

Veggie ‘meat’ may usher in the next diet revolution

Disruptive food technology and novel trends and technology are in line with the scientifically-validated Planetary Health Diet that can prevent 11 million deaths from under nutrition and food-related diseases.

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The Impossible Whopper, which was added to Burger King menus in 59 restaurants on April 1 this year, is so popular that it will now be available in all 7,200 branches in the US by the year end. (HT File (Representative Image))

The alternative meat movement is mainstreaming vegetarianism across the world and offering committed carnivores the option abandoning meat but not the flavour for reasons as varied as improving health, stopping cruelty to animals, reducing climate change by reducing the number of methane-producing cattle, and lowering antibiotic resistance from unregulated misuse of antibiotics for growth promotion in commercial animal and poultry farms.

While fake soy chicken, meat-free sausages and the like have been available for committed vegetarians for a few decades, plant-based “meats” going beyond trendy food labs and fusion kitchens to fast-food restaurants that feed the masses and lead to diet revolution that is less dependent on meats and sugars and more on plant-based food.

Disruptive food technology and novel trends and technology are in line with the scientifically-validated Planetary Health Diet that can prevent 11 million deaths from under nutrition and food-related diseases. “Food transition is as crucial as the energy transition to save the planet and the amazing thing about food is very one can make a difference. It makes food such a powerful tool for change,” said Gunhild Stordalen, founder and executive chair of EAT, which is hosting the EAT Stockholm Food Forum to promotes scientifically-validated healthy diets from sustainable food systems.

Less meat

“People do change their diets when they have the right information. Red meat consumption has gone down 40% in the United States since 1970, most likely because of health reasons,” said Dr Walter Willet, professor of epidemiology and nutrition at Harvard School of Public Health, and co-author of EAT-Lancet Commission, which created Planetary Health Diet that recommends the world double its consumption of nuts, fruits, vegetables, and legumes and halve the amount of red meat and sugar eaten.

North European cuisine is in transition. At The Nordic Food Lab in the department of Food science at University of Copenhagen, Denmark, culinary entrepreneur, professor and co-founder of one of the world’s best restaurants Noma in Copenhagen Claus Meyers explores the edible potential of the Nordic region to promote seasonal flavours and local ingredients. “Using local produce, reducing meat and food waste does not mean giving up on flavour. A cuisine must speak truly of its birthplace and be created using local ingredients produced using environment-friendly farming and production methods,” said Meyers, founder of the New Nordic Cuisine Movement sweeping Europe. Meyers has just entered a partnership with furniture giant IKEA to provide vegan meatballs made with pea protein, pea starch, potato flakes, oats, and apple that look and taste like meat.

Veggie burgers go global

Across the Atlantic in the United States, no-meat “veggie” burgers have gone beyond beans and aloo tiki (potato croquettes) with California-based startup Impossible Foods crafting a plant-based alternative to red meat that mimics its taste and texture so closely that it “bleeds” like beef. The Impossible Whopper, which was added to Burger King menus in 59 restaurants on April 1 this year, is so popular that it will now be available in all 7,200 branches in the US by the year end. Midwest fastfood chain White Castle has Impossible Foods sliders, and Carl’s Jr. sells burgers from Beyond Star Meat Burgers. Even Tex-Mex is going meatless, with US-based Mexican food chains Qdoba made Impossible Taco and Impossible Bowl part of its menu to in all its 730 US outlets in May, while Del Taco added meatless Beyond Tacos to its 580 stores menus starting April 25.

“Around 29% people in India are vegetarian, compared to 21% vegans and vegetarians in the world. India has several vegetarian options for meat dishes, we have veg kebabs, veg burgers and veg kofta (meatballs), to name a few -- turning vegetarian or reducing meat is not a problem, but these meat-like alternatives may become popular in urban India,” said Rita Teatia, chairperson, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, which is the country’s food regulator.