

Delectable New Dairy-Free Mozzarella "Cheese" Sparks Vegan Pizza Revolution

Cruzer Pizza Sees Overall Sales Soar 63 Percent within First Month of Introducing Vegan Pies with Daiya Cheese Alternative - For years, food manufacturers have searched far and wide for the Holy Grail of mainstream vegan cuisine: a non-dairy cheese substitute which stretches, melts and tastes so much like the real thing even cheese lovers can't tell the difference. Even though a variety of "cheeses" made from soy, nuts, rice, and other plant-based ingredients have made inroads into the lucrative vegan market in the last decade, none has excelled enough at the all-important flavor equivalency test to convince even the choosiest of cheese devotees — until now ...

A new vegan cheese substitute made by Canadian company Daiya Foods, Inc. could represent the long-awaited commercial breakthrough. As the only company in the world to make vegan "cheese" from cassava (a tropical shrub native to South America that is also the basis of tapioca), Daiya ferments the plant's root so that it curdles the same way milk does during the traditional cheese making process, creating the supple yet chewy consistency that largely accounts for cheese's enduring popularity. As a result, Daiya has won rave reviews from food bloggers, as well as VegNews magazine's "Best of Show Award" at the 2009 Expo West trade show.

Daiya vegan "cheese" only became available in the United States in 2009, and the first eatery to offer it to patrons in the Western U.S. was Cruzier Pizza in the Los Feliz district of Los Angeles. Cruzier's owner, Sam Khalaf, started using Daiya on pizzas after being approached by Michelle Sass, California Advocacy Organizer for Farm Sanctuary, the nation's leading farm animal advocacy group. At Sass's suggestion, Khalaf removed veal from Cruzier's menu and simultaneously added eight new vegan Daiya "cheese" pizzas featuring toppings like tofu-based "chicken," "ham," "sausage," and "pepperoni," as well as a full range of fresh vegetables.

According to Khalaf, customer response to the change was phenomenal, unmistakable and surprisingly immediate. "Since launching the vegan menu on May 29, overall sales in our Los Feliz store have increased by 63 percent, and the vegan items have outsold everything else we make," he reported. "Sales have been so good that we've decided to add vegan calzones, macaroni and "cheese" spaghetti and "meat" balls, and lasagna to our menu." Khalaf publicized Cruzier's new menu by hanging 50,000 doorknob fliers throughout the area, and has even started making vegan pizzas at their Glendale location as well as some of the other 20 pizzerias he owns in the L.A. area bearing other names.

Meanwhile, after watching its next door neighbor's vegan pizza sales go through the roof, upscale restaurant Desert Rose made a full one-third of its menu vegan and prominently printed Farm Sanctuary's "seal of approval" next to the new items, which include Cruzier's pizzas. About 150 people attended the menu launch party at Desert Rose on Saturday night, June 27, an event that was co-organized by Farm Sanctuary's Sass and Vegan Drinks, a social networking group that promotes the vegan lifestyle by hosting monthly outings in more than a dozen U.S. cities.

Like Khalaf, Sass believes Daiya's game-changing innovation will fuel an exploding vegan pizza demand that the smartest restaurateurs will be ready to supply. "Cruzier and other pizzerias using Daiya are on the cutting edge of a trend that is going to grow exponentially as more people get a taste of this fabulous product," she said. "There is already a huge underserved and largely untapped consumer demographic out there comprised of vegans and millions of others who want appetizing, natural, cruelty-free alternatives to milk-based cheese. That is exactly what Daiya is, and the first companies — from the smallest storefronts to the largest global franchises — to get in on the ground floor of this budding business are going to profit the most."

Farm Sanctuary is the nation's leading farm animal protection organization. Since incorporating in 1986, Farm Sanctuary has worked to expose and stop cruel practices of the "food animal" industry through research and investigations, legal and institutional reforms, public awareness projects, youth education, and direct rescue and refuge efforts. Farm Sanctuary shelters in Watkins Glen, N.Y., and Orland, Calif., provide lifelong care for hundreds of rescued animals, who have become ambassadors for farm animals everywhere by educating visitors about the realities of factory farming. Additional information can be found at farmsanctuary.org or by calling 607-583-2225.

Photo above is from Quarry Girl's review of Cruzier Pizza and Daiya Vegan Cheese. To view several full size images and a full review, see her Cruzier / Daiya Review.