



Power Your Menu with Plants

Plant-Forward Toolkit for Military Dining Facilities



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What is Plant-forward Eating?

Plant-forward and other plant-focused eating patterns (vegan, vegetarian, etc.) are increasingly popular in the U.S., especially among younger generations (“Millennials” and “Generation Z”). A “plant-forward” eating pattern focuses on nutrient-dense, whole plants such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans and lentils, nuts and seeds, healthy plant oils, and herbs and spices. These nutrition powerhouses are rich in nutrients—such as vitamins, minerals, fiber, complex carbohydrates, protein, and heart-healthy fats—essential for optimal health and performance. In the Go for Green® (G4G) program, these foods code “Green” as high-performance fuel.

Plant-forward eating patterns take into account that not all plant foods are created equal. Some packaged plant foods are highly processed, high in added sugars or saturated fats, and contain artificial flavors and preservatives. Plant-forward menus swap these less nutritious options with high-performance whole foods closer to their natural state.

Plant-**forward** differs from plant-**based**, vegan, and vegetarian eating patterns. Plant-forward eating doesn’t exclude animal products, but instead includes smaller portions of animal protein (fish, eggs, dairy, poultry, and lean meat).

// Plant-based is used to refer to ingredients and foods themselves, that is, fruits and vegetables (produce); whole grains; beans, other legumes (pulses), and soy foods; nuts and seeds; plant oils; and herbs and spices. Could also mean vegan or vegetarian dietary patterns. Different from “plant-forward,” which refers to the style of cooking and eating that emphasizes and celebrates these foods, but is not limited to them.”

– The Culinary Institute of America

Benefits of Plant-forward Menus

Most Service Members don't eat the recommended daily servings of nutritious plant foods like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Improving eating habits, including serving performance-focused menus through G4G, are key to optimizing Service Members' nutritional fitness.

In the military dining environment, a plant-forward menu offers a practical approach to meet military and service-specific nutrition and menu standards, **G4G Menu Coding Goals**, and the *U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020–2025*. Plant-forward menus can be an effective, flexible approach to increase access to “Green” foods and promote a supportive nutrition environment. How and when to introduce and serve more plants is adaptable to your specific foodservice environment, diner population, staffing, resources, and other priorities.

The qualities of a plant-forward menu help support Warfighter health, performance, and readiness. Low saturated fat and higher amounts of fiber and phytochemicals in plant-based eating patterns can reduce inflammation and benefit body weight, cardiovascular health, blood sugar, and blood pressure. Many plants are also high in protein, allowing Service Members to meet their protein needs when they eat a variety of plant-rich menu items.

Besides health, diners might adopt an eating plan with less (or no) animal products and more plants because it's more environmentally sustainable, more animal-friendly, or for religious, cultural, or personal reasons.

Power Up Your Menu with More Plants

Plant-forward recipes might be new or unfamiliar to diners who see and choose more traditional menu items. In the military nutrition environment, often the best strategy for both diners and staff is to gradually increase plant-forward offerings in a dining facility, snack bar, market, food truck, kiosk, or other “extended delivery” menu. Even small changes in your menu can introduce Service Members to high-performance meals, recipes, and snacks. In addition, staff might need more training or education to prepare plant-forward ingredients and recipes.

First, work with a team of foodservice and nutrition staff who are passionate about improving the quality of menu options to plan your plant-forward changes. During the G4G **pre-implementation** planning phase, there are multiple things to consider.

- ▶ Availability and feasibility of purchasing **nutrient-dense** plant foods.
 - Choose fresh and frozen vs. canned produce whenever possible.
 - Work with your prime vendor to add more whole-grain products on the catalog.
 - Look for multiple ways (Mainline + specialty bars) to use plant-based ingredients to support the need for them.
- ▶ Feasibility of preparing more plant-based recipes.

// Plant-forward is a style of cooking and eating that *emphasizes and celebrates*, but is not limited to, plant-based foods—including fruits and vegetables (produce); whole grains; beans, other legumes (pulses) and soy foods; nuts and seeds; plant oils; and herbs and spices—and that reflects evidence-based principles of health and sustainability.”

