



# MEATLESS MONDAY BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

## INTRODUCTION

This Best Practices Guide is intended for food service operators interested in starting a Meatless Monday program or improving an existing program. The Guide is based on findings from a qualitative evaluation conducted by the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future in collaboration with Bon Appétit Management Company. The full report can be found at: <http://bit.ly/2rsTG92>

## BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MEATLESS MONDAY

A non-profit initiative of The Monday Campaigns, Meatless Monday began in 2003 in association with the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health with the simple message of “one day a week, cut out meat.” Meatless Monday seeks to reduce the prevalence of preventable illnesses and environmental impacts associated with meat production and excessive meat consumption. The initiative is based on research showing that Monday is the most common day to start and continue a new health behavior. Meatless Monday has grown into a global movement powered by a network of participating individuals, hospitals, schools, worksites and restaurants around the U.S. and also in over 40 countries worldwide.

Meatless Monday is designed for simple integration into existing operations. Implementing Meatless Monday can help institutions achieve sustainability goals, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and environmental impact. Furthermore, it can save money. The cost of plant-based proteins is more predictable and generally lower than meat and other animal products. Meatless Monday also offers choice. Rather than taking away meat, most sites feature meatless dishes and promote customer participation in Meatless Monday. It creates a platform for new dishes and engages employees to help improve health and the environment. Finally, it fosters collaboration and demonstrates leadership in the food service industry.

The methods and frequency of Meatless Monday implementation in food service operations vary greatly – from offering vegetarian items to highlighting vegetarian specials to only serving meat-free options on Monday. It is often initiated at the request of customers, while chefs, managers and employees are also influential in starting Meatless Monday. It addresses multiple issues of concern to customers: health, environment and climate, animal welfare and cost.

### **BRIEF OVERVIEW OF BON APPÉTIT MANAGEMENT COMPANY**

Bon Appétit Management Company (Bon Appétit) is an on-site restaurant company offering full food-service management to corporations, universities, museums, and specialty venues. Based in Palo Alto, CA, Bon Appétit operates more than 650 cafés in 33 states. In Bon Appétit kitchens, food is cooked from scratch, including sauces, stocks, and soups. A pioneer in environmentally sound sourcing policies, Bon Appétit has developed programs addressing local purchasing, overuse of antibiotics, sustainable seafood, the food-climate change connection, humanely raised meat and eggs, and farmworkers' rights.

Bon Appétit first committed to addressing the connection between the food system and climate change in 2007, with the launch of its Low Carbon Diet program. The Low Carbon Diet set out a five-year plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; after the completion of the program in 2012, Bon Appétit committed to sustaining and further pursuing reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in its operations and supply chain by moving from a “Diet” of reduction goals to a “Lifestyle” that minimizes greenhouse gas emissions. The Low Carbon Lifestyle is a multi-pronged approach to addressing climate change, which includes a mandate to prioritize plant-based proteins. The commitment includes specific, unit level goals for beef purchased and animal products purchased, and is accomplished by serving attractive and tasty plant-based options and tracking meat purchases at all sites. In partnership with the communities they are a part of, many Bon Appétit teams have promoted Meatless Mondays as a way to encourage guests to reduce meat consumption.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND KEY THEMES

For Meatless Monday, most sites report better success when they feature a variety of tasty vegetarian items rather than eliminating all meat on the menu. Some sites do this at only one station, while others serve vegetarian options at every station on Monday. A few sites host only stand-alone Meatless Monday events but try to emphasize vegetarian items throughout the week in their cafés.

The degree to which sites promote Meatless Monday also vary. Sites that put more effort into promotion tend to be more invested and positive about the movement. However, minimal promotion seems to fit in well when they have multiple initiatives and foci; it wraps well into other programs.

Five Key Themes emerged from the evaluation for ensuring Meatless Monday success. These themes inform the Best Practices identified through the interviews with food service operators.

