

Plant-Rich Dining Experiences for Conferences and Meetings

A Guide for Kitchen and Serving Staff

Foreword

This guide has been developed based on five inspiration programs involving hotel and conference businesses from Denmark. The participating companies engaged in plant-based cooking workshops, piloted nudging initiatives, and provided valuable insights into the practical implementation of greener catering.

Based on these programs, Center for a Plant-Based and Organic Future in collaboration with chef and recipe developer Christine Bille, has created this practical guide as inspiration for adding more plant-based dishes to conferences and meetings. This guide is intended for both kitchen staff and servers interested in exploring plant-based cuisine.

A big thanks to the staff at Scandic Aarhus City, Nørre Vosborg, Trinity Hotel and Conference, Hotel Europa, Sinatur Hotel Storebælt, DGI-Huset Vejle, and CPH Conference for their valuable contributions to the project's workshops and experiments.

Read more at www.plantebaseretvidenscenter.dk or contact Adam Kuskner at ak@videnscenter.dk

Who's behind?

Adam Kuskner

Behavioral specialist, working with implementation of plant-rich menus and nudging for greener choices.

Christine Bille Nielsen

Chef, recipe developer, and food communicator specializing in plant-based cuisine.

Lene Midtgaard

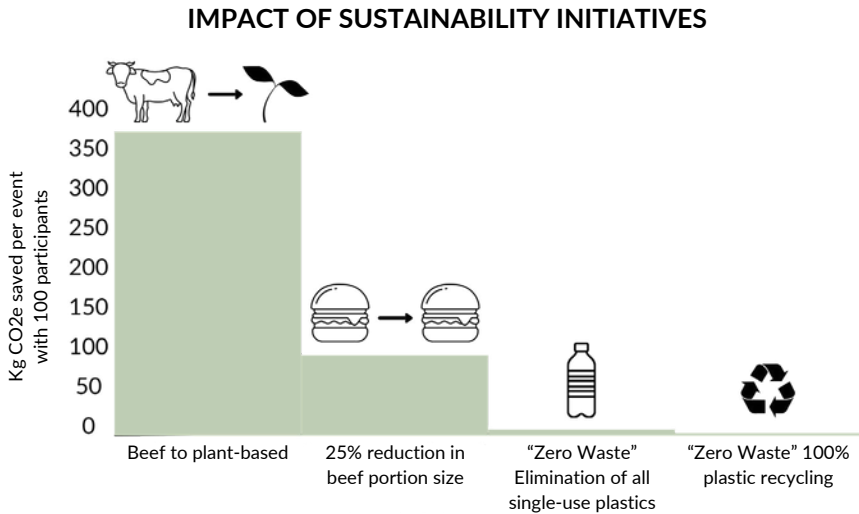
Senior Project Manager at MeetDenmark and advisor on sustainable initiatives in Danish business and meeting tourism.

THANK YOU TO THE REFERENCE GROUP FOR SUPPORTING THE PROJECT



Why more plant-based menus at conferences?

“An increasing number of companies are taking responsibility for reducing their environmental impact - just as we do at Comwell. This puts greater pressure on us to deliver sustainable solutions, particularly in our catering, which has a high climate footprint. That's why our menus must be more plant-based when companies host meetings and conferences with us. *Rasmus Rasmussen, Comwell Hotels*



Miller, Shelie A.: "Five Misperceptions Surrounding the Environmental Impacts of Single-Use Plastic" in: *Environmental Science and Technology* 54(22), november 2020