– The Culinary Institute of America

- Ensure you have enough staff to prep fresh produce or the ability to buy pre-prepared options.
- ▶ Feasibility of staff training on new plant-forward menus and recipes.
 - Consider who trains staff and has the skills and knowledge needed to be successful.
- ▶ Diner food preferences, popular or commonly requested items, and diner feedback.
 - Introduce new plant-based options in flavor profiles that your diners like.
 - > For example, if your diners like Mexican flavors, offer plant-based Mexican options.
- ▶ Support from your foodservice operations leadership since buy-in is critical to sustainment of dining facility initiatives.
 - Demonstrate how plant-forward menu changes support DoD and service-specific menu standards and programs such as G4G.
 - Provide input and feedback from diners asking for more nutritious options.
 - Show cost savings for a plant-based vs. traditional animal protein-centered meal.

The [Armed Forces Recipe Service \(AFRS\) database](#) has a wide variety of plant-forward recipes for your foodservice operation. Start with plant-forward recipes that can be easily incorporated into your current menu like those that don't require additional resources or staff and build up gradually.

Make Plant Foods the Center of the Plate

There are many ways to slowly increase plant-forward menu options. Instead of the traditional plate design, where meat is the center, focus on making plant foods the star of your diners' plates. "Flip" the standard protein options to decrease, combine, or swap out animal proteins for plant alternatives. Load your menu with whole grains, beans and legumes, nuts, seeds, fruits, veggies, and healthy fats and oils so diners can build a high-performance meal that's filling and satisfying.

In other words, get protein from plant sources more often than animal sources. Try these strategies to increase plant proteins in your menu:

- ▶ Plan your menu with a variety of plant-based entrées based on what your diners like.
- ▶ Offer recipes that blend plant foods with nutritious animal proteins in popular dishes.
 - [Blended Beef and Mushroom Burger](#) (N-321-00)
 - [Mediterranean Chickpea Meatball Sub](#) (N-334-00)
- ▶ Use well-prepared, flavorful animal proteins as a garnish or flavoring instead of a central theme to the dish.

// Protein Flip": Rebalancing ratios of meat and plant-based protein...elevating the role of legumes, nuts, and plant-forward flavors in general.

– The Culinary Institute of America

In addition to increasing plant proteins, add more fruits, veggies, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds, oils, and herbs and spices to build a plant-forward menu. Offer more plant foods on your menu, so diners can create a nutritious, balanced plate.

- ▶ Vegetables and fruits.
 - Offer more veggies in main dishes, sides, and at specialty bars.
 - Place fruit in different forms throughout the facility.
 - > Offer fruit or fruit-based desserts.
 - > Use fruit as toppings at specialty bars.
 - > Serve whole, fresh fruit at the Salad Bar.
 - > Add sliced fruit to infused water.
- ▶ Whole grains.
 - Make whole grains the default option for sandwich breads, rolls, and wraps.
 - Place white-bread options out of sight (behind the counter) and serve by request only.
 - Offer a variety—including whole-grain pasta, legume pasta, quinoa, brown rice, oats, and bulgur wheat—on the Mainline and at specialty bars.
- ▶ Legumes (beans, peas, and lentils).
 - Offer a variety of legume-based entrées and sides.
 - Offer legumes in bowl options or mix them with familiar ingredients (a good way to introduce legumes to diners).
 - Serve legumes at specialty and theme bars.
 - > For example, offer legumes at the Mediterranean-, Southwest-, or Pacific Rim-themed bars.
- ▶ Nuts and seeds.
 - For added crunch and flavor, choose recipes that include nuts or seeds as a healthy, plant-based fat.
 - Offer nuts as nutritious toppings at the Fitness Bar or Salad Bar, and for build-your-own bowls because their texture works well with oatmeal, grits, yogurt, cottage cheese, rice, and other grains.
- ▶ Plant-based oils.
 - Use olive and canola oils (as instructed in AFRS recipes) for optimal flavor and cooking.
 - Add a small amount of sesame oil to enhance flavor at the end of cooking.
- ▶ Herbs and spices.
 - Use a variety of different fresh and dried herbs and spices to garnish and enhance the taste of plant-based dishes.
 - Keep in mind you need less salt when a lot of other flavors are present.
 - Wherever possible, make these seasonings available for diners to enhance their own meals in place of reaching for the saltshaker.