Key Themes	Description
<b>Collaboration</b>	Customers and staff provide valuable feedback. They are the main drivers and promoters of Meatless Monday through their participation. Collaborating with interest groups, such as sustainability or food alliance groups, extends reach and helps with both education and promotion.
<b>Education</b>	When customers understand the reasons behind Meatless Monday, they are more willing to participate. Personal outreach and peer to peer (colleague to colleague) are the most effective means of education. Staff conversations with customers also effectively increase participation.
<b>Promotion</b>	Customers and staff are key. Face to face interaction is more effective at catching people’s interest than any other written or “flat” promotion. Use compelling messages. Be consistent but vary the approach and methods.
<b>Staff engagement</b>	Food service staff are valuable promoters when they are engaged and involved. Taking time to train and involve staff builds ownership and commitment to the program.
<b>Focus on menus</b>	Creative, delicious menus are absolutely necessary; they promote participation, sustainability of the program and long term diet changes. Customers value choices and do not want to be told what not to eat. When vegetarian options are appealing and delicious, most people (including non-vegetarians) are willing to try a new entrée.

## BEST PRACTICES

The following describes 10 Best Practices for Meatless Monday based on the Key Themes:

Theme	Best Practice
<b>Collaboration</b>	1. Collaborate with customers, students and staff and collect regular feedback.
<b>Education</b>	2. Keep the next step in mind.
<b>Promotion</b>	3. Promote and make the program recognizable. 4. Be mindful of how meatless items are presented.
<b>Staff engagement</b>	5. Allow time for culinary staff to learn new recipes, flavors and cooking styles. 6. Invite staff input and creativity.
<b>Focus on menus</b>	7. Focus on the culinary aspect. 8. Keep menus varied and emphasize choice.
<b>General</b>	9. Be consistent and patient. 10. Be flexible and adaptable.

1. Collaborate with customers, students and staff and collect regular feedback

Involve customers and staff in Meatless Monday to increase satisfaction, participation and reach. Utilize strong and involved customer groups as partners and invaluable sources of information. Work with them and use their communication channels to get the word out about Meatless Monday.

Encourage staff to promote plant-based foods on the serving line and interact with guests to collect any feedback that can be used to improve the program. Customers are usually willing to try samples, so empower staff to offer free samples and talk about the food being served.

2. Keep the next step in mind

Consider how Meatless Mondays can spur your customers on to the next step of reducing meat and increasing plant-based foods the rest of the week. Culinary culture is changing, and more people are familiar with plant-based and globally inspired food. Yet, does familiarity with new cuisines influence people's diets long term?

Focus on education to help your customers better understand that their eating choices have an impact on the environment and their health, and that, as one site explained, "You can have a healthy, protein packed diet without meat."

3. Promote and make the program recognizable

In many cases, the menu on Meatless Monday is not vastly different than other days. Vegetarian foods have become more mainstream than they were nearly 15 years ago when Meatless Monday began. For example, all Bon Appétit cafés offer plentiful vegetarian options at every meal period. It is the advertising and promotion-making it a day-that makes Meatless Monday stand out as a prompt even if menu changes are not dramatic. When customers enter the café, they should be immediately reminded that it's Meatless Monday and encouraged to make a different meal choice.



*"When [the director of operations is] interacting with students, he will talk about Meatless Monday with a huge sense of pride... He's really excited about it and a huge promoter of it... That enthusiasm is really infectious for the students."*

**SALIENT EDUCATIONAL MESSAGES:**

- Our food choices have consequences (environment, health, animal welfare).
- We can get enough protein and nutrients without added meat or animal products.
- Plant-based meals can be delicious and satisfying.



*“No type of flat media is going to bring the type of excitement of someone in your facing going, ‘It’s going to be amazing!’ It’s a whole different feeling.”*

Promotion should also be looked at as a way to educate. Promote with compelling messages in order to extend reach and bring new participants in, such as athletes or other campus cultures that may consider meat necessary to complete a meal. Relatable messages, such as comparing the number of showers equivalent to the water used to produce a pound of beef, provide a more practical connection for people.

4. **Be mindful of how meatless items are presented**

Set up and present Meatless Monday stations strategically to increase traffic. Place vegetarian items first on the line or side-by-side with meat-containing items. Use point of service signs highlighting Meatless Monday choices. Make them easy to select and appealing. The Cornell [Food & Brand Lab](#) provides research and ideas for cafeteria set up that encourages healthier choices.