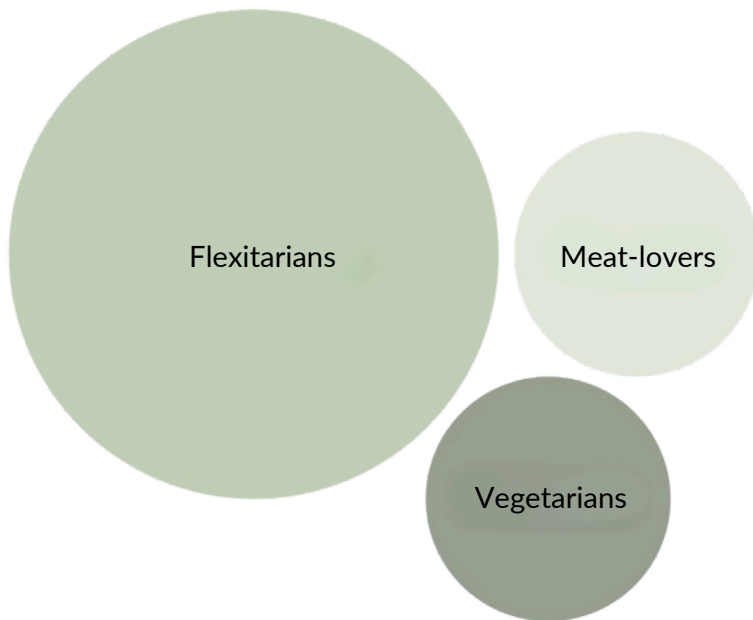
There are significant climate savings to be made by reducing meat consumption. With EU's new climate legislation for businesses, it's not only beneficial for the planet but also for your business. Serving delicious food that supports their sustainability ambitions makes you the preferred choice for businesses.

Plant-based food - A new way of thinking

Who are we cooking for?

The idea that you either eat meat or cut it out completely has dominated for years - but it's time to rethink this approach.

Flexitarians make up the largest target group



It can be a challenge to bridge the gap between devoted meat-eaters and plant-based eaters. The middle ground is to meet the majority of guests where they are: open-minded, curious, and eager to eat more greens. These are exactly the people we're cooking for. Offering meat as an optional add-on ensures broader inclusivity.

Give the guest an option

Despite a widespread desire to increase vegetable consumption, practical barriers remain. We become entrenched in the same routines, and that is also when selecting food, it is essential to consider sustainability. Therefore, this guide presents the most effective strategies for encouraging your guests to opt for more environmentally friendly choices. This can be achieved, for instance, by positioning meat as the last item on the buffet or establishing plant-based options as the standard on the menu, allowing guests the choice to purchase meat or fish as an accompaniment.



Example of a green dish accompanied by meat on the side, Sinatur Hotel Storebælt.

The Wonderful World of Plant-Based Foods

Cooking with plants as the primary ingredient presents a unique approach compared to meat accompanied by sauce and potatoes, as recognized in Danish-French cuisine.

Still, we'd bet it's just as enjoyable and exciting. Since plant-based foods typically cost less than meat, they enable greater financial flexibility to invest in high-quality and organic products.

Overview of the various categories of edible plants



NUTS



CEREALS



POTATOES



VEGETABLES



MUSHROOMS



BERRIES



PLANT-BASED
PRODUCTS



SEEDS



HERBS AND
SPICES



SEAWEED
AND ALGAE



PLANT-BASED
DAIRY PRODUCTS



LEGUMES AND
PULSES

Inspiration for plant-based dishes

Satiety, flavor and sensory

Let's clear up one thing before we go any further: When we cook with plants, we need to ensure a good sense of satiety and plenty of flavor!

“It's all about putting together the dish with a variety of colorful ingredients and including different sources of protein, such as legumes, grains, seeds, and nuts. And most importantly, giving the ingredients plenty of flavor through seasonings and the right cooking methods.

Christine Bille Nielsen, Chef and Recipe Developer

Satiety

A common misconception is that plant-based dishes lack satiety, which might not be so surprising if all they've been served is a bland salad. A reduction in animal protein intake should be accompanied by an increased consumption of plant-based protein sources. Use a wide variety and mix to achieve a good amino acid profile. Also include fiber-rich carbohydrates for a satisfying fullness, and don't forget healthy fats for extra flavor and satiety.