Performance Swaps for Plant-forward Menus

Make menu upgrades to replace less nutritious “Yellow” or “Red” menu choices with high-performance alternatives (for example, swap French fries for roasted sweet potato wedges) or choose recipes that “blend” nutrient-dense plant foods with nutritious animal proteins (for example, bean and beef burger). Try “smart swaps”! Substitute traditional ingredients for “Green” options when you can.

// Blended burger concept: Meat blended with mushrooms and/or other vegetables, legumes, or grains.”

– The Culinary Institute of America

Swap Out	Swap In
Refined grains: enriched pasta, white rice, and white bread	Whole grains: quinoa, whole wheat, legume or multigrain pasta, brown rice, and multigrain breads or wraps
Deep-fried sides: French fries, onion rings, and chips	High-performance sides: steamed, baked, sautéed, or roasted veggies
Highly-processed, high-sugar desserts: cookies, pastries, and ice cream	Fresh-cut fruits, fruit cups, fruit smoothies, yogurt parfaits, and innovative new AFRS dessert recipes featuring whole grains, legumes, and less sugar
Ground meats in burgers, meatballs, meatloaf, lasagna, casseroles, and other popular dishes	Mashed or minced legumes (chickpeas, black beans, or lentils), mushrooms, other veggies, or whole grains
Croutons and other fried, refined, crunchy garnishes	Nuts and seeds
Salt	Herbs and spices (dried or fresh) or acids (vinegar or citrus)
Butter or shortening	Olive or canola oil

Try to include more plant-forward menu offerings at different serving stations too. For more ideas, read [Go for Green® Guidelines: Plant-forward Menus](#).

Mainline

On the Mainline, most sides are already plant-forward such as veggie- and grain-based options. Try to include at least one nutrient-dense, plant-based entrée on the Mainline at each meal. You can start with plant-based or blended alternatives of classic recipes that diners are already familiar with. Based on diner feedback and staff feasibility, gradually increase menu offerings.

When feasible, place nutrient-dense, plant-based menu items first in line or front and center, making it easier for diners to choose.

Spicy Garlic Lemon Shrimp and Quinoa (G)	Taco Pasta (G)	Sautéed Garlic Spinach (G)	Cauliflower Rice (G)	Hot Glazed Sweet Potatoes (Y)	Turkey Enchiladas (Y)	Refried Beans with Cheese (Y)
→ Diner flow of traffic →						

Specialty Bars

Daily, rotating, or themed specialty bars are excellent ways to increase variety and offer diners fresh, flavorful ingredients in customized meals. **Specialty bars** or action stations are often very popular with diners as the setup and ingredients are similar to popular restaurant chains, allowing diners to build a meal with their preferred ingredients and flavors.

First, include more plant foods in your current specialty bars. Have plant-focused sides, including vegetables, at the specialty bar to encourage diners to choose them along with their entrée. Offering plant-forward entrées in addition to, or in place of, traditional meat-centric entrées, is a great way to ease staff into serving—and diners into eating—more plants.

- ▶ Nearly every specialty bar can feature vegetables.
 - Use what’s available and in season to complement specialty bar flavors.
- ▶ Offer various plant options at build-your-own bars and find **AFRS recipes** that work with your specific theme.
- ▶ Place plant-based options on the line before meat-focused ones.
- ▶ Offer animal-based options in smaller containers.
- ▶ Use “**Featured Meal**” signage to promote plant-based meals.

If you’re featuring a traditional Chicken Wing Bar, make it more plant-forward:

- ▶ Offer more nutrient-dense veggie sides.
 - Serve hot vegetable sides such as roasted or steamed vegetables.
 - Serve cold vegetables such as raw, cut-up carrots, celery, and cucumber.
- ▶ Offer plant-based options with a similar flavor profile such as the **Buffalo Tofu Bowl** (T-313-00).
- ▶ Serve leaner alternatives such as grilled shrimp or grilled chicken.
- ▶ Direct diners to where they can find plant-focused sides for a well-rounded plate.
 - For example, direct them to the Salad Bar or Cold Bar for whole or cut-up fruit or a specialty salad of the day.



As part of your menu rotation, you can also offer a mostly plant-forward themed bar. For example, Mediterranean-style eating focuses on fresh vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and olive oil with a small amount of lean poultry and fish, which makes it a great plant-forward themed bar. **Go for Green® Guidelines: Mediterranean Bar** provides details on making this part of your facility’s menu rotation.

