

JULY 2013

RESTAURANT BUSINESS.



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Yogurt wins again

THE FUTURE 500

THE FASTEST GROWING SMALL CHAINS IN AMERICA

PG. F1

Recipes

July is such a wonderful time to put more produce on the plate. Fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables are in abundance in every part of the U.S., inspiring chefs with their flavors, colors and aromas. Make produce the star on summer menus, starting here.

Menu R&D

Foodservice Buyer

Fresh thinking



Provencal Stuffed Onion

4 large whole, unpeeled onions, rinsed and dried
1 zucchini
1 yellow summer squash
1 large red bell pepper
1 large yellow bell pepper
1 oz. olive oil
4 oz. tomato sauce
1 bunch fresh basil, julienned
2 stems fresh oregano, julienned
Salt and pepper to taste

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Without peeling the onions, cut top ¼ off each; cut enough off root end so onions sit upright.

2. With sharp spoon, scoop out center of each onion, leaving 2 to 3 outermost layers; chop scooped out portion. Rub onion shell inside and out with olive oil; season with salt and pepper. Bake 15 minutes.

3. Dice zucchini, squash and bell peppers into ¼ in. pieces. Heat olive oil in large, heavy sauté pan; sauté vegetables in small batches until they brown nicely. Allow pan to heat up again before adding next batch.

4. When all vegetables are sautéed, add tomato sauce, basil and oregano; season with salt and pepper. Spoon vegetable stuffing into onions. Bake 20 to 30 min. longer or until internal temperature reaches 165°F. Serve hot.

Yield: 4 servings



A MANGO AND WATERMELON SALAD REFRESHES SUMMER PALATES

Sourcing produce has gotten trickier. Used to be that your broadliner delivered staples like potatoes and carrots, and a produce vendor could fill in with items like arugula, specialty mushrooms and mangos. But these days, fussy consumers—and chefs—want local and/or seasonal fruits and vegetables on the menu, often along with the name of the farm. What's more, an ordinary tomato or squash won't do; heirloom and exotic varieties are in demand. Plus the USDA is recommending that half the plate be filled with produce. These challenges are driving operators to approach purchasing with a different

mindset and a market basket of sourcing strategies.

Grown in Colorado

Local sourcing has been a priority of Mad Greens founders Marley Hodgson and Dan Long since they launched nine years ago. Partnering with the right suppliers is key to fulfilling this mission as the Denver-based 11-unit chain expands.

"Shamrock has been our broadline distributor since the beginning," reports Hodgson. "They were willing to take on the logistics and responsibility of sourcing from local farmers and producers." Hodgson and Long do their part too, by intensively researching each pros-

pect. "We only go to reputable growers and producers, then probe deeply into their acreage, safety standards, financing and volume." Shamrock uses their research to help farmers institute safeguards and ramp up production.

For Mad Greens, local is about supporting the Colorado economy. Several menu items reflect that thinking. The new Olomomo Salad was inspired by cherry vanilla almonds from Boulder's Olomomo Nut Company; the almonds are tossed with baby greens, feta, green apples and dried cranberries. And every August, the chain features a "locals only" salad with all-Colorado ingredients. A recent example is the Alferd Packer salad—a mix of Romaine lettuce from Center, Colorado, roasted sweet corn from Olathe, peaches grown in the Palisade and Northfork



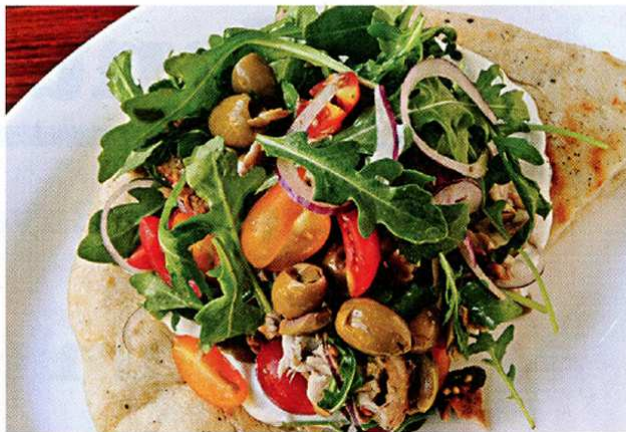
THE ALFERD PACKER "LOCALS ONLY" SALAD AT MAD GREENS

valleys of the Rockies and cheese from Haystack Mountain Goat Dairy.