Satiety from protein-rich plants

Lentils, beans, peas, chickpeas, tofu, kale

Fullness from fiber and carbohydrates

Potatoes, pasta, rye bread, grains, brown rice, crispbread

Richness

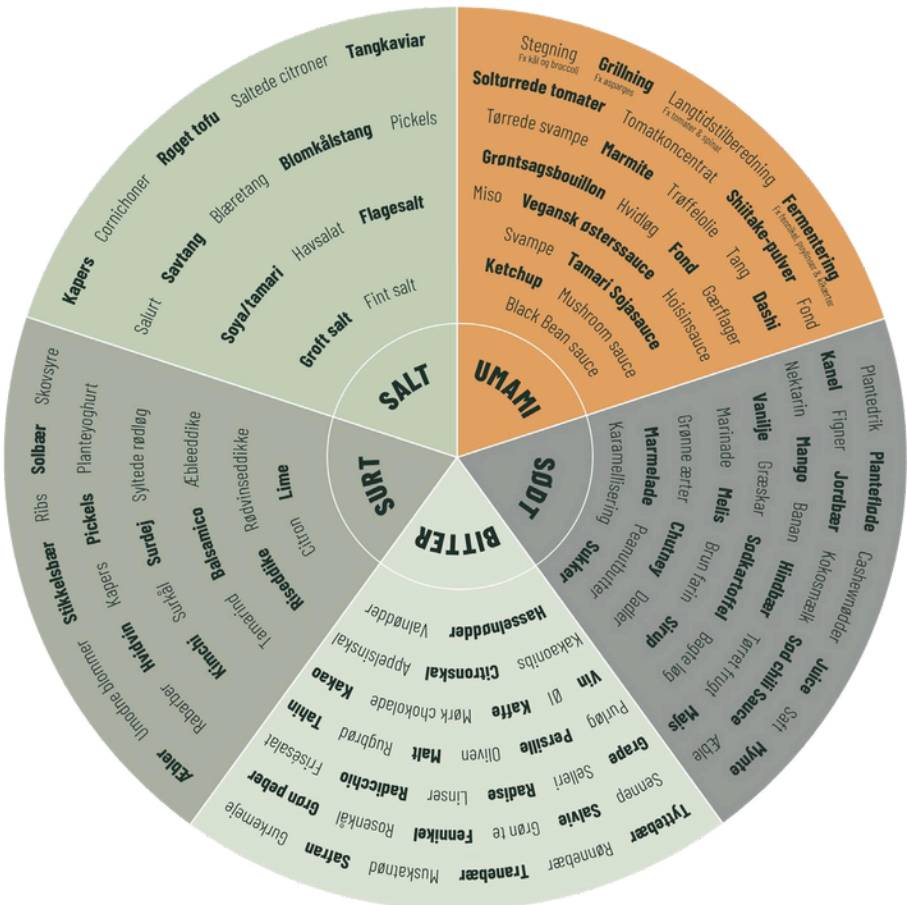
Coconut milk, avocado, blended nuts, olive oil

Flavor

As always, we need to consider sour, salty, sweet, and bitter elements in our cooking. And what about umami? Well, umami can definitely be created in plant-based dishes. Slow-cooked tomatoes, garlic, and mushrooms are just a few of the excellent ingredients used to add depth of flavor. In addition, flavor enhancers like seaweed, miso, and nutritional yeast can take a dish to a whole new level.

THE GREEN FLAVOR COMPASS

IN DANISH



Sensory

Once we've ensured the dish is both filling and flavorful, we mustn't forget the sensory aspect: we don't just taste with our sense of smell and taste - we also need to satisfy other senses. We can do this by:



Have you ensured a balance of textures? Something soft, something crispy?

How can we incorporate a chewy element into the dish? Horse beans!

What about the creamy element?

TRY IT OUT!

Use legumes

The legume family includes peas, chickpeas, beans, fava beans, lentils, and lupins. Before animal products became widespread, legumes and pulses were a cornerstone of Danish food culture.