Sample Mediterranean Bar Setup

Mediterranean Orzo (Y)	White rice (Y)	Hummus (G)	Herb Baked Chicken Breast (G)	Chopped Greek Salad (Y)	Feta (Y)	Oil & Vinegar (G)
Lettuce (G)	Rice & lentils (G)	Turkish-Style Meatballs (G)	Roasted bell peppers (G)	Greek Roasted Potatoes (G)	Kalamata olives (Y)	Fresh & dried herbs (G)
		White beans (G)	Sautéed mushrooms (G)	Shakshuka (G)	Avocado (G)	Nuts & Seeds (G)
→ Diner flow of traffic →						
Note: Additional condiments that don’t need refrigeration can be kept off to the side with Green-coded items displayed first.						

If you can’t provide everything at the specialty bar, direct diners to build a complete, balanced meal with items from other serving bars.

- ▶ Highlight the specialty salad at the Salad Bar or Cold Bar.
- ▶ Suggest a whole-grain side dish from the Mainline.
- ▶ Promote the plant-based soup of the day.
- ▶ Use signage to suggest meal combinations or ideas.



Use AFRS recipe ideas to increase the plant options on your Mainline or specialty bar menu.

Breakfast

Plant-based entrées (vegetarian):

- ▶ [Apricot Overnight Oatmeal \(E-305-04\)](#)
- ▶ [Berries and Cream Quinoa Bowl \(E-328-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Huevos Rancheros \(F-301-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Huevos Rancheros \(F-301-01\)](#)
- ▶ [Peanut Butter and Jelly Quinoa Bowl \(E-329-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Pesto Quinoa Power Bowl \(F-309-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Potato Frittata \(F-300-02\)](#)
- ▶ [Savory Grits Breakfast Bowl \(F-311-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Shakshuka Breakfast Bowl \(F-312-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Southwestern Scramble \(Tofu\) \(F-307-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Southwestern Breakfast Bowl \(Tofu\) \(F-308-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Vegetable Frittata \(F-300-00\)](#)

Plant-forward or Blended entrées:

- ▶ [Vegetable Frittata \(F-300-00\)](#)
- ▶ [BLT Quinoa Bowl \(F-310-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Chicken and Grits Breakfast Bowl \(F-313-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Mushroom, Turkey, and Swiss Frittata \(F-303-01\)](#)

Lunch and Dinner

Plant-based entrées (vegetarian):

- ▶ [Buffalo Tofu Bowl \(T-313-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Classic Veggie Stir Fry with Tofu \(T-004-01\)](#)
- ▶ [Eggplant Lasagna \(T-300-00\)](#)
- ▶ [General Tso Cauliflower and Edamame Bowl \(T-306-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Pesto Pasta with Blistered Cherry Tomatoes \(T-305-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Red Lentil Penne with Roasted Eggplant Puree \(T-304-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Spaghetti with Mediterranean Chickpea Meatballs \(T-308-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Southwest Vegetable Stuffed Peppers \(T-176-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Sweet and Tangy Tofu Poke Bowl \(T-311-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Vegetable Curry with Brown Rice \(T-203-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Vegetable Lasagna \(T-508-00\)](#)

Plant-forward or Blended entrées:

- ▶ [Blended Beef and Lentil Burger \(N-323-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Blended Beef and Mushroom Burger \(N-321-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Chicken Biryani \(L-213-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Kung Pao Chicken \(L-367-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Kung Pao Shrimp \(L-367-01\)](#)
- ▶ [Spicy Garlic Lemon Shrimp and Quinoa \(L-370-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Stuffed Green Peppers \(L-040-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Taco Pasta \(L-369-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Turkey and Quinoa Burger with Spinach and Feta \(N-319-00\)](#)
- ▶ [Unstuffed Peppers \(Italian Rice and Beef\) \(L-205-00\)](#)

AFRS has many plant-based, starchy and non-starchy vegetable sides included in the examples below. Diners can sometimes make a plant-based meal from a combination of sides, especially when legumes are offered (to increase protein).

