continues to push boundaries after raising funding through financing rounds. Good Catch also opened a production facility in Heath, Ohio, and branched out into the United Kingdom by partnering with Bumble Bee Foods as part of a joint distribution effort.

As the plant-based trend is expected to continue to grow, there is ample opportunity for all brands to capitalize on this growth within the foodservice industry.



Good Catch Tuna Melt image provided by Gathered Foods.

Whether its patties, tacos, or tuna melts, the possibilities are endless, and adventurous consumers are eagerly awaiting what plant-based offerings innovators will come up with next. [UB](#)

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