

PLANT-BASED TRAINING GUIDE FOR FRONT-OF-HOUSE STAFF

INTRODUCTION

Whether or not your new plant-forward menus are well-received by your guests depends primarily on two things: first, if the items on your menu are delicious, balanced, convenient, and affordable, and second, if they are presented in a way that makes them appear normal and desirable. Your front of house staff have a key role to play in nudging your guests to try your new offerings.

We designed this resource to get you get your front of house staff excited about your plant-based choices, so that your guests can sense their positivity and enthusiasm. Ideally, you can use this information to educate your staff during existing orientation or training sessions, allocating 45 minutes to 1 hour for this content, but you can also include it in staff training manuals or resources.

If you have any questions at all, please reach out to our Forward Food team at forwardfoodcanada@hsi.org.



Part 1: Start With Why

ESTIMATED TIME: 30 MINUTES



For your staff to get on board with the changes you are making within your operation, they need to understand why those changes are happening. We recommend briefly explaining to your employees **why your leadership is moving towards more plant-based menus**, making it specific to your organization and how it aligns with your existing values or practices.



Next, we invite you to **share our video**, [Building a Better Food System with Plants](#). This presentation provides an overview of the many reasons why plant-based and plant-forward diets are beneficial, for the environment, our health, animal welfare, cost-savings and inclusivity. It is also available in French [here](#). Your staff can watch this together or independently.



Finally, encourage your staff to **sample the plant-based options** on offer whenever possible. Once they see how delicious they are, they will be more motivated to recommend them to your guests.

Photo by Jen Squires



Part 2: Share Key Messages

ESTIMATED TIME: 5 MINUTES

Here are some key messages we recommend inviting your staff to share with your guests. Feel free to add or create your own!

CHAT ABOUT THE CHANGES:

- Let your guests know that there are now more plant-based foods on your menus, because they are so good for us, the planet, and animals. Encourage diners to try something new, even if it's just a small portion.

TALK ABOUT TASTE:

- Since taste is the most important factor in food choices, encourage diners to choose plant-based dishes by reassuring them that they are delicious!
- If you have tried the dish, share what it tastes like. For example, you could explain that a dish is “full of flavour”, “really creamy” or “got a good kick to it”. You can also get creative, saying things like “it's very comforting and exactly what you want to eat on a cool fall day like today”.
- If you have not tried the dish, let them know that it is chef-approved!

HIGHLIGHT HEALTH:

- Eating more plants has so many health benefits, such as lowering the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and certain cancers. Plus, it has been shown to reduce mortality from chronic lifestyle diseases, helping people to live longer.

EMPHASIZE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY:

- Meat, eggs, dairy and aquaculture are very resource intensive. They produce nearly 60% of food's greenhouse gas emissions and use 83% of all farmland, yet they provide just 18% of global calories and 37% of all protein. Each of us can make a positive difference to the planet: swapping just one meat dish for a plant-based one saves greenhouse gas emissions that are equivalent to the energy used to charge your phone for two years.

ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR EFFORT:

- For any guest who decides to try a new plant-based dish, congratulate them on making a good choice! If they didn't like it, encourage them to keep an open mind and try again at their next meal. There are all kinds of great plant-based options out there, and just because they did not like what they tried today, it does not mean they won't love another option.



Part 3: Interactive Activity

ESTIMATED TIME: 10 MINUTES

If time permits, wrap up this short training session with an interactive activity.

First, lay the groundwork and let your staff know that people are more likely to choose plant-based foods when they are presented as appealing and available to everyone, not just for the vegans or vegetarians.

Question 1: What are some things you might not want to say to your diners about your new plant-based options?

Examples:

- “This dish is made with tofu, which I personally don’t like.”
- “Yeah, you could order the bean burrito, but most people get the beef.”
- “Oh, you want the vegan dish? Okay, if you’re sure.”
- “We’re out of the chicken curry right now, but we’ll have more of it ready soon if you’d rather wait instead of having the chickpea curry.”

Question 2: What are some things you could say instead, to encourage a guest to try the new plant-based or plant-forward offerings?

Examples:

- “This dish is made with tofu, which has a bad reputation but is actually delicious – I really like it. Do you want to try a sample?”
- “Yeah, you can order the bean burrito, it’s a new offering and it’s very tasty. It’s also high in nutrients, like fibre, and is low in GHG emissions.”
- “Oh, you want to try the vegan dish? Awesome, it’s really good and I hope you like it.”
- “We’re out of the chicken curry right now, can I recommend the chickpea curry instead? It’s our chef special and it’s very nicely spiced.”

Part 3: Interactive Activity

Here are some additional tips to make sure your plant-based options are successful:

Create crave-worthy dishes

Rather than focusing on developing dishes that will only satisfy your vegetarian, vegan or flexitarian clients, strive to offer items that will appeal to anyone. Build in lots of flavour, use omnivores as your taste testers and refine recipes until they are enjoyed by all.



Carrot osso buco with polenta



Mushroom tacos with cilantro crema

Choose mouthwatering names

Research shows that dishes with names that highlight their flavour, mouthfeel and provenance are far more likely to be ordered. For example, instead of “vegan burrito”, try “smokey black bean and sweet potato burrito” or “spicy seven layer burrito”. Use a “V” or “VG” symbol to denote these items are vegan, for guests who need to know.

Place items in prime positions

Make plant-based options the easy choice by putting them at the top of your menu, at the front of your buffet, or first on a list of daily specials. You can also nudge guests towards plant-rich choices by making them your default – like using oat milk in coffee unless guests request dairy.



Cheesy tri-coloured nachos



Crabbyless crab cakes with remoulade

Integrate, don't separate

Those who eat meat are 56% less likely to order a plant-rich dish if it's contained within a “vegetarian” box on a menu. Include vegetarian and vegan items in your main menu, rather than sectioning them off – which signals that they are only for people who identify with the assigned label.

Get guests and staff excited

Generate excitement in your plant-based or plant-rich menu items by promoting them on your social media, offering in-store samples, and telling your staff about the many benefits they offer. You can also offer incentives, like discounts or rewards, to guests who try your new dishes!

Part 4: Wrap Up

ESTIMATED TIME: 10 MINUTES

End the activity and training by answering questions from staff. Remember, the key takeaway is to get people excited to eat more plants, for the sake of our planet and everyone on it. Every member of the team has a role to play in nudging guests towards the more sustainable choice!

Have any questions? Contact us at forwardfoodcanada@hsi.org.



Additional Resources

Would you benefit from **free, personalized support** in making your operation's food offerings more plant-based?

SIGN THE FORWARD FOOD PLEDGE 

When you sign the Forward Food pledge, you are making a meaningful and achievable commitment to make your food offerings at least 20% more plant-based.

By signing the pledge, you can take advantage of our free resources and supports, such as culinary training, recipe and menu development support, guidance on marketing and communications, educational sessions, and greenhouse gas impact assessments.

Additional free resources:

- [Forward Food website](#)
- [Packet of ~200 plant-based recipes](#)
- [Plant-based substitution guide](#)
- [Plant-based sample menu](#)
- [Plant-based vendor list](#)
- [Virtual culinary trainings](#)

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2024



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