Non-starchy sides:

- ▶ [Buffalo Roasted Cauliflower](#) (Q-313-00)
- ▶ [Cauliflower Rice](#) (Q-352-00)
- ▶ [Parmesan Cauliflower](#) (Q-024-53)
- ▶ [Parmesan Oregano Zucchini Strips](#) (Q-358-01)
- ▶ [Roasted Broccoli](#) (Q-315-00)
- ▶ [Roasted Brussels Sprouts](#) (Q-106-51)
- ▶ [Sautéed Spinach](#) (Q-121-50)

Starchy sides:

- ▶ [Caribbean Black Beans](#) (Q-301-00)
- ▶ [Garlic and Soy Roasted Potatoes](#) (Q-319-00)
- ▶ [Hot Glazed Sweet Potatoes](#) (Q-334-00)
- ▶ [Mexican Roasted Sweet Potatoes](#) (Q-321-00)
- ▶ [Spaghetti Squash](#) (Q-355-00)
- ▶ [Sweet and Spicy Lentils](#) (Q-335-00)
- ▶ [Sweet Potato Home Fries](#) (Q-318-00)

Grab ‘n Go, Markets, and Food Trucks

Plant-forward foods are excellent choices to improve nutritional quality, flavor, and variety of grab-and-go, market, and food truck menu items. Serve plant-based foods along with traditional options and current favorites to offer exciting new flavors and choices.

Sandwiches, wraps, salads, soups, chilis, stews, and bowls all lend themselves well to the grab ‘n go format. Other menu items that travel well can also be offered for diners on the go. Including more plants can mean some simple changes such as using whole grains as the default for breads and buns, offering a wide array of veggies for burger and sandwich toppings, and offering flavorful fruits and vegetables as sides and salads. These plant-forward sides can accompany both animal- and plant-based menu items.

“Flip” the traditional format since many menu items can be presented primarily as plant-based with the option to add animal protein. If the base items sound interesting enough, some diners might decide to skip the animal protein completely.



Turkey and Quinoa Burger with Spinach and Feta (N-319-00)

Below are some ideas to get you started with tasty, nutritious grab-and-go entrées. Look for others in [Go for Green® Guidelines: Grab 'n Go](#).

- ▶ [Chipotle Hummus Wrap](#) (N-335-00)
- ▶ [Blended Beef and Mushroom Burger](#) (N-321-00)
- ▶ [Turkey and Quinoa Burger with Spinach and Feta](#) (N-319-00)
- ▶ [Citrus Twist Salmon Poke Bowl](#) (L-375-00)
- ▶ [Pacific Rim Shrimp Poke Bowl](#) (L-376-00)
- ▶ [Thai Shrimp Salad](#) (L-506-50)
- ▶ [Korean BBQ Tempeh Wrap](#) (N-320-01)
- ▶ [Mediterranean Chickpea Meatball Sub](#) (N-334-00)
- ▶ [Mediterranean Pesto Orzo Bowl](#) (T-309-00)
- ▶ [Buffalo Tofu Bowl](#) (T-313-00)
- ▶ [Chickpea Curry and Basmati Rice Bowl](#) (T-303-00)

Bowls

Bowls are a great way to serve more vegetables, whole grains, plant-based proteins, and healthy fats using the “build your own bowl or plate” concept from popular quick-serve restaurants. Offer a wide variety of colorful veggies, whole grains, flavorful sauces, and toppings or garnishes that enhance appearance, flavor, and texture. Bowls can be offered on the Mainline or specialty bar and also work well as Grab ‘n Go options.

Breakfast Bowl examples:

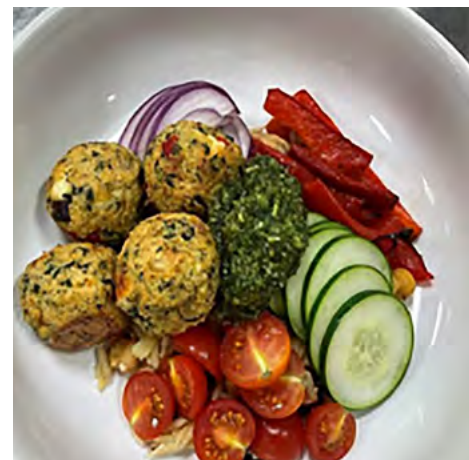
- ▶ [BLT Quinoa Bowl](#) (F-310-00)
- ▶ [Mediterranean Chicken and Grits Bowl](#) (L-374-00)
- ▶ [Pesto Quinoa Power Bowl](#) (F-309-00)
- ▶ [Shakshuka Breakfast Bowl](#) (F-312-00)
- ▶ [Southwestern Breakfast Bowl \(Tofu\)](#) (F-308-00)