In addition to their positive impact on the nature, soil, and health, legumes are also incredibly versatile in the kitchen. Even if we're not used to cooking with legumes and they may seem a bit starchy, don't be discouraged - there are countless ways to prepare delicious dishes with legumes.

BENEFITS OF LEGUMES



Absorbs a lot of flavor



High in protein



Good texture (Blended, they add juiciness, and whole - especially fava beans and peas - provide a nice bite)



Good to build routines around



Opportunity for creativity and innovation

“Legumes come in many shapes and colors, and they have countless functions. Try incorporating them into every meal - it's a great exercise and an effective way to increase their presence in your kitchen.

Kenneth Brandt, Head Chef at Scandic Aarhus City



Photos: Pure Dansk, Trinity, Kasper Rebien

Guidelines for using legumes in the kitchen

Whole legumes should generally be soaked for about 12 hours before cooking. This is mainly to shorten the cooking time. If they haven't been soaked, simply boil them for a longer period.

FURTHERMORE, WE SUGGEST THAT YOU:



Always prepare dishes with flavour compounds
For example robust herbs, garlic, and carrots.



Always cook them until tender
The dish's crispiness should not derive from the legumes.



Allow them to absorb the flavor as they cool in the boiling water
Turn off the heat when they are nearly ready and let them rest for 30 minutes.



Ensure that the dish comprises at least 50% non-leguminous vegetables
Transform it into more than merely a bowl of chickpeas.



Introduce legumes gradually, increasing the quantity day by day
Turn up the volume day by day

Offering sustainable menus

Use sensory descriptions instead of 'meat-free'

If we inform our guests that they will be served a vegetarian, plant-based dish or meat-free dish, they may likely frown slightly. However, when we highlight the taste, aroma, or history of the food, it nearly markets itself.



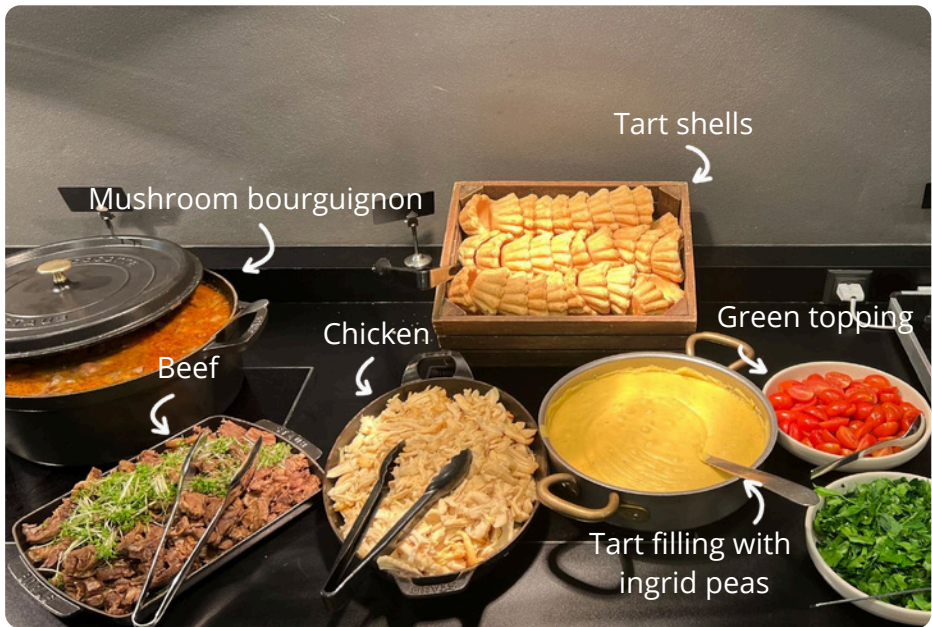
Understanding your audience is crucial. Some individuals welcome vegetables in their meatloaf, while others may feel deceived; in such cases, meat can serve as an extra option. A growing number of individuals aspire to adopt a greener diet, yet many are weary of the constant discourse surrounding it, so it is essential to emphasize flavor.