Shamrock also brings in items from further afield. “You can’t grow avocados in Colorado, but customers want them in our salads,” says Long. But thanks to VeriFresh, a local hydroponic grower, Mad Greens is getting a greater percentage of Colorado-grown lettuce and spinach. And the chain is participating in a pilot program with Agriburbia, a firm in Golden, Colorado, that works with developers to plant produce on public land. “We set up the infrastructure and assume the costs of farming, but Agriburbia does the work,” notes Hodgson. “This summer, all the grape tomatoes and cucumbers we use will come from this land.” The partners see this business model as scalable and profitable.

Cobbling together a plan

Michael Leviton, chef-owner of two Boston-area restaurants—Lumiere in Newton and Area Four in Cambridge—and current chair of sustainability advocacy group, Chefs Collaborative, has long been a proponent of local sourcing. “It just makes sense that a fruit or vegetable that travels a few miles will be fresher and more flavorful than one that travels 100 miles,” he states. Although New England has a notoriously short growing season, farmers and chefs are figuring out ways



AREA FOUR'S FLATBREAD GYRO IS PILED WITH ARUGULA AND TOMATOES

to solve the problem.

“There are various aggregate distribution models, CSAs and farmers markets, plus more greenhouse and hoophouse operations to extend the growing season,” Leviton reports. As for himself, he’s cobbled together several sourcing methods.

Foodex, a large aggregator that acts as a distribution hub for farmers, makes regular deliveries to Lumiere and Area Four. Leviton also works with a few farmers who bring fresh produce directly to his back door. The neighboring state of Rhode Island runs a farm-to-foodservice distribution program called Mobile Market and Vermont has its own version. All this produce tastes of the soil in which it’s grown by people who take care of the land.

Serving what’s in season also means top flavor. By the middle of this month, Leviton’s menus will feature lots of corn, tomatoes, beans, strawberries and greens. Signature summer items include Panzanella, BBQ Beef and Corn Ragu and a Corn Soup that’s “the essence of sweet corn.”

While supporting local farmers and producers is rewarding, Leviton can’t limit his menu to that extent. “Customers want citrus and coffee year round and salads in the winter,” he says. “Being hyper-local is not a sustainable business model here.”

California dreaming

Tony Baker is “blessed” to run three restaurants located very close to California’s produce-rich Salinas Valley. Much of



CHEF TONY BAKER ROASTS GREEN BEANS IN THE WOOD-FIRED OVEN

what he purchases for Montrio, Rio Grill and Tarpy’s in the Monterey-Carmel area make a very short trip from field to plate. Even so, the chef-partner sources produce through multiple channels.

“We use FreshPoint out of San Francisco for core items, as well as a local supplier in Monterey,” he explains. “But we also work with a mushroom

forager, buy organic vegetables from nearby Swank Farms and visit the Monterey Farmers Market every Tuesday.”

Walking the one block to the Farmers Market, Radio Flyer wagon in tow, is particularly inspiring. “Talking to the farmers and seeing the produce displayed teaches you something—you know immediately what’s in season,” he says. July is peak for stone fruits, cherries, an abundance of fresh herbs and tomatoes. Baker also picks up pasture-raised eggs and makes his signature warm “Bacon and Egg” Salad with whatever seasonal greens are available.

Baker is doing his part to incorporate more produce into the menu, and his customers are responding. “There’s been a pickup in requests for vegetable sides,” he says. To date, Montrio has sold 900 orders of a roasted Brussels sprouts salad with Medjool dates and bacon. Green beans and carrots roasted in the wood-fired oven are also strong sellers.

When the menu doesn’t push vegetables too aggressively, guests respond better. Inspired by a visit to Turkey, Baker is offering a grilled shrimp dish with a profusion of fresh mint and parsley. “I don’t mention the mint on the menu as it might deter guests from ordering it,” he says. No worries—it’s proving to be a very popular seasonal item.

—PATRICIA COBE