Lunch and Dinner Bowl examples:

- ▶ [Chickpea Curry and Basmati Rice Bowl](#) (T-303-00)
- ▶ [General Tso Cauliflower and Edamame Bowl](#) (T-306-00)
- ▶ [Mediterranean Pesto Orzo Bowl](#) (T-309-00)
- ▶ [Savory Rice and Vegetables with Salmon Grain Bowl](#) (L-371-00)
- ▶ [Sweet and Tangy Tofu Poke Bowl](#) (T-311-00)



General Tso Cauliflower and Edamame Bowl (T-306-00)



Mediterranean Pesto Orzo Bowl (T-309-00)

Promote Your Plant-forward Menu Offerings

Market and promote plant-forward menu options to increase visibility and interest. Creative strategies to advertise plant-forward menu items can make them more appealing and nudge diners to choose them.

- ▶ Highlight plant-forward menu choices as “Featured Meals” or “Featured Items.”
 - Display them prominently in your facility and use **social media** to promote them outside the dining facility or food venue.
- ▶ Use printed or digital **signage** to promote plant-forward themed stations such as “Taco Tuesday,” “Mediterranean Station,” or “Poke Bar.”
- ▶ If able, offer tastings of new plant-based recipes and ask diners to give feedback on comment cards or social media.
- ▶ Use creative names and descriptions of plant-forward menu items that focus on flavor, taste, and appearance.
 - Use indulgent descriptions such as “crunchy,” “creamy,” or “sizzling” and positive descriptors such as “fresh” or “seasonal” to make items more appealing to diners.
- ▶ Continue and sustain marketing efforts for plant-based items because diners might need time to change their perceptions and try something new or different.

Samples of “Featured Meal” print and digital signage



FEATURED MEAL

POWER-PACKED VEGGIE SANDWICH





- Whole wheat bread
- Lettuce
- Tomato
- Cucumber
- Onion
- Sprouts
- Cheese (optional)


LOW




FEATURED MEAL

SPICY VEGGIE STIR FRY WITH NOODLES





- Noodles
- Broccoli
- Bell peppers
- Onion
- Zucchini
- Carrots
- Red pepper flakes
- Soy sauce
- Sriracha (optional)
- Lime







Mongolian Grill

BASE	VEGGIES
Whole-wheat pasta	Cabbage
White rice	Broccoli
Rice noodles	Bean sprouts
PROTEIN	
Tofu	Mushrooms
Chicken fajita strips	Zucchini
SAUCES & GARNISHES	
Buffalo	Carrots
Teriyaki	Spinach
Sweet & sour	Red onions
Nuts	Bell peppers
Cilantro	Banana peppers
	Jalapenos

Build Your Own Salad



1 Pick Your Base

Romaine lettuce
Spinach

2 Pick Your Protein

Chickpeas
Black beans
Tuna

Eggs

3 Pick Your Toppings

Cherry tomatoes
Cucumbers
Shredded carrots
Mushrooms
Green peppers
Onions
Broccoli
Jalapenos

Shredded cheese

4 Pick Your Dressing

Oil & vinegar

Ranch
Italian

Try a Tex-Mex Salad:
Romaine lettuce + black beans + cherry tomatoes + onions + green peppers + jalapenos + Ranch dressing

FAQs

Will plant-forward menu items be appealing in taste and flavor to diners at military dining facilities?

Yes! Nutrient-dense, whole plant-based foods can be included in a variety of delicious recipes that are tasty, flavorful, and appealing to Service Members. A common misconception is that plant-based foods are bland. If you use creative strategies to enhance the flavor and taste of plant-based foods, the food will speak for itself. Use your resources, including [AFRS recipes](#) and [G4G Guideline Cards](#), to create tasty plant-forward items your diners will enjoy.