Most importantly: Embrace your role as host. Make sure the guests feel comfortable. Prepare your staff to answer questions and share your journey toward a greener kitchen internally. At Sinatur Hotel Storebælt, chefs and waitstaff stand by the buffet to talk about the dishes and ingredients. This enhances the dining experience and sparks the guests' curiosity – also about the plant-based dishes.

Use meat as a seasoning

The more plant-based options there are on the menu, the more likely guests are to automatically make greener choices. By making plant-based dishes the default, you accommodate those who follow a plant-based diet. Hardly anyone will object to serving the meat on the side.

By serving meat as a side, the quantity can be significantly reduced. Take inspiration from Scandic Aarhus City, where they have created a plant-based tartelet filling with vegetables and Ingrid peas, placing the chicken on the side as an optional add-on.



Frokostbuffet, Scandic Aarhus City

Another example is from Sinatur Hotel Storebælt, where large platters of fish were replaced with small individually portioned bowls. This reduced both food waste and the amount of fish taken from the buffet.

Signage for the menu and buffet

Put spotlight on plant-based options and use small pictograms to indicate vegetarian and vegan dishes instead of labeling them directly. Many guests do not identify with the terms themselves but still want to eat more sustainably.

An explanation of the pictograms can be placed on the menu or at the buffet.

The icons are available at www.vegetarisk.dk/foodservice and are free to use.



(vegetarian)



(vegan)

Another way to inspire guests to choose plant-based dishes is by placing signs with labels such as “Chef’s Favorite” or “Seasonal Favorite.”



Lunch buffet, CPH Conference



Lunch buffet, DTU

Make plant-based the standard

The most effective nudging tool is to flip the traditional conference menu around and make plant-based dishes the default option. Studies show that when guests have to actively change their selection to a non-plant-based menu, an average of 72% choose to stick with the pre-selected plant-based option.

“It's about making the choice easy for the guest; if we make a green menu the standard, it's much easier for the guest to stick with that choice, rather than actively choosing a "vegetarian alternative" when they don't actually see themselves as vegetarians.

Sarah Pihl, Head-Chef at Sinatur Hotel Storebælt



Green serving, Sinatur Hotel Storebælt

On this page, you'll find examples of how a heading or link sent from the meeting organizer can be set up.

Example 1: Meet as an active add-on

By making the plant-based option the default, it is presented as the recommended choice. This has proven to be the most effective solution for greener menus - for example, at ICA's conferences and at Roskilde University.

At [company name], we strive to serve food in line with our sustainability principles. Our chefs have therefore prepared a plant-based and satisfying evening menu using seasonal ingredients.

☐ Please tick the box below if you would prefer a non-plant-based menu

Example 2: Two menu options

Another approach is to let the guest choose between a plant-based and a non-plant-based menu. In this example, the menus are labeled with neutral colors to avoid drawing attention to the guest's choice when the food is served.

Conference dinner - Choose your menu

- ☐ I would like the **orange** menu.
Ballotine of savoy cabbage and lima beans, pan-seared chicory, lentil and cabbage sauté, and vegetable velouté
2,1 Kg CO₂e
- ☐ I would like the **purple** menu.
Pheasant ballotine with pan-seared chicory, lentil and cabbage sauté, and chicken velouté
4,8 Kg CO₂e

Example 3: Three options

For some, it feels more comfortable to have meat as a side rather than giving it up entirely. With this setup, the majority will follow the norm and choose the plant-rich menu, which includes, for example, 60 grams of fish or meat.

In practice, guests can receive different colored tokens upon arrival at the dinner, making it easy for the servers to see who gets what.

Please select which menu you would like tonight



The Plant-Based

100 % plant-based and satisfying menu with no animal products. A meal full of flavor and climate-conscious choices.



The Plant-Rich

A plant-rich menu on the season's flavorful vegetables. Meat and fish are served as side options.



The Plant-Poor

A traditional menu with pork, beef or chicken as the main element. Potatoes and siders are served seperately.

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