*“There’s a threshold for how much tofu students will eat. Chefs can get stuck in a rut and throw tofu out as the vegan option for the day. We really encourage chefs to be more creative and not run the same thing frequently.”*

**TABLE 1: PREFERRED PROMOTIONAL METHODS**

- Word of mouth and face to face - from peers, customers and food service staff
- Weekly emails
- Menus and calendars
- Interruption tables or outreach – especially when done by students or customers
- Table tent cards with promotional and educational messages
- Point of sale messages – reminders as customers make choices on serving line
- Facebook pages – by dining team or interest group
- Digital displays
- Special events – Earth day, special meals, etc.
- Handing out samples
- Cooking demonstrations
- Meatless Monday Pledge
- Using other groups or co-initiatives to help promote
- Giveaways and freebies

5. Allow time for culinary staff to learn new recipes, flavors and cooking styles

Provide chefs time to plan and test recipes in order to ensure they are practical, delicious, and appealing. Allow chefs to develop, modify and find new recipes, rather than being held to standard company recipes. Bon Appétit chefs have tremendous freedom to create recipes and menus that are right for their guests; however, making sure cooks and food service staff are comfortable with the recipes and changes in foods being prepared before they are served to customers makes Meatless Monday easier and more enjoyable to implement.

6. Invite staff input and creativity

Make it a team effort. Involve all staff and invite them to contribute ideas and experiences. This will in turn increase your staff's interest, cooperation, and, most importantly, ownership. Offer trainings on the health and environmental benefits of eating less meat, as well as preparation of vegetarian and global cuisines. Listen and pay attention to staff feedback.

7. Focus on the culinary aspect

Meatless Monday is most successful when the food looks and tastes great! A site can do all the promotional techniques possible and have influential messages, but if the plant-based options are not delicious, the program will probably not successfully draw in vegetarians and non-vegetarians alike. It is not about just replacing meat. It is about offering creative, delicious plant-based meals.

Chefs and their culinary team play a large role in developing innovative and varied menus. Food service managers and directors need to ensure their team is motivated and has ample opportunity to be creative and learn to cook with different ingredients and styles. See [Table 3](#) for popular global cuisines identified by chefs and food service operators.

## CASE STUDY: TRYING NEW RECIPES

Emmanuel College has hosted weekly Meatless Monday events successfully for over three years on campus in the school's main all you care to eat café. In the past, Bon Appétit chefs at Emmanuel College have found new recipes, thinking they were going to be easy to make and serve, but found out the hard way that it may not always be the case. The team learned this when they made eggplant meatballs, which were more difficult than anticipated. Thinking back, they would have liked to take the time to test the recipe before serving the dish. Despite the extra time it can take to seek out and test new recipes, "if you're willing to take the time to train your chefs in a new way of thinking, it's 100 percent worth it."

-- General Manager for  
Bon Appétit at  
Emmanuel College.

## TABLE 2: SUGGESTIONS FOR PLANNING SUCCESSFUL MENUS

- Put the same amount of thought and effort into planning and creating plant-based meals as animal-based meals. Plant-based meals should not seem like an afterthought.
- Emphasize the culinary aspects of the foods. Substituting tofu for meat is not enough to create delicious meals. On the other hand, entrees that are similar to typical meat entrees, such as vegetable lasagna are well-received as long as they taste great.
- Integrate more mainstream menu items together with new and creative offerings, which may help “lure” customers into trying a new food.
- Present food that looks filling. It is not enough to just put out more vegetables. This is especially important for athletes and students.
- Offer a variety of choices – not just the same rotation every week.
- Introduce new recipes and tastes on a regular basis, especially in residence halls where students eat every meal and can become bored quickly.
- Find inspiration from cuisines where plant-based foods are common, such as those from Indian and Mediterranean cultures. Global recipes have better acceptance from vegetarians and non-vegetarians alike.

### CULINARY KEYS TO SUCCESS

- Meatless options have to look and taste good.
- Purchase quality ingredients.
- Provide choice and options. Offer unique, different and fresh options each week



## 8. Keep menus varied

Offer a frequently-changing variety of new and interesting meals. Avoid short menu rotations because customers will notice and lose interest. (Bon Appétit chefs change their menu daily and do not use menu rotations.) Prevent “dining fatigue” by seeking out new recipes from cookbooks, cooking blogs, magazines, peers, or customers. Keep dishes fresh by incorporating what is in season or on trend. Utilize flavor, color, and visual stimulation to encourage customers to try plant-based dishes. If the flavor and presentation of plant-based dishes are mediocre, it will be difficult to inspire people to reduce their meat consumption and shift toward a plant-based diet.

## 9. Emphasize Choice

Rather than talking about going without meat, talk about eating more plant-based foods. Do not completely eliminate meat, as it would also eliminate choice. Removing meat entirely is often not well-received and may push the customer to other dining facilities. Instead, focus on improving the promotional and culinary aspect of reducing meat consumption and let the customers choose when and how they can contribute to the movement.