Tips to enhance the flavor of plant-based foods:

- ▶ Choose recipes with fresh ingredients as often as possible.
- ▶ Use seasonal produce for peak flavor.
- ▶ Add fresh or dried herbs and spices.
- ▶ Use olive oil, sesame oil, or other plant-based oils.
- ▶ Add a splash of vinegar or citrus juice for bright flavor.

Will including plant-based foods increase the cost of my menu and cut into the profit margin?

Nutrient-dense, plant-based foods won't cost more if you use budget-friendly strategies to purchase and prepare plant-forward recipes. In fact, they can cut costs because plant-based proteins are typically cheaper than animal protein. Use these strategies to help keep costs in check.

- ▶ Buy in bulk.
- ▶ Coordinate with other dining facilities to lower the cost of ingredients and labor.
- ▶ Buy in-season produce.
- ▶ Use frozen fruits and vegetables, especially when fresh varieties aren't available.
- ▶ Plan your menu to use plant-based foods across your dining facility in a variety of ways.
 - For example, quinoa can be used as a Mainline starchy side, Salad Bar ingredient, prepared salad, or part of a bowl for Grab 'n Go.

Working with fresh produce can mean more labor, but use smart planning strategies ahead of time to help manage the workload.

- ▶ Centralize all fresh produce prep to one station with one or more dedicated cooks.
- ▶ Prepare all grains at once for use in multiple recipes or stations.
- ▶ Plan meals around leftovers from the previous day.
 - Use leftover plain rice to make fried rice or a rice salad.
 - Use leftover raw veggies from the Salad Bar as stir-fry options at the Mongolian Bar.
 - Turn leftover chicken into chicken salad and put a 2-oz scoop on top of an entrée salad.
- ▶ When using a station-style feeding setup, many components can be used at multiple stations.
 - For example, the same veggies might be available at the Salad Bar, Mediterranean Bar, South of the Border Bar, and Deli Bar.
 - Create meals with different combinations of components along with sauces and seasonings.

- Depending on the service setup, you can serve some portions of a certain veggie cooked and some portions raw.

Will plant-forward choices meet the protein needs of Service Members to optimize their performance?

Most Americans consume more than enough protein. Service Members might be eating more protein than they think throughout their day, especially if portion sizes of certain foods, such as animal proteins, are large. **Protein needs** differ based on body weight as well as frequency and type of workouts or missions.

Plant-forward menus provide an excellent opportunity to meet the protein needs of Service Members. Beans and lentils, nuts and seeds, whole grains, and even vegetables contain protein, all contributing to their daily protein intake. Keep in mind that not all plant-forward items exclude all animal proteins. Sometimes they just include smaller portions of fish, eggs, poultry, or meat. Blending plant sources of protein with nutritious animal protein in popular dishes, such as **Blended Beef and Lentil Burger** (N-323-00) and **Spicy Garlic Lemon Shrimp and Quinoa** (L-370-00), is a great way to introduce diners to more plants.

What are “meatless meat” foods and should they be included in plant-forward eating patterns?

“Meatless meats” are meat substitutes made with vegetarian ingredients such as soy, textured vegetable protein, or wheat gluten. Some popular examples are “meatless burgers” and “vegan beef crumbles.” Some meatless meat products are highly processed and might code Yellow or Red. In addition, these products can be expensive. The best choice is to use whole, nutrient-dense plant foods to create nutritious, flavorful, and tasty recipes. If you want to include ready-to-use plant alternatives, look for ones with smaller ingredient lists that will code Green or Yellow. These products can be offered based on customer demand and might help nudge strict meat-eaters towards the idea of eating plant proteins. Whole-food, plant-forward options are nearly always less expensive and more nutritious than ready-to-use products.

Plant-forward Resources

There are multiple resources you can use to help plan a performance-focused, plant-forward menu in your military nutrition environment.

- ▶ **Plant-Forward Kitchen.** The Culinary Institute of America offers information on the health, foodservice, and economic benefits of plant-forward eating, including recipes, videos, and more.
- ▶ **Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020–2025.** The U.S. Department of Agriculture & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offer guidance and key recommendations on nutrition and healthy dietary patterns for better military wellness and performance.
- ▶ **Enjoy Vegetarian Meals.** Learn about the benefits of a healthy eating plan that includes plant-based protein in this tip sheet from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s MyPlate.