## 10. Be consistent, patient and adaptable

To ensure success and growth, embrace Meatless Monday whole-heartedly and demonstrate its importance to customers. Be consistent to the practice. It will take time, but when leaders are committed, customers will take notice and acceptance will grow.

Take advantage of customer and staff feedback and adjust the program as needed. Follow trends as well. Operations that had negative feedback after going entirely meatless were more successful when they met customers in the middle and kept meat available on Mondays, while emphasizing plant-based choices. It may take some modification at first. Don't give up.



*“Your vegetarian dish might be absolutely delicious, but you’re not going to appeal to everybody all the time. If there are a lot of vegetarian options you have a better chance of getting people to try new things”*

## CASE STUDY: RESPONDING TO CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

After researching how Meatless Monday worked best at other schools, one university believed alternating a completely meat-free Monday between two dining halls would be the most successful. Once they implemented Meatless Monday, the dining hall where athletes frequented had significant pushback. In reaction, many students chose to eat at the school's retail café, which doubled the number of customers and placed an unexpected burden on the staff and supplies. The team eventually decided to incorporate meat back into the café frequented by athletes. They kept an entirely meatless program at the other dining hall on a weekly basis, which has now become a popular place to dine on Mondays. Lesson learned? Despite the best intentioned plans, what works best for one campus may not be the best for another. The team realized that any implementation requires trial and error, and openness to change based on campus needs.

**TABLE 3: POPULAR GLOBAL CUISINE**

Cuisine Inspiration	Examples of popular meatless menu items
Asian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Potato curry</li> <li>▪ Coconut curry tofu stew over cilantro lime rice</li> <li>▪ Crispy tofu lettuce wraps</li> <li>▪ Stir-fried veggies with tofu and tempeh</li> <li>▪ Pho bar</li> <li>▪ Fried rice</li> <li>▪ Tofu banh mi</li> <li>▪ Bombay potatoes</li> </ul>
Mediterranean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Chickpea and seitan paella</li> <li>▪ Tortellini</li> <li>▪ Eggplant parmesan</li> <li>▪ Homemade falafels, with vegan sour cream</li> <li>▪ Vegetable lasagna</li> <li>▪ Vegetable flatbread</li> <li>▪ Lentil pasta</li> <li>▪ Mediterranean night with baba ganoush, tzatziki, hummus, and toasted flatbread</li> </ul>
Mexican	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bean and vegan cheese enchilada</li> <li>▪ Taco bar with salsas, beans, and rice</li> <li>▪ Burrito bar</li> </ul>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Vegan mac and cheese</li> <li>▪ Soy cheesecake</li> <li>▪ Salad bar, with beans, quinoa, edamame, tofu, those are the staples.</li> <li>▪ Black bean burger with a mango salsa</li> <li>▪ Handmade vegetarian burgers (made with beets or quinoa)</li> <li>▪ Green lentil cake with pickled red onions, tempeh, and smoked tomato nage</li> <li>▪ Vegetable jambalaya</li> <li>▪ Seitan with caramelized onions</li> <li>▪ Quinoa/bean cakes</li> </ul>

## TABLE 4: POTENTIAL MEATLESS MONDAY PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

### 1. Corporate or Campus

- Office of Sustainability
- Environmental initiatives
- Food and Dining committees
- Health and wellness committees
- Staff dietitian or wellness staff
- Food waste or composting initiatives
- Local sourcing programs (such as Farm to Fork program)
- Student groups
  - Sustainability groups – student led or with student involvement
  - Environmental action groups
  - Food related student groups
  - Student vegetarian groups
  - Student government association
  - Peer health advocates/Student wellness champions
  - Campus farm or garden group



*“Our students’ eating habits are evolving and this once ‘meat and potatoes’ college is attracting healthier eaters that are concerned with how their food choices impact the world around them. In fact, during an incoming student day I spoke with five vegan students concerned about the choices they would have in our cafés. I was pleased to tell them about our program and know they will have plenty of variety to choose from when they arrive to campus this fall.”*

General Manager,  
Bon Appétit  
Management Company

## CONCLUSION

Meatless Monday provides a simple, effective approach to educating customers about the consequences of meat consumption and providing them with opportunities to make dietary changes. When implemented thoughtfully, consistently, and in collaboration with staff and customers, many food service operators have found it valuable and well-accepted. Key themes to successful Meatless Monday implementation include collaboration, education, promotion, staff engagement and attention to the culinary aspects of the meatless meals.

## MEATLESS MONDAY RESOURCES

- Meatless Monday [Promotional Materials](#)
- Meatless Monday [Institutional Food Service Toolkit](#)
- Meatless Monday [Recipes](#)
- Bon Appétit [recipe blog](#)
- Center for a Livable Future’s [Meat Consumption and Public Health Resources](#)

## MEATLESS MONDAY FAQ’S

### DO I HAVE TO USE THE NAME?

Using the name Meatless Monday is not required. Some sites are hesitant to use the Meatless Monday name to promote the program externally because the name is often interpreted negatively as getting less of or going without something. However, in most cases, once people understand that it’s a choice, the name is not a problem.

Many sites are motivated by the fact that embracing Meatless Monday makes them part of a global movement—part of something bigger. This resonates with people and can be leveraged to gather more interest and involvement when the name is adopted.

## HOW DO I MEASURE THE SUCCESS OF MEATLESS MONDAY IMPLEMENTATION?

Tracking the impact of Meatless Monday can be a challenge; however, changes in diner traffic or sales have been used as proxies of success. Below are some suggestions of metrics to compare:

### DINER TRAFFIC

- How many diners or meals did you serve on an average Mondays before and after implementing Meatless Monday?
- How many diners or meals did you serve each week on average before and after implementing Meatless Monday?

### REVENUE (FOR RETAIL SITES ONLY)

- What were your typical sales on Mondays before implementing Meatless Monday?
- What are your typical sales on Mondays now that you implement Meatless Monday?
- What were your typical sales each week before implementing Meatless Monday?
- What are your typical sales each week now that you implement Meatless Monday?

### FOOD CHOICES AND COST

- How much meat and poultry did you serve each week by pounds or value before and after implementing Meatless Monday?
- Do you track the number of servings of each dish offered? If yes, then:
  - How many meat and poultry dishes did you serve on Mondays before and after implementing Meatless Monday?
  - How many vegetarian dishes did you serve on Mondays before and after implementing Meatless Monday?
  - How many vegetarian dishes did you serve on an average week before and after implementing Meatless Monday?

## DOES IT HAVE TO BE ON A MONDAY?

No, some sites find it easier to do Meatless Tuesdays or Thursdays.

The Monday in Meatless Monday is based on research that suggests more than any other day of the week, Monday is the day people start diets, quit smoking, or try a new health behavior. Health promotions that connect the value of weekly periodicity and the unique cultural associations of Monday can help people adopt and maintain healthy behaviors.

### STEP BY STEP IMPLEMENTATION - BY THE MONDAY CAMPAIGNS

1. **Commit to Meatless Monday.** Share the environmental, health and business benefits of Meatless Monday with your team and your client (including their medical committee, and employee wellness and sustainability departments). Get everyone on board.
2. **Set a goal.** Agree on what is a “success” and how you will measure it. The Meatless Monday [Toolkit](#) includes some key performance indicators you can use with information you already have and includes setting a baseline before you start.
3. **Set a schedule.** Decide when you are going to launch Meatless Monday and in which dining locations. Both employee dining and retail locations are good choices.
4. **Develop your menus** and offer to feature several vegetarian and vegan options that can be promoted on Monday. Plan at least three months out and use Meatless Monday as a way to have a more successful launch that gives your customers another reason to try something new
5. **Determine your order a little bit earlier.** Make sure your supplier has everything you need and ask them about plant-based ingredients that may want you to try as your Meatless Monday efforts continue.
6. **Decide on your marketing plan.** Use your organization’s resources as well as Meatless Monday point of service and marketing resources which can be adapted to feature your brand and your client’s brand both in their employee communications and in the dining hall.
7. **Get the team ready.** Have the culinary team try out new recipes, and give culinary and front of house staff a quick briefing about the benefits of Meatless Monday during a pre-service huddle or family meal. Get them ready to answer your diners’ questions.
8. **Go!** Work with your client to announce your launch on your client’s employee web portal, email to employees and communications in the dining halls. Meatless Monday has resources you can use.





CLF Website:  
[www.jhsph.edu/clf](http://www.jhsph.edu/clf)

Meatless Monday:  
[www.meatlessmonday.com](http://www.meatlessmonday